CONTEXTUALIZING THE HUMAN NATURE IN INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT: EXPLORING THE IDEA OF PURUSHARTHAS, VIKARS, TIME AND SPACE IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

The paper looks forward to providing an alternative conception of human nature by contextualizing it in the Indian Political Thought. The paper argues that the the idea of Purusharthas(Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha), Vikars (Kama, Krodh, Lobha, Madh, Moh, Matsarya), Time & Space, the permutations and combinations of these twelve features will give an appropriate and expanded understanding of human nature. It argues that such understanding was missing in the monotonous narrative set by Western Political Thought. The current dominant understanding of human nature prescribed by the Western Political Thought is heavily one-sided flawed conceptualization of human nature, exaggerating few features and theorizing them to extremity. It completely ignores the possibilities of contradictory features and discontinuities in human nature. The other two essential features of time and space are not even considered worthy to explore in western intellectual traditions. The theoretical framework of the paper largely remains hermeneutic, as it is based on the interpretation of these ancient ideas and categories, and its application in the contemporary study of political science. The paper has used the qualitative method of textual-discourse analysis to understand the discourse set on human nature in the Western philosophy and Indian philosophy.

Keywords: *Purusharthas, Vikars, Time, Space, Human Nature, Indian Philosophy*

I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.

Mahatma Gandhi, Young India (June 1, 1921)

1. INTRODUCTION

The understanding of human nature is the most important and essentially the starting point of any philosophical inquiry and traditions. Several disciplines acknowledge the normative significance of locating appropriate explanations of the natural attitude, the 'default setting' of humans. Political philosophy too takes this task very seriously. The dominant paradigm of political philosophy, i.e. Western Political Philosophy tries to present a monotonous understanding of human nature which either it believes human nature to be essentially good and moral or to be bad and corrupt (Thakur, 2022). This doesn't help us account for varied actions that humans undertake in their lifetime. Taking up an example from the ancient Sanskrit epic, Mahabharata, Yudhistra, the eldest of the Pandava brothers lied to his teacher Dronacharya about the death of his son, Aswatthama. How would the western political philosophy interpret this action? Hobbesian followers would fetch their master out of the grave to tag Yudhisthira as an selfish and nasty individual. But will this interpretation be true? The eldest Pandava, the only one to reach the gates of heaven, was anything but selfish. When he reached the gates of heaven along with a dog, his only companion, Devta Indra welcomed him but refused to accommodate the stray animal. Yudhisthira did not think twice to strike down the offer. He was so loyal to a dog that he refused to enter heaven which he struggled so much to reach. A selfish man would never do that. Aren't these two accounts of the same character self-contradictory? If we go by the accounts of human nature by dominant Political philosophy we are bound to find them contradictory. The monotonous accounts fail to acknowledge the multifaceted aspects of a character. The paper would argue that the alternative accounts of human nature can arise from the conceptions of Purusharthas and Vikars in Indian philosophy.

Purusharthas is composed of two words, 'Purus' meaning man or human and 'Artha' meaning objectives. Thus, Purusharthas means the objectives of human life. These are the good aspects of human life. Indian political thought has talked about four objectives – Dharma (righteousness), Artha (Economic Values), Kaam (Pleasure), Moksha (Liberation).

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To put simply, an ideal human must attain all these four values, Vikars represent the weakness of human nature, the 'evil' values found in human beings. Vikars is an inclusive term, in Hindu thought, the term used is "*Arishadvargas*" and "*Shadripu*", highlighting the six enemies of the human mind. They are Kama (Desire), Krodh (Anger), Lobh (Greed), Madh (Sense of I), Moh (Attachment), Matsarya (Envy). In Sikhism and Buddhist traditions too, there is mention about five thieves and five hindrances respectively, the vocabulary is definitely distinct but across Indian philosophical traditions there is a unity on what are considered as vices in human nature. Time and Space too have a unique understanding in Indian philosophical traditions. In Hindu traditions, time is also called "*Kaal*" which is also used for death and for manifestation of God. Time is personified as *Yama*, the god of death as our existence is our time. However, in Sikhism, the term '*Akaal Purakh*' is used to refer to God, which literally means a 'timeless being'. In Surya Siddhanta, a text written by King Maya, father-in-law of Ravana, the first known book in Indian astronomy, there is mention of time, it suggests that time creates, manages and destroys everything. It talked about two conceptions of time- finite and infinite. Infinite time has no beginning or ending. The finite time has two kinds itself- practical and philosophical (Maheshwari, 2018). For space, ancient Indian texts like Rigveda extend its understanding. Space is considered to be bestowed or given openness where the world later extended and manifested itself. In Upanishads and Aranyakas, the conception of '*Akasha*' which is considered as one of the five basic elements or '*Mahabhutas*'. It has many meanings, it also means 'space' that contains all bodies or some form of materiality. It is also approximated with the conception of eternal Brahman, the creator of the universe (Duquette and Ramasubramaniam, 2010).

All these twelve features and their deep Indian understanding and explanations of how they essentially define, regulate, guide, and even hinder human actions are critically important for a claim for comprehensive understanding of human nature. The homogenous and monotonous accounts of human nature in Western philosophy are missing these varied values. Hence, we require critical re-evaluation of these insights in light of the new evidence that should be brought into light which highlight the incompleteness and inefficiency of the existing accounts. However, the frame of analysis and categories should be neutral and not western itself. We must ask ourselves, have we ever re-considered for a fair comparison between IPT and WPT?

2. HUMAN NATURE IN WESTERN PHILOSOPHY: UNDERSTANDING THE DOMINANT PARADIGM

Every Political theory begins with the theory of human nature. From Plato to Marx, each philosopher reflects on the essential attributes of a human being. In Plato's conception of human nature, 'virtuousness' is an important aspect. Justice has been the most important virtue of humans. (Jha, 2010, p. 35). In Machiavelli, we do not find an idealistic notion of human nature. He highlighted that the humans were prone to wickedness. For him, the only way to make humans behave or act righteously is through compulsion. It is only because of this illness in human beings that their societies and communities are corrupt (Jha, 2010, p. 92). Hobbes made his first attempt at defining human nature in 1640. Hobbes defined two kinds of motions in humans, one is the vital motions like the circulation of blood, breathing oxygen and the other one is voluntary motion or as he calls it endeavor. The vital motion towards something shows our desire and away from something shows our aversion. Hobbes defines humans as the bundles of desires and aversions, human life is about satisfying desires one after the other. The circle of desires ends only with death. The happiness achieved through regular accomplishments of desires is what he called felicity (Jha, 2010, p. 110). The conception of Hobbesian Individualism is essentially based on his account of human nature (Jha, 2010, p. 123). Jean Jacques Rousseau also provided a conception of human nature. According to Rousseau, every individual has two natural sentiments- 'self- love' and 'pity'. Self-love or *Amour De Soi* is a feeling to preserve oneself or loving oneself. Pity on the other hand, is the feeling of compassion we feel on seeing others in pain and sufferings. But still, Rousseau still believed that human nature is indeterminate and can be good and bad as they have faculty of self-improvement (Jha, 2010, p. 145-146). J.S Mill offers a very different account of human nature, He wrote in the third chapter of his famous work, *On Liberty*, " Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for

it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing" (Jha, 2010, p. 185). The indication towards 'tree' highlights the varied attributes in human nature, a notion that earlier philosophers skipped, even Mill did not elaborate much on it. The dominant discourse thus set by Western political thought has therefore no space for simultaneity of contradictory attributes at a given time. Time and space are ignored outrightly in determining human nature. The basic explorations of these accounts highlight various gaps that can be fulfilled.

3. PURUSHARTHAS: THE FOUR IDEALS OF GOOD LIFE

The idea of Purusharthas is an important aspect of the Indian Political thought canon. The term is composed of two Sanskrit words, "*purusha*" meaning 'immaterial spirit' and "*artha*" meaning 'for the sake of'. The term would mean "that which is done for the sake of immaterial spirit" (Parel, 2008, p. 45). The Purusharthas consist of four ideal goals of human life- Dharma, Artha, Kama, Mosksha. Hiriyanna defined "a 'purushartha' as an end which consciously sought to be accomplished either for its own sake or for the sake of utilizing it as a means to the accomplishment of a further end" (Hiriyanna, 1952, p. 66). However, it is debatable which goal is the more superior than others, as they are all distinctively important. The different philosophical traditions in Indian thought have ranked them differently. For example, in Arthashastra traditions, Artha has a very crucial role to attain the other three goals and it is not incompatible with the pursuit of Moksha, but in the Moskha traditions, the Artha has been ranked very low and has been seen as an impediment to the serious pursuit for Moksha. It can only be achieved by the gradual withdrawal from the life of real politics and economics (Parel, 2008, p. 46). It has been mentioned in *Yajnavalkya Smriti*, *Gautam Dharamsastra* and *Apastamba Dharmasutra* that in case of conflict between Dharma and Kama & Artha, Dharma shall prevail. Dharma is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Dhri' which literally means 'to hold', it symbolizes to hold what is right and true. However, in texts like Bhagawad Geeta, Moksha is considered as the ultimate aim as it is achieved after life. It is both a 'purushartha' and a 'paramartha', an ideal goal both for humans and divine beings (Howaldar, 2017).

The concept which was described elaborately in the ancient text of *Mahabharata,* has been brought into practice in modern India. The ancient wisdom can thus be used in modern times as well, it can definitely help us to locate values that modern Indian citizens endorse (Howladar 2017). The Indian project of introducing comparative political theory would fetch accounts of human nature from lived practices and ancient philosophical texts emanating from India. The current gaps in academia can be filled by this exercise.

4. VIKARS: THE SIX EVILS IN HUMANS

Kama Krodascha Lobhascha Dehe Thishtanthi Taskarah Jnana Ratno-paharaya Tasmat Jagrata Jagrata.

- Adi Shankaracharya

The Vedic scholar, Adi Shankaracharya stated that these values are dacoits that reside within individuals and restricts one from attaining the spiritual wisdom about the ultimate truth. In Bhavishya Purana, which is one of the major one in eighteen works in Purana genre, there is mentioning of '*Brahamachari Dharma*' or the duties of the bachelor life, it highlights that a bachelor must get rid of meat, intoxicants, scents, body-decoratives, 'arishadvargas' in order to become good student and attain salvation after life. In Sikhism, there is mention of five evils or five thieves for humans as they steal away their common wisdom and bring out their negative character. These five evils are Ahankar (Ego), Kaam (Lust), Krodh (Anger), Lobh (Greed), Moh (Attachment) (Izzo, 2017, p. 51-52). There are similarities in the conception of vices considered in Hinduism and Sikhism, it can be because the later being the new one learnt a few positive things from the former, however there was nothing wrong or unethical about it as it was a careful transaction. (Singh, 1980, p. 63).

In Buddhist traditions as well, there is a discussion about five hindrances in meditation or the whole journey for liberation of an individual. These five hindrances are Kamacchanda (Sensory Desire), Vyapada (Ill Will), Thina-Middha (Sloth and Torpor), Uddhacca-Kukkucca (Restlessness and

Remorse), Vicikiccha (Doubt) (Brahmavamso, 1999). The term 'sensual desire' alludes to the tendency of mind to latch onto something that attracts it. 'Ill will' on the other hand is the opposite of attraction, it symbolizes aversion, 'Sloth and torpor' means laziness and lethargy when one meditates. 'Restlessness and remorse' means continuous mental activities that make us restless. Doubt is fear of committing something wholeheartedly. These five components hinder one from meditating with focus (Kyabgon, 2013, p. 34-35).

We see a certain kind of unity of thoughts on vices among different strands of Indian philosophies. However, these conceptions have been completely missing from any accounts of human nature in IPT. The inclusive concept of 'Vikars' can include several aspects of different strands and further a cumulative understanding of evils in humans.

5. DECOLONIZING THE INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT: A STEP TOWARDS INTELLECTUAL SWARAJ

"Slavery begins when one ceases to feel the evil and it deepens when the evil is accepted as good", Indian philosopher Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya seems to still relevant in the post-colonial societies in the 21st century. We have been politically, socially and culturally free to practice our beliefs but mentally and intellectually slaves to the scholarship of the modern West. For years, post colonial societies have faced collective intellectual amnesia, the need of the hour is to change the fate now.

The recent works in the Indian political theory still sidelines the conception of 'Purusharthas' in defining the ideal human nature. Rajeev Bhargava highlights in his new work that "we are inescapably ethical beings" (Bhargava 2022, 35-36). However, this fact is not something unique. Maninder Nath Thakur asks why intellectuals like Bhargava did not communicate with Indian philosophy which has a multidimensional understanding of human nature. He comprehends that perhaps one reason is that Indian scholars educated in western tradition are not aware of this dimension of Indian philosophy (Thakur 2022, 96). Maninder Nath Thakur's new book, *Gyaan ki Rajneeti* (Politics of Knowledge) highlights that the understanding of the human nature available in Indian philosophy is quite different from one found in western philosophy. The solutions to the problems of philosophy and social studies are also contained in it (Thakur 2022, 89). Aditya Nigam goes a step forward with his new work, *Aasman Aur Bhi Hain,* to boost the reader to dive deep in the sea of Indian philosophical traditions. He claims to be a decolonial theorist. Nigam urges us to rethink important political concepts like power, democracy, capital etc, as he believes that these terms, which came from particular 'context' and 'time' acquired new meanings in different places with time (Nigam, 2023. p. 17). This again reiterated the importance of time and space.

One modern political thinker who invested his time and energy to seriously rethink on the conception of 'Purushartha' was M K Gandhi. Gandhi discarded old ways of conceiving the notion and presented a paradigm of thinking around it. He elaborated hoe these values are not exclusive but work interactive terms. Anthony J Parel outlines that Gandhi made the idea of Purusharthas as the foundation for his political and social ideas (Thakur, 2022, p. 99).

In *Hind Swaraj*, he presented the practical relevance of achieving Swaraj not just politically but economically, socially, and spiritually as well. These conceptions are very close to 'Purusharthas' themselves. For Gandhi, these values are not the aim of only individuals, but also nations and civilizations as well (Shah, 1996). We must learn from his ideas and re-investigate the idea of human nature on our contextual terms. It will be only then that our decolonial project will be finally successful, otherwise it will be another moniker that we often use academically in social sciences.

6. CONCLUSION

This subjection is slavery of the spirit: when a person can shake himself free from it, he feels as though the scales fell from his eyes. He experiences a rebirth and that is what I call Swaraj in Ideas.

- Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya, October 1931

The paper seems to be very significant for the sub-disciplines of Indian Political thought and Political theory of Political Science. It highlights the revived interest to carve out Indian political theory with

political terminologies and conceptions emanating from Indian texts, it is an urgency to engage with ideas in the Indian languages and make space for them in the political thought for these contextual paradigms, space for critical comparison between the existing concepts and to know which one is more exploratory and expressive for ourselves, for an academic discipline reflecting understanding of our societies.

The emphasis on the simultaneity of both positive and negative attributes of human nature was missing from the dominant conceptualization. Indian philosophy is bridging the gap in the existing academic discourse. The way it has brought the two dimensions of time and space in a political thought is nearly ground-breaking. It is a scientific add-on to the existing literature. One can wonder how Indian knowledge systems were tagged as un-scientific? It indicates the 'politics of knowledge' that underlies the game (Banerjee, 2021). The knowledge emanating from the East has always been considered inferior to the West, the relationship between knowledge systems has always been hierarchical.

However, it must be highlighted that the essence of the paper is not to parochialize the old canon of Indian Political thought, which would endorse caste hierarchies and gender inequalities. The idea is to not begin with a critical assessment of the age-old canon and to preserve and re-strengthen the efficient political concepts under the reflection of modern Indian thinkers, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad, and B. R. Ambedkar essentially MK Gandhi, primarily because he had seriously engaged with the idea of Purusharthas and Vikars.

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