



THE PROBLEM OF MAN IN ANCIENT INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

Rustamov Shahzodbek Shahzod o'g'li

First-year Master's student of group M 25-1, Alfraganus University

***Abstract.** The problem of man occupies one of the central places in ancient Indian philosophy. In the teachings of the Vedas, Upanishads, Buddhism, and Jainism, the essence of human beings, their spiritual and physical nature, as well as the meaning of life and the problem of liberation (moksha, nirvana) are deeply analyzed. In these philosophical views, a human being is interpreted not as a mere biological entity, but as a complex being endowed with spiritual consciousness and subject to the laws of karma and samsara. In the Upanishads, the true essence of human beings is explained through the idea of the unity between Atman and Brahman. Buddhism, in turn, presents the concept of "anatta" (no-self), portraying human beings as a process devoid of a permanent "self." Jainism regards the purification of the soul and liberation from karma as the primary goal.*

***Keywords:** Ancient Indian philosophy, problem of man, Atman, Brahman, karma, samsara, moksha, nirvana, Upanishads, Buddhism, Jainism, anatta.*

The problem of man occupies a central place in ancient Indian philosophy, where human beings are interpreted not merely as biological or social entities, but as "spiritual beings" possessing cosmic and metaphysical essence. Indian anthropological views, beginning from the Vedic period and further developed through the Upanishads, Buddhism, Jainism, and orthodox (astika) philosophical schools, are based on the idea of the inseparable connection between human beings and the universe [1, p. 85].



1. The essence of man: the unity of Atman and Brahman. One of the most important anthropological ideas in Indian philosophy is the concept of the unity of Atman (individual soul) and Brahman (universal soul). In the Upanishads, it is emphasized that the true essence of a human being is not located in the body, but in the eternal soul. Atman is regarded as the inner “self” of the individual, while Brahman is the universal foundation of all existence. The formula “Tat tvam asi” (“That thou art”) expresses the unity of human beings and the cosmos [2, p. 23]. This view interprets human beings anthropologically as a microcosm (a small universe).

One of the central metaphysical ideas of ancient Indian philosophy is the concept of the unity of Atman and Brahman, which is especially elaborated in the Upanishads. This view interprets human beings not merely as physical or social entities, but as spiritual beings with cosmic essence [3, p. 120].

Atman is the inner “self” of a human being, i.e., the eternal and unchanging

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p • Atman exists independently of the body;

i • it is neither born nor dies;

r • it represents the true “self” of a person.

i This approach presents human beings not as temporary physical bodies, but as eternal spiritual entities.

u Brahman is the supreme, universal foundation of the entire cosmos, cosmic

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b • the origin of all existence;

n • the inner law and order of the universe;

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Brahman is not external to individual beings; rather, it constitutes their inner essence.

The most important metaphysical formula in the Upanishads, “Tat tvam asi” (“That thou art”), expresses the complete unity between the human being and the

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o • the individual soul (Atman) and the universal soul (Brahman) are essentially one;

m • self-realization leads to the understanding of Brahman;

o • knowledge is not about the external world, but about discovering inner truth [4, p. 35].

. This concept leads to the following philosophical conclusions:

• human beings are a microcosm reflecting the universe;

• true knowledge arises through self-realization;

• the highest goal of human life is moksha (liberation), i.e., the realization of the unity of Atman and Brahman.

Thus, the idea of Atman and Brahman elevates human beings to a cosmic and metaphysical level, interpreting them as an integral part of universal consciousness [5, p. 55].

2. Karma and samsara — the ethical ontology of human beings. In Indian philosophy, human life is determined by the laws of karma (action and its consequence) and samsara (cycle of rebirth). A person’s current condition is the result of their past actions; every action has an ethical consequence; and the ultimate goal is liberation from samsara (moksha). This approach presents human beings not only as social entities, but also as morally responsible subjects.



In ancient Indian philosophy, human existence is not limited to biological life or social activity; rather, it is interpreted as a profound ethical and ontological system. The foundation of this system consists of the concepts of karma and samsara, which define the position of human beings in existence, their actions, and moral responsibility [6, p. 40].

Karma (Sanskrit: “action,” “deed”) is the law stating that every thought, word, and action has a corresponding consequence.

According to the doctrine of karma:

- every action produces moral results (positive or negative);
- the present life is determined by past actions;
- future life depends on current behavior.

This approach presents human beings as morally responsible subjects, where destiny is not accidental but a result of one’s own actions.

S

- a • represents the continuous migration of the soul;
- m • reflects the temporary and impermanent nature of existence;

s

a Within samsara, a soul may be reborn in different forms of existence. This process continues until spiritual liberation is achieved.

a Karma and samsara form an interdependent system:

- karma is the cause (ethical action);
- i • samsara is the effect (rebirth cycle).

s

- positive karma leads to higher forms of rebirth;
- t • negative karma results in lower forms of existence;

h



- neutral karma maintains the current state [7, p. 60].

Karma and samsara as ethical ontology. Karma and samsara are not only religious beliefs, but also a profound ethical ontology, because they: explain existence as a system based on moral law; connect human life to a chain of spiritual cause and effect; and give ethical choice ontological significance. According to this view, ethics is not merely a social norm, but an inner law of the universe.

Moksha — liberation from the system. Liberation from the cycle of karma and samsara is called moksha (liberation). It is achieved as a result of: the cessation of karmic bonds, exit from the cycle of samsara, and realization of one's true essence.

The concept of karma and samsara in Hindu philosophy interprets human beings as morally responsible entities subject to cosmic laws and striving toward spiritual perfection. This system explains human life as an ethical-ontological process based on cause and effect and is considered one of the most important anthropological achievements of Eastern philosophy.

3. Dharma and the socio-ethical role of human beings. The concept of dharma in Hindu anthropology defines the social and moral function of human beings. It refers to duties and responsibilities corresponding to one's position in society. Every individual has a dharma corresponding to their varna (social class). Moral order ensures social stability. The violation of dharma disrupts both cosmic and social balance.

In ancient Indian philosophy, the concept of dharma is one of the most important categories defining human beings' place in the social, moral, and cosmic order. Dharma is interpreted not only as a religious concept, but also as a universal



ethical law ensuring social stability. It is a normative system expressing human duty, responsibility, and proper conduct [8, p. 15].

The word “dharma” in Sanskrit means “that which holds,” “foundation,” or “law.” In Hindu philosophy, it is considered as:

- a universal law maintaining cosmic order;
- a moral norm defining human duties;
- a principle ensuring social balance.

Dharma is closely connected with cosmic order (ṛta), and human actions must conform to this order.

D

h • fulfill duties corresponding to their social position;

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m In ancient Indian society, this concept was also linked with the varna system, where each varna had its own dharma.

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d • every individual must perform duties corresponding to their nature and social role;

f • imitating others’ roles is considered a moral deviation;

m • human perfection is achieved through proper fulfillment of one’s duty.

p This idea connects social order with individual responsibility.

e As an ethical system, dharma includes the following principles:

s— truthfulness;

t— non-violence;

h— compassion;

n



- **shanti** — inner and external peace.

These principles ensure moral stability in society and regulate human behavior.

Dharma is closely connected with cosmic law. If a person follows dharma:

- cosmic and social balance is maintained;
- justice and order in society are strengthened.

Conversely, violation of dharma leads to disorder and moral crisis. Dharma in Hindu philosophy is a central concept defining human socio-ethical role, expressing duty, moral responsibility, and harmony with cosmic order. It interprets human beings not only as social entities but also as active participants in a universal ethical system.

4. Buddhist anthropological approach: the idea of “anatta” (no-self).

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- u • there is no permanent, unchanging “soul” (anatta);
- d • a human being consists of five aggregates (skandhas);
- d • suffering (dukkha) is the fundamental condition of existence.

h Buddhist anthropology analyzes human beings not as static entities, but as dynamic psychophysical processes.

s In Buddhist philosophy, the problem of man differs fundamentally from classical Indian views. While the Upanishads interpret human essence as the eternal Atman, Buddhism introduces the concept of “anatta” (anātman) — the idea that there is no permanent, unchanging “self.” This concept is one of the central foundations of Buddhist anthropology.

d “Anatta” (Pali) or “anātman” (Sanskrit) means that there is no permanent, independent, and unchanging “soul” in human beings. According to Buddhism:

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- what is called “self” is not a stable substance;
- human beings are a collection of constantly changing processes;
- personality is a temporary psychophysical flow.

This approach interprets human beings not as static entities, but as dynamic processes.

In Buddhist anthropology, human existence is explained through five skandhas:

- physical body,
- sensations and feelings,
- perception and cognition,
- volitional formations,
- consciousness and awareness.

The human “self” is a temporary combination of these aggregates, which are constantly changing.

Buddhism rejects the idea of a permanent “self” (Atman), because:

- no experience or state is permanent;
- personality is in constant change;
- the concept of “self” is a psychological construct.

This idea contrasts with the classical Indian notion of an independent and eternal soul.

According to Buddhism, attachment to the “self” (ego-illusion):

- is the main cause of suffering (dukkha);

Therefore, understanding anatta is an important stage of the Buddhist path.

D

e



- attachment to the “self” disappears;

- spiritual peace and liberation arise.

Nirvana is not the disappearance of personality, but liberation from suffering.

In Buddhist anthropology, the concept of “anatta” interprets human beings not as permanent, independent souls, but as changing psychophysical processes. This approach radically transforms the understanding of human nature in Eastern philosophy, rejects ego-centered anthropology, and explains spiritual liberation as the abandonment of the concept of “self.”

5. Human being and spiritual purification in Jainism. In Jainism, the human soul (jiva) is considered an eternal and independent entity. Every jiva is contaminated by karmic particles. Spiritual liberation is achieved through moral purification. Ahimsa (non-violence) is considered the highest principle.

Jainism is one of the ancient Indian philosophical-religious systems in which the problem of man and spiritual development occupies a central place. Jain anthropology interprets human beings as an eternal spiritual substance - jiva (soul), and its main goal is liberation (moksha) through purification from karmic impurities.

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- c • it is eternal and indestructible;

- c • it possesses consciousness and perception;

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r Jiva exists not only in humans but also in animals and even in microorganisms.

This idea forms the basis of Jainism’s strict principle of non-violence (ahimsa).

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- n • negative actions attach karmic particles to jiva;

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- these particles burden the soul and hinder its development;
- the soul becomes bound to the cycle of rebirth.

Therefore, the main goal of human life is to eliminate karma and purify the soul.

In Jainism, the highest ethical principle is Ahimsa (non-violence). In

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a • requires not causing harm to any living being;

i • rejects violence in thought, speech, and action;

n • is regarded as the primary means of spiritual purification.

i Ahimsa encompasses not only external behavior but also internal intentions and thoughts.

m In Jainism, strong ascetic practices are considered essential for attaining spiritual liberation:

• fasting and limiting bodily needs;

t • meditation and inner self-control;

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These practices serve to eliminate karma and lighten the burden of jiva.

h I

n • the complete liberation of jiva from karma;

g • exit from the cycle of rebirth (samsara);

h • attainment of a pure and infinite state of consciousness.

a In the state of moksha, jiva achieves the highest spiritual purity and attains cosmic freedom.

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In Jain anthropology, the human being is interpreted as an eternal soul — jiva, and its main function is spiritual purification through the removal of karma. Ahimsa, asceticism, and moral discipline are the main instruments of this process, which free human beings from material attachments and lead them to moksha. In this sense, Jainism presents human beings as morally self-perfecting entities with cosmic responsibility.

Conclusion. In Hindu philosophy, the problem of man is interpreted in a broad

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n • part of cosmic unity (Upanishads),

d • morally responsible beings (karma and dharma), or

p These views create a unique system of Eastern anthropology and serve as an important theoretical foundation for modern philosophy and ethics.

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