

**THE CONCEPT OF TIME (KĀLA) IN
MAHĀBHĀRATA
AND OTHER SYSTEMS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY**

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According to Vyāsa, the genesis of the universe and the conduct of the same are united with 'time' (kāla). The ancient people of India possessing great intelligence have thought about the origin and end of all creatures in this world. In the processes of birth and death, time had been divided into 'cycles'. The main aim of them was to find out the existence of the varied entities within the framework of time circles. The birth, existence, growth, change, increase, decrease

and elapse were attributed to the time factors.¹ None of the worldly affairs can come to the premise of knowledge without the connection of time.

In earlier days, natural phenomena were taken as criteria to measure time. The movement of celestial bodies gave people some clues for some calculations of time. As such, primitive people could very well understand and differentiate day time and night time. In spite of any limitation alluded to Kāla, it was intrinsically held as the one without beginning and end. The Vedic Aryans held the knowledge of time connected with the rising and setting of Sun, Moon, eclipses of Sun and Moon etc. The term *muhūrta* in the sense of moment is traceable to the Rgvedic people also. Besides this, another term *nāzhika* is also seen used to measure time. A day is said to be consisted of sixty *nāzhikas*. Further calculations based on *muhūrtas* were done leading to a year. Āryabhaṭṭa I, Brahmagupta I, Varāhamihira and Bhāskara I had their own contributions to Astronomy where different concepts of time occupied predominant position. Bhāgavata and Brahma purāṇas as well as the Naiyāyikas accepted 'kṣaṇa' even though there is slight difference in the unit of time. Really concepts of the unit of time came into existence depending on the natural phenomena.

However, certain heavenly conceptualizations are considered above the impact or limit of time. According to Advaitins, Brahman is the Absolute and is without beginning and end. Some people

consider God for Brahman and thus not get entangled by the chain of time. The ancient sages of India, with their deep thinking and imagination attempted to measure the immeasurable time. They had put effort to allude names or terms to particular portions of time, viz. 'kāṣṭhā', 'nimeṣa' etc. even though they do not exist in actuality. We come across the calculations of an interesting table of period from 'kāṣṭhā' to a unit of a few seconds to one year. The term 'kāṣṭhā' is calculated to have the period of fifteen winks of the eyes. Thirty kāṣṭhās are taken as a unit known as 'kalā'. Such thirty kalās and the tenth part of a kalā are considered as a unit called 'muhūrta'². Such thirty muhūrtas are combined together to make one day and night. Thirty days and nights form a unit of one month. Such twelve months are taken as a year. Two ayanas are considered to exist in a year like Dakṣiṇāyana and uttarāyana. The Ayanas are the solar movements. Our terrestrial one year was taken as equal to the day and night of the gods. The uttarāyana period is considered as the day and the Dakṣiṇāyana period is considered as the night of the gods.

A Short Survey of Time in Other Systems of Indian Philosophy

Time in Sāṅkhya system:

Sāṅkhyas never admit time as a factor. Even though they openly admit that they do not accept Kāla, they are also not averse to its impact. In an indirect way, they accept a certain term called 'kṣaṇa'.

According to them, kāla is included in moment and direction. So they never consider kāla as a separate factor.³

Time according to Yoga Philosophy:

According to Yoga philosophy, God is above the time, at least the one unaffected by the same. Yogins admit time or kāla as a factor, for which references are easily available in Yogasūtras.⁴

Nyāya Philosophy:

Those who take their birth are under the purview of time. So kāla is said as the creator of the originated. It is the cause of the concept of yesterday, today and tomorrow. To the Reality, it is all- pervasive and without any division. People hypothetically allude this division with the completion of worldly affairs. The above said concept is discussed in Bhāṣā Paricheda. Accordingly, kāla is the cause of the notion of the priority and posteriority that is converted into a movement etc..owing to its limiting adjuncts.⁵ The “Muktāvalī” an explanatory part of the same runs as follows-‘Janyānaṃ janakaḥ kālaḥ jagatāmāśrayo mataḥ’⁶

“Time is the cause of things that are produced and is considered to be the Substratum of the universe.”

The Vaiśeṣika Philosophy:

Kaṇāda, the teacher of the Vaiśeṣika consider time as matter and a separate factor. Reference to this effect can be seen in the Vaiśeṣika Sūtras (Chapter 2, Sūtra 6) ⁷

Kāla according to the Mīmāṃsakas:

Space, Time and Ether are perceptible for the Mīmāṃsakas. They are all pervasive like the Soul. The Pūrva Mīmāṃsakas consider time as a “Dravya bheda.” ⁸

The Cārvākas:

The Cārvākas or Lokāyatikas never admit Kāla. At the same time they accept visual elements like Ether, Water, Fire, and Air. They never admit space because it is known by inference. The Cārvākas accept only perceptions.

Buddhistic View:

For the Buddhists “each knowledge is momentary” which implies that Time is admitted only as kṣaṇika. ⁹

Jaina View:

Jainas consider Time as a factor or Dravya ¹⁰

The View point of Bhartṛhari:

Bhartṛhari, a philosopher of Sound accepts Time as eternal and all- pervasive. Time is the cause of birth, existence, decay and everything. ¹¹ The sequence of things in the universe takes place due

to the effect of Time. Actually time is one and indivisible, but it is differentiated in various terms due to its association with different actions. Bhartṛhari notes all the terms of time in different varieties. This can be traced to his important work "Vākyapadīya" (Kālasamucheda).

The Vedānta:

According to the philosophy of Vedānta Brahman is the creator of the Universe. The Sun makes the day and night for the beings. The night is the time for sleep and the day for work. Learned people say that 12000 celestial years form what is called a cycle. A thousand such cycles form a single day of Brahman. The same is the duration of Brahman's night. In the śukānupraśna, Vyāsa says about four yugas. Four thousand celestial years is the duration of the Kṛta age.¹²

The morning of that cycle consists of four hundred years and its evening is of four hundred years.¹³ Regarding the other cycles, the duration of each gradually decreases by a quarter.¹⁴ In the Kṛta age all the duties exist in full, along with Truth. Men of that age never acquired knowledge or object through unrighteous or forbidden means.¹⁵ In this age, all persons are free from disease and achieve their objects and lives for hundred years. In the Treta yuga, the period of life decreases by a quarter.¹⁶ In the Kṛta, penance is the foremost. In the

Treta knowledge is formost. In the Dvāpara, sacrifice has been said to be formost. In the Kali yuga, only gift is sanctioned.¹⁷

However as a general case, the views regarding time noted by Vyāsa while enumerating the qualities of the same to his son Śuka, find its place in the Darśanas with its varied ways of presentation.

Notes & References:

1. षड्भवविकारं भवन्ति वार्ष्याणि.
जयते विपरिणामे वर्धते पक्षियते विनाशयति.
(Nirukta of Yāska-Naighaṇṭuka kāṇḍam).
2. Kāṣṭhā nimeṣa daśa pañca caiva triṁśattu kāṣṭhā gaṇayet kālāṁ taṁ. Triṁśatkālaścāpi bhavenmuhūrto bhanah kalaya daśamaścayaḥ syāt. Triṁśanmuhūrtaṁtu bhavedahaśca rātriśca samkhyā munibhiḥ pranītā. Māsaḥ smṛto rātryahāni ca triṁśatsamvatsaro dvādaśamāsa uktaḥ. Samvatsaram dvetyanye vadanti sāmkyāvīdo dakṣinamuttaram ca. Mahābhārata-śāntiparvā Ch. 231-verses 12-14.
3. Kālaśca Vaiśeṣikābhīmata eko na anāgatādiv yavahārabhedam pravartayitumarhati. Tasmādayam yairupādhibhe dairanāgatādibhedam pratipadyate, santu te evopādhyayaḥ ye anāgatādivyavaharahetavaḥ, kṛtamatrāntargaduna kāleneti Sāṅkhyācāryaḥ. Tasmāna kalarūpatattvāntarābhyupagama iti: Sāṅkhyata ttvakaumudī, Kārika.33.

4. Sa Pūrveṣāmapī Guruḥ kālenānavacchedāt. Pātañjalayo gadarśanaṃ, I.26.
5. Parāparatvādihetuḥ kṣaṇādīḥ syādupādhiṭaḥ Dūrāntikādīdhiheturekā nityā digucyate. Bhāṣā pariccheda. 36 (Time and Space).
6. Kārikāvalī, P.145.
7. Aparasmīnnaparam yugapacciram kṣipramī kalalīṅgāni. Vaiśeṣikasūtra, II.6.
8. Vyomakalādisamadāu pratyakṣatvaṃ samarthyate. Mānameyodaya. Meyakhaṇḍa, Kārikā-21.
9. Sarve padārthāḥ kṣaṇikāḥ kṣaṇe kṣaṇe jāyante viruddhadharmādhyāsāt. Sarvadarśanakaumudī, Bauddhadarśanaṃ, p.111.
10. Kālasyaṅekapradeśatvabhāvena āstikyatvabhāvepi dravyatvamasti tallakṣaṇayogāt. Taduḥktaṃ guṇapar yāyavad dravyaṃ. Tattvasūtra. V.38.
11. Vyāpārvyatirekeṇa kālameke pracakṣate Nityamekaṃ vibhuḥ dravyaṃ parimāṇaṃ kriyāvātāṃ. Vākyapadīya. Kālasamuccheda-1.
12. Kālātmā dīnakṣīmanastuhīnaguḥ sattvaṃ kujo jñō vaco Jīvo jñānasukhe sītāśca madano duḥkhe Dīneśatmajah. Rājāno Ravisitaguḥ kṣītīsuto netā kumāro Budhaḥ

Bhūirdānavapūjitaśca sacivau prekṣya sahasrāmbujah. Hora
Daśādhyāyī-II.15.

13. Catvāryāhuḥ sahasrāṇi varṣāṇāṃ tatkr̥taṃ yugaṃ.
tasya tāvacchati sandhyā sandhyāṃśaśca tathāvidhaḥ.
Mahābhārata śāntiparva 231-20.
14. Itareṣu sasandhyeṣu saṃdhyāṃśeṣu tatastriṣu.
ekapādēna hīyante sahasrāṇi śatāni ca.
(Mahābhārata śāntiparva 231-21)
15. Catuspātsakalo dharmah satyaṃ caiva kṛte yuge.
nādharmenāgamah kaścitparatasya pravartate.
(Mahābhārata śāntiparva 231-23)
16. Arogaḥ sarvasiddhārthāścaturvarṣaśatāyusaḥ.
kṛte tretāyuge tveṣāṃ hrasate vayah.
(Mahābhārata śāntiparva 231-25)
17. Tataḥ paraṃ kṛtayuge tretāyāṃ jñānamuttamaṃ.
dvāpare yajñamevāhurdānamekaṃ kalau yuge.
(Mahābhārata śāntiparva 231-28)