

Life After Death in Indian Context

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Abstract:

The point of view of Life After Death is the most striking question which is intrigued human mind on and on from the time immemorial. It leads to a host of furthermore questions. What is life? What is birth and death? etc... The materialists believe only the thing what they directly experience. Accordingly, they do not opine the notion of the existence of life after death while some others hold that all personalities will go to either heaven or hell permanently after death in accordance with their doings. Hinduism believes that life is a journey, which ends when the soul discovers its true nature. Buddhism completely difference from all those stand points. In this context, the concept of Life after Death is impossible to be treated as a form of escape. It is, in that case, however, timely requirement to examine the conclusions presented by renowned Indian preceptors. This experiment will be confined only to Hindu scriptures with special reference to Prasthanatraya. That is to be the line of thought in this article.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of **Re-birth** or **reincarnation** is a very popular and fascinating score and has been discussed for a long while. It does not only intrigue human mind but also lead to furthermore questions. What is life? What is birth and death? What happen to our life after death? Does it come to exist as rebirth or an end with dissolution of the physical body? These are some of those fundamental questions which plague us from very remote past, and every thinking individual seeks an answer to. Even though we do not get an authentic conclusion, much conversation, on this talking point, has been taken place. Various personalities, time of passage, have conclusively answered them, but they keep coming up still. In accordance with materialists, the person is only the physical body. Everything ends there, at the time when it dies. Destruction of the corporal itself is the emancipation; (*debacchedo mokṣaḥ*) other than that, there is nothing; *Bhāṣya mibhūṭasya debasya punarāgamanam kutaḥ* (*Sarvadarśana Saṅgraha*. 1. 1 & 5). Some others opine that all personalities will go to either heaven or hell permanently after death in accordance with their doings. The Buddhist proclamation on this standpoint, obviously, mentions that some of them, from whom die, are born in a womb, evil doers are born in woeful states, the ones, who collected the merits, go to blissful states, and those free from fetters pass away to deliverance; *Nirvāṇa*. A person who has implicit faith in Hinduism believes that life is a journey, which ends when the soul discovers its true

nature. In this context, the concept of **Life after Death** is impossible to be treated as a form of escape. It is, in that case, however, timely requirement to examine the conclusions presented by renowned Indian preceptors. This experiment will be confined only to Hindu scriptures with special reference to *Prasthanatraya*. That is to be the line of thought in this article.

2. THE MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE

There are two kind of truths such as conventional truth, (in Pāli – *Sammuti Sacca*) and absolute truth (in Pāli – *Paramatta sacca*), (Mūlāmā. 24. 8). The existence of the truth does not depend on our acceptance or non-acceptance. With a view to achieving a remarkable conclusion regarding whatever kind of points, the correct process of thinking wants to be applied. When we start to think spiritually the basis of conventional truth is nescience. Three valid means of knowledge are taken for granted, on the consent of the majority in the field of philosophy, to have an exclusive conclusion on tangle skein of thread whatsoever. The first means of knowledge, Perception (*Pratyakṣa Pramāṇa*), second and third, Inference (*Anumāna Pramāṇa*), and Verbal Testimony (*Śabda Pramāṇa*) in turn are, basically, accepted in Indian knowledge tradition as well. The first means of knowledge of three is our direct experience. Second and third are logic. The first two of these three are easily accepted by the most. The huge wisdom and knowledge gained by the individuals are based on one's own

experiences and inferences. *Śabda Pramāṇa* based on Scriptures. It gives us more knowledge of reality of transcending of the sense. The one who does not have direct knowledge in relation to existence of heaven and hell or other matters of extramundane circumstances, such as **Life After Death**, wants to believe in the scriptures. The written documents such as Vedas pave the way for realization on this truism.

3. PRE-HISTORICAL PRIMARY SEEDS OF SURVIVAL AFTER DEATH

The man who lived in stone age or hunting age did not deal with a comfortable and complex lifestyle. He, who tends to open caves to dwell and claims to be charming and calm regimen possesses, hunted an animal for his way of life. The cave man drew the form of hunted beast on the wall of his own cave not for affection on it but for trusting that the life of the dead beast can be gained again by itself. The body of deceased relation was buried in own dwelling by primordial human. The picture of dead person is formed on the wall of dark caves. By doing so, otherwise, they corroborate that the departed be with them even though they have gone in physically. The hidden meaning of this is to fetch them again as a newborn. Primeval man believes in that the cold person will come and increase one's own unity. Under the impression of this ritualistic performance, it is paved the way for notion of rebirth. This is the most important and very past remote evidence of the next birth.

4. OBSEQUIES OF ANCIENT

Even though the veterans did not have philosophical minds, they, without any doubt, knew that the being who was born in this world would die. The existence of the being after death may become or not the respectable process regarding the remains was followed. The remains that were wrapped with a straw, were laid length wise in a timber coffin, by *Sumerians* who ruled *Mesopotamian* and *Babylonian*. When the stiff was burned and the rest ash threw into flowing water, (Mackay, 1948. P. 73). They, at a time, by bestrewing grain in the graveyard, expected prosperity for manes in the next birth, (Sastri, p. 13). The rocky weapons, met with fossil skeletons, are the striking examples, on this point. The weapons were laid with the stiff by veterans with a view to be benefited by death persons in next birth. *Babylonians* opined to bestow the clothes, ornaments, that were used by themselves, in the casket in which the remains were laid in order to facilitate beyond the grave. Sometimes those appliances were kept in the mausoleums. By doing this and that they pray for plentitude over the next life of one's own kindred who died recently by the name of them. The obsequies brought into line by the *Mesopotamians* are ornate. When Brahmin (*Brahmaṇa* – the clergy class) died, his own stick was kept in the right hand of the death body. When a royal person (*Ātriya* – the leader class) and a merchant (*vaiśya* – the business class) died, bow string, and cane, were placed in the right hand of cadaver respectively, (Rollinson. 1959. P. 30). Mummified Bodies, almost four thousand years old, in Messara, even today, can be seen, (Story. 1975. P. 14). They believed in that the self of the dead person dwells conjoined the corpse, (ibid). Expecting the sanctity the animals' bodies also stored in the same way, (Zenemer, p. 227). The skeletons were laid likewise the way of embryo conceived in a womb.

The underlying motive of these implemented rituals was **life after death**.

5. INDIAN PERSPECTIVE FOR AFTER DEATH.

Hinduism deals with concept of re-birth, in the case of talking about fruit of action, accepting cycle of death and birth - what is technically known as *Samsāra* – recurrent wandering, (Manu.1. 117). The concept of cause and effect (which called *Satkāryavāda* = the effect exists in its cause prior to its production or manifestation) is a most important theory in Indian context to analysis the transmigration and fruit of action (the law of karmic). If we do not accept the previous existent cause for present effect, then there can be nothing. This is called by *Vedānta*, *akṛta abhyāgata doṣaḥ* - the fallacy of an effect without a cause. But it is understood that human children are born to human beings, birds to birds and so on. This evidence is strong enough to prove that the effect is like the cause. Non – acceptance of life after death is *Kṛta vipranāśaḥ*. That means destruction of the result. There is an action but no result from it. It is impossible as well. In that case, any effect is impossible without cause. Accordingly, if there is an effect, then there should be a cause.

The difference between a live body and a dead body, on the outside, wants to be understood. In a dead body there can be no sense of pleasure or pain; this all admits (*mṛtaśarīra sukṛtādāhāyabāhāvāsyā sarvasammatatvāt*). As our experience, even a sleeping body is not capable of having performance yet alone a dead body. If so, something strength, which cannot be touched, cannot be seen by physical eyes, or unable to be perceived by knowing the ways of the world (worldly knowledge), should be there in the live body.

In accordance with Hindu tradition, bodies in general are threefold, (1) Astral body (*sūkṣmā*) (Subtle are those called rudimental bodies = *tanmātrāṇi saṁgrhātāṇi tanmātrikāṇi sūkṣmaśarīrāṇi*), (02) Spring from parents (generated) (*mātrpitrja*), and (03) Gross body (elementary), together with great elements (*sahaprabhūta or pañca bhautika = pañcabhautiko dehaḥ*). The *sūkṣmaśarīra* has been named *Liṅgaśarīra* itself, (*sūkṣmā liṅgaśarīrakhyā*). By the name of *sūkṣmaśarīra* there are two bodies. As *Vijñānabhikṣu*, the renowned scholar in philosophy of *Sāṅkhya* said in his *pravacana bhāṣya*, *tat liṅgaśarīrādhiṭṭhānaśarīrayoranyonyaniyatatvena sūkṣmatvena caikatabhiprāyāt*, that means the *liṅgaśarīra* together with *adhiṭṭhānaśarīra* is considered as a one *sūkṣmaśarīra*. The aggregation of seventeen elements such as intellect, eleven organs, and five subtle elements, (*sapta dasaikamliṅgaṁ*) and (*tanmātrāṇi saṁgrhātāṇi tanmātrikāṇi sūkṣmaśarīrāṇi*) are the subtlety so called ***Liṅgaśarīra*** which accompanies the individual spirit or soul in all its transmigrations and is not destroyed by death, (it is also called *sūkṣmaśarīra*, and since it is the sign and accompaniment of individuality, it can never perish till the individualized soul is finally merged in the Universal), (SK. 39). This abstract has been known to *Vedānta* as *Jīva* alike, (*Jīvaḥ sa vijñeyah*), which can be named Soul.

Although, we do not see outgoing of subtle body, it can be believed in for saying scriptures that vital thing departs from the body at the point of death. The subtlety so called *Jīva* which dwells in depth of heart is diminutive (*ātmāntarbrdaye'nyān*) (Chānd. U. 3. 14. 3). This vital principle

(living soul) is as small as one part of hair of which was divided into hundred parts from the part of hair of which has been divided into hundred portions (*valāgraśatabhāgasya śatadhākalpitasya ca*). *Jīva*, size in thumb (*aṅguḥ ṭaṁ puruḥ aṁ*, or *aṅguḥ ṭha mātram puruḥ aṁ*, *Kaṭha*. 2. 3. 17, & *Mahābhā. Araṇya Par.* 281.16), leaves from the gross body at the point of death. The holy *Bhagavad Geetā* plainly called that the Soul dwelled in the body departs when the physical body declares the death.

Śarīraṁ yadavāpnoti yacca'pyutkrāmatīśvaraḥ
Gr̥hītvai'tāni saṁyāti vāyurgandhāniva'sayāt. (15. 8).

The *Jīvātman* resumes his contentless consciousness, similarly, the wind acquires the scent inherent in the flowers, when he detaches himself at the point of death and takes another birth by spreading out his senses, mind to assume another body. Apart from that it says, in the same resource, that, if we are unable to see, only the person whose eyes are trained in knowledge can see how a living entity can quit his body. Consider the following,

Utkramantaṁ sthitaṁ vāpi bhuñjānaṁvāguṇānvitam
vimūḍā nānupaśyanti paśyanti jñāna cakṣuḥ aḥ (15. 10).

Objects were distinguished in the preceding verse according to, who departs, stays, enjoys and is conjoined with qualities, cannot be seen by ignorant, but by one possesses the eye of wisdom.

Everyone knows what happen to the physical or the gross body (in Sanskrit word goes as *pañcabhautika deha*), such as issue from father and mother are perishable after death. It is the frame that proceeds from mother and father ceases (*mātāpitr̥jā nivartante*), even here, at the time that the breath departs. It is cremated, buried, thrown into flowing water like river, or left to rot, according to the situation and merges into earth and the other gross elements. Otherwise, it must resolve into them, alike dust to dust, after death.

In accordance with *Vedānta*, the Soul or *Jīva* has to play threefold roles as a subject of knowledge, an agent of action, and an enjoyer of the experience of actions. Accordingly, this physical gross body is known to *Vedānta* as only the counter of experiences, (*bhogaśatanaṁ*), and the entity which is occupying in this body and, contacting this world is consider as agent of action (*bhoga śādanam*). In this respect, what we want to know is, whether the journey of the soul continues after death of physical body.

The mirror in which the customs and traditions of Vedic masses are reflected, is **R̥g Veda**. It is the most authentic document in Indian context. When we go back to *R̥g Vedic* era, obviously, the point of view of the life after death they opined, can be seen. The five hymns (14 – 18) included in chapter X of that unique report obviously mentions about the death and after death. Those five hymns are the cardinal and valuable resources on this talking point. Accordingly, the death body is carried to the afterworld by *Agni* and is directed by *Savitṛ* (1. 35) and is protected by *Puṁ an* (VI. 54). The Soul of the death person enter the blissful state of deliverance or the world of the fathers along the road by which they followed. The manes, after entering the world of fathers, meet with their former fathers who are rejoicing with *Yama* (ibid).

These sources have been taken for granted as very remote past evidence in relation to this standpoint. The doctrine of the transmigration of soul is propounded also in *Yajur Veda* as well. It emphasizes that the Soul roams in air, water, and plants after leaving the body at the point of death and then enters the womb and born again and again, (*garbhe sañjāyase punaḥ*). (Xii. 36).

In the time of *Upaniṣad* the standpoint of re-birth stands along as beacon-lights on a mountain-peak. Some souls enter the womb to have a body; some others go to the plants according to their work and knowledge (*Kaṭhopaniṣad* – 2. 5. 7). *Upaniṣads* specify that the wheel of births and deaths revolve within the vaster wheel of the Universe, which is confined within the three worlds called *Bhūloka*, (the earth - terrestrial world), *Bhūvarloka* (the space between the earth and sun inhabited by Munis, Siddhas) and *Svargaloka* (Indra's heaven above the sun or between it and the polar star). (*Brhad.* 1, V. 16). All the things that we are offered in these three worlds, are tainted with mortality, (*Kaṭha*. 2. 23 - 28). The objects, whatever, the being meet with in these three worlds, are disintegrated with the sway of death. The mental, astral, and physical things are subject to birth and death except only one non-destructive particle, in size of thumb, which the experience of the body. This perpetuity gets into the round of births and deaths by means of generated body for devoid of proper understanding (*avijñānavān*), thoughtless (*amanaskah*) and always impure (*sadā śuciḥ*) (*Kaṭha*. U. 1. 3. 7).

Inordinate strive has been taken by the system of *Saṅkhya*, however, to assert the perpetuity of subtle. This is imperceptible and undergoes successive states of being. The subtle bodies, consisting of the subtle elements, endure either till liberation (*āmokḥ aḥvasthāinaḥ*) or until the great Pralaya (*āmahāpralayaśavatiḥ ṭhanti*). It, in another words, migrates the three worlds, as an ant the body of God *Śiva*, until the knowledge is attained. (*nityaṁ yavanna gñānamutpadyante tavat saṁsarati tacca mahadādisūkḥ maparyantaṁ mahanādaṁ yasya tanmahadādi buddhirabaṅkāro mana iti pañca tanmātrāṇi suūkḥ maparyantaṁ tanmātraparyantaṁ saṁsarati śulagrabapīlikāvat trināpiloḥan*).

Pūrvotpannamasaktaṁ niyataṁ mahadādi
sūkḥ maparyantaṁ
saṁsaratinirūpabhogaṁ bhāvairadhivāsitaṁ liṅgaṁ (SK 40).

If so, we must agree with that this Subtlety was at the beginning, it is not confined. This has always existed and undergoes successive states of transmigration. This subtle body migrates until knowledge is attained or until it meets its real nature. It is, in this connection, called lasting. The wandering of this astral body is taking up one another same material body by throwing out perishable bearing body. It is explicitly defined that the *Ātman* takes up another body by giving up the old one just as a man casting off filthy clothes and puts on new one.

Vāsāṁsi jīrṇāni yatā vibhāya navāni gr̥hīṇāti naro'paraṇi
Tata śarīraṇi vibhāya jīrṇānyanyāni saṁyāti navāni dehi (Bha.G. 2. 22).

And again, this point has, similarly, been repeated in Īśvarakṛṣṇa's work as follows.

*Purīṣaṁ ārthabhetukamidaṁ nimittanaimittikaprasaṁgena
prakṛter vibhutvayogānnaṭavad vyatīṣṭhate liṅgaṁ* (SK. 42).

It is declared with striking simile that the subtle person, for the sake of soul's, performs like a dramatic actor by means of various forms. Then there is a continuity that we are looking for. Accepting the theory of reaction (*Karmaphala* – theory of fruit of action) is a great proof for next birth. The accumulation of strength of action assists for this continuity of soul. The fruit of actions will justify what kind of body should be taken by the *Jīva* at the point of the new birth is taken up. We cannot even be sure which body and where or when the Soul will take. All these factors depend on law of action. No one can say for certain the way of remuneration of actions. In accordance with literature the *Jīva* will not possess the same body consecutively but differences in accordance with results of one's own actions. As one sows – so one reaps. Once the *Jīva* manufactures the form of man it may change into another kind of body at the next.

*Yonimanye prapadyante śarīratrāya debinaḥ
sthaṇumanye'nusamṇyanti yathākarma yathāśṛtaṁ* (Kaṭha. 2. 2.7).

In this explanation consistently, *Upaniṣads* consider that the *Jīva* enter the womb to have a body and the others spring as plants just according to their actions and knowledge. *Bhagavad Gītā*, another eminent Hindu scripture, is also of the same view. It says, according to their qualities (*guṇā*) *Jīva* enters different bodies. The reference culled from that authentic record will come under here.

*Yadā sattve pravṛddhe tu - pralayaṁ yāti debabhyt
tado'ttamaṁ lokaṁ - amalapratiṣṭhate* (14. 14).

Accordingly, the steppingstone of the next birth of the soul is the uppermost thought in the mind at the point of departing from present body. Godly thoughts are inevitable at this juncture if the individual, who meets with death, has a mind full of good qualities (*sattve pravṛddhe*). If so, the next birth of this adherent unfailingly will be in the highest regions called *Brahmaloka*. They who meet with death in the qualities of activity and darkness, are born among those attached to actions and the wombs of the deluded in turn, (ibid, 14. 15). However, the strength of last thoughts determines the body which *Jīva* takes up.

Agreeably to the stanza 8. 6 in the same literature observes, the future birth of *Jīva* is determined in accordance with actions implemented by oneself through whole life and its last thought. The body which is taken up by the *Jīva* will be determined with the strength of these mental factors. Good begets good and bad begets bad. Every action has its reaction. This universal law cannot be avoided even by the *Jīva*. By this karmic theory corroborates that **“we are the results of what we were, and we will be the results of what we are”**. Consequently, the meritorious deeds accumulated by the departed soul are alone its friend. We will be rewarded with pain or pleasure according to the life we live. The result of good action is said to be of the nature of goodness and purity, while the fruit of passion is pain and the fruit of dullness is

ignorance. Thus, we find it has been stated in plain language in Holy *Bhagavad gītā*, such as,

*Karmaṇaḥ sukr̥tasyā'bhū - sāttvikam̐ nirmalam̐ phalam̐
rajasas tu phalam̐ dukkham - ajñānam̐ tamasaḥ phalam, (ibid, 16).*

One of *Upaniṣads* agree with one accord with this statement by saying that, the fruit of good actions is virtue and pure, the fruit of quality of foulness is pain, and the fruit is ignorance of the action of darkness. *Muṇḍakopaniṣad* (3. 2. 2). Apart from that it convinces that knowledge is raised from goodness, the greed is from passion and negligence, and errors are raised from dullness (ibid, 17). The fluctuation of three qualities determines in which stage the soul should stay. The person who has goodness rises upwards (*īrdhvam̐ gacchanti sattvasthā*). He, who deals with activeness remains in the middle regions (*madhye tīṣṭhanti rajasāḥ*) and the one who has consisted with darkness goes downwards (*adho gacchanti tamasaḥ*) (ibid, 18).

It obviously says that there is no more birth or death for the individual soul that has realized his true Self (Tejomayananda, 2015. P. 19). The souls attain different bodies according to their qualities (*Guṇās*) (*Gītā* – 14. 14). The future path of the soul is determined according to the actions and the last thought committed by the *jīva* (*Gītā* – 8. 6). In the stanza in one of *Upaniṣads* it was stated that there is no more birth or death for the individual soul that has realized his true Self (*Muṇḍa*. U. 3. 2. 2).

*Nai'nam̐ chindanti śāstrāṇi - Nai'nam̐ dahati pāvakaḥ
Na cai'nam̐ kledayantyāpo - na śo' ayati mārutaḥ* (Bha.G. 2. 23).

“The *Ātman* cannot be cleft by the weapons, no is burnt by the fire, no is soaked by the water, no is seared by the wind”.

6. CONCLUSION

The motto, **“Life After Death”** which gives rise to other questions like - Is there life before birth? Is there life after birth? is laid on the table. The authentic scriptures in connection to Hinduism frequently strive to respond to those questions with approximative answers.

The existence of truth does not depend on our acceptance or non – acceptance. Hindu scriptures talk about astral body in plain language. It cannot, however, be observed by human vision. The subtle bodies are lasting. The body commences by rudimental elements and migrates, according to the imperative influence of acts through the forms of beasts, birds, reptiles, or immovable substances, such as mountains, trees, and the like or, in consequence of virtue, proceeds through the heaven of Indra, and other celestial abodes. Subtle is enjoys with generated body. In that case, there is a continuous cycle of life and death going on. From one standpoint we may say that something has died but from another view something is born. One mother was very unhappy with her child for breaking a crystal vase, but the child was most unperturbed and said, “I have not broken the vase.” but created many pieces (Tejomayananda, 2015, p. 4). In this context, the cycle of creation and destruction is a very peculiar and most precious thing.

There are three stages of being such as **Gross Body, Soul** and **The Self**. Gross body is the one made by parents which is called *mātrpitrja*. The Soul is continuity by which different bodies are taken up from time to time by birth. This Soul is egoism for thinking “I” The Oneness (determined) **I AM. The Self is nature.**

So, it is clear, here, we are asking the **Soul** that *Vedānta* talks about. This Soul or *Jīva* can be identified as mind and intellect together accompanied with life, which is the manifestation of consciousness, which is occupying this body, and which is dealing with this entire world. The real **Self** is the third aspect to our personality than body and soul. This is changeless and immutable. This absolute **Reality** is concerned there is no birth at all. It was never born, nor does it die or decay (*Na jāyate mriyate vā kadācit*), (*Gītā* – 2. 20). In the *Upaniṣads*, this Reality is referred to as **Brahman**. In this respect, according to Indian philosophy, the phenomenal world is the effect of the cause, so called **Soul**.

Our present knowledge is not sufficient to see or understand directly what happens to the energy dwelled inside as an ergent, at the point of death of this physical body. Those who have realized the truth only can declare for sure nothing others. The others want to embellish means of knowledge at their disposal for the conclusion. The scriptures talk about the talking point in their best at whenever needs arise.

The most striking statement elsewhere from Hindu scriptures is *Saṁsaro'yam atīva vicitraḥ* - this world is indeed strange and bewitching. In that context, in these three worlds, the wheel of births and deaths is turning. In this respect the evidence is strong enough to believe that there is something in physical body which cannot be grasped by sense organs. The fact that we are aware of all changes proves that there must be a changeless, permanent substratum. This imperceptible abstract is going on here and there in this world as cycle of birth and death. So, it is worth to see life as a journey, which ends when the true nature is discovered by the *Jīva* or Soul.

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