

# The Interplay of Birth, Action, and Chance: Vedic Insights and Modern Interpretations on Life's Determinants

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**Abstract:** *This article explores the profound influence of birth, action, and chance on human life, drawing from both ancient Vedic teachings and contemporary observations. It delves into the three key determinants Janma birth, Karma action, and Bhaga chance and examines how these factors shape individual destinies. By integrating insights from the Vedas with modern sociological and genetic studies, the article highlights the enduring relevance of these concepts in understanding life's dynamics. It also discusses the implications of these determinants in the context of societal structure, individual opportunities, and the randomness of chance, providing a comprehensive analysis of how personal outcomes are shaped by a complex interplay of predetermined and random factors.*

**Keywords:** Vedas, Janma, Karma, Bhaga, determinants of life

## 1. Introduction

A Veda is a collection of poems or hymns composed in archaic Sanskrit by India European speaking peoples who lived in the northwest India during the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE. The hymns formed a liturgical body part that in part grew up around the some ritual and sacrifice and were recited or chanted during rituals. The four Aryan Vedas : the Rg Veda contains hymns about their mythology; the Sama Veda consists mainly about religious rituals, the Yajur Veda contains instructions for religious rituals; the Athar Veda consists of spells against enemies, sorceress and diseases.

The 4 Vedas were initially recited in words before being written down. Agni Rishi delivered the first Veda (Rg Veda) the second by Vayu Rishi (Yajur Veda), the third by Aditya Rishi (Sama Veda) and the final by Angira Rishi (Atharva Veda).

Brahman is a key concept found the Vedas, and is extensively discussed in the early upnishads. The Vedas conceptualize Brahman as the cosmic principle in the Upanishads, it has been variously described as sat-cit-ananda (truth- consciousness-bliss) and as the supreme person, creator and hood who leads to salvation.

### Key documents

- 1) Rg Veda
- 2) Yajur Veda
- 3) Sama Veda
- 4) Athar Veda
- 5) And the Vedas

## 2. Observation

From the details furnished above in would be apparent that the determinants play a long life in the world. All the determinants such as Animsa etc play a great part. Also very variable such as birth, action and chance are important. Further every one know about the three Vedas such as Rg Veda<sup>1</sup>. Sama Veda<sup>2</sup>, Atharva Veda<sup>3</sup> and also Yajur Veda<sup>4</sup> are known to all. Published by Nag Publishers, College Road, Kamla Nagar, Delhi. Do, Do, Do, Do – 4.

All the three Margs (Jyan – Karma – Raj) focuses on the

basic determinants of human life on earth. They were known for a long time; however, the interpretations of the determinants have changed. The pattern of human life has changed in unmistakable terms. Man's knowledge and understanding of this world has leaped manifold and in the past few decades we have truly become a world society a society in which family members have travelled widely and where people of all descriptions meet on everyday basis. Yet, the fundamentals remain unaltered.

### Three Determinants

What determinants an individual's life in the world? The answer is indeed simple. It is more or less determined by three factors, namely birth, action and chance. In Sanskrit, these are known as Janma, Karma and bhagya.

### Janma

Janma or birth has two basic aspects. The first is to do with a person's biological inheritance and second with the societal environment. The latter has two aspects– the economic and social status of parents and the type of society.

### Biological inheritance

At the time of birth, an individual inherits around 36,000 genes of this 99 percent are common to all human beings. Only about 300 to 400 genes vary from one individual to another, if we take all races of mankind from all parts of the world together. However, if we go down to the level of the family and look at siblings, the variation in the number of the genes will be reduced to 10 or 20 is because all of us carry a pair of genes of the same type, only one of which is active and effective while the other is doorman. As result, siblings do not look alike or behave in a similar way, at least not always. At birth a persons biological make up is determined and he cannot change it.

The genes (and also chromosomes in which the genes are a constituent part) determine sex, physical appearance, quality of the brain, propensity for heredity ailments, congenital deformities and one's mental makeup. This will include aspects such as level of intelligence, aggressiveness, selfishness and many other character traits.

Psychologists believe that around 50 percent of a person's

mental attributes are inherited biologically through genes. Of the rest, a great part is shaped by family, educational, and social environment. The negative or positive effects of some genes may be modified or altered by human action. We can also enhance or reduce their effect by right or wrong action.

### Social Inheritance

A person is born into a family in a specific geographical location, in a specific country or state, and at some point in time. If we look at this more carefully, what really matters is the socio-economic status of the parents or family and the character of the state in which he is born. The first determines his immediate upbringing as a child, while the latter determines the socio-political environment in which his life will progress. Both are crucial.

In feudal and democratic societies of the world, it matters a great deal if one is born to rich or poor parents. The variations here are enormous, from royalty to serfdom and from a business magnate to a common daily wage earner while the children born to rich parents have advantages for advancement in life the children of poor parents inherit the parents misery and stay at the same level. This simply illustrates the extreme relevance of status of the parents.

Parents also determinate the child religion, theoretically, the child can change his religion, but it is done only rarely and most tend to follow the religion of parents. Whatever the religion, it has a strong bearing in ones religion and adopt a new one. A lot of people reject all traditional religions as being outmoded and anachronistic in the modern world.

The freedom to change one's religion and to enhance one's social status was very limited in feudal society. In the modern world, life is highly controlled in theocratic status, such as Saudi Arabia, and in communist countries does the individual have the freedom to pursue his vocation and beliefs. A person born in a theocratic state is handicapped to change his way of life, while in democratic societies this can be done rather easily.

Life in free societies is also conditioned by laws which are uniformly applied to all citizens. The laws do change for the better and society also undergoes change rather slowly but surely. Every individual participants in this change. In the Manusmriti, Kshatriyas and Brahmanas are given power to uphold and interpret the law. The law here is the law of the feudal state. The injunction to ordinary people is to follow the laws of the state enforced by the state through the Kashatriya Varna and interpreted by the Brahmanas. The Manusmriti is no longer law in India, although it is one of the sources of our laws. Today individuals in India enjoy freedom. However, this was not so in the recent past. Manu's laws had a stifling hold on Hindu societies for centuries.

Karma means individual action. All living things are active in one way or the other all the time. The activities are of various kinds.

- Basic activities such as bathing, eating, sleeping etc.
- Learning activities.
- Work – activities.

- Play and leisure activities.
- Service such as helping any living object without expectation of reward.

While basic activities are common to all, there is a need for discipline in one's basic activities. Food habit needs to be controlled, so also all other activities essential to life maintenance. Lack of discipline in these matters can lead to health problems of various kinds while controlled habits can reduce them or even eliminate them. One pays for ones misdeeds is very true in this case and this punishment happens in one's lifetime.

Learning is a fundamental activity which distinguishes man from animals to a large extent. Formal learning has become very important now a days and this continues into early adulthood. Parents spend a lot of money and effort in educating their children. While inherited intellect is important, effort and chance pay their part in the outcome of the educational process. The more advanced the education that one receives the better are the prospects for employment and improved life. As a result boys and girls study very hard and toil for 15 to 20 years. Learning continues throughout one's life. Those who do this are better off than others, though not necessarily in economic terms.

The most activity in life has to do with working for earning a living. It provides a purpose and meaning to life. This activity continues throughout one's adult life. There are people who do not work or neglect work or earn a living by doing harm to others. All these bring negative consequences to one's life. If work is done according to the laws of the land, there is no problem; breaking the laws may result in punishment. There is no divine rule here. The nature of work varies and in the modern world, work means everything that contributes to making life possible or better, this includes unpaid jobs done for the family and friends. A religious teacher is also doing work so also others.

Life is often said, is for enjoyment. While work can be enjoyed in India it is often considered as a pain in the neck. This is a very bad value system. However, after work one needs leisure and should enjoy it. This is legitimate. Again, some leisure activities may be enjoyable in the short term but harmful in the long run. One has to pick and choose. Good and bad becomes result from one's own decisions.

Serving other human beings in either distress or even ordinarily is considered to be a very good religiously. Leaving the religious merit apart, it is a good thing if one enjoys doing it. Service is not for reward in this or the next life. In a way it is a way of life in itself.

The focus of human action or Karma varies depending on the stage of life cycle. In childhood the focus is on learning and goes on until 20 years of stage, therefore it focuses on work and earning a living which last about 60 years of age; and finally, in old age the focus is on service. Throughout all the three stages, the basic and leisure activities continue to play. Only its relative importance of the activities change during one's life but they do exist all the time.

In the modern world, there is a belief that 'Karma' or human action determines everything. A person can achieve everything and anything if only he applies himself, body and mind, to the objective in mind. The objective may be to get rich becomes in any one area such as sports, arts, science etc. This is only partially true unless one is exceptionally talented. The very talented persons form a small minority of the population of any country.

In the Hindu tradition, 'Karma' is often interpreted to mean ritual action which earns merit in the next life, a second view limits karma to one's occupation and work related to it. The latter is fixed by birth and hence an individual has no scope for independent action based on his own judgment or free will. Thus, karma is determined by birth. The traditional interpretation has few followers today. The overwhelming view of 'Karma' is that it is action resulting from human judgement and free will and it has only two constraints.

- Ahimsa or non-violence or action that does not hurt anyone in anyway, by way of words or physical action. Action is good if it helps one and even better if it helps others. Action is bad if it hurts self or others in anyway.
- The laws of the state in which one lives. Whatever be the nature of the state, one has to obey the laws. There is no choice. The laws are more or less good in democratic countries. In others, it varies.

Every human action generates a reaction. If the action is good, the reaction is also good, if bad, the reaction is also bad. Human action, therefore has a built-in mechanism for reward and punishment. Both occur either in the present or in the near future. If we help others, they will help us. If we do harm to others, they will harm us in return. This rule does not work in the automatic function but it does in the long run.

### **Bhaga**

Bhaga means luck or change. It plays a major role in life. An incident in which one gets disabled or killed is one example of change factor in life. Outcomes in an interview or an examination partly depends on chance. Chance plays a part in every aspect of life.

In nature also chance plays a key role. Gender is determined by chance during conception. The probability of having a male child is almost exactly fifty percent. New species are evolved by mutation of genes, which is probably based on chance or probability. This in fact is a world of probabilities. Perhaps the entire cosmos is based on probabilities.

### **Cascading Effect of Luck**

Chance or luck favours those who are better placed than those who are disadvantages. For a poor man it is extremely difficult to become rich. Why? An economist will say that a poor man spends too much on food and has no savings. On the other hand a rich man spends little on food and has high proportion of savings which he invests. Investments increase income and thus the rich get richer while, for any lack of investment, the poor remains at two same level. This is the essence of the Keynesian theory. The poor man's problems are compounded by lack of access to education

and medical help, while the rich man has in abundance. Scope contact infections and disease of various kinds, most depend on chance factor. For example, cancer can occur in anyone; even if one does not smoke or chew betel nuts. Once contracted, the disease has the posented to enlarge its scope and the patient even more vulnerable. If a person has diabetes his woes multiply in course of time; his economic condition will weaken and he becomes highly vulnerable to disease. A healthy person is ale to withstand diseases and he remains in good health. One set back in life leads to another and the problem multiply. Luck has a cascading effect. Good luck leads to further, while bad luck does not.

Bhaga or chance, therefore, brings good and bad things for man. However, he cannot create it or alter it. It is totally independent or man.

### **Time Factor**

Birth, Action, and chance are independent variables in life. Of these, man has control over action but none at all over the other two. Further the three variables represent what are past, present, and future.

Birth and all the things inherited from birth are already partially or fully known. Only the secrets of our gene composition are not ordinarily known to us, but even this can be verified at great cost. In fact, the first thing anyone should do is to understand his inherited advantages and disadvantages. This is not an easy task. Most often people are not even prepared to think about the health problems that their parents or relations have faced and its implications for themselves. We often ignore or underestimate our inherited virtues and defects, particular the latter.

Chance concerns the future. All of us are very much interested in the future and we try to shape in the way we want by our present action. In this we succeed only partially. Our own effort, it is said count only 50 percent of the outcome, while the other 50 percent is left to God or Chance. Human actions have limitations but man has to survive and act which is a must. This is Karma yoga. Do what you must do, for your own good and the good of others. In theory, the past and the present determine or at least influence the future. Let us see how it works in real life.

### **Three Part Rule**

Janma, Karma and bhaga determine the future. The relative importance of these factor varies from one situation to another. It is not possible to go into details here, but at this stage we may express the proposition in mathematical terms as follows.

$$ax + by + cz = F$$

Where F represents the future, X, Y, and Z represents Janma, Karma and bhaga factors. The parameters a, b, c, reflect the relative importance of these factors in a given situation and they add upto one:

$$a + b + c = 1$$

Another way of looking at this is to assume a priori, that a,

b and c are equal or that life is influenced equally by all three factors. Is this true? Not always.

#### Example 'A'

Let us take up a rather serious but basic question. How long could I expect to live ?

In the aggregate, this question can be easily answered. Estimates of expectation of life at birth are available and we can add several criteria such as age, sex and other health factors and look at the altered statistics about the expectation of life. This will not answer an individuals questions fully. One can make an educated guess. As this state, a person who believes in the right to die with dignity may say that this is in relevant as one can in fact decide the time and venue of one's death in a peaceful manner. Assuming the laws permit such a thing, a person may die before his date of appointment with death. There is obviously something more to it, namely, the chance factor which no one can control.

Alternatively, most people would like to ask how they can prolong life with medical treatment or by changing food habits, exercise and so on. However, the effectiveness of all these methods, if anything, is rather minimal, that can prolong life for extra short distance. I would think that is no more than 20 percent of years one is expected to life. Chance as we noted earlier, plays a crucial part. If we look at statistics on accidents and all other unnatural deaths, including murders, we get a slightly better view. Unnatural deaths are by no means common and the member of people who die through unnatural means is less than 5 percent, perhaps even lower.

If we take all this into consideration the equation for this example will be  $-0.75x + 2y + 0.05z = F$

Where F is expected years of life ahead a person, X his of Health at that time. Y is his level of discipline and medication, and Z the chance factor.

The conclusion in this example is that janma or birth factors are more important than others; human action in the form of disciplined life style and proper medication are of secondary importance, and chance, over which no one has control or influence even less so. The last part is the most surprising insight, namely, that chance does not play a major role in life. Life is after all pretty much predetermined by birth characteristics.

#### Example 'B'

While expectation of life at any stage is of greater significance to the aged, marriage concerns the youth and in fact overwhelms them at some stage. The concern about the spouse lasts only until late into middle age. The critical question in the initial stage, before marriage, is whether one would get a person of one's liking and choice the ideal mate. After marriage, the view will be to find what wrong and why? What is the prognosis?

The answer to the first question is simple no and if people accept this the second question may not arise. The fact is

that there are no ideal spouses except the one in our imagination. Why? The reason is that there are far too many attributes and qualities that one is aspiring for in a spouse and out of these hardly a few are actually met. In astrology they look for 32 types of match but are often satisfied with less than half of them for 32 of a successful marriage.

We also look at the ability of men and women to make a correct choice. Most boys and girls simply do not have this ability. Self-estimates are grossly exaggerated as also of the person who is liked for some reason. The problem is far too complex. Apart from the ability to judge itself and the potential spouse one has to remember that the range of practical choice for selection of a spouse is invariably very limited. Given this paucity of choice for selection of a spouse is invariably very limited. Given this paucity of choice, one has to accept the reality. Even a rationalist will admit that making a decision on one's potential spouse is beyond the realm of rationality. One should be reminded about Arrow's Impossibility Theorem, where he proves that if we impose more than five conditions to a problem. In marriage, we impose many more.

Almost everyone does not get married. In traditional societies, parents decide with 00 without the consent of the boy or the girl. Only basic attributes are taken into account in this decision and rest is left to chance. What happens after marriage is fate or vidhi. Here chance becomes a fate. In the model frame work, this may be written as  $0.5x + 0.0y + 0.5z = F$ . Karma is absent because the boy and the girl did not participate in the decision making.

In modern societies, boys and girls make their own choice. While physical appearance matters a lot besides economic and social considerations, the range of choice available to them is simple. However, it may be emphasized that even here the birth attributes must match to some extent before the decision can be thought of decision making is time consuming and sometimes thoughtful. We have to give due weight to this process, but finally, there far too many loose ends and chance is allowed to take over. The marriage model of a modern boy or girl is  $0.4x + 2y + 0.4z = F$ . It is not know how this formula has evolved because there is no source at arriving at such a formula.

### 3. Summary

Life begins with birth and birth determines life. Most, including myself would like to believe otherwise. The empirical evidence, however over whelming supports the birth factor. Certainly, a few persons outstanding or even mediocre merit have shaped their own lives in good and bad ways, the majority follows the path of their parents. From early childhood, one is brought up in the cultural milieu of parent's language, religion, values and social linkages circumscribe the child mental growth. It has no choice and choice, if at all will come in early admit hood. Cultural shocks and values linger on during one's entire life span. Even if one transplants ones entire life span. Even if one transplants oneself to another country and another culture, one's personality and life are still influenced by birth.

Science and technology have facilitated the globalization of culture which has started an invasion of the privacy of homes all over the world through television channels children are affected by this trend even if they watch only cartoons. What does this portend? Will local cultures vanish from the scene and will they be replaced by a global culture? Will individuals lose their roots and identities? Hard to say, but things are bound to change.

Life is no longer the same as before. Even in India, life expectancy has doubled. It is increasing all over the world. Major threats to life in the form of small pox, malaria, tuberculosis, plague, etc, have been controlled or even eliminated.

Man has gained control over births and even death. Death, even if inevitable, can be painless and peaceful. No need to fear death. Births are now highly regulated people can even decide to have a male child, however perverted the desire may be. The birth of children with congenital defects can be detected early and avoided altogether.

Has not the power of Karma or human action increased manifold in various walks of life? This is to a large extent true. We are in general have greater control of our lives than ever before. Most of these powers have come to us without our making a personal contribution to it. Yet we can exercise the power to restrict the number of children or even decide to terminate life when it no longer is worth living. The power of Karma has increased and will continue to increase.

In spite of everything, the future is uncertain. No one can foretell what will happen to an individual from time immemorial, man has been intermittently obsessed with the desire to become immortal and with the craze to know the future. Both are unachievable uncertainty or chance is a basic ingredient of life. If future is known threadbare, man will definitely try to alter it. He will be very happy if cannot do that. The best thing to accept that the future is not entirely in our hands. In this, context religion, and in particular Hinduism has a very positive role to play.

#### 4. Conclusion

There is not much left to comment especially when all the details have been furnished above. We have seen that life begins with birth and birth determines life. Life is no longer the same as before. Man has gained control over births and even death. The three part rule janma, karma and bhaga together determine the future. All the determinants of life is controlled by three factors namely birth, action and chance.

To sum-up we can say that there is nothing more to pen as everything has been mentioned above.

#### Glossary

Rg Veda 1. Rg Veda Samhita, Nag Publishes College Road, Kamla Nagar, Delhi (This volume contains 10,552 mantras in Dev Nagri Script)

Atharaveda 2. - do- - do – (This volume contains 4000 mantras in Dev Nagri Script)

Samveda 3. - do- - do – (This volume contains 1500

mantras marks organized into dusters according to the purposes for which they are to be used).

Yajurveda 4. - do- - do – (This volume contains 1500 mantras in Dev Nagri Script).