

# The Synergism in Asian Philosophies to Elevate Humanity from Individualistic Dimension to the Universal Perspective

Ms. Iti Dayal  
Research Scholar  
Dept. Of Philosophy  
Gujarat University, Ahmedabad  
Email : vidhudyl@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Asia is the most diverse and vast continent which is still sustaining and nourishing the world's oldest and prominent civilisations. The various Philosophies sprouted in Asia, depict and convey the evolution of humanity, multiculturalism, pluralism, cohesiveness immanent in the diversity and the human urge to self – transcend. The manifold cultures and their mutual interactions, beliefs, religions, rationality, ethos, contemplations and orientations that developed in Asia metamorphosed into different Philosophies and find their expression through these Philosophies. The heterogeneity and peculiarities present in these different Philosophies unfold the infinitude manifestations that the diversity could undergo.

Hinduism preaches that everything is the manifestation of one supreme, purely conscious and entirely blissful Brahma. Jainism propagates the doctrine of relativity and plurality along with ascetic discipline. Buddhism believes in enlightening oneself to eliminate ignorance, suffering and bondage. Confucianism has been the code of ethics which professes that human beings, in order to attain perfection, must follow their inherent virtues of benevolence, justice, propriety and wisdom. Taoism is mystical in nature and teaches to live in accordance with the natural order of the universe and to strive for attaining immortality. Shintoism emphasises on Purity of Heart and virtues like Beauty, Truth, Goodness and Morality. Judaism ensures faith in one single, omnipotent, incorporeal God as the creator and governor of universe as well as the moral source for humanity. The Christian doctrine of Trinity teaches the unity of God, Jesus Christ and Holy Spirits while the Triad teaches to cultivate Faith, Hope and Love. The philosophy of Islam preaches submission to Almighty, to seek his divine guidance and to become an integral whole.

Asian Philosophies along with their further off – shoots and contemporary versions unanimously believe – *firstly*, in the divinity inherent in humanity; *secondly* in the potential of human beings to unfold their latent divinity and transcend their physicality; *thirdly* they all accept the entire creation as a single living entity directly or indirectly; *fourthly* they all strive to maintain peace and order in the world and *fifthly* they endorse harmonious relationship of human beings among themselves and with the entire creation. The subtle essence of every Philosophical School is to raise the humanity into a higher plane of spirituality where one can have the holistic realisations of unity amidst diversity and divinity in the Creation.

**Keywords:** Asia, Abrahamic Philosophies, Eastern Philosophies, unity, diversity

\*\*\*\*\*

Asia encompasses about one third of the total world's land area. The vastness of Asia is also reflected in its the rich legacy of generosity to facilitate the emergence of multitude Civilisations, Philosophies, religions, faiths, literature, art and music, deliverance and orientations. The creativity of humankind has found immeasurably vivid expressions in this landmass. As Asia literally means "Sunrise" or "East", we witness the upsurge of human and spiritual orientations about how to survive the uncertainties, clashes and adversities of life and fear of death, and how to restore ethics in individual as well as in social spheres. Human faculties of intellect and intuition have always aspired to reveal the truth behind the apparent worldly manifestation and to actualise the innate human urge to transcend oneself. Humanity is intensely engaged to find the principles, fundamental ontology and teleology behind the vast creation which is harmoniously propagating itself from the limitless macrocosmic to immeasurably minute

microcosmic manifestations. This human contemplation, urge and awe gave rise to world's most prominent schools of Philosophy – Hinduism, Abrahamic School, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Shintoism, off – shoots of Buddhism in the Asian Continent. These Philosophies are instilling fearlessness, hopefulness, positive inclination towards life, peaceful coexistence, ethical order and emanating humanity towards embracing the universalistic and holistic vision.

According to Jewish historian Josephus Flavius, Abraham was the first ardent philosopher who reason to the knowledge of Supreme Being 'God' and the creation of universe. Abraham is regarded as the father of **Judaism** and of the Jewish nation Israel in West Asia. **Christianity** regards Abraham as the root of spiritual lineage of universal faith. **Islam** considers Abraham as the spiritual father of all believers who was the first to submit to the absolute obedience to God. The Abraham tradition is

significant for its monotheism and transcendental nature of God. They believe that God listens to the prayers and sends prophets or messengers from time to time to deliver his divine messages and commands to the humanity.

In the Jewish wing of Abrahamic Philosophy, it is preached that there is one Supreme Being 'God', there is no second; in each man, there is a unity or totality that corresponds to the Unity of God. It believes that humans are created in the image of God which implies that humans have the ability to reason and exercise their Freedom of Will with conscience and accountability. Their Monotheism is usually referred as 'Ethical Monotheism' as it binds right acts to the obedience of One Almighty and thereby strengthens unity among the followers. According to their Philosophy of *Tikun Olam*, God is said to have created the world incompletely. Instead of making bread, He gave us wheat, and instead of bricks, He gave us clay. We have to harvest the wheat, make flour and then bake the bread ourselves. In this way, the entire creation propagates with the partnership of God and humans. We human beings are not the isolated individuals but we are collectively important agents and participants in the divine scheme of God. Jews, the followers of Judaism, share a close bond within themselves and consider themselves as an integral part of global community. Judaism is an action-oriented Philosophy and it tends to focus more on the way in which one lives and practices one's beliefs in the world. Jews believe that they are appointed by God and have been assigned the responsibility to preach holiness and ethical behaviour to the world by their own conducts and practices. Jews believe that people should not be judged on the basis of intellectual content but on the extent to which one has contributed to the overall holiness of the world. This followers' clan of Abrahamic Philosophy are often regarded as 'being Philosophers by race' and they consider themselves as 'a light to other nations'.

Jesus Christ reproduced Judaism in accordance with his own vision, intuitive revelations and claims. After his martyrdom, Christianity evolved as a powerful movement and as another version of Abrahamic Philosophy. Christianity claimed itself to be the complete and legitimate heir to Jewish Monotheism and insisted that its beliefs and philosophy cannot remain confined to a particular nation Israel but entire humanity deserves the practice and benefits of Christianity. It is a dynamic and progressive Philosophy. Though there were religious wars continued for centuries, other wars and persecutions of Philosophers, astronomers, scientists and activists, but with the emergence of Copernican astronomy, industrial development and progress of Science and Technology, Christianity recreated itself with new and different interpretations of the Gospel and continued its reformation and progression.

In the Christian tradition, there is a doctrine of '**Imago dei**', which in Latin implies – Image of God. It refers to the unique imprint God has placed on humanity, it establishes humanity as a special creation. Humanity incorporates physical and non – physical components. This doctrine of *Imago dei* also describes people as God's counterpart in the universe. God has created human beings for fellowship, to represent Him and to continue His presence on Earth. The entire ethics can be summed up by the two Great Commandments – 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your mind' and 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. The doctrine of *Imago dei* makes these two Commandments mutually inclusive, that is, to love God is to love others and to love others is to love God as everyone bears the imprints of God.

Another Abrahamic School Islam believes that humans are the greatest of all creatures, created with free will for the purpose of obeying and serving Supreme Being 'Allah'. The cardinal virtue of Islam is 'Submission'. The word **Islam** has its root in an Arabic word '**Slm**' which means 'to be in peace, to be an integral whole'. Thus, the word Islam implies 'to surrender to God's law and thus become an integral whole'. According to Quranic teachings, 'The best and most beautiful of my creations is a compassionate man who gives alms. If he does so with his right hand and hides it from left, he is more powerful than all things', 'Anything that will bring a smile on the face of others is a good deed, and is the love of one's neighbours', to honour the memory of one's mother – 'dig a well in her memory and give water to thirsty' – this one is a significant exhortation, as the area was water scarce.

In Zoroastrianism, the ancient Iranian tradition, we come across the concept of **Spenta Ārmaiti** which is considered to be the manifestation of wisdom. 'Spenta' signifies boundless creative Force while 'Ārmaiti' implies calm thinking, harmonious thoughts and serene meditation. The *Spenta Ārmaiti* causes the channelizing of immense creative instinct of human beings into devotion towards family, friends, and eventually develop altruism and love for the entire creation. This auspicious attribute of *Spenta Ārmaiti* has been personified as female divinity and is associated with Earth. Zoroastrianism believes in harmonious living with all living and non-living creations, their followers respect the four primary elements – Air, Fire, Water and Earth, and they advocate to avoid polluting these elements with impurities. Among the elements, fire is looked upon with most reverence and respect as it is believed to be the symbol of enlightenment, love, sanctity, warmth and permanence.

In the East Asia, we have a profound legacy and an ancient tradition of philosophical contemplation. The Eastern philosophy of Confucianism that focuses on how to achieve harmony through mercy, social order and fulfilment of responsibilities. Confucianism is an ethics that gives primacy to human relationships, the Five Cardinal Relationships are Sovereign – Subject, Father – son, Elder – Younger brother, Husband – Wife and between friends. Thus the identity of an individual is defined by the his membership in the reference group to which that individual belongs to. Thus, an individual has no significance as a separate being but is identified as a member of a larger whole. “**Ren**” is the central ethical principle that emphasizes on the virtues of love, mercy and humanity. Ren is well explicated in a simple Confucian thought – “What you do not wish others to do to you, do not do unto them”.

Parallel to Confucianism, another philosophical school of **Taoism** flourished which is quite mystical in nature. Taoism preaches selflessness, that is, it disregards the centrality of self and considers an individual as a manifestation or an extension of cosmos. It says that a selfless person is free from social constrictions and internal psychological impediments, but he still leads a balanced life in harmony with the society as well as Nature. Thus a selfless person could become a sage in tranquility and a king in activity. When selflessness is attained the distinction between ‘I’ and ‘other’ disappears and an individual gets humbled with the realisation of universalism at cosmic level.

Shintoism is the cornerstone of Japanese culture which is regarded as a ‘patriotic cult’. It considers all human life and Nature as sacred. In Shintoism, Nature is sacred hence to be in kinship of Nature is to be close to Almighty or ‘Kami’. Natural objects are worshipped as sacred spirits. Ancestors are deeply revered and are worshipped. The ethics of Shintoism urges to be helpful to others and in the world at large through deeds of worship without the thought of rewards, and to seek the advancement of world. It further urges to bind oneself with others in harmonious acknowledgement of the will of the Emperor, praying that the country may flourish and that other people too may live in peace. Shinto ethics considers anything that disrupts social order, world order and harmony of the world, as undesirable and bad. Thus Shintoism promotes harmony and purity in all spheres of life. For Japanese, Shintoism is simply a “celebration of life, of all life forms and the place of human beings in Nature”. The ethical emphasis is on the moral purity and mental sincerity.

**Buddhism and Jainism** emerged as great Movements within Hinduism to counter the religious and social entropy that grew up in Hinduism. They emerged as

the prominent movements and spread throughout Asian continent. These atheistic philosophies and promote self-help, that is, they intend to make humanity so morally strong that it itself evolve its immanent divinity without depending on some Supreme Being. Existence of some Supreme Being is not required as our own being is a bundle of Divinity. In Buddhism we come across the ethics of Brahmaviharas that preach to practice Four subliminal states of emotions, they are, **Maitri** (loving kindness), **Karuna** (compassion), **Mudita** (joy) and **Upeksha** (equanimity) to attain the *boundless state* or Buddhahood. The unconditional and boundless love (**Maitri**) guards compassion (**Karuna**) against turning partial and discriminating; and imparts to equanimity (**Upeksha**) its selflessness and boundlessness. **Karuna** does not allow **Maitri** and **Mudita** to get self satisfied and help them to grow into truly boundless states. **Mudita** prevents **Karuna** from getting overwhelmed with the worldly sufferings and develops **Karuna** into active empathy. **Upeksha** is evenmindedness. Thus **Maitri**, **Karuna**, **Mudita** and **Upeksha** are thus the four sufficed Supreme Efforts or Divine Emotional states., if practiced, cultivated and established, these virtues lead human understanding and wisdom to an enlightened state. In this state the perception of organic division dissolves and the realisation of harmonious wholeness and unity emerges.

In Jain Philosophy, there is subliminal concept of **Anatachatushtaya**, according to which every individual soul possesses infinite power, infinite knowledge, infinite faith and infinite bliss. Anatachatushtaya is the true essential nature of a human being. It preaches that divinity is inherent in every individual soul and it is not necessary to surrender to any higher being nor to ask for any divine favour to attain the state of perfection or Anatachatushtaya. Jain ethics of **Triratna** comprises Right Faith, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct. Right faith discerns the nature of body and soul, and this awareness grows detachment and non – possession. Right knowledge frees one from Absolutism and enables one to be liberal and generous. Finally the realisation of oneness of all living beings leads to non violent Right Conduct. The centrality of Non violence in Jain Philosophy makes it truly universal and all inclusive.

The origin of **Hinduism** is said to have started some eight millennia or more ago, with the emergence of Vedic tradition. The development course of Indian Philosophy went through different stages like Pluralism to Dualism and from Dualism to Non-dualism. Hinduism is considered to be the driving Indian Philosophy of oldest surviving human civilisation. Hinduism is characterised as spiritual for it considers Consciousness as the only fundamental entity and all its preaching, rituals and practices

aim at developing the divinity inherent in humankind. Hinduism refers itself as '**Dharma**' which literally means the essential properties or essence of a substance. Hinduism strongly holds that divinity is the essential nature or essence or **dharma** of every individual and **Hinduism aims at developing Divinity immanent in humanity** in particular and entire creation in general. That takes a being back to its essential nature and enable it to realise the divinity inherent in itself along with the cosmic dimension of individuated Consciousness. Practice of Dharma, establishes one in highest bliss, give respite from worldly misery and delusions.

We human beings, so far, are the best creation with well developed faculties of sensations or emotions, cognition, intellect and intuition. Indian tradition has provided humanity with subliminal plans, disciplines, specialisations, freedom, self-restrains, duties and worth accomplishing goals to channelize the immense and unpredictable potential, creativity, empathy and resourcefulness. So there exists **Ashram** system which divides human life into four segments of 25 years each and four **Purushartha** in parallel -*Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha*. In this way, Indian tradition provides a comprehensive planning and direction to bring the sense of self-fulfilment or self-actualisation in human beings. Also, it gives freedom to adopt any other mode that suits to an

individual but it should be in conformity with the Loksangraha, that is, overall well being of the world. Loksangraha, which is to bring about welfare and coherence in the world, is the end of all human activities. All the prominent prophecies of Hinduism like **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, atmavat sarvabhuteshu, Sarve santu sukhinah, ten vyaktena bhunjitha** along with several others underline the holistic perspective that establishes a dynamic unity between humans and cosmos.

The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Asian Philosophies do vary from one school to another, but regarding Ethics, we find less divergence. All the schools of Asian Philosophy uphold the divinity inherent in humanity. The Asian Philosophies create mutual synergies to raise the plane of human understanding and conscience to realise the unity in plurality and pluralism as a graceful expression of unity. Asian Philosophies collectively work to expand human consciousness to rise above the anthropocentric approach and adopt a universal perspective. All of them aspire to establish a dynamic unity of human beings among themselves and also with the entire cosmos. This dynamic unity is the unity of purpose and this purpose is to develop divinity inherent within for harmonious co-existence with regards to diversity. The Asian Philosophies visualise unity in diversity and altogether reject segregation.