

NATURE OF PHILOSOPHY

KRISHNA DEKA
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The word Philosophy' is derived from the Greek words 'Philos' which means 'love, and 'sophia' which means 'wisdom and 'knowledge'. The literal meaning of Philosophy is 'love for knowledge' or 'wisdom' or 'search for the truth for its own sake'.

The Indian term for Philosophy is 'Darsana'. The Sanskrit word 'darsana' means 'the direct experience of the ultimate reality or 'realisation of truth'.

To define a thing is never an easy task; for definition presupposes an exhaustive knowledge of the connotation of what is to be defined.

The difficulty of definition proves even greater when we try to understand what is meant by philosophy which seems to have no limits to its subject of investigation.. By following the practice of Aristotle, let us start with a tentative or provisional definition of philosophy.

Philosophy may provisionally be defined as an attempt to explain and appreciate life and the universe as a whole. The philosopher does not look at life and the universe as piecemeal, but always takes them as a systematic whole, and his entire being reacts upon that whole. He is, in the words of Plato, the spectator of all times and existence. He will start by way of analysis, with the world as it appears. For the philosopher, genuine or philosophical knowledge is always knowledge of the whole. The organized, totality of reality and value, and such knowledge is not confined within the bounds of reason but may extend beyond it to other elements of experience to include the elements of faith, feelings or emotional intuition.

From the above provisional definition of Philosophy we can form an idea of its province or scope. Philosophy, as an explanation and appreciation of life and the universe as a whole, is the most comprehensive of all enquiries and as such must have the widest scope of all. It includes within its scope every branch of human enquiry.

The universe appears in the first instance, as a realm of Phenomena which the philosopher cannot ignore. Therefore, Philosophy must include phenomenal or scientific study of the universe. Behind phenomena there must be reality from which phenomena spring and by which they are

ultimately explained. Again reality is the subject matter of enquiry for another branch of knowledge which is generally known as 'Ontology or 'Metaphysics'. Therefore, Philosophy which studies Phenomena in the light of reality must include within its scope both science and metaphysics, Phenomenology and Ontology.

Again, Philosophy studies the science which investigates into the nature and conditions of correct knowledge which is known as Epistemology. So, Philosophy must include within its scope, the science of correct knowledge or epistemology.

We have stated in our definition of Philosophy that it is the explanation as well as appreciation of life and the Universe. The term 'appreciation' in our definition of Philosophy includes much more than what we have stated so far within the province of Philosophy. We believe that value or worth is as real as things and their attributes and relations, to be more precise. Appreciation of worth or value is not the same as merely logical analysis of facts. Thus Philosophy also includes within its scope the problem of value. And value as identical with reality, forms the subject matter of what is called Axiology. Hence the province of Philosophy comprises science and metaphysics, epistemology and axiology.

Thinking is man's natural endowment. He may think in one way or another but think he must. It follows then that reflective thinking or philosophy is as old as the human mind. The reflective thought of man cannot be accepted to have one uniform pattern, when once started. Both the original start of philosophic enquiry and the subsequent cast it receives from the philosopher depend upon his personal outlook and the natural and social environment he has to face. It is because of these incentives to enquiry that we have the various developments of Philosophy. The following are the most important sources of Philosophic enquiry

- (i) Wonder – Plato was the founder of this enquiry.
- (ii) Doubt- Bacon was the founder of this enquiry.
- (iii) Pragmatic or Humanistic enquiry.
- (iv) Love of Wisdom – Socrates was the founder of this enquiry.
- (v) Spiritual urge.

Philosophy, as we now understand it, is the result of a long course of human thinking. Turning to the history of European Philosophy, we find that in the early Greek period, Philosophy was mixed up or rather identical with natural science. To the early Greek mind the objects of the world were of the most engrossing character, and naturally, therefore, it was busy with the study of the elements of nature separately or collectively as they forced themselves upon their imagination. The early Greek Philosophy was objective and theoretical.

In the medieval European Philosophy, we miss the freedom of thought and imagination of the ancient Greeks. Medieval Philosophy was marked by a stagnation and distortion of human thought. The philosophy of the medieval ages was the philosophy of the inspired preachers about supernatural problem, stultified by intellectual stagnation.

Modern European Philosophy is however, marked by criticism as opposed to the dogmatic and credulous tendencies of the medieval period. It is more confined to the problems of the here and the now, of what experience and reason reveal to us.

The development of philosophy in India, has not, however, been parallel to that in the west. The philosophy of India has not been the result of different philosophers at different periods of history. To India, philosophy has always been a way of life. All the systems of Indian Philosophy have a family likeness in that, they all are practical in their outlook, emphasizing as they do, that philosophy is pre-eminently an art of life. The proper aim of philosophising according to the Indian mind has never been knowledge for its own sake but for the sake of making life better.

Philosophy must be the essential occupation of human life. History of Philosophy, however, has shown that the conception of philosophy in relation to life has not been kept in view all thorough the vicissitudes of man's history. Socrates in ancient Greece and the seers of ancient India touched the vital cord of life. Philosophy investigates the origin, aim nature and meaning of human life.

The function of a true philosopher has been portrayed in its proper colour by Thoreau when he said, "to be a Philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a School, but so to love wisdom as to live, according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity and trust". Philosophy is the expression and fulfillment of life. It must always be rooted in the deeper soil of the soul. Then only truth will be revealed in all its glory. A philosopher is a bearer of the trust which will not only ennoble him but also is bound to edify mankind for whom he bears it. □