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# ‘Way Of Life’ In A Philosophical Perspective In The Works Of Dr Ananda Coomaraswamy

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### Abstract

Even though he was born in Sri Lanka, Ananda Coomaraswamy highlighted the worth and value of Indian thoughts to the entire world. He has used our philosophy as a way of life: a map and root to the universe. He proclaimed that Indian philosophy taught us the conception of moral values that guide human being with peace and pleasure. He also understood that Indian philosophy is more worthy and has deep meaning. He wished to declare its truth to the world. This paper aims at studying ‘way of life’ in a philosophical perspective in the works of Ananda Coomaraswamy.

**Keywords:** Philosophical, Perspective, Buddhist religions, Legends, Poetry.

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## 1. Introduction

Ananda Coomaraswamy was born in Srilanka to a Tamil Father and an English Mother. He acquired his education in mineralogy in London. Due to his mineralogical survey, he reached his land Srilanka. When doing his duty, he discovered fine artwork as our own or Indian treasures in his land. He realised that its roots and its beginning were in India. He was very excited and astonished about the eternal works of our Indians. He immersed himself in seeking our traditional wealth like philosophy, Art and Culture through the Hindu and Buddhist religions, Legends, and Poetry. He also discovered its other sources through our Historical places of monuments.

Before the independence, our forefathers had ideas for the National feelings; they were struggling for our freedom and they wanted to free us from the British control. However, they forgot to understand our treasures and to expose them to the world. Because, at that time, they were unaware of them due to the circumstances. Our situation has changed, and the time has come for men to accept that every man has the same desires and longings to gain what we already forgot. In this concern, men like Swamy Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr Radhakrishnan and Ananda Coomaraswamy have not only advised men to liberate themselves from the narrow political boundaries, but also they have advocated our Religion and Philosophy as a remedy to the present day ills of materialism and nationalism.

At the same time, when the West was fascinated with its material quests and industrialisation, the East, especially India, advised such kind of moderation to western nations of brothers. Great men like Swami Vivekananda and Ananda Coomaraswamy have proved to the West that India has practised something concrete to offer. It is worth quoting here the word of Roman Rolland, who, while commenting on the ancient wisdom of Asia, Says; “Asia, the great land of which Europe is but a Peninsula, the advance guard of the army, the prow of the heavy ship, laden with a thousand wisdoms... from her have always come to use our goods and our ideas, But in the course of the many circuits made by one people who followed the track of the sun, losing contact with our native East, We have deferred, for our own ends of Violent and limited action the university of her great thoughts”.

That is why our philosophy gives light and freedom to our way of life. This Lamp is not only to the East but also to the West. We need to read and realise the religious philosophy of our heritage or traditional Asserts. There are timeless efforts taken by our men like Swamy Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Dr Ananda Coomaraswamy and Dr R.Radhakrishnan. There was a re-establishment of interest in the Indian Religion, Philosophy, Arts and Culture.

In this book, *The Dance of Shiva*, Ananda Coomaraswamy has written that India has the talisman to cure the ills of Western Civilisation and make human beings happy. Though the book contains a series of essays in a collection with various themes, they all have been brought from the same source of Indian Religious Philosophy which is vast in the tranquil metaphysical of India. The philosophy deals with our principle of the universe, our nation, social organisation and our traditional way of life demand to change the world. It helps us to morally and socially lead the world, everything expounded in his essays. For instance, we know how the character of men and women in the modern world is changing. Through the collection of work, Dr Anand Coomaraswamy has dealt with the problem of the love marriage system, and he also tells about our youth, brotherhood civilisation and culture.

The essential virtue of Indian culture is its all-inclusive quality. Without negating anything and correlating all diverse elements, The Indian Culture is a symbol of integration into the western culture. There are several languages, several civilisations and orthodox cultures in the country. However, all these mingle and gather like the trees in the forest, and we have a great harmonised Indian culture. In Europe or Western countries, a cold and complex logic or philosophy isolates the usual elements and makes it a clear section of the Western Culture. However, in India, our philosophy is ever mindful and valuable of the natural differences in souls and philosophies and tries to combine them into each other to form a complete unity.

The world has become a universal tragedy. At the same time, there were significant revolutionary political, economic, social and cultural changes. Our social thinkers and religious leaders insisted that the change was a standard order. They said the change would be accepted only when built on the rock bottom of changeless values. It is their universal feelings, which they expect that the West can look up to India for their spiritual guidance. It is a vast treasure of values rooted in its philosophy and art as a way of life. By focussing our tradition, custom, culture, ancient civilisation and our teaching of unravished Ayurvedic or Herbal Medicine, India is making its rich and valuable contribution to the western world and as a become of human values. Here, Ananda Coomaraswamy rightly observes that India, in its every race, contributes something essential to the world's civilisation through its self-expression and self-realisation. The character builds up by solving its problems through the experience of its misfortunes, a gift each offers to the world. The essential contribution of India then is her Indianess; her great empowerment would be to substitute or to have substituted for this own character or svabhava a cosmopolitan semblance, for then indeed she must come before the world with empty – handed.

In his essay, “what has India contributed to Human welfare?” Ananda Coomaraswamy says that the uniqueness of Indian civilisation is unity in diversity; In this nation, our people belong to several religions, languages and cultures that live side by side. However, despite these surface differences, a common collective Indian Culture can evolve out of this. Far better than the western, the average

Indian can understand the meaning of life and knows that happiness lies in tolerance, unity and humility. Though this philosophy is also found in the West, this has become a way of life.

Our politics cannot help our people widely unless it is spiritualised. Our spiritual politics is only an advocate for the people. Modern political thinkers seem to make ad-hoc solutions to the problem of society. They also think that religion and politics are two unsociable forces and philosophy has no place in politics. However, Indian Philosophy considers that all our activities should be guided by a compatible theory and governed by a social Dharma which activates and alert everything in India.

Due to the absence of such a theory, opportunism and exploitation were persuaded in the industrial West. When we compare our dogmas and philosophy with the West, Indian Philosophy shows the light of such an in-depth and intellectual path. So, the Indian view of life is recognised as a unity of life, with one source, essence, and goal existing and guiding all forms. It is considered our acquisition of wealth and gifts pleasure and natural wishes. We should not be suppressed while pursuing these philosophies on religion, culture, social setup, and civilisation. So as an Indian, any individual should subject himself to self-discipline.

The Indian way of life is the maxim of a man seeking pleasure, slowly weaning self-realisation. The concept of Self-Discipline and Self-realisation is not very much emphasised in western philosophy. The western nations or their society faces problems of excess in it. The westerners adopt an epicurean attitude to life because their desires defeat them.

Due to understanding “our self and Self-realisation and Self Enquiry”, Sri Ramana, a saint, defines as: with rising questions like what is self? How does it function? and what is self-realisation?. He says, The ‘Self’ or real ‘Self’ ‘I’ is neither a perceptive experience or an individual experience. But, it is a non-personal or all inclusive awareness. We don’t confuse with the individual self which essentially non-existent, being a fabrication of the mind which conceal to understand the authentic experience of the ‘real-self’, So the real ‘Self’ is always present and experienced. He emphasised that one who be consciously aware of it. Finally we should understand that the permanent of continuous Self-Awareness is known as Self-Realisation.

Then he defines the ananda or our being consciousness bliss. Sri Ramana extends as; ‘Self’ is pure being, subjective awareness of 'I am' which is entirely devoid of the feeling ‘I am this or 'I am that. There are no subjects or objects in the self; there is only an awareness of being. This self gives a state of unbroken happiness or Ananda (bliss).

The experience of the ‘Self’ is sometimes called Jnana or Knowledge. The actual knowledge or Jnana is not an object or subject of experience. However, it is a direct knowing awareness of the one reality in which subjects and objects have ceased to exist. So one who is established in this state is known as a Jnani.

Dr Ananda Coomaraswamy and Sri Aurobindo have revealed how our India has contributed her Religion, Philosophy, Culture and Civilisation to the world as her way of life, or she is showing her “Self-expression” to the world.

Sri Aurobindo talks about our self-expression. He observes as: our ancient Indian Religion, Philosophy, Culture, and way of life are of immense bliss and important both to the nation and to the world. Because India wants to contribute her time-old spirit and national ideals to the world of the human race, she comes with spiritual force as a source which impulse of herself as an expression. It gives a reshaping and rebuilding of the world. With these, she has self-consciousness to form new changes in the world.

Indian Philosophy also introduces concepts like Reincarnation and the Seven cycles of existence. Even here, the idea is that the sins committed by an individual during his previous birth will decide the nature of life for the present and future. The human form is considered the highest form of existence

among all creations. When somebody attains perfections, he will swim across the sea of Seven birth and finally become immortal. So greater importance is given to which attitude of life is lacking.

Today, our Indian educational system is affected because we want to imitate the foreign education system and culture. We forget our system, which is already made upon spiritual and philosophical ideas. Ananda Coomarasamy, in his essay "What has India contributed to Human Welfare?", says that ancient India judiciously solved the education problem; only modern educational psychology can come anywhere near it. It was believed that all knowledge need not be made accessible to all. "The key to education is to be found in personality". Modern theory grants equal opportunities for all, but it ignores the concept of personality. For example, Dr Ananda Coomaraswamy says, "As the man who digs with a spade to obtain water, even so an obedient pupil obtains the knowledge which is in his teacher". Thus, the pupils advocate the idea that only through unquestioning obedience and constant quest that one can reach perfection. By which we have our education on the relevance of Indian Philosophy.

In his essay "Intellectual Fraternity", Ananda Coomaraswamy says that history provides us with many shameful examples of one group of men killing another group of men. As well as a group killing a couple or lovers from two different communities. Why does it happen? Because of the inhumanity, those with animalistic nature or a superiority complex suffer a race. In this way, if one race considers itself superior to another, it will only lead to war and genocide. For example, in Europe, during World War II, the Germans planned to exterminate the Jews because they thought their race was superior to other races. It is worth quoting here the words of Ananda Coomaraswamy: In a world of rapid communications, it must be founded on humanity's common purposes and institutions. Since in the absence of common motives, there cannot be cooperation for agreed ends. Only when people of different races and religions raise themselves from their national walls and consider themselves human can there be real peace. Ananda Coomaraswamy notes that many writers in India, like Sankara, Gautama, and Thiruvalluva were able to find intellectual kinship with western philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and Socrates. In art, Europe and India also had many common theories, especially on drama and poetry; from these examples, it could find common agreeable ends.

Some people wrongly believe that the "Asiatic Vision" makes people inactive, to which Ananda Coomarasamy reacts by saying that it teaches only detachment and not inaction. He prescribes the following antidote to Europe, "The impetuosity of youth cannot completely compensate for the insight of age, and we must demand of a coming race that men should act with European energy, and think with Asiatic Calm".

The Indian philosophers touched upon every aspect of life, from abstract ideas on religion to practical solutions to political problems. Thus the writer gives many examples to prove that Indian Philosophy has an everlasting value; its values have spread everywhere, producing changes in the philosophy of those countries. The caste system in India represents unity and integration; the marriage system is based on the principle of common ends and not on pleasure. Compared with this, the Western system looks like an undernourished baby.

Every Indian Temple shows its deep meaning in art that is the basis of philosophy. The statues of the temples mostly symbolised the meaning of philosophy and culture. He says that Indian art also has a similar integrated approach to the various aspects of life. Even now, one can see in and around the Hindu temples many sculptures depicting the love life of man and woman. Many people wondered what connection could be there between the worship of God in the temple and these sculptures of men and women in embraces. Anyone who studies the temple architecture of India will realise that our ancestors, in their supreme wisdom, have symbolically conveyed the idea. It is unwise to distinguish between the 'agam' and 'puram' aspects of life through God's images, combining art and philosophy.

Thus Ananda Coomaraswamy, who comments on the meaning of *The Dance of Shiva*, says that the different postures of Lord Shiva that he makes during his dance expose many profound philosophical

messages. No artist in the world could have created such an intricate image combining beauty, rhythm, religion and philosophy.

In his essay titled “*The Dance of Shiva*”, Ananda Coomaraswamy begins by noting that Lord Shiva is called Nataraja, Lord of Dance. The cosmos is His theatre. He Himself is the actor and the audience. His repertory has several steps, but the most famous among them is Ananda Tandava. The other dance was the evening dance which was performed in the Himalayas. This Dance of Shiva forms the motif of the south Indian copper images. According to Ananda Coomaraswamy, the image has many philosophical meanings. The writer adds that all the other dances of Shiva also have more profound meanings. The image of Nataraja integrates the five activities of life creation (Srishti), preservation (Sthithi), destruction (Samhara), rest (Tirobhava), and Salvation (Anugraha). *The Dance of Shiva* has been a constant wonder to even Western philosophers who think the image has aesthetic and philosophical importance.

## 2. Conclusion

Indian religious philosophy sincerely insists on the four concepts of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. The Dharma teaches human honesty, sincerity, duty and education. It differs from the meaning of ignorance and knowledge and its consequence. The Artha is a doctrine of a cause of birth and death. It suggests how to lead our life on earth with wealth and health. The Artha also guide us to enter into the Heavenly life or incarnation. The Kama is the precious one; through it, if anyone wants to attain a life of maturity, he has to fulfil and satisfy in his sexual and earthly life. He would be ready to escape from this temporary pleasure. The fourth principle, the Moksha, is the most significant in our cycle of birth. The Moksha happens in the cycle of life when goes through the above three stages of our way of life. The final stage in our life gives us a fruitful life. This perfection of life gives us redemption from the entire slavery ignorance and totality of the earthly life into heavenly life.

Thus, with great insight, Ananda Coomaraswamy has analysed every aspect of life. He compared the Eastern and the western civilisations and said the East has more to offer than the Western World

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