

DOCTRINE OF KARMA AND REBIRTH IN AYURVEDA – A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF DIFFERENT PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHTS

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ABSTRACT

The doctrine of karma and rebirth holds one of the most central positions among all theistic and atheistic philosophical thoughts as well as moral and social traditions of India. Ayurveda also adopted these two doctrines as one of its fundamental metaphysical concepts. The views of Ayurveda regarding these doctrines, especially of Charaka Samhita, are inspired by various philosophical schools, among them Vedanta is the most important one. According to this text, we have to experience the consequence of our every past action which was performed, not for any undone actions; also, every consequence of any action depends on the moral quality of that particular action. Both of these two doctrines are used to explain multiple fundamental queries like the basis of moral conduct, the root cause of our misery, pathophysiology of many idiopathic and hereditary diseases, the process of transmigration of self from one body to another, the eternity of the self and the concept of salvation etc. The doctrine of karma has been used to establish the theory of rebirth, where different epistemological evidences are placed in support of this theory. Many of the understanding of Charaka Samhita regarding these two doctrines can be reverified by applying the observations made by different ancient philosophers, modern thinkers as well as recent researchers.

KEYWORDS: Karma, rebirth, reincarnation, the Self, Atman, Ayurveda, Charaka Samhita.

INTRODUCTION

In Indian philosophical and moral tradition as well as social belief, the doctrine of karma and rebirth holds one of the most pivotal roles, right from the early Vedic period up to most recent time. Almost all the major Indian philosophical schools, whether theistic schools like Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga and most importantly different traditions of Vedanta philosophy; or atheistic schools like Buddhism, Jainism etc. – all have discussed the nature of human actions, their consequences, the qualitative relations between them as well as the continuity of human life even after death through rebirth. The term '*Karma*' literally means actions, but philosophically it signifies the moral law of cause and effect, according to which every deed, thought and intention produces corresponding results. Based on this Indian moral belief of 'law of action', the term '*Karma*' has long been adapted in English language as a loan word and has found its place in all principal English dictionaries. Wilhelm Halbfass (2000) explains karma (*Karman*) by contrasting it with the Sanskrit word *Kriya*: whereas *Kriya* is the activity along with the steps and effort in action, *karma* is (1) the executed action as a consequence of that activity, as well as (2) the intention of the actor behind an executed action or a planned action (described by some scholars as metaphysical residue left in the actor). A good action creates good karma, as does good intent. A bad action creates bad karma, as does bad intent.^[1] The doctrine of rebirth explains an eternal cyclical process of birth, death and rebirth, through which *Atman* i.e. the Self (as per all the theistic schools of philosophy) or *Bhava* i.e. the stream of consciousness (as per Buddhist school of philosophy) passes in various *Yoni* i.e. human, animal & plant species until this cycle finally breaks down, a phenomenon which is known as *Moksha / Nishreyasha / Kaivalya* i.e. liberation or salvation.

Vedic tradition, mainly Upanishads, Mahabharata and most importantly the Bhagavad Gita hold the view that, the doctrine of karma and rebirth are closely associated with immortality of the *Atman* i.e. the Self as well as attainment of salvation. Theistic schools of Indian philosophy have accepted karma as the invisible moral force governing human destiny. Atheistic schools of Indian philosophy like Jainism interpreted karma as the subtle material substance that binds the soul, while Buddhism accepts the role of karma in rebirth without accepting the existence of a permanent Self. Although generally the law of karma has been seen from retributive perspective, where good karma results in happiness either in this life or in next life and a bad karma results in misery, but many modern spiritual giants and scholars of Indian philosophy like Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, S. Radhakrishnan etc. stretched upon the evolutionary aspect of this law of karma, where karma beyond its retributive effects, helps us to develop our moral character and becoming a perfect human. This aspect has also been reflected indirectly in Buddhism also. Ayurveda being the part of Vedic tradition also gave much importance on the law of karma and subsequently applied this to explain the phenomenon of rebirth. Among the principal texts of Ayurveda, Charaka Samhita holds its central position from metaphysical perspective. This text discusses the law of karma and rebirth extensively, where both of these doctrines are used to explain multiple fundamental queries like the basis of moral conduct, the root cause of our misery, pathophysiology of many idiopathic and hereditary diseases, the process of transmigration of the Self from one body to another, the eternity of the Self and the concept of salvation etc. The thought process of Charaka Samhita regarding these two doctrines bears the impression of many theistic schools of Indian philosophy, mainly the Samkhya – Yoga system and most importantly Vedanta philosophy. This present article will try to evaluate the concept of doctrine of karma and rebirth from the perspective of Ayurveda, mainly Charaka Samhita and also will discuss how the fundamental understandings of other systems of philosophy have influenced the thought process of this treatise. Also, this present article will try to evaluate how the observations of modern thinkers and contemporary researchers can be correlated with the understandings of Charaka Samhita regarding the doctrine of karma and rebirth.

DISCUSSIONS

Doctrine of Karma and Rebirth Across Vedic Literatures and Charaka Samhita

Among the various principal Vedic scriptures, Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita contains the most profound references of the doctrine of karma and rebirth. Among whole of the Vedic corpus, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad contains the earliest known reference of the doctrine of karma as Yajnavalkya – Artabhaga dialogue in such way: ‘one indeed becomes good through good work and evil through evil work’.^[2] Contemporary scholars have interpreted this statement as metaphysical retributive explanation of karma and also in terms of character formation. Another important passage from this text describes the law of karma in such way: ‘as it (the self) does and acts, so it becomes; by doing good it becomes good, and by doing evil it becomes evil – it becomes virtuous through good act and vicious through evil acts’.^[3] Chhandogya Upanishad describes about the retributive concept of karma in such way that, after death the departed souls attain good or bad next births, depending on their good or bad deeds in their past lives.^[4]

Among the whole Vedic literatures, Bhagavad Gita contains the most eloquent references of the doctrine of karma and rebirth. In the second chapter of this text, lord Krishna tells Arjuna that, embodied self or the soul continues to exist even after death and takes on another body painlessly: ‘as after rejecting worn-out clothes a man takes up new ones, likewise after rejecting worn-out bodies the embodied one unites with new ones’.^[5] Krishna also tells interestingly that, for death of anyone born is certain, and of the dead rebirth is a certainty; so, it should be taken as an inevitable fact.^[6]

Coming to the law of karma, in sixth chapter Krishna tells Arjuna that, no one engaged in good deed meets with a deplorable end. (After death) Attaining the worlds of the righteous, and residing there for eternal years, the man fallen from *Yoga* (the one who fails to attain perfection in the path of either devotion or of desireless action in his life) is born in the house of the pious and the prosperous’.^[7] He also reminds Arjuna that, we can only control our actions, not their fruits – which denotes the sense that, law of karma is beyond the reach of any human manipulation. One particular verse from the sixth chapter of this text indicates to universal liberation – the view that all souls will eventually attain liberation – since we seem to have to take birth again and again until we finally achieve spiritual perfection.^[8] Thus, it can be said that, in the Bhagavad Gita the conception of rebirth is nuanced and multifaced, which is intricately related to law of karma.

Charaka Samhita being in the lineage of extended Vedic corpus also reflects the same Vedantic approach regarding karma and rebirth. Vedanta accepts the unavailability of karmic effects – one has to go through the consequence of his actions either in form of *Sukham* i.e. happiness or *Dukkham* i.e. unhappiness. According to the doctrine of karma, we reap what we sow, in the sense that the moral quality of our actions – good, bad or morally neutral – shapes, at least in part, our future state or circumstances, either later in life or in subsequent life.^[9] According to Atreya Punarvasu, we have to experience the consequence of our every past action which was performed, not for any undone actions; just as a sprout cannot generate without a seed. He also opines that; every consequence of any action depends on the moral quality of that particular action – an understanding which bears the reflection of Vedantic understanding of law of karma.^[10] Charaka Samhita postulates the universal framework of law of karma in such a way: ‘we have to inevitably experience the consequence of every action done by us, whether it is significant (*Mahat*) or insignificant (*Swalpa*).

There is no escape from the law of karma’.^[11] In Charaka Samhita, during the discussion regarding origination of *Rashi Purusha* i.e. living beings, sage Bhadrakapya opines that, all the living beings originate due to their karma and all their diseases are also caused by their unrighteous actions; none of the living being nor their diseases can originate without

retributive effect of karma.^[12] While establishing the theory of rebirth, Atreya Punarvasu considers karma as the principal cause for association and disassociation of six fundamental structural elements of human beings like *Prithvi*, *Jala*, *Teja*, *Vayu*, *Akasha* and *Atma*.^[13] Acharya Chakrapani, the foremost commentator of Charaka Samhita considers deeds of previous lives as responsible factor for such association and disassociation. Also, Atreya considers *Rashi Purusha* i.e. living beings as the seat of all *Karma* and also *Karma Phala* i.e. fruit of karma.^[14] More interestingly, Acharya Charaka considers 'Asata Karma Purvakritam' i.e. the unrighteous actions of previous lives as the principal factor for vitiation of four important environmental elements like *Vayu* (air), *Udaka* (water), *Desha* (soil) and *Kala* (time period) – which ultimately leads to destruction of human habitats.^[15]

Fundamentals of Doctrine of Karma and Rebirth According to Different Philosophical Traditions

Every Indian philosophical school, either theistic or atheistic accepts the law of karma and rebirth, except Charvaka. While Buddhist school of philosophy accepts rebirth but they deny the existence of an eternal self, most of the other Indian philosophical schools accept that the reincarnating entity is an eternal conscious self, distinct from physical body. Only Samkhya philosophy upholds that non conscious subtle body is the reincarnating entity.

Various classical schools of Vedanta philosophy like Advaita Vedanta, Vishistadvaita Vedanta, Dvaita Vedanta etc. in common accept some important aspects of the doctrine of karma and rebirth. Regarding doctrine of rebirth, all these schools accept that, the reincarnating entity is an eternal, conscious and immaterial individual soul (*Jivatman*) associated with *Sukshma Sharira* i.e. subtle body which comprises *Mana* (mind), *Buddhi* (intellect), *Jnanendriya* (five sense organs), *Karmendriya* (five organs of actions) and *Pancha Vayu* (five vital forces). At the time of death, this individual soul along with subtle body leaves the *Sthula Sharira* i.e. gross physical body and takes birth in other gross physical bodies. Regarding doctrine of karma, all these schools accept God who is omniscient and omnipotent, as the *Karmadhyaksha* i.e. supervisor of karma who dispenses the fruit of karma. Vedanta philosophy accepts three kinds of karma, which scholars explain as the force that is generated by an action and that has the potency to bear karmic fruit, like: 1. *Sanchita Karma*: karma accrued from past lives that has not yet begun to bear fruit, 2. *Prarabdha Karma*: karma accrued from past lives that has already begun to bear fruit in the present life, and 3. *Agami Karma*: new karma accrued in the present life that will bear fruit in future (either in later phase of present life or in future life). Classical scholars of Vedanta like Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhvacharya etc. held that when one attains the knowledge of *Brahman* i.e. supreme reality, one's *Agami Karma* and *Sanchita Karma* are destroyed but one's *Prarabdha Karma* remains active.^[16]

Samkhya school of philosophy accepts *Prakriti* and *Purusha* as the fundamental reality of this whole creation. *Purusha* is the conscious, immaterial and inactive self, while *Prakriti* is non-conscious, insentient nature. *Purusha*'s presence activates the *Prakriti* for this creation, but they never truly unite. As long as *Purusha* identifies itself with *Prakriti*, the creation continues, that is to say, as long as we whose real nature is pure consciousness, identify ourselves under delusion with the body-mind complex, we have to take birth again and again in various physical bodies in accordance with our karma. Samkhya upholds the reincarnating entity as the subtle body, which is devoid of experience and endowed with dispositions. Vachaspati Mishra, the commentator of Samkhya Karika considered this subtle body to be comprised of *Buddhi* (intelligence), *Ahamkara* (egotism), *Mana* (mind), *Jnanendriya* (five sensory organs), *Karmendriya* (organs of actions) and *Pancha Tanmatras* (five primary elements) – all parts of *Prakriti* which is devoid of experience due to disassociation with *Purusha*. This subtle body is endowed with different karmic dispositions – in

form of merit and demerits (*Punya* and *Papa*), which determines the nature and circumstances of its present and future births.^[17]

Yoga school of philosophy being the sister concern of Samkhya philosophy accepts most of the metaphysical principles regarding karma and rebirth of the latter, with some of the important exceptions. Unlike Samkhya, Patanjali's Yoga Sutra accepts *Ishwara* – the ever-perfect *Purusha* but in accordance with Samkhya thought, considers *Ishwara* has no role to play in bestowing karmic results. Yogasutra postulates the law of karma differently from Samkhya. Patanjali accepts *Karmashaya* i.e. store house of karma as the immediate cause of rebirth. As long as *Karmashaya* exists, it will undergo the process of *Vipaka* i.e. fruition or ripening and will cause rebirth. At the time of death this *Viapaka* of *Karmashaya* determines three specific aspects of our next birth: *Jati* (the species into which we will be born), *Ayu* (span of life) and *Bhoga* (good or bad experiences). This ripening of *Karmashaya* depends on *Kleshas* i.e. conative modification of mind in form *Raga* (affliction), *Dvesha* (aversion) and *Bhaya* (fear). If *Kleshas* are completely destroyed, *Karmashaya* cannot fructify and hence person will not be born again. On the nature of reincarnating entity although Patanjali himself doesn't tell anything, but principal commentators of Yoga Sutra opined that, *Chitta* – a composite insentient entity encompassing *Mana* (mind), *Buddhi* (higher intellect) and *Ahamkar* (egotism) undergoes various modifications, called as *Vrittis* – which expands and contracts in accordance with karma. *Vrittis* of *Chitta* assumes the shape of next physical body immediately after death.^[18]

Nyaya and Vaisheshika schools of philosophy accepts that, the real nature of each of us is *Atman* - the eternal, immaterial soul, which is distinct from body-mind complex. This *Atman* when associated with the body-mind complex acts as an agent, which possess different karmic merits and demerits along with different emotions, volitions and latent impressions. It is this individual *Atman* that reincarnates from birth to birth, assuming new bodies in accordance with its karma. In contrast to Samkhya – Yoga philosophy, Nyaya – Vaisheshika schools accept God as the regulator of all karmic results like Vedanta philosophy.^[19]

Key Concepts of Doctrine of Karma According to Charaka Samhita

Doctrine of Karma – Teleological and Ontological Perspective

In Charaka Samhita, the doctrine of karma has been discussed in both teleological as well as ontological perspective. Acharya Charaka considers karma as the root cause for creation of all human beings and also for their destruction. Quoting sage Bhadrakapya, Charaka Samhita postulates the central role of karma behind the creation of human beings as well causation of their diseases.^[20] Also, the principal propounder of Charaka Samhita, sage Agnivesha holds karma which was done in our past lives responsible for both of union and dissolution of six fundamental constituents of physical body during birth and death subsequently.^[13]

Charaka Samhita urges that, karma done in previous lives are the sole responsible factor for different diseases – both physical as well as mental in present life. Such diseases which are caused by our past deeds in previous lives are called *Karmaja Vyadhi*.^[21] In relation with the disease *Jwara*, Acharya Charaka opines that, diseases like this and many such miserable conditions are caused by human's own karma.^[22] In relation with *Switra*, the causative role of different unrighteous actions of past lives as well as present life have been accepted.^[23] Also, in relation with *Aguntaja Unmada*, Acharya Charaka interestingly holds one's own unrighteous and immoral actions (referred as '*Klisyamanam Swakarmanah*') responsible for drawing attention of different celestial elements and subsequent afflictions by them.^[24]

These understanding of Charaka Samhita reflects two important principles of Vedanta philosophy – one, we reap what we sow, in the sense that the moral quality of our actions – good, bad or morally neutral – shapes, at least in part, our future state or circumstances, either later in life or in subsequent lives in form of happiness or miseries; two, one has to face the consequence of his past deeds in form of *Prarabdha Karma* in present life, no one can evade it.

Inevitability of *Karmaphala*

Traditional Indian moral and ethical traditions accept the inevitability of *Karmaphala* i.e. fruit of karma. Charaka Samhita also reflects the same understanding through multiple statements regarding the relationship between *Karma* and *Karmaphala*. Atreya Punarvasu states that, one has to experience the consequence of each one of actions he does, no matter how significant or insignificant they are.^[11] To establish this aspect of inevitability of *Karmaphala*, Atreya further states, the diseases produced as consequence of the deeds of past lives may nullify the whole course of treatment. One has to bear the suffering of those diseases until his fulfilment of scheduled fruit of actions of past deeds, bestowed upon him by the law of karma.^[25] He also states that, the persons who can control their senses and desires (*Jitendriya Purusha*) suffer from diseases only when their past deeds begun to ripe, that is to say, one can avoid the three fundamental causes of diseases in form of *Asatmya Indriyārtha Samyoga*, *Prajnaparadha* and *Parinama*, but they have to bear the fruit of past actions in form of various diseases.^[26]

Concept of ‘Group Karma’

Putting forward the idea of ‘group karma’ sage Agnivesha opines that, in case of mass destruction of human lives due to any natural catastrophe, it is their wicked past deeds in pervious lives in common (*Asat Karma Purvakritam*), which cause the defilement of four important environmental factors like air, water, soil and season – leading to origination of different epidemic diseases responsible for mass casualty.^[15]

Traditional known concept of karma pertains strictly to the individual souls. However, some modern thinkers have proposed the idea of ‘group karma’ to make account for mass calamities like due to epidemic diseases as described in Charaka Samhita. For instance, modern thinker A. Coomaraswamy argued that, the karma doctrine holds as much for groups and communities as for individuals, since no man lives to himself alone, but we may regard the whole creation. as sharing a common karma, to which every individual contributes for good or ill’²⁷. It’s quite fascinating to note that, long ago Charaka Samhita also postulated similar advanced concepts to justify the catastrophic effects of different epidemic diseases.

Concept of *Daiva* & *Purushakara*

Charaka Samhita defines the past deeds of previous lives as *Daiva* and the deeds of present life as *Purushakara*.^[28] In context with genesis of miseries and diseases, Atreya opines that, the imbalance between *Daiva* and *Purushakara* is responsible for miseries in form of diseases; whereas the mutual balance between them leads to cessation of such miseries in form of diseases.^[29] This *Daiva Karma* is also referred as *Adrishta Karma* (the unseen deed), *Swakrita Karma* (one’s own inherent deed), *Pourvadaihika Karma* (actions done in previous body i.e. life), *Apariharya Karma* (whose fruit of actions are inevitable), *Avinashi Karma* (whose fruit cannot be destructed) and *Anuvandhika Karma* (the inherent action whose fruit passes in the subsequent births).^[30] All these synonyms indicate the central concept of *Daiva Karma* in a nut-shell. Charaka Samhita further conceptualizes these *Daiva* and *Purushakara Karma* qualitatively, where both of these actions have been classified as *Hina* (least), *Madhyama* (intermediate) and *Uttama* (superior).^[31] Based on the qualitative index of these, both types interplay with each other which determines the onset,

amount and quality of miseries of present life. This interplay between these two types of actions – one which was done in previous lives and the actions of present life considered as the most crucial factor for sustenance of life. Atreya draws a very important conclusion as: ‘the lives of all living beings depend on the rational interplay between *Daiva* (deed of past lives) and *Purushakara* (deeds of present life). The *Bala* and *Abala* of *Ayu* i.e. the positive and negative qualitative index of life in terms of its continuous sustenance, depends on the interplay between these two forms of actions. A superior *Daiva* and *Purushakara* together results in an optimum blissful life, a mediocre *Daiva* and *Purushakara* together stand responsible for a mediocre life and an inferior *Daiva* and *Purushakara* results in a least quality of life.^[32] How these two types of karma affect each other’s impact in present life has been rationally explained by Atreya. According to him, ‘one the one side, the more powerful *Daiva* obstructs the fruits of comparatively weak *Purushakara*; whereas on the other side, a powerful *Purushakara* also obstructs the fruits of comparatively weak *Daiva*. Some of the powerful *Daiva Karma* matures on due course in present life, whereas some maturation of some weak *Daiva Karma* is uncertain and can be affected by other conditions. In the former situation, the effects of *Daiva Karma* cannot be obstructed by *Purushakara*; whereas in the latter situation, *Purushakara* can obstruct the effects of *Daiva Karma*. The certain and uncertain maturation of *Daiva Karma* and how *Purushakara* effects the former determines the sustenance of life.^[33]

Charaka Samhita’s such concept of *Daiva* and *Purushakara* can be loosely correlated with one of the fundamental problems of modern philosophy – the role of free will versus determinism in deciding the course of our actions in present life. One of the illuminated scholars of modern age, Hariharananda Aranya while commenting on Patanjali’s *Yogasutra* classified karma in two categories: *Purushakara*, which he defines as ‘acts done by an individual out of his own free will’ and *Adrishtaphala Karma*, ‘acts done by an individual either unconsciously or being under the complete control of some dominant organ or some exciting cause’. He further clarifies, ‘the act which an individual may or may not perform at a particular moment is *Purushakara*’.^[34] His such concept of free will can be compared with what modern philosophers call ‘leeway-based freedom’, the view that free will is ‘primarily a matter of having alternative possibilities’.^[35] Apart from him, many other modern thinkers like S. Radhakrishnan, M. Hiriyanna etc. held the view that, karma is compatible with limited, but not unfettered, free will. S. Radhakrishnan opined that, ‘the law of karma explains why we are born with certain tendencies that we are tempted to follow, but we are nonetheless free, in the present, not to succumb to these tendencies and to rise above them instead’.^[36] Charaka Samhita’s understanding that, a powerful *Daiva* obstructs the weak *Purushakara* goes compatible with the concept of ‘no free will’ as traditional thinkers like Shankaracharya opined, whereas it’s concept that, a powerful *Purushakara* obstructs the course of *Daiva* in present life, supports the idea of limited free will over determinism what modern thinkers postulated. But most interestingly, being an extended corpus of Vedic literature, Charaka Samhita accepts both determinism in form of *Daiva* and free will in form of *Purushakara* as the factor which decides our course of life with equal importance, which cannot be found anywhere in the early Vedic texts.

Concept of *Prajnaparadha* and its Relation with Doctrine of Karma

Charaka Samhita’s unique concept of *Prajnaparadha* is based on the doctrine of karma. Atreya considers *Prajnaparadha* as sum total resultant action of impairment of three mental faculties namely *Dhi* (intellect), *Dhriti* (will power) and *Smriti* (memory), which leads to vitiation of all the *Doshas*.^[37] Such vitiation of *Doshas* paves the way for causation of all types of *Dukkha* i.e. miseries in forms of various diseases.^[38] Interestingly this *Prajnaparadha* has been referred as ‘*Karma Ashubham*’, which denotes ‘something which is inauspicious or evil’ or ‘which yields a negative

impact on individual beings as well as on the whole society'. But from the perspective of moral science, it should be considered as something which is immoral or unethical. Hedonistic view of morality considers happiness as the end goal of morality i.e. those actions which yields unhappiness or misery at the end should be considered as immoral, whereas ascetic view of morality considers reasoning and following social & universal law as the standard of ethical life; for them anything which is not driven by reasoning and violates the social & universal guidelines should be considered as unethical. From both of these two views of morality, *Prajnaparadha* should be considered as something which is immoral and unethical.^[39] Charaka Samhita's consideration of *Prajnaparadha* as the mother of all causes for all types of miseries throws a new light on the utility of doctrine of karma from the perspective of this text. This concept postulates the idea that, for our every misery, it's our own wrong actions are basically responsible and we should not pass the blame to any other subjective and objective factors. This idea becomes clear in relation with *Aguntaja Unmada*, when Atreya comments that, although different celestial beings (*Graha*) appear to be responsible for causation of *Aguntaja Unmada*, basically it's our wrong / immoral deeds in form of *Prajnaparadha* which attracts them to possess us selectively, not everyone in the society in general.^[24]

Many modern scholars like S. Radhakrishnan have urged that, it is perfectly sufficient for our moral and spiritual growth to have the general belief that, our present suffering is the karmic result of our misdeeds from past lives or earlier this present life.^[40] Such belief helps us to take responsibilities for our own actions and to gain courage for every consequence of those actions. This is also very crucial for character building as it discourages the escape mentality and teaches us the importance of 'facing the brute'. Swami Vivekananda, arguably the greatest Vedantic monk and scholar of modern era, perhaps put this idea most loudly, 'when you find yourselves suffering, blame yourselves, and try to do better Say, 'This misery that I am suffering is of my own doing, and that very thing proves that it will have to be undone by me alone'.^[41] Contemporary philosopher Whitley Kaufman said, 'acknowledging past mistakes is in general an important (even essential) educating force in our lives'.^[42] Swami Medhananda, another important modern-day philosopher observed, 'belief in karma enables us to acknowledge and take responsibility for our past mistakes'.^[43]

Thus, Charaka Samhita's theory of *Prajnaparadha* has immense possibilities in the field of personality development and moral science following the doctrine of karma.

Key Concepts of Doctrine of Rebirth According to Charaka Samhita

Process of Reincarnation & Rebirth

In the textual section called Sharirasthana, Charaka Samhita raises one of the fundamental questions regarding rebirth and process of reincarnation like this: 'how does the Self transmigrates from one body to another and which is it ever associated with?'.^[44] The query has been resolved in such way: '(after death of physical body) *Atman* i.e. the Self along with four *Sukshma Bhutas* i.e. subtle elements like *Prithvi, Jala, Teja & Vayu*; driven by the functions of mind, transmigrates from one body to another nascent body, in accordance with past deeds. Such transmigrating Self cannot be perceived without divine visualizing power'.^[45] Here, this text accepts the role of karma in the process of reincarnation, which reflects the thought process of both Vedanta and Yoga philosophy. Also, this text accepts the transmigrating entity as *Sukshma Sharira* i.e. subtle body comprising *Atman* (the Self), four *Sukshma Bhutas* (subtle elements) and *Mana* (mind); which reflects the principles of Vedanta philosophy which considers the transmigrating entity as the subtle body along with the Self, although the compositions of subtle body vary between them.

Explaining the nature of transmigrating entity, Charaka Samhita tells us that, 'in the body, four *Bhutas* are associated with the Self, and the Self, in turn, depends on these four *Bhutas* for the process of transmigration from a deceased body to a nascent body'.^[46] Associating the law of karma in the process of reincarnation, this text further declares that, 'four *Bhutas* are derived from past deeds which having merged with the self, enter into the foetus, because the Self with seed like character always transmigrates Himself from one body to the other (in a cyclical order)'.^[47] The law of karma plays the substantial role in deciding the morphological as well as psychological character of a new born baby as mentioned like, 'according to past deeds, forms (morphological characters) arise from the past form and mind arises from the past mind. Whatever differences are observed in physiological and psychological characters are caused by variations of *Rajas* and *Tamas* as well as past deeds'.^[48]

Role of Mind in The Process of Transmigration of The Self

In Charaka Samhita, sage Atreya tells that, '*Atman* (the Self) never gets disassociated with extremely subtle and sense-transcending *Bhutas*, in similar way, it never gets disassociated with *Karma* (past deeds), *Mana* (mind), *Buddhi* (intellect) and *Ahamkara Vikara Dosha* (ego related defects)'.^[49] The ever-free Self gets associated with subtle *Bhutas* through mind only, as mentioned by Atreya: 'mind gets associated with subtle *Bhutas* through *Rajas* and *Tamas*, because without the absolute knowledge, mind becomes tainted with all defects. A defective mind coupled with past deeds is the main cause of transmigration of Self'.^[50] Atreya further states that, 'mind in association with the Self, establishes its contact with *Sprika Sharira* only i.e. the part of the body which has sensation'.^[51] This statement gives firm foundation to the understanding of mind's role as vehicle of the Self in transmigration. If it is accepted that, only the Self transmigrates to a new body without any involvement of mind, then due to all pervasive nature of the Self, the element of consciousness should be present all over the body. But practically many of the body parts like hair, nail etc. lacks consciousness. Then, if we accept mind's association with the Self, then it can be easily understood why only specific sensible areas possess the element of consciousness, not the aforesaid insensible areas.

Remembrance of Past Life Memories – Possible Explanations

Charaka Samhita attempts to give an explanation of the remembrance of past life memories in terms of mind's involvement in this process. It says, mind which transmigrates along with the Self from one body to another, consist three attributes namely *Suddha*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. The attribute which had dominance in previous life will also have a dominance over mind in this present life also. If the mind was got dominated by *Rajas* or *Tamas* in the previous life, then the present life will also have dominance of either one of them. In such case, memories of past life will be forgotten. But then how someone can remember the memories of past life? Atreya gives its answer like this: 'if any one's mind had a dominance of *Suddha / Sattva Guna* in previous life, then this present life will also have the dominance of same. The past life memories which are associated with the Self, will also be transmigrated with it from one body to another, along with pure mind having dominance of *Sattva Guna*. In such a case, a person will remember all the memories of past life'.^[52]

Fourfold Arguments in Support of Rebirth

As part of its unique dialectical argumentative process, before placing the arguments in support of the theory of rebirth, Charaka Samhita first places the arguments against the theory of rebirth as former view and subsequently refutes them.

Four distinct views are placed against the theory of rebirth viz. *Matri Pitri Vada* (the view that, parents alone are the cause of birth), *Swabhava Vada* (the view that nature alone is the cause of birth), *Para Nirmana Vada* (the view that, a

supreme creator alone is the cause of birth) and *Yadriccha Vada* (the view that, birth occurs by chance without having any distinct cause). Charaka Samhita denies the theory of *Matri Pitri Vada* by placing arguments that, if the *Atman* (the Self), *Mana* (mind) and *Buddhi* (intellect) migrate to progeny from parent's body, they may go either wholly or partly.

In case, they go wholly, the parents should die invariably and as regards the other alternative, there cannot be any partial migration of the subtle self, consisting *Atman*, *Mana* and *Buddhi*.^[53] Similarly, Charaka denies the theory of *Swabhava Vada* by saying that, though the specific characters of six natural elements like *Akasha*, *Vayu*, *Teja*, *Jala* and *Prithvi* along with *Atman* are inherent, but their association and disassociation, which are responsible for birth and death respectively, depends upon the virtuous and malicious deeds of previous lives.^[54] On the third front, Charaka denies the theory of *Para Nirmana Vada* by saying that, the *Atman* which is by nature is beginningless and the sustainer of consciousness cannot be created by some other factor apart from itself.^[55] Lastly, Charaka denies the theory of *Yadriccha Vada* by placing the argument that, this view has been accepted by the nihilists who denies the very existence of *Atman* along with other fundamental factors including the doctrine of karma; so, their views should be rejected.^[56]

Refuting the four-fold arguments against the theory of rebirth, Charaka Samhita subsequently justifies the theory by placing four-fold epistemological evidence in support of rebirth. This text, although having different variations, accepts four principal modes of epistemology viz. *Aptopadesha* or *Agama* (scriptural testimony), *Pratyaksha* (direct sensory perception), *Anumana* (inference) and *Yukti* (logical reasoning).^[57] First, the theory of rebirth has been established through scriptural testimony by mentioning the supreme authority of Vedas and other scriptures sourced from Vedas, where the theory of rebirth has been accepted by the sages, who were the seers of truth. As those scriptures were authored with the central view of attaining the final goal of *Nisreyasha* i.e. liberation from the cycle of birth and death, this soteriological approach conversely points towards the very existence of rebirth.^[58]

After the scriptural testimony, the theory of rebirth has been justified by placing some direct sensory realizations. Different real-life experiences have been placed as evidences in support of this theory such as: having progeny dissimilar to parents, difference between siblings in complexion, voice, morphological character, mental characteristics, intellectual characteristics etc. in spite of having same genetic similarities, taking birth in different higher and lower castes, innate dispositions like predilection to slavery and sovereignty, qualitative differences in life's experiences, innate aptitudes like weeping, breast suckling, laughing, fear etc. by an otherwise inexperienced child, appearance of birthmarks in body, difference in results in spite of similarity in actions between two persons, recalling of the incidents of previous births, liking and disliking towards similar objects etc.^[59]

Thereafter Charaka Samhita places third epistemological arguments in favour of rebirth in form of inferences, based on above direct experiences such as: 'on the same basis it is inferred that, the deed of the self is unavoidable, un-destructible, related to previous body and continuing is known as '*Daiva*' (fate). This rebirth is result of that previous deed. Hereafter, another birth will also be true. Seed is inferred from fruit and vice versa'.^[60]

Finally, Charaka Samhita argues in favour of rebirth through four principal reasoning and dialectical arguments like: 1. *Garbha* i.e. foetus is formed by conjunctions of *Sada Dhatu* i.e. five *Mahabhutas* and *Atman*. This conjunction is governed by our past deeds, and those past deeds could only be accepted if we accept the very existence of past life; 2. Any action is due to conjunction of *Karta* i.e. doer and *Karana* i.e. instrument. In case of *Garbhauptatti* i.e. origination

of foetus, the *Atman* which travels from previous body to this current body should be regarded as the doer and the deeds of previous life should be regarded as instrument; thus proves the very existence of past life; 3. Result comes out of only those actions which were performed and not of unperformed, as there is no growth of sprout without seed. It means, this present life is the resultant of all the past deeds done in previous life, not the undone deeds. Here past deeds refer to seed and this present life refers to the sprouts; & 4. Every result is consonance with action; no other plant grows from another seed. This refers to the idea, we reap what we sow, that means, we have to face the consequence of each good or bad action done, in form of happiness or misery accordingly. karmic results depend on the moral quality of karma. So, the happiness or the miseries i.e. the qualitative variance of this present life actually depends on the qualitative variance of our past actions – which establishes the existence of past life.^[61]

Cross Cultural Arguments in Support of Charaka's View on Rebirth

Many of the arguments placed by Charaka Samhita in favour of rebirth, most importantly the direct experiences of empirical life in form of *Pratyaksha*, can be supported by different cross-cultural arguments in favour of rebirth. Charaka's example of innate tendencies like suckling of breast by a child can be found in other philosophical discussions in favour of rebirth also. Udayanacharya, the famed Nyaya philosopher, urged that, a newborn baby's effort to reach his mother's breast to suck milk is not possible without recognition of how the desired object is to be acquired.

Such recognition of the object (breast), in case of a new born baby, who has no such previous experience of suckling breast, can be only explained by the presence of latent mental impressions, formed by the experience of having milk at his mother's breast in a previous birth. Therefore, he urged, karma and rebirth are true.^[62]

Charaka Samhita's another example of variations in mental and intellectual characteristics among offsprings of same hereditary origin as argument in support of rebirth is got echoed in some of recent researchers' observations. Like, Jay Joseph puts in: 'sustained worldwide research, carried out during the past three decades, has failed to uncover the genes that behavioural genetic researchers believe underlie IQ, personality, and the major psychiatric disorders'.^[63] According to contemporary thinkers like Ted Christopher, this 'missing hereditary' problem, coupled with empirical evidences of rebirth lend considerable support to the theory of rebirth.^[64]

Charaka Samhita's argument of considering remembrance of past memories of previous life in this present life (*Jatismaranam*) is probably the best known socially accepted evidence of rebirth worldwide. Many verified reports of past life memories lend considerable support to the theory of rebirth. Prominent contemporary researchers like Ian Stevenson and Jim Tucker have conducted extensive and careful investigations of numerous cases of spontaneous memories of past life – usually those of young children, spread over Indian subcontinent and United States.^[65] Instances of xenoglossy, the ability to speak a real language – often with great fluency and accuracy, which a person had not learned at any point of his present lifetime, can be found frequently in such cases of remembrance of past life memories, which researchers considers as crucial evidence in support of rebirth. Some other researchers like Almeder,^[66] Analyo^[67] etc. have also argued that, such verified cases of people claiming to remember their past life constitute substantial empirical evidence in favour of rebirth.

CONCLUSIONS

The doctrine of karma and rebirth are two of the most central concepts of Indian philosophy and spiritual life, which were discussed with much importance in ancient Ayurvedic texts, especially in Charaka Samhita. The doctrine of

rebirth is a multilayered concept which is based on the doctrine of karma. We have to face the consequence of our every action done and the qualitative aspect of that consequence depends on the moral quality of that action done. To serve the consequence of our actions done, the Self transmigrates from one gross physical body to another gross physical body along with other components known as subtle body. Thus, the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth continues, fueled by our karmic consequences. The principles of both of these two doctrines as postulated by Charaka Samhita reflect the understanding of other philosophical schools, among which Vedanta philosophy is the primary one. The metaphysical understandings of Charaka Samhita have been inspired by all major Indian philosophical schools, but the most unique part of this text is that, it amalgamated all those understating together and presented them in its own unique way. This present article is an attempt to analyze the doctrine of karma and rebirth as discussed in Charaka Samhita from the perspective of different philosophical schools and also from contemporary understandings. Such novel study will help the researchers and learners of Ayurveda and Indian philosophy to understand both of these doctrines better and will pave way for more advanced studies in coming days.

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