



Role of philosophy in the time of crisis

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ABSTRACT:

Philosophy offers us to have a rational outlook in any situation. The wisdom imparted by world-renowned philosophers is helpful in dealing with situations in each and every sphere of life. Philosophy becomes a necessity for our wellbeing during crises. Today, while dealing with coronavirus, philosophy is serving as a support for our emotional and mental health. Thus understood, this paper intends to analyze the role of philosophy during a crisis. Drawing references from stoics, Camus, Bhagwad Gita, and Buddhism, I argue that philosophy acts as our guide during a crisis. Philosophy is not only a body of knowledge, in fact, but it is also a mindset, love of wisdom, way of linking emotions with reason, and the goal of living and dying well.

KEYWORDS:

- Philosophy
- Coronavirus
- Crisis
- Wisdom

I. INTRODUCTION:

Philosophy is very well acquainted with the crisis. A lot of great philosophers have done their amazing and lasting work during crises like a pandemic, economic disruption, and social disruption. Philosophical insights are always relevant and in the situation of crisis, it is relevant more than ever. Philosophy offers us to have a rational outlook in a situation. Philosophy does not give us an easy answer rather it reframes our question and helps us look at the situation with a different perspective – a skill that is necessary and invaluable in the time of crisis.

Today, the whole world is facing a pandemic challenge in the form of the corona virus. People all around the world are feeling hopeless and are horrified. The horror of corona-virus does not only surround our health but it also encircles our jobs and our lifestyle. A lot of people have lost their jobs; the daily wagers are in the middle of nowhere. Everyone is trying to deal with stress in their own way; the responses are highly varied. Some are

trying to deal with everything and everyone with grace; whereas; some people are under a lot of stress and depression. So, it is in situations like these that we need to get hold of ourselves, if not physically then mentally and teachings of different schools of philosophy can provide us mental and emotional strength to deal with the crisis.

II. PHILOSOPHY TO THE RESCUE

Stoicism was born amidst unfavorable situations. Its founder Zeno established the school after he was ship-wrecked near Athens in 310 B.C. It teaches us that crisis happens, in fact, the crisis is simply bad things that we did not expect to happen. They saw life as a training period for difficult times; therefore they always welcomed hard times. Meditation by Marcus Aurelius can be regarded as an ancient training manual for developing mental resilience that is essential to get through the pandemic. In Meditation (book 8.49) he writes about the time when one of his sons fell ill. At that time he focused his attention on the present moment rather than adding something from his side to the situation. Stoics believed that we are often more frightened than hurt and we suffer more in our imagination than in reality. By applying this simple mantra to our lives we can reduce our stress and calm ourselves, as most of the time we are stressed because of our habit of anticipating our future.

A stoic would also advise us to be careful of the media and views of other people, as they infect our well-being. Avoid sabotaging yourself by unwittingly adopting negative, unproductive attitudes through our association with other people.

Albert Camus, another great philosopher experienced his great share of adversity. He grew up in Algeria fighting poverty and endured world war. In his classic, *The Plague*, Camus mentions about an infection that killed more than half of the population of a town. It points out the inevitability of human sufferings and “altruism” being healthier during the time of global crisis. (Camus, 1947)

For Camus, absurdity arises when our expectation of the world to be just and rational is contradicted by our experience of the world that is



indifferent to our expectations. This absurdity can be conquered by our “leap of faith”- the choice of not holding on to our expectations. Camus said that – it is not our task to understand the meaning of pandemic. He suggests we invest our energy and efforts in our duty and not worry about the results.

Similarly, Nishkaamkarma of Bhagawad Gita advises us to perform our duty without getting attached to the result. During the pandemic, this mantra of selflessly performing one’s duty has become more authentic and is the need of the hour. It encourages us to perform selfless acts. It is what we are seeing doctors, virologists, sweepers, and nurses do. They are just performing their respective role. (Singh and Singh, 2012).

Buddhist philosophy can provide us some comfort in the time of crisis. It teaches us that we are subject to birth, aging, illness, and death. It helps us to acknowledge that it is normal to face uncertainty, lack of control, pain, impermanence, and expecting otherwise will only add to the sufferings. Buddhism mentioned four limitless qualities – kindness, compassion, empathy, and equanimity. They believed that these four qualities help us to be calm, and overcome the fear and anxiousness of our mind. Also, Buddhist teachings of unity and compassion are more relevant today as we suffer from COVID-19. During the time of crisis, we need each other more than ever. (Sharma, 2009)

It’s time like these that need us to be patient and force us to reflect on the quality of our life on a deeper level. In this pandemic, we have started to value things that we always took for granted. Every person of society is coming forward and helping one another. It is only by helping one another and working together that we can prevent this virus from spreading and recover from this deadly virus.

Thus, there are plenty of philosophical schools that can help us get through the crisis. It helps us realize that we are always nested in the human condition and therefore, illness, pain, scarcity, death, and the different forms of crisis will always be a part of our life. Also, there are things that mattered before the crisis, like justice, relationship, being kind, virtuous, moral leadership and it will matter when the crisis will be over.

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