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The four noble duties with environmental ethics: Indian philosophical perspective

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Abstract

There are four Ashramas or stages in life, viz., Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha, Sanyasa. Each stage has its own duties. These stages help the evolution of man. The four Ashramas take man to perfection by successive stages. The practice of the four Ashramas regulates the life from the beginning to the end. The interaction of the man and environment is studied based on the Ashramas. Which is explained about the relationship with the nature. Every man should pass through the different Ashramas regularly. These four are involved along with environmental ethics in our life. The changes are also noted from the ancient period to the modern period. The concept of ashramas as successive stages in the life of an individual was a later development in vedic society. The vedic dharma originally upheld the concept of ekashramam.

Keywords: brahmacharya, grihastha, vanaprastha, sanyasa, man, environment

Introduction

There are four Ashramas or stages in life. Each stage has its own duties. These stages help the evolution of man. The four Ashramas take man to perfection by successive stages. The practice of the four Ashramas regulates the life from the beginning to the end. Ashramas: The Term —Ashramam generally refers to four distinct social locations within which the Hindus pursue cultural as well as specifically religious goals^[1].

The four ashramas are as follows:

- Brahmacharya or the period of studentship
- Grihastha or the stage of the householder
- Vanaprastha or the stage of the forest-dweller or hermit, and
- Sanyasa or the life of renunciation or asceticism.

The first two Ashramas pertain to Pravritti Marga or the path of work and the two later stages—the life of Vanaprastha and that of Sanyasa—are the stages of withdrawal from the world. They pertain to Nivritti Marga or the path of renunciation.

Through the courses of time, this ashrama system is one of the crucial concepts. This system very well explains the intimate relationship between man and nature. It is also pointed out that the concept of moksha or liberation is possible only for those who have deep communion with nature. The progression or succession of four stages culminates, according to many Hindu sources, in moksha or release from transmigration, ignorance, and suffering stereological goal embodied in the term-Moksha dharmam. Thus appropriate place and opportunity are given at least in theory to both participation in the social virtual world and renunciation of that world^[2].

Sanatana Dharma

Life is very systematically and orderly arranged in Sanatana Dharma. There is opportunity for the development of the different sides of human activity. Due occupations and training are assigned to each period of life. Life is a great school in which the powers, capacities and faculties of man are to be evolved gradually.

Every man should pass through the different Ashramas regularly. He should not enter any stage of life prematurely. He can enter the next stage, only when each has been completed. In nature, evolution is gradual. It is not revolutionary.

Lord Manu says in his Smriti: —Having studied the Vedas or two Vedas or even one Veda in

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due order without breaking celibacy, let him dwell in the householder order. When the householder sees wrinkles in his skin and whiteness in his hair and the son of his son, then let him retire to the forest. Having passed the third portion of life in the forests, let him, having abandoned attachments, wander as an ascetic in the fourth portion of life.¶

In extraordinary cases, however, some of the stages may be omitted. Suka was a born Sanyasin. Sankara took Sanyasa without entering the stage of a householder. In rare and exceptional cases, a student is allowed to become a Sanyasin, his debts to the world having been fully paid in a previous birth. Nowadays, young Sanyasins without qualification are found in abundance. This is contrary to the ancient rules and causes much trouble.

The Brahmacharin or the celibate student

The first stage, Brahmacharya, is the period of study and discipline. The student should not indulge in any pleasures. He stays in the house of his preceptor and studies the Vedas and the sciences. This is the period of probation. The teachers in ancient India usually lived in forest hermitages. These hermitages were the Gurukulas or forest universities. The student begged his food. The children of the rich and poor lived together. The student regarded his teacher as his spiritual father and served him with faith, devotion and reverence.

The life of the student begins with the Upanayana ceremony, his second birth. He must be hardy and simple in his habits. He rises early, bathes and does Sandhya and Gayatri Japa. He studies scriptures. He takes simple food in moderation and takes plenty of exercise. He sleeps on a hard mat and does not use soft beds and pillows. He is humble and obedient. He serves and respects elders. He attempts to be chaste in thought, word and deed.

He ever engages himself in doing services to his preceptor. He refrains from wine, meat, perfumes, garlands, tasty and savoury dishes, women, acids, spices and injury to sentient creatures; from lust, anger, greed; dancing, singing and playing on musical instruments; from dice-playing, gossip, slander and untruth. He sleeps alone.

After the end of his student career, he gives a present to his preceptor according to his ability and returns home to enter the household life. The preceptor gives the final instruction and sends the student home. The teacher delivers a convocation address to the students at the conclusion of their studentship:

- Speak the truth. Do your duty. Never swerve from the study of the Veda. Do not cut off the line of progeny (after giving the preceptor the fee he desires). Never swerve away from truth. Never swerve from duty. Never neglect your welfare. Never neglect your prosperity. Never neglect the study and the teaching of the Vedas.
- Never swerve from the duties to the gods and the forefathers. Regard your mother as a god (Matridevo bhava). Regard your father as a god (Pitrivevo bhava). Regard your teacher as a god (Acharyadevo bhava). Regard your guest as god (Atithidevo bhava). Let only those actions that are free from blemishes be done and not others. Only those that are good acts to us should be performed by you and not others.
- You should remove the fatigue of Brahmanas who are superior to you by serving them with seats, etc. Gift

should be given with faith, in plenty, with modesty and sympathy. If there be any doubt regarding rites or conduct, then look up to the lives of great men and follow their examples. This is the injunction. This is the teaching. This is the secret of the Vedas. This is God's word of command. This should be observed. Thus is this to be meditated upon.¶

Bramacharya refers to sexual abstinence and control of one's senses. every asrama as an institution is a set of normative duties on the individual which are related to the goals of the asrama [3]. This is the period of student life. In this period, the student acquires practical training by disciplining the body and organs.

Based on the first stage of this observed the forests. The man is live in the forest that means the relationship begins with the environment and also followed the ethical values. To learnt the importance of the nature which should be imbibed in this stage. Which is upgraded in the eco philosophical perspectives in the Vedas. Is a set of normative duties on the individual which are related to the goals of the asrama. Learns self restraint and non-violence. From the ecological point of view, the student learns the greatness of nature in this period. He or she learns to control his or her material needs to the minimum there by developing the attitude of modesty and compassion to all beings, with regard to the value of life, he finds no difference between man and other beings. Another important factor is that he learns the lessons of social equality in this period. The sons of rich and poor are to live and study under similar conditions and are to be subject to same treatment.

In the modern days Study and acquire some degree, skill or expertise in some field that is in harmony with your inner disposition.

The grihastha or the householder

The second stage is that of the Grihastha or householder. The household stage is entered at marriage, when the student has completed his studentship and is ready to take up the duties and responsibilities of householder life. Of all the Ashramas, this is the most important, because it supports all the others. As all creatures live supported by the air, so the other Orders exist supported by the householder. As all streams and rivers flow to rest in the ocean, so all the Ashramas flow to rest in the householder. The Grihastha is the very heart of Aryan life. Everything depends on him.

Marriage is a sacrament for a Hindu. The wife is his partner in life. She is his Ardhangani. He cannot do any religious ritual without her. She stands by his left side when he performs any religious performance. Husband and wife keep Rama and Sita as their ideal.

A householder should earn money by honest means and distribute it in the proper manner. He should spend one-tenth of his income in charity. He should enjoy sensual pleasures within the limits of the moral law. A householder is permitted to enjoy conjugal happiness on one night in a month.

The householder should perform the Pancha Maha Yajnas. The five Yajnas are:

Deva-Yajna - offering oblations unto Devas, with recitation of Vedic Mantras.

Rishi-Yajna- study of Vedas and teaching of Vedas to students, and offering of oblations to Rishis.

Pitri-Yajna- Tarpana or ablutions to departed souls and Sraddha or annual religious rites performed for departed souls.

Bhuta-Yajna- distribution of food to cows, crows and animals in general.

Atithi-Yajna- giving food to guests and honouring them.

Hospitality is one of the householder's chief duties. He must ever feed first his guests, Brahmanas and his relatives, and then he and his wife should eat.

When the householder sees that his sons are able to bear the burden of his duties, when his grandsons are around him, he should know that the time has come for him and his wife to retire from the world and spend their time in study and meditation.

The period of grhastha or householders is the most important period among all the asramas. Manusmriti mentions the grhastha ashrama as the preeminent ashrama and the grahastha as the pre eminent among members of all the four asrams [4].

This concept of grhastha is equalled with modern concept of citizenship and grhastha is having twin constituencies of political and ethical man. This ethical constituent registers man's psycho-social growth.

This ethical constituent directs grhastha to have a harmonious relationship with environment, both inner and outer. This interaction between man and his environment is ought to be controlled and regulated by ethics.

In the present day Marry, rear children, perform your responsibilities towards your parents, wife, children, relations, friends, organization, society and world in general. Treat all life as sacred and be philanthropic.

The other three, vanaprastha, sanyasa, and brahmacharya are all depended on grhastha in the sense that it is grhastha who is capable of fostering and nurturing the other three asramas in all ways, both mentally and spiritually in this sense grhastha is jyesthasrama or the preeminent ashrama [5].

It is Grihastha who is responsible for a society in which harmony prevails. the role of Grihastha is full or responsible and he is expected to do service to all sections of society. He is the upholder of morality and behaves kindly with all creatures of the earth.

According to swami ranganathananda, Vanaprastha stage is attained when Grihastha performed all his duties, towards pitri and putra towards society. The concepts of debt, finance liberality and sacrifice bring out the social obligation of the grhastha [6].

The vanaprastha or the recluse

The next stage is that of the Varnaprastha. Brahmacharya is a preparation for the life of the householder. Even so, Vanaprastha is a preparation for the final stage of Sanyasa. After discharging all the duties of a householder, he should retire to the forest or a solitary country place and begin to meditate in solitude on higher spiritual things. He is now free from social bonds and the responsibilities of life. He has ample time for study of scriptures. His wife may go with him or remain with her sons.

This concept is most important in relation with ecology. This stage helps us to understand intimately and teaches us to live with nature.

Evaluate and review what you have done so far. Have you completed your obligatory duties towards you family and relations? Are you in a position to slowdown, to withdraw and spend more time in mentally satisfying and spiritually uplifting tasks? Remember Vanaprastha is not an escape but a kind of obligatory retirement for a higher cause.

The sannyasin or the renunciate

The next stage is that of a Sanyasin. When a man becomes a Sanyasin, he renounces all possessions, all distinctions of caste, all rites and ceremonies and all attachments to any particular country, nation, or religion. He lives alone and spends his time in meditation. He lives on alms. When he attains the sublime state of deep meditation he rejoices in his own Self. He is quite indifferent to sensual pleasures. He is free from likes and dislikes, desires, egoism, lust, anger, greed and pride. He has equal vision and balanced mind. He loves all. He roams about happily and disseminates Brahma Jnana or Knowledge of the Self. He is the same in honour and dishonour, praise and censure, success and failure. He is now Ativarnasrami, i.e., above Varna and Ashrama. He is quite a free man. He is not bound by any social customs and conventions.

Such a Sannyasin is an ideal man. He has attained perfection and freedom. He is Brahman Himself. He is a Jivanmukta or a liberated sage. Glory to such exalted personages who are living Gods on earth.

This is the phase of complete withdrawal. You have seen it all. You have enjoyed your life. It is time you sit and relax, you reminisce, and look at life as if in a film and draw into yourself your attention and your thoughts. It is time to wake up the God in you.

Pancasila is the five basic tenets of morality and all the moral -code's foundation is based on these principles. The Principle of Ahimsa or non-violence is the first among pancasilas and which has a great importance viewed from ecological point of view. This principle is closely associated with the human psychological makeup. So it is religiously, socially, politically, ethically, and ecologically important principle. Ahimsa or non-violence is based on man's basic instinct of love, sympathy, and compassion and non-hatred. From this point itself it is very clear that it is ecologically most important principle.

Ecological diversity and harmony in nature cannot be maintained and preserved without the principles of Ahimsa or non-violence. Positively speaking, Ahimsa stands for love in a higher realm which means unselfish love without any conditions. In its lower realm, it means love with attachment which inevitably includes selfishness also. The basis of Ahimsa or non-violence is unselfish love. In ecological point of view it is unselfish love and compassion towards all beings, both living and non-living.

The concept of ahimsa is a gradually evolved entity in Indian Philosophy. In the prevedic and in the beginnings of Vedic Period one could find references to animal sacrifice. As the pre-vedic Indian offered to God what was their food, as they were meat eaters, they Offered flesh to God. As the Vedic man gradually evolved to higher realms, they discouraged animal sacrificing rituals. The dominant rule in latter Vedic periods were 'Na himsyat sarvabhutani'- all creatures should not be killed [7].

Asrama dharma under modern conditions

At the present moment, the Asramas cannot be exactly lived according to the details of the ancient rules, as the conditions have changed very much; but, they may be revived in their spirit, to the great improvement of modern life. In these stages, no one should do the duty of another. The student or Brahmachari should not do the duties of a householder, a recluse or a Sanyasin. The householder must not perform the duties of a Brahmacharin, Vanaprastha or a Sanyasin. A Sanyasin should not seek again the joys of the householder.

Peace and order will prevail in society, only if and when all people do their respective duties efficiently. The abolition of Varnas and Ashramas will cut at the very root of social duties. How can the nation hope to live when Varnashrama Dharma is not rigidly practised?

The students of schools, and colleges should lead a life of purity and simple living. The householder should lead the life of an ideal Grihastha. He should practise self-restraint, mercy, tolerance, non-injury, truthfulness and moderation in everything. Those who find it difficult to lead the life of the third and the fourth Asramas should, remaining in either of the other two Asramas, gradually withdraw themselves from worldly life and practise selfless service, study and meditation.

Jainism and Buddhism were totally against animal sacrifices. Ahimsa in its extreme form can be noticed only in Jainism. The underlying principle of non-violence is the principle of equality or samata in Jainism. Samata is the basis of all morality, philosophy and logic of Jaina thought and prevails all over Jaina system. For this it is said, no living being loves suffering (Dukkha) just as I do not^[8].

By looking into the traditional ecological wisdom of India, it is clear that the danger to man is not nature but man himself. The danger to whole earth comes from negative technological mindedness and over materialistic tendency.

It is only through the cultivation of noble philosophical ideas that man can strike a balance. So the primary duty of man is to create a workable environmental ethics with the support of Indian Philosophical systems as the background.

It is because an Indian philosophical system is whether it is orthodox or heterodox speaks about welfare of man. But in contrast to other ideologies, Indian concept of man includes his relationship with outer world also. So when ever man thinks about welfare, it includes others welfare also. It is clear from the prayer.

Let there be balance in the space
 Let there be balance in the sky
 Let there be balance in the earth
 Let there be calmness in Waters
 Let there be growth in plants
 Let there be growth in the trees
 Let there be grace in all gods
 Let there be bliss in the Brahman
 Let There be balance in everything
 Let there be peace and peace
 Let such peace be with every one of us^[9].

Geographical boundaries cannot delimit the importance of wisdom contained in our tradition. As this geographical determination of countries is the creation of man, not by nature, and as Indian Philosophy prays for the welfare of all

beings in earth, it has a justifiable claim to be incorporated into all streams of thought.

Conclusion

The four noble duties are plays an important role in the life. In Indian Philosophy these four noble duties The first noble duty learnt many things like a builder of the house how is the base necessary like this is the first step in our life. which is learnt from the Guru. It is also said that the god, mother, father importance in the life. In the ancient period to pray the God is a nature. So the origin is started from the ecological ethical values. In this stage learnt all the aspects of the nature and its importance. To know the environmental ethics with the man and its relationship. These all are studied here only, the human beings be survive in the earth its responsibility to the nature all are explained by the teacher. Which is the route of the ladder in the growth of the life. The first Stage is mostly focused on the non-living organisms and the living organisms importance. They emphasis on the plants and animals characteristics, values its importance and also studied the patterns of the forests. The second stage is the grihastha or the householder, to perform the Pancha Maha yajanas like wise Panchabhutas all the five elements are integrated in the earth. They are not present alone in the earth. To maintain the balance of the living organisms and the non living organisms and environmental ethical values in the earth. The third noble duty is the vanaprastha or the recluse is deals with the how to live in the nature. The fourth noble duty is the sanyasin or the renunciate to maintain the equal vision and balanced mind in all aspects.

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