

## HERMENEUTICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONCEPT OF BEING

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The concept of Being has been understood to locate its place in various cultures and civilization in Indian tradition. It is assumed to refer the nature of Reality with the subjective elements in understanding as a different thought processes. Though the process of understanding 'Reality' is accepted differently among Indian schools there is an inter-link in regard to the evidence of the acceptance of subjective elements. Buddhism expressed their views concerning the concept of the term 'sat' in terms of justified existence which is also related to the welfare of the society. The concept 'sat' depends on person's good works with holy motive, but not his name, position and family fame. The concept of 'sat' has been discussed in terms of the words satatā, sattā, sattva and satpuruṣa as mentioned by the Naiyāyikas, Bhāṭṭācārya, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition to find out the concept promoting justified existence related to social service.*

### **Keywords**

Existence (sat), relative (syāt), unselfish love (sattva), Reality (sattā), honesty (satatā), indescribable (avāchya), friendliness (maitrī), compassion (karuṇā), good people (satpuruṣa), devilish man (mānavarākṣaka).

### **HERMENEUTICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONCEPT OF BEING**

In the Aitareya Upaniṣad (2. 1. 3) it is clearly stated that woman is but the womb that bears the discharged seed marking the first birth of a human being, while the second birth is the delivering of the child from the mother's womb. In this processes the chance of being born as human being is rare, because it depends on individual's cycle of karma performed of his early birth or in this birth. When an individual being born in this universe, he has different duties assigned to perform in making the great cosmic order smoothly. That duty comes to be defined as the duty of his own caste or groups related to the society where he has been living; otherwise his existence would not be treated as justified existence as a human being. Now the question is: when and how does one realise his existence justified in this society? To meet this question we shall endeavour to make sense of the term 'Being' and then locate concept of Being in various cultures and civilization in a hermeneutical manner in Indian tradition.

### **THE CONCEPT OF EXISTENCE**

The concept of existence has a synonym sat. Let us revert to the past and discuss the concept of sat in the Rig Veda. The universe, as the Rigvedic men saw it, was in two antithetical terms. One part was known as sat, that is, the Exist. The word sat is the neuter stem of the present participle as the verb as 'be' and corresponds to the Latin essens. Below the earth lay the other part of the universe called the Asat, that is non-sat, the Non-Exist. This concept has been interpreted in various ways in the post-Vedic period. Very often it is assumed to refer the nature of Reality realized by an individual and also the subjective elements in understanding lies in different ways of thought processes. In all cases we will find an inter-link among all interpretations laid down by

different schools of Indian tradition. The Reality seem by the Buddhists is different from that of Jainas and Naiyāyikas, where the concept of being is also changing. The subjective element in the domain of understanding 'being' is evidenced. The justification of birth in this universe may be of different types. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad illustrated that a thing which cannot provide us Immortality cannot be said existent one. The Kathopaniṣad also expressed the same view when it remarked that self-realization is the only means of understanding justified existence, but not the mere enjoyment of wealth, holding the position of power etc.,

The Jainas expressed the concept of Reality in terms of 'syāt', meaning that which is relative. For them, Reality or satta has its infinite dimensions and we being finite are capable to know some of them. All sentences depicting Reality are necessarily relative, conditional and limited. There is no contradiction, because the real nature of Reality is indeterminate and complex and hence affirmation and negation may be made from a different standpoint. The absolute statement about the nature of Reality is erroneous. Hence, the Jainas believe that the Reality is infinitely complex (anantadharmaṇam vastu) which allows all opposite predicates from different standpoint. It is real as well as unreal (sadasadtmakam). What is real, universal, permanent and one from the substance, it is unreal, particular, momentary and many from a different mode. The Jainas presented the story of the six blind persons who expressed their opinions after touching the body of an elephant from different angles. All blind persons were quarrelling among themselves regarding the real nature of an elephant. But the person who knows the real nature of an elephant can realize that all blind persons are expressing the parts of the elephant considering it as a whole. So, all philosophical differences are made on mistaking the partial truth as the whole one. Since, it emphasises complex nature of reality and its indefiniteness. The dynamic character of reality can consist only with relative or conditional predication. Reality is multiform and

ever changing. It pursues the conversion of the inner man as a way of achieving freedom. In this sense, they promote the three jewels (triratna) of faith in Jina, knowledge of his doctrine and perfect conduct. The three together form one path, and are to be simultaneously pursued as a way to unselfish social service.

The Mādhyamikas also expressed the same view when they remarked that the Reality is *sūnya* in nature, i.e., indescribable (*avācya*). In this sense, the Reality is beyond the domain of four categories of intellect (*catuskotivinirmukta*). It means that the Reality goes beyond existence, non-existence, both existence and non-existence and neither existence nor non-existence. Hence, worldly pursuits fall under phenomenal truth or common truth (*samvṛti satya*) that is relative in nature, but not absolute truth. From the absolute point of view it is reality which is indescribable and transcendental, and any category of the intellect is not sufficient to describe it adequately. It follows that the Reality or Being is not of one type depending on the ontological and metaphysical presuppositions of the person. As per the Mādhyamika philosophy, the realization of the emptiness (*sūnyatā*) leads one to the higher spiritual and ethical level of consciousness or being. In this stage an individual enjoys the ability of cleansing the evils and cultivating good for others. It helps an individual to overcome his selfish and subjectocentric attitude and also promotes the culture of universal love and compassion towards the suffering lot. Hence, the purpose of the Mādhyamika philosophy is to make the world a peaceful and happy through self-transcendence so that his existence in this society may be others' oriented.

### THE RIG VEDA

The Rig Veda does not specify the contents of the sat as in a code, though it implies and includes physical, social moral and religious law. In course of times codes of social, moral and religious law were compiled and latter on more specific codifications were made, applicable to more aspects of life. The social and moral ideas behind more aspects of life were reflected by the Buddhists through their new approach concerning the concept of sat or Existence. The term 'sat' has been highlighted as many as of different meanings. These meanings also prevail in maintaining peace and order in the society in the light of justified existence. According to the Buddhists, an object is to be understood as sat if it bears some causal efficacy (*arthakriyā kāritavam*). In this sense, an object is called sat if it bears the capacity of producing an action and fulfills the purpose. On the other hand, an object is called asat if it does not bear the capacity of producing an action. The definition of sat and asat as described by the Buddhists in the light of *arthakriyākāritva* may be extended also to the idea of social welfare and sense of morality. A person may be described as sat in the true sense if he performs good works adopting compassion (*karūṇā*), and friendliness (*maitrī*) to all beings of the world. Here compassion (*karūṇā*) does not mean emotionalized identification with another's suffering. To lose oneself in concern for another, says the Buddhist, is mere sentimentality or emotional orgy. It is a manifestation of weakness and not strength. This weakness cannot be termed as sat. Rather the ideal compassionator is like a skilful

physician but not a fellow mourner. When he fully appreciates the suffering of the patient and only he who is calm and pure, perceptive, clear and knowledgeable, his works will be treated as sat in the positive sense. On the other hand, *maitrī* is higher than sentimental sensual love. According to Buddhism, one's first duty is to properly love himself. *Maitrī* directed the self is held to be no mere self-love, but a benevolent willing of true spiritual character, worth and salvation to himself. It helps one to get rid of all fetters in mind. That works of the individual help him to radiate to others, is called as 'sat' in the true sense.

If our existence is not endowed with above senses of causal efficacy or which is endowed with causal efficacy in the negative sense is called as asat. According to Buddhism human body is nothing but an object. So the concept of *sattā*, rooted from sat, of human being is determined in terms of causal efficacy in relation to human value as well as social value. For the causal efficacy of human being in terms of social welfare can be expressed not in one direction, but in different ways. Same idea can be placed in the Buddhist conception of sat as *svalaksāṇa*. This view can clearly be explained by sighting an example. The causal efficacy of fire lies in the object itself, but not in the word or name 'fire'; likewise the causal efficacy of human being lies itself in the person, but not in his name, caste or groups etc. possessed by him. It is understood that the causal efficacy of an individual as sat depends on his good works with holy motive, but not his name, caste or groups where he is living. Moreover, in the definition of *svalaksāṇa* the Buddhists used the term '*kalpanā*' or imagination to refer name, caste or groups that have no utility in proving an individual as sat. The Buddha encouraged independent individual effort what is useful for one's striving without recourse to name, caste or groups that are imaginary in nature. His dictum: Be light unto yourself, depend on yourself, do not depend on that imaginary qualities have to be understood in this context. When an individual has to establish himself firmly on this ideal related to the attainment of happiness and welfare of all, his existence will make him famous or sat. But the person having the high post or high family background cannot prove himself as sat. So the Being or sat has a ontological imperatives through which an individual can flourish himself as self-luminous and only then his works may be called as sat or justified existence. It has echoes of it in Kabir's religious poem as:

“*Vaḍā huyā to keyā huyā*  
Jaise vaḍi khejur  
*Pānthako chāyā nāhi*  
*Phal lāge atidūr*”.

It means that a person being born in a high family like a big date-palm has no significance in the society, even the tired travellers cannot get shadow from it and its fruits cannot easily plucked by an individual, so the person who swears by high family, high education, high position etc. his mere existence need to be questioned as sat until and unless he really proves himself existent by doing good works and welfare of the society. In doing so, a person who is happy by himself can make happy others and he becomes sat, having the quality of sat or justified existence.

The term 'sat' has a synonym, called sattva. The term 'sattva' is understood by a balanced quality. The question is: whether all existing individuals in terms of the literal meaning of the term 'sat' can be called as a balanced quality (sattva)? In reply, it can be said that an individual's mere existence does not mean as sat if he does not prove himself as justified existent, i.e., meaningful existence. If an individual's actions being existent in the society related to the performance of remarkable actions are known worthy to all then his existence called as sat or sattā, but never his mere physical existence.

It may be argued that if an individual presents himself famous for his immoral or negative actions like dacoity, murder, rape etc., can his actions being existent be taken as sat? The negative way of functioning actions or immoral actions, which may harm the interest of the society, can never be taken as sat and his actions will be treated as asat, i.e., non-availability of the positive value related to the society. Therefore, the existence of an individual without performing his valued duties in his life for the sake of harmony is asat and the person doing reverse is sat or honest.

The term 'sat' is also known in India by the Sanskrit word satatā or honesty. Let us try to understand what we mean by satatā in terms of sat. If I promise to help anybody in his difficult situation, I must keep up my promise if his difficult situation arises. Here satatā or honesty is coined with duty. In this case if I break my promise, my action would be taken as dishonesty (asatata). For this immoral action may lead to disbalance the peace and order of the society with all its aggressive belongings. Hence our existence for doing several deeds in this society for maintaining order and peace, which we enjoy through natural courses, should be justified; otherwise we may be charged as dishonest due to the misuses of our existence.

### **DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE PURE EXISTENCE (SUDDHASATTĀ) AND THE QUALIFIED EXISTENCE (VIŚIṢTASATTĀ)**

The distinction between the pure existence (suddhasattā) and the qualified existence (viśiṣtasattā) made by the Naiyāyikas perhaps may be pertinent in terms of justified existence although they have used it in the context of the logical analysis of the definition of vyāpti. Pure existence (suddhasattā) exists in substance (dravya), quality (guṇa) and action (karma) in the relation of inherence (samavaya). It means that pure existence is not confined to the gross body (dravya) but it is also pervasive to quality (guṇa) and action (karma). Here gross body (dravya) means the body of a person, quality indicates good qualities like social service, broad mind etc., and action denotes good actions like welfare service, performance of duties towards family and society. In this sense if a person having body does to have possess remarkable good quality and good action, his existence is to be termed as sattā (existent), i.e., pure sattā in true sense of the term. When the body (dravya), good qualities (gunas) and good actions (karmas) co-exist in harmony the pure sattā prevails there. In other hand when the sattā exists in substance alone, but not in quality or action is called as the qualified existence (viśiṣtasattā). In other words, the sattā which does not exist in quality (guṇa) and action (karma), but

only exist in substance (dravya) is called qualified existence or viśiṣtasattā (guṇakarmanyatvaviśiṣtasattā). According to the Naiyāyikas, pure existence or suddhasattā is desirable or acceptable than that of qualified existence or viśiṣtasattā, and the later has got less importance to the social life due to the lack of harmony among gross body, quality and action. Hence it is clear from the above that the pure existence (suddhasattā) is real existence or sattā which may be called sattva.

Bhartṛhari in the śloka of Nitiśataka expressed the same view when he makes a distinction between good people (satpuruṣa) and devilish person (mānavarākṣaka). The person (puruṣa) who is qualified as sat has got overwhelming goodness, i.e., goodness which is not vitiated by selfish motive or self-interest. So a person is called as satpuruṣa when deserves goodness without recourse to all narrow belongings of existence and he becomes glorified by the welfare of others. In other hand the person who is always engaged to have more comfort and pleasure in his life in the cost of destroying others' welfare, is called a devilish man or asura (mānavarākṣaka). In this stage a devilish man can fulfil his physical and biological needs but fails to develop his moral character. Owing to the absence of moral education his actions or attitude towards society would lead to break down harmony with the social needs. But this type of man can be transformed to sattva from the discourse of asuratva, i.e., the devilish attitude.

It is true that the present age of transition is as full of interest as of anxiety. It is also true that our civilization has become ossified, our dharma a bigotry of externals, our spirituality a faint glimmer of light, there is so much of quarrelling, strained relations, jealousy, hatred and factionalism. What is needed is acceptance and transformation of life and society by spirit, i.e., to re-establish the notion of satpuruṣa in the society. It would be incorrect to confuse the standards of civilization with economic welfare and maintenance of social order. The spirit of man craves not comfort but happiness, not peace and order but life and liberty, not economic stability or equitable administration but the right to work out one's salvation even at the cost of infinite toil and tribulation. All systems recognise as obligatory unselfish love and disinterested activity (sattva), and insist on the concept of satpuruṣa as essential to all moral culture. The discipline of moral life includes the suppression of devilish attitude, the development of true desires and the overcoming of empirical individualism.

The same type of human existence has been addressed by our leaders of thought. The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement culturally accepts human existence in terms of unselfish love for others. Ramakrishna expressed this view by saying: you should keep some residues in this earth as a mark of your birth (janmechis jakhan dag rekhe ja). It means that every human being should cultivate and inculcate the moral discipline in his life in order to justify his existence and find a way of doing good works for others so that people can remember him for his mentionable deeds. Our ancient scriptures advise us the metaphor of a banyan tree so that the suffering creatures can take shelter under its dense shadow and protect themselves from outer crisis. In this sense, it is understood that human beings should become as big as this tree so that he may stand to show the way of achieving the desirable social living. For people should not find satisfaction

being confined within their narrow intentions and attitudes, but they should be broader in heart, thought attitude and deeds so that they can provide peace, solace and well-being to others. This point was explicitly brought into high relief by Vivekananda's mission of social service as a part of one's way to mokṣa: jagaddhitāya mokṣartham. It is a real form of meaningful existence which entails from justified existence, i.e., having the quality of sattva. In this context the Mahāyāna iconic figure of the Bodhisattva comes to mind. A Bodhisattva is one who stands at the verge of Nirvāṇa, and yet keeping in view of the suffering humanity he decides to work for the transformation of the lot of the people. Śāntideva has articulated the ideal of the Bodhisattva in the following lines:

As long as space endures  
 As long as there are sentient beings,  
 May I too live.  
 To dispel the miseries of the world.  
 (Bodhicaryāvatāra, Chap X, 55)

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