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Nature of Vedic Ethics and its Critique as Soteriology

By Swagata Ghosh[*]

The present paper deals with the idea of understanding Vedic ethics as a code of righteous living, in the light of Mīmāṁsā philosophy. The paper also intends to reflect upon the possibility of such methods as a means of attaining liberation. In other words, the Vedas provide us with prescriptive codes of right and wrong actions. It commands us about duties and non-duties, through the performance of rituals, in order to lead a good life. We know that human endeavours are primarily based on attaining the desired, and to prevent the unwanted ends. Hence, the entire effort of human actions lies in the fact that we want to attain the cessation of sufferings. This paves the way for studies in Soteriology, and the question arises that, could the Vedas be considered as a literature on Soteriology. The paper consists of a number of sections. The initial ones involve the linguistic analysis of the Vedic statements based on Sanskrit grammar and semantics. These are aimed at depicting the manner in which Vedic sentences act as prescriptive ethical codes. The latter ones deal with the questions raised by the opposing schools, namely Sāṁkhya-Yoga, against the idea of considering Vedas as a supreme sanction of means, leading beings to their salvation from empirical sufferings, and their plausible responses.

Keywords: *duties, ends, sacrifices, knowledge, liberation*

Introduction

Indian philosophical conception of morality is widely based on the Vedic notions of right and wrong. The philosophical traditions not only restrict themselves in advancing various theories on ethics regarding the standard of evaluation of voluntary acts, or trying to determine the import of ethical terms, or even factors influencing moral judgement and the like, rather the orthodox traditions hold that the ultimate sanction of morality is the Vedas. This is because of the fact that the various schools of thought in the Indian tradition are primarily based on Soteriology. Thus, we find that any discussion on morality, however, is two-fold – one aspect deals with the qualitative evaluation of intentional actions, while the other prescribes or commands ways of righteous living, which eventually lead to the salvation of individuals. Both the functions are deeply related to linguistic employments, and hence, our main contention in this paper would be to carry out an analytic discussion on morality as expressed through linguistic usage in the Vedas. Further, the idea is to critically evaluate the possibility of emancipation from sufferings, following the Vedic rites and rituals.

[*]Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of North Bengal, India.

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Methodology, Literature Review, Discussions and Analyses of the Subject Matter

Dichotomy of Ethical Statements

At the very outset of the discussion let us split the entire set of ethical statements into two sets, namely, the domain of public usage and that of the Vedic context. The ethical statements in the Vedas mostly speak of duties and non-duties of individuals belonging to certain sections and particular stations of life. The ethical sentences of ordinary parlance, like, 'Always speak the truth', 'Do not steal' etc. inhere a power to direct individuals accordingly, yet, they differ greatly from sentences of the Vedic realm, which speak of ritualistic duties and non-duties, in the Vedic context only. However, at times we find Vedic sentences acting as the cause of our inclination towards an action, or refraining us from an activity which is of empirical nature as well, as in '*mā gṛdhaḥ kasyasviddhanam*' (Roer 2011), meaning, we should not be jealous about others' properties. Again in other sentences like, '*na kalañjaṁ bhakṣayet*' (Bhargananda 1411 Bengali year), we find restrictions on intake of red garlic, or meat of an animal killed by a poisonous weapon. In the present context, the initial part of our discussion would precisely be about the linguistic analyses of the Vedic sentences with regard to the Pūrva Mīmāṁsā tradition, in context to their potency of moral communication, and their power to determine the ethics of various acts related to Vedic rites and sacrifices.

Vedas as the Ultimate Sanction

According to the Indian orthodox philosophical traditions, Vedic sentences are taken to be the sources of knowledge of the domain which lies beyond our sense-experience. Whatever be the content of the injunction, empirical or supra-empirical, the compulsive force expressed through the optative or potential mood of the verb (denoting sense of duty) leads us to act, or to refrain from, accordingly. The importance of the Vedic injunctions lies in the fact that they constitute such a portion of the Vedas that conveys matters not known or knowable otherwise. The injunctions enjoin such matter that is not established by any other means of proof, and enjoining thus, it becomes useful and necessary (Sukthankar 2005). To explicate further, let us consider the following injunction, – '*agnihotraṁ juhuyāt svargakāmaḥ*', meaning that, one desirous of attaining heaven must perform the *agnihotra* sacrifice. It is evident that such knowledge is never obtainable by other means, like, the perception, inference, comparison, presumption *etc*., which are strictly the means of attaining cognitions of empirical verifiability only. Hence, we must admit that the Vedas are the sole sources of knowledge on matters arguably beyond the empirical and/or sensory realm. Consequently, the Vedic injunctions are considered to be the supreme sanctions in the realm of supra-sensuous matters[1].

[1]'*tatrājñātārthajñāpako vedabhāgo vidhiḥ/ sa ca tādṛśaprayojanavadarthavidhānenarthavān yādṛśaṁ cārthaṁ pramāṇāntareṇāprāptaṁ vidhatte – yathā "agnihotraṁ juhuyāt svargakāmaḥ" iti vidhirmānāntareṇāprāptaṁ svargaprayojanavadhomaṁ vidhatte/*' (Sukthankar 2005, p. 16).

The Vedas, also referred to as *Śruti*, are the ultimate source of verbal testimony. According to the Pūrva Mīmāṁsā philosophers, the Vedas are not created. They are self-manifested, without a beginning, eternal and un-authored. The Vedas consist of millions of sentences which are passed on verbally through ages from a preceptor to his pupils. The Vedas provide us knowledge of that which is not knowable otherwise, and one such knowledge is that of *dharma*. The term '*dharma*' originating from the Sanskrit root verb '*dhṛ*', meaning to hold or to sustain, refers to ethics or morality. That is, morality is such that sustains human existence on earth, and the entire creation as such. It strictly refers to ethical codes and performances of morally sanctioned actions. Such knowledge is imparted to us primarily through the Vedic injunctions and prohibitions.

> Vedic injunctions possess undeniable persuasive power because of the fact that their authority and reliability are beyond the realms of doubt and error. For instance, injunctions like, '*yajeta svargakāmo*', meaning that, one desirous of attaining heaven must perform specific Vedic sacrifices. These dictates are neither questionable nor deceptive. The above linguistic expression does not carry any sense of probability or uncertainty in it. Śabarasvāmi, the commentator on Mīmāṁsā aphorisms, points out that the linguistic usages of human beings in the ordinary parlance, like, 'there are fruits on the bank of the river' (*Śābarabhāṣya* on *Mīmāṁsā Sūtra* 1.1.2), may be either true or false, and it is empirically verifiable. On the contrary, whatever is expressed by the Vedic sentences is not at all contradicted by the subsequent cognition of a person in a different situation, or by different individuals in different times and places. Hence, its infallibility is unquestioned and is free from all kinds of uncertainty[2].

Grammatical Analysis of a Vedic Injunction to Show its Compelling Force

Let us now try to analyse how a Vedic injunction works. In the injunction, '*yajeta svargakāmaḥ*', the verb '*yajeta*' consists of the directive power of the injunction in question. The verb '*yajeta*' is constituted of the root '*yaj*' and the suffix. The suffix again consists of two constituent parts, - the verb-notion and the optative or potential mood. We know that in Sanskrit grammar, there are ten participles signifying tense or mood[3]. The verb-notion is present in all the ten participles, but the compulsive force (signifying, sense of duty) is specific to the optative participle only. The conjugated sense of both the parts of the suffix gives rise to a creative energy towards performing actions. Before the production of an action, the favorable factor, that is, a kind of intent or mental propensity of the individual which propels the action is called the creative energy (*bhāvanā*)[4]. The creative energy is again of two types, - verbal creative energy and end-creative

[2]The indubitable and infallible nature of Vedic statements are expressed as, - '*na ca svargakāmo yajeta ityatovacanāt sandigdhamavagamyate bhavati vā svargo na vā bhavatīti/na ca niścitamavagamyamānamidaṁ mithyā syāt... na ca iṣa kālāntare puruṣāntare' vasthāntaredeśāntarevā viparyeti/ tasmādavitathaḥ//*' (*Śābarabhāṣya* on *Mīmāṁsā Sūtra* 1.1.2).

[3]The central force of persuasion which remains embedded in the Vedic injunctions lies in the verb '*yajeta*' in the above example and is discussed in much detail in Sukthankar (2005, p. 11 onwards).

[4]'*ubhābhyāmapyaṁśābhyāṁ bhāvanaiva ucyate/bhāvanānāmabhaviturbhavanānukūlo bhāvayiturvyāpāra viśeṣaḥ/ sādvedhā, śābdībhāvanā, ārthībhāvanā ceti*' (Sukthankar 2005, p. 11).

energy (Gajendragadkar and Karmarkar 1998). The verbal creative energy is responsible for producing the compulsive conducive force in the mind of the agent for the performance of the action. It is expressed by the optative element in the suffix. The end-creative energy is the actual or the final end-oriented activity which leads to the accomplishment of the action. The end-creative energy is preceded by verbal creative energy. In other words, the verbal creative energy produces the end-creative energy. We might consider an everyday experience to explicate the above notions. For instance, X is cooking rice. This action is preceded by the creative energy of X which leads to the performance of the action. Now, Y asks X to cook rice. X first listens to the instructive sentence. The words in the instruction, accordingly, produce an inspiration in the listener's mind (here, X) and it is known as verbal creative energy. At the next moment, the meaning of the words along with the end-notion produces yet another inspiration in her/his mind. Thus, the activity is about to be undertaken in order to accomplish the end. This is referred to as end-creative energy.

Analogously, in case of Vedic injunctions like, '*yajeta svargakamaḥ*', the term '*yajeta*' is responsible for the production of both verbal creative energy and end-creative energy successively in the individual's mind in a similar manner, which then leads to the production of inclination in the listener. The inclination is of the form, 'This Vedic injunction is inspiring me to perform the sacrifice'. Thus, it might be claimed that the persuasive power of the Vedic injunctions is communicated to the individual through a psychological experience, namely, creative energy, and the entire force inheres in the suffix in the form of the compulsive force signifying the sense of duty, that is, through the optative or potential mood. Due to this reason, the injunctions are considered as sentences which inspire to act. However, it is important to mention here that there is a difference between the compulsive force of injunctions and that of empirical imperatives or mere commands. The optative or potential mood of the injunctions, discussed above, does not merely act as a propeller or stimulus. Rather there is a rigorous sense of obligation entwined with it.

Vedic Prohibitions

Now let us turn our attention to another significant part of the Vedas, namely, the prohibitions. We know that just as human beings desire to attain pleasure, they also want to avoid pain and misery. This is specifically where the prohibitory statements play their active roles. These instructive statements prevent us from performing certain acts which may bring about misery and pain upon us. Thus, they are regarded as statements which refrain us from actions. These Vedic sentences, in turn, are equally powerful in communicating and strictly preventing acts like the enjoyment of prohibited objects out of sheer passion, as it would inevitably lead to extreme sufferings[5].

[5]'*puruṣasya nivartakaṁ vākyaṁ niṣedhaḥ, niṣedhavākyānāmanarthahetu kriyā nivṛttijanakatvenaivārthavatvāt/ tathāhi, yathā, vidhiḥ pravartanāṁ pratipādayan svapravartakatvanirvāhārthaṁ vidheyasya yāgāderiṣṭasādhanatvamākṣipan puruṣaṁ tatra pravartayati/ tathā* '*na kalañjaṁ bhakṣayet*' *ityadi niṣedho'pi nivartanāṁ pratipādayan*

One such instance of the Vedic prohibitions is, '*na brāhmano hantavya*' (Bhargananda 1411 Bengali year), meaning that one should not kill a Brahmin, that is, a person who might be a possessor of supreme knowledge, or a servant of God. Such prohibitory statements again carry a sense of obligation, and thus, on hearing such sentences, more often than not, individuals refrain from committing such acts.

It is, thus, evident that the Vedic injunctions inspire an individual to perform rites and rituals in accordance with one's desire and one does so out of the sense of obligation as imposed on them by optative or potential mood of the injunctions. Similarly, the Vedic prohibitions prevent one from involving in prohibited acts with the same intensity as the injunctions. The injunctions and prohibitions respectively communicate the senses of 'duty' and 'non-duty' to an individual. One realizes what *should* be done and what *should not* be done. Clearly, this is nothing but the basic tenet of a moral prescription.

Are the Vedic Means Soteriological?

The Vedas being the ultimate source of Soteriology, at this point, let us examine the efficacy of the Vedic prescriptions in order to attain emancipation from sufferings. All individuals on earth strive to attain cessation of sufferings through various means. All human endeavours are directed towards such. Thus, a prudent being would strive to attain such cessation of sufferings which would be sanguine and that which would never recur. We know that such cessation of sufferings is never attainable by empirical means, since, those means are not strong enough to prevent the recurrence of sufferings. Hence, reflective individuals would always resort to such paths which would lead them to their desired ends. That is, adopting scriptural means would provide us with the means of absolute cessation of sufferings. In Sāṁkhya philosophy, the most ancient orthodox school of thought in the Indian philosophical tradition, we find some intriguing critiques regarding the tenability of the Vedic rituals as a means of emancipation from sufferings. The Vedic means are mostly admitted by the Pūrva Mīmāṁsā philosophers or the Karmavādī Mīmāṁsā philosophers. According to the Sāṁkhya philosophers, though liberation is identical with the absolute cessation of sufferings, but it can only be attained by acquiring discriminatory knowledge (*vivekajñāna*) between the consciousness (*puruṣa*) and the matter (*prakṛti*). In case of an embodied consciousness, there appears an apparent non-apprehension of the distinctive cognition between the psycho-somatic states of the individual and the being as pure consciousness. This precisely acts as the root of all our sufferings, and hence, to liberate oneself from such induced bindings permanently, one has to attain discriminatory cognition (*vivekakhyāti*) between the consciousness (*puruṣa*) and the matter (*prakṛti*).

On that note, as discussed so far, we find that the means stated by the Vedas are similar to the empirical methods of pain eradication. That is, they cannot bring

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svanivartakatvanirvāhārthaṁ niṣedhasya kalañja bhakṣaṇasya parāniṣṭasādhanatvamākṣipan puruṣaṁ tato nivartayati' (Bhargananda 1411 Bengali year, p. 140).

about absolute cessation of sufferings. As elaborated above, there are various sacrifices, rites and rituals mentioned in the Vedas which help to fulfil the different kinds of desires of beings, and thus, remove sufferings. These include sacrifices like *jyotiṣṭoma, agnihotra, aśvamedha, viśvajit etc.*, which respectively fulfil the purposes of attaining heaven, victory over enemies, acquiring huge areas of land and thus widening the territory of the kingdom *etc.* All these apparently are responsible for removal of sufferings, as they bring about immense pleasure as their respective consequences, as per the desire of the individuals. However, the question remains that whether such freedom from sufferings is eternal or not. That is, whether ends like heaven can provide absolute cessation of sufferings or not. According to the noted commentator Vācaspati Miśra[6], heaven involves that state of pleasure which is not only unstinted by sufferings, rather it is contradictory to sufferings (Goswami, 1406 Bengali year). Further, Kumārila Bhaṭṭa[7] states that the unstinted and the extreme pleasure which is to be enjoyed, can only be experienced in a place which is devoid of conflicts and contradictions (Goswami 1406 Bengali year). In the empirical world we can never find such a place which is free from contradictions, even momentarily. Thus, the unstinted pleasure called heaven, can only be experienced at a particular place, that is, the abode of the deities (Goswami 1406 Bengali year); though it is to be noted that traditionally heaven is accepted by most philosophers as a *state of being*, and not as a place[8].

Debate between Karmavādī Mīmāṁsā Philosophers and Their Opponents on the Nature of Liberation

There is a section of the Mīmāṁsā system called the Karmavādī Mīmāṁsā philosophers who admit heavenly bliss to be the highest end of human life, and they establish the eternal character of the heavenly bliss on the basis of certain scriptural statements[9]. Reference to the views of these philosophers may be found in the verses of the second chapter of *Śrimadbhagvadgītā*[10]. However, the mainstream schools of the Mīmāṁsā system, such as the Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṁsā school, do not admit this view of the Karmavādī Mīmāṁsā philosophers. The Sāṁkhya philosophers also do not consider heaven to be eternal. The philosophers who do not admit the eternal character of heavenly bliss establish their thesis on the basis of both inference and scriptural statements. The inference which they employ to

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[6]'*duḥkhavirodhīsukhaviśeṣaśca svargaḥ*', Miśra, Vācaspati in Goswami (1406 Bengali year, p. 20).
[7]'*yā prītiḥ niratiśayā, anubhavitavyā/ sā cā uṣṇaśītādidvandvarahite deśe śakyā anubhavitum/ asmin ca deśe muhūrtaśatabhāgaḥ api dvandvai na mucyate/ tasmāt niratiśaya-prītyanubhavāya kalpyaḥ viśiṣṭa deśaḥ//*', Miśra, Vācaspati in Goswami (1406 Bengali year, p. 19).
[8]'*yanna duḥkhena sambhinnaṁ na ca grastamanantaram/ abhilāṣopanītaṁ ca tatsukhaṁ svaḥpadāspadam//*', Miśra, Vācaspati in Goswami (1406 Bengali year, p. 19).
[9]'*apāma somamṛtā abhūma*' in Goswami (1406 Bengali year, p. 20).
[10]'*yāmimāṁ puṣpitāṁ vācaṁ pravadantyavipaścitaḥ/ vedavādaratāḥ pārthanānyadastīti vādinaḥ//*', *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* Verse 42 (Brahma 1986).
'*kāmātmānaḥ svargaparājanmakarmaphalapradām/ kriyāviśeṣavahulāṁ bhogaiśvaryagatiṁ prati//*', *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* Verse 43 (Brahma 1986).
'*bhogaiśvaryaprasaktānāṁ tayāpahṛtacetasām/ vyavasāyātmikābuddhiḥ samādhaunavidhīyate//*', *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* Verse 44 (Brahma 1986).

establish their thesis is as follows – '*vimataḥ svargaḥ anityaḥ kṛtakatvāt ghaṭavat*'. It means that, heaven or heavenly pleasure is non-eternal, because it is created, just like a jar. We know that if something is created or has a beginning, it would have an end too. Thus, things with a beginning, presuppose an end, and hence, are non-eternal. The state of heavenly pleasure is produced as a result of the sacrifices, and thus, it is generated, just as a jar. Accordingly, it cannot be eternal.

The Karmavādī Mīmāṁsā philosophers might argue that this inference is not capable of establishing the non-eternal character of heavenly pleasure. The eternal character of heavenly pleasure is established by the scriptures themselves. It is said that the deities performed the Vedic rite called *soma yāga* and drank the extracts of the creeper called *soma*, and as a result, they attained the status of 'deathlessness' (*amṛtatva*). Now the term '*amṛta*' etymologically means deathlessness or going beyond death. Thus, the deities went beyond death or transcended death by performing this rite and became eternal. Since the deities are eternal, the heavenly bliss or heavenly pleasure enjoyed by them is also eternal. This scriptural statement overrides the above inference by which other philosophers have tried to establish the non-eternal character of heavenly pleasure.

Against the above defence of the Karmavādī Mīmāṁsā philosophers, the Sāṁkhya philosophers point out that whenever there is a conflict or contradiction between a scriptural statement and some other valid epistemic instrument, it cannot always be said that the scriptural statement is stronger than the other instruments. This is due to the fact that a perceptual cognition and an inference cannot establish its object in any way other than it actually does. If the scriptural statement is always considered as stronger than the other epistemic instruments, then one would have to forego or give up some other valid epistemic instrument, such as a veridical perception or a valid inference. However, if the validity of valid epistemic instruments is denied, then the entire epistemology will lose its trustworthiness. For this reason, no orthodox Indian philosopher places any kind of blind trust or credence upon a scriptural statement, whenever there is any conflict between the scriptures and other epistemic instruments. Rather the classical Indian philosophers evaluate the relative strength and weakness of each epistemic instrument and only such assessment of relative strength can determine whether a particular epistemic instrument can override another. On that note, the Sāṁkhya philosophers talk about a specific methodology to resolve the above conflict between the eternal and non-eternal character of heaven, as endorsed by the scriptures and denied by the opponents, respectively. This is being discussed in the following section.

Sāṁkhya Critique of the Karmavādī Mīmāṁsā Philosophers' View

i) Methodology and arguments from the paradigm of Sāṁkhya philosophy

To prove the non-eternal character of heavenly pleasure, the Sāṁkhya philosophers employ the methodology called argumentation on the statements of wider and narrower scope (*sāvakāśa-niravakāśa nyāya*). The Mīmāṁsā system

invented the said method of argumentation to resolve conflicting scriptural statements. It states that whenever there is a conflict between two rules or two scriptural statements of which one has a wider scope than the other, the rule or the statement of lesser scope should be considered as stronger than the rule or the statement of the wider scope. For, if the rule or the statement having the wider scope is considered as stronger then, in every instance, it will be so, and consequently, the statement or the rule having the smaller scope would have no scope at all. In that case the rule or the scriptural statement having the smaller scope would not have any application at all, and hence, could not be regarded as a veracious statement or rule at all, even in its specific context. The matter is clarified by the Sāṁkhya philosophers by referring to another employment of this methodology. For instance, the scriptural statements – '*mā hiṁsyāt sarvābhūtāni*' (meaning, never harm any being) and '*agniṣomīyaṁ paśumālabheta*' (meaning, sacrifice animals for the performances of *agni* and *soma* sacrifices) contradict one another. This is because the former statement forbids violence towards any organism, whereas the second prescribes animal sacrifice for appeasing the deities, like *agni*, in case of sacrifices. Here the former statement obviously has a wider scope than the latter. Now if the statement with the wider scope, that is, the first statement is considered as stronger than the latter statement, then the latter would not be applied at all. Hence, it cannot be treated as a source of veridical cognition. Now if the validity of one Vedic statement is denied, then the entire Vedas would be at the risk of losing its supreme authenticity. For this reason, in this context, the statement with the smaller scope, that is, the latter statement is considered as stronger than the statement of the wider scope. In that case, the latter statement would mean what it literally means, but the significance of the former statement would have to be restricted in conformity with the significance of the latter statement. Thus, the former statement would mean that violence is forbidden in all other cases, except in case of certain sacrifices. When thus interpreted, neither of the two statements loses their validity and the veracity of the entire Vedas also is not subjected to doubt. Similarly, whenever a valid inference is at odds with any scriptural statement, the inference is considered stronger because of its smaller scope than the scriptural statement. This is because, in an inference the probandum is established in the locus of the inference with the help of a probans, and it cannot be established otherwise. On the contrary, a scriptural statement being a linguistic entity can be interpreted in many different ways. So the scope of a scriptural statement is always greater than a veridical perception or a valid inference. For this reason, whenever a veridical perception or a valid inference comes into conflict with a scriptural statement, the scriptural statement is interpreted in accordance with the perception or the inference. The inference, as stated above, which demonstrates the non-eternal character of heavenly pleasure is a valid one. So the validity of this inference cannot be denied. Hence, the term '*amṛta*' occurring in the statement '*apāma somamṛtā abhūma*' must carry some other sense. In fact, this other meaning is indicated by another scriptural statement in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, - '*ābhūtasaṁplavasthānamamṛtatvaṁ hi gīyate*', meaning that the heavenly bliss lasts till the destruction of a particular creation. So compared to ordinary pleasures, heavenly bliss or heavenly pleasure lasts for a long time, but it is not everlasting or

eternal. The Vedic means are vitiated by the defect of erosion or destructibility. It is to be noted here that Īśvarakṛṣṇa, the author of *Sāṁkhyakārikā*, and other Sāṁkhya philosophers are not talking about the destructibility of the means. This is because a Vedic rite being an action is obviously of a particular duration. So Īśvarakṛṣṇa here is talking about the destructibility or the non-eternal character of the end which is attained through these Vedic rites and this end is nothing but heavenly pleasure. Since, the end attained through the Vedic means may be destroyed; the Vedic means are at par with the empirical means of overcoming sufferings, such as medicines *etc.*

ii) **Discussion on the nature of heaven**

Now there remains an apprehension that due to the presence of the causes of sufferings, one might be afflicted by pain even after the attainment of heaven. In that case, the attainment of heaven might not be the desired end of the individual. To resolve such discomfort, Vācaspati Miśra says that heaven is that kind of pleasure which is not only contradictory to sufferings; rather it destroys all kinds of pain which are impediment to it. Further, it also eradicates all the causes of sufferings, including the root cause, that is, consequences of one's actions from previous lives[11]. He further claims that heaven is not something which would erode after a point of time[12]. However, the opponents might argue that heaven being the result of Vedic sacrifices, is a positive entity which is produced, and hence, it cannot be eternal[13]. In refutation of the above, the Vedic tenet which has been cited is – '*apāma somamamṛtā abhūma*', which means that one who drinks the *soma*, that is, the person performing the Vedic sacrifice attains deathlessness, meaning that the individual transcends death. This further establishes that whatever is produced as a result of the sacrifice, that is indestructible. Thus, from the above standpoint the advocates of the Vedic means of pain eradication argue that the method of attaining discriminatory cognition between the matter and consciousness, as held by the Sāṁkhya philosophers, is extremely difficult to achieve, as it requires the effort and care on the part of the individual over multiple lives. In contrast to that the Vedic means are easier and involve much less effort as regards the performance of the sacrifices. Thus, one should adopt the Vedic means of rites and rituals in order to remove sufferings.

iii) **Vedic means are comparable to empirical means in terms of removal of sufferings**

[11]'*sa ca svasattayāsamūlaghātamapahanti duḥkham*', Miśra, Vācaspati in Goswami (1406 Bengali year, p. 20).
[12]'*na ca eṣa kṣayī*', Miśra, Vācaspati in Goswami (1406 Bengali year, p. 20).
[13]'*svargaḥ kṣayī utpattimat bhāvapadārthatvāt aihikasukhavat ghaṭapaṭādivat*', Miśra, Vācaspati in Goswami (1406 Bengali year, p. 21).

In response to the entire above discussion and the objection raised thereafter, Īśvarakṛṣṇa states in the second *Sāṁkhyakārikā*[14] that the Vedic means are similar to the empirical means in terms of the fact that the Vedic sacrifices too are not capable of providing absolute emancipation from sufferings. The Vedic means of eradication of sufferings refer to the kind of knowledge which can be known after listening to the Vedic tenets from the preceptor. However, the knowledge attained thereby, that is, the cognition of the Vedic sacrifices, is analogous to the empirical means of pain removal as they are neither the exclusive means, nor can they sanction the non-recurrence of sufferings. Now one might argue that the notion of the discriminatory knowledge (*vivekajñāna*) between the consciousness (*puruṣa*) and the matter (*prakṛti*) is also obtained from the Vedas. Hence, similar to the other means which are Vedic in nature, *vivekajñāna* too cannot ensure the absolute cessation of sufferings. In response to the above apprehension, it is stated that in spite of the fact that *vivekajñāna* - the highest form of knowledge as held by the Sāṁkhya and the Yoga schools of philosophy, though endorsed by the Vedas, are not tainted with limitations, unlike the Vedic sacrifices. The following inference helps to show the limitations of the Vedic sacrificial means – '*vaidikaḥ upāyaḥ dṛṣṭatulyaḥ na aikāntikātyantikaduḥkhatrayapratikāropāyaḥ aviśuddhiyuktatvāt kṣayayuktatvāt atiśayayuktatvāt ca*' (Goswami 1406 Bengali year). That is, the Vedic means are merely at par with the empirical means of alleviating sufferings, because the Vedic sacrifices and their results are vitiated by three defects, namely, impurity, erosion and differences in magnitude. That is, the Vedic rituals often involving animal sacrifices are tainted with the quality of impurity. Also, the results that are produced as consequences of the sacrifices, however, pleasurable they might be, have an end. And, the results obtained because of the sacrifices are not of the same quality. They vary in magnitude, duration and intensity. Hence, they lack the marks of eternal bliss, or absolute cessation of sufferings.

In the above inference the locus is the Vedic means, and the probandum is the comparability of the sacrificial means with the empirical means of eradication of sufferings. However, simply stating 'Vedic means' includes the sacrifices as well as the discriminatory cognition in its purview. Thus, the afore-mentioned apprehension gets revoked. To clarify, Vācaspati Miśra states that the reference to Vedic means in the aphorism refers to the sacrificial rites and rituals only. Though it is true that the discriminatory cognition between the self or the consciousness and the matter is known from the Vedas too, yet there are Vedic statements, which according to Vācaspati Miśra, should be interpreted as the self or the consciousness is to be perceived as radically different from matter[15]. When such distinctive perception is produced, it is to be practiced over ages, and over multiple lives of an individual. Then finally sufferings are eradicated in such manner that they can never recur (*Chāndogya* 8.15)[16].

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[14]'*dṛṣṭavadānuśravikaḥ sa aviśuddhikṣayātiśayayuktaḥ/ tadviparītaḥ śreyān vyaktāvyaktajña vijñānāt//*', *Sāṁkhyakārikā* 2.

[15]'*ātmāvā'are draṣṭavyaḥ*', and '*prakṛtitaḥ vivekatavyaḥ*', Miśra, Vācaspati in Goswami (1406 Bengali year, p. 23).

[16]'*na sa punarāvartate*'.

iv) **The nature of distinctive cognition: Sāṁkhya claim**

As mentioned earlier, that the results of Vedic sacrifices cannot be eternal due to the presence of impurity, erosion and degrees of variation, but such is never the case with distinctive cognition. It is devoid of and is essentially radically different from the above three features as we find in case of empirical pleasures and that of the form of heaven. Hence, the Sāṁkhya philosophers claim that the discriminatory cognition between the self or consciousness and the matter is more fundamental and most efficacious in terms of eradication of sufferings. Here, a few points need elucidation regarding the Sāṁkhya and the Yoga philosophy on the nature of liberation of the self. In Sāṁkhya philosophy, the internal sense organ consists of three components – namely, the intellect, the ego and the mind. The three parts have three fundamental functions in attaining knowledge of objects in the empirical realm, like a jar, a piece of cloth *etc*. and that of the self as in case of I-cognitions, like, 'I am happy', 'I am the knower' *etc*. In Sāṁkhya and the Yoga philosophy it is admitted that the intellect, the ego and the mind, along with the body are products of evolution of matter, whereas the consciousness does not evolve. It is ever pure, immutable, eternal and essentially unrelated to anything around. However, in case of beings, that is, while looking at embodied consciousness, we find that there is an apparent non-apprehension of the distinction between the self and the products of matter, namely, the intellect, the ego, the mind and the body. The Sāṁkhya epistemology holds that the sense organs like, the eyes *etc*. receive the form of the object and sends it to the internal sense organ. The intellect-ego-mind compound then takes up the form of the object, say, a jar, and through subsequent steps the determinate cognition of the form, - 'I know that this is a jar' is produced. Similarly, for instances of emotive and other cognitive states, expressions like, - 'I am happy', 'I am sad', 'I am healthy', 'I know', 'I perceive', 'I enjoy' *etc*. occur. However, all these states are modifications of the internal sense organ compound only, and none of it actually touches the consciousness. The self or the consciousness remains as it is in its pure, unaltered state. The issue that arises at this point is that the consciousness being in proximity to the internal sense organ gets reflected on the intellect which is of luminous nature and possesses the property of reflection like a mirror. This is due to the predominance of the buoyant and luminous perpetual quality (*sattva guṇa*) in it. The reflected consciousness then appears to identify itself with the modifications of the internal sense organ. Accordingly, the emotions and the cognitions that are actually there in the internal sense organ, appears to be there in the consciousness. The actual consciousness, though, remains as it is, unaffected by any of the above. This can be explained by a metaphor, as follows – if we look at a mirror which has got some spots on it, the face that appears on the mirror also carries those spots. The actual face though, remains as it is. It is only the reflected face that carries the spots from the mirror. Such is the case of the apparent non-distinction between the consciousness and the matter. It is, thus, the very objective of any prudent individual to free oneself from apparent notions, and to realise things as they are. Hence, the ultimate cognition is case of Sāṁkhya and the Yoga philosophy is to realise the consciousness as it is, and to be freed from any impact of matter

whatsoever. Thus, the highest form of liberation for the Sāṁkhya and the Yoga philosophical schools is the attainment of distinctive cognition, such that the consciousness exists only in its true essence. As a result, without even any apparent relation with matter, the question of sufferings does not arise at all.

Conclusions

On arriving at the terminal part of our discussion, it may be stated that the above debate between the different schools of philosophy originates from the fact that there is non-concurrence among the views of the schools regarding the nature of liberation. Though each of the schools consider the eradication of all kinds of sufferings from the empirical realm, yet there remains disagreements regarding the nature of the ultimate existence of the self, and hence, the form of emancipation. In the noted Sanskrit text, *Sāṁkhyatattvavivecana* of Kṣemendra[17], we find that the Sāṁkhya philosophers are advocates of such liberation which is a state devoid of any attributes (*abhāvamokṣavādin*s). That is, liberation for them is the state of consciousness-as-it-is, and hence, not qualified by any other state of feelings or being, like pleasure *etc.* Such kind of absolute cessation of sufferings is considered as liberation by the Sāṁkhya philosophers, where the consciousness remains in isolation, oblivious of anything around. This is the highest and the most sought after state of the consciousness, which is technically referred to as *kaivalya*, meaning isolation. However, philosophical schools like the Pūrva Mīmāṁsā philosophers or the Karmavādī Mīmāṁsā philosophers consider liberation to be not only the cessation of sufferings, but the state of realisation of eternal pleasure. For them, the state of liberation is marked by the absence of all kinds of sufferings and is qualified by eternal bliss (*sukhamokṣavāda*). Thus, according to them the attainment of heaven itself is the eternal and unwavering state of bliss. Sāṁkhya philosophers, however, point out that the realisation of pleasure, whether it is eternal or fleeting, the realisation itself being a cognitive state is always non-eternal. Hence, liberation is not a state of realisation of eternal pleasure; rather it is the state of absolute cessation of all kinds of sufferings (Dvivedi 1920).

Now keeping the contention of our present paper in mind, we can assert that since, the Pūrva Mīmāṁsā philosophers or the Karmavādī Mīmāṁsā philosophers consider liberation to be not only the cessation of sufferings, but the state of realisation of eternal pleasure or bliss, then according to the school of thought in question, the Vedic sacrifices, and accordingly, the duties and non-duties are the sole means of attaining liberation. Accordingly, the Vedic scriptures pose to be the absolute sanction of Soteriology in the arena of such philosophical thoughts.

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[17]‘*darśanaśaktirahitasya kriyāśaktimataḥ pradhānasyāpi puruṣeṇa saṁyogaḥ mokṣārtha puruṣasya bhinnatvena vyaktāvyaktapuruṣajñāne jāte pradhānasya mokṣo bhavati/ nityasukhopalabdhirmokṣa iti cedupalabdherapi nityānitya vivekagrastatvādasāram/ na ca nityasukhagocarasyāvidyādi yatkiñcidāvaraṇabhaṅga eva puruṣārthe/ vācyaḥ sukhānubhavasyaiva puruṣārthatvāccaitanyanityatvenāvaraṇasyāpi asambhavācca/ mokṣe paramānandaśrutismṛtayastu - mokṣaśāstraparibhāṣāmātrā/ duḥkhamevāsti na sukhaṁ yasmāt tadupalabhyate/ duḥkhārtasya pratīkāre sukhaṁ sajñāvidhīyate// duḥkhaṁ kāmasukhāpekṣā sukhaṁ duḥkhātyayaḥ smṛtaḥ/ ityādismṛtibhirduḥkhanivṛttireva sukhatvena paribhāṣitā/’*, Kṣemendra, in Dvivedi (1920 p. 33).

However, it is to be kept in mind here that the Vedic means might often bring about tremendous sufferings too due to the sin incurred by performing certain sacrifices like, *śyena*, which can accomplish killing of one's enemies through sacrifices. Moreover, the performances of the sacrifices themselves are, in some way or the other, afflicted with some amount of sufferings, in spite of the fact that they produce immense pleasure by fulfilling the desired ends. However, it is never the case with the advocates of the opposing theories, as discussed above. Thus, the Sāṁkhya philosophers argue that the Vedic rites and rituals are merely means of eradication of sufferings, if at all, in the empirical realm, but not the means of attaining liberation of the spirit in the absolute sense.

Finally, it may also be highlighted that the Vedas though prescriptive in nature, are of the structure of hypothetical imperatives. This is due to the fact that the injunctions are end-specific. They posit that if one desires a particular end, then they must perform a specific sacrifice. For instance, *if* individuals desire to attain heaven, *then* they must perform a certain sacrifice. The evident *if-then* form presents the injunction as a hypothetical imperative. This portrays the fact the Vedic prescriptions, though of the nature of commands, accommodates the free will of individuals. Hence, the good or bad of actions are not merely directed by the Vedas, rather it depends upon the choices that the individuals make for themselves. Thus, it could be claimed that the Vedic ethics involves paradigms to ascertain a good life for beings, based on individual choices. At the same time, based on such action-consequence principle discussed throughout, we may further claim that it provides the means of eradication of sufferings in order to attain eternal bliss, or in other words, liberation as admitted by certain sections of philosophical schools.

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