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Indian Philosophy As I See It

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Since the dawn of history, man has acted and looked upon himself in two different ways: Man as a social being and man as an individual being. But even till today he finds it difficult to bridge the gap between these two halves to create a new man - a total-being, a total which is more than the two halves. The chequered history of human evolution is perhaps at the heart of this wide gap between these two halves of Homo Sapiens. Man, the naked ape, was essentially an individual man, while man, the clothed hunter, was essentially a social man. Without being a social man he could not be an efficient hunter. Unfortunately, since then these two halves of man have remained leagues apart, frozen in two different time-slices, giving birth to the most contradictory phenomenon in nature - man himself. What is even more interesting is that in a certain way the two halves of human civilisation, East, especially India, and West, have specialised in dealing with only one half of the to be total-man, leaving the other half essentially untouched a classic, though often misunderstood, case of the international division of intellectual labour. This explains the constant flow of easterners rushing towards the west in search for material well-being, and a corresponding stampede of westerners towards the east in search of spiritual well-being.

I shall try to explain this in terms the west understands the best, namely, the vocabulary of the market-place. The west has viable solutions to the problem of man as a social being, and the east, especially India, has viable solutions to the problem of man as an individual being. And the hordes of teachers and gurus, the modern spiritual-traders, are nothing but the same old barons in new guise, trying to exchange the commodity they have in surplus for the commodity they don't have at all. All the material commodities in the west put together are not able to create that one single spiritual commodity for which the modern man, trying to evolve into the total-man, is longing the most - inner happiness, peace, harmony, and balance. Unfortunately these very same spiritual commodities which India possesses in plenty cannot create even one loaf of bread for the hungry millions. So both the east and the west need to be joined into a single equation so that the total-man may be born. Now the question is what India has to contribute to this equation - to the birth pangs of the total-man?

The answer, in short, is a lot. Now I shall try to explain this in spiritual and non-market, though not non-marketable, terms. The fact that India has viable solutions to the problem of man as an individual being, that in the international division of intellectual labour, India has specialised in the art of living and the science of

being, but that India has failed miserably in the art of making bread from stones, five thousand loaves from five loaves, is well-known and well-hampered on by the western man. But beyond this a lot about India is unknown or misunderstood. India is full of unexplained and unexplainable paradoxes. This is not surprising. The starting point of Indian approach is often diametrically opposite of the starting point of western approach even to the same problems. And even when the starting point is the same, the two approaches often arrive at diametrically opposite conclusions. Another difficulty in understanding the Indian approach to life is that Indian philosophy is basically a philosophy of praxis, not an exercise in theoretical debates. Gandhi's statement "My life is my message" sums this approach very well. Often the simplest rules, like the ten commandments, are the most difficult to practice. But without practice, believing in such rules is not enough. This is, unfortunately, all too often ignored in our modern times where the thing of paramount importance is to beam your "message" and "solutions" over radio, TV, and other media to acquire instant fame and fortune. Practice is often the first victim of this "Idol" or "Role Model" approach.

Let us compare the starting points of western and Indian psychology. Western psychology starts with Freud. But there are fundamental flaws in Freud's approach to human nature. Freud was a doctor and his approach to life was based on observing the sick mind of his patients. He tried to restore the abnormal mind back to normality, back to a state, however miserable, where the sick and abnormal mind could once again adopt itself to external conditions. Back to social adaptability - is the great slogan of western psychology. Again we see an over-emphasis on man, the social being, at the expense of man, the individual being. It was because of this lop-sided observation of the sick mind of his patients that many of Freud's conclusions have been proved wrong. A healthy mind, trying to realize her potential, in studies, in sports, whatever, may behave very differently and may have totally different needs.

In contrast to this approach, the Indian approach to psychology is not based on observing the sick mind, but (self)-observing a healthy mind determined to realise his full potential and find scientific solutions to the problems of the soul. The mind of a Buddha, Mahavira, or Pitanjali was not a sick mind, but a mind bent on exploring itself to its limits. These spiritual path-blazers did not base their theories upon observations of rich and neurotic patients but upon observations of the deepest working-mechanisms of their own minds. For the Indian Guru, the eastern analog of the western psychoanalysts, it is not enough to restore the sick mind back to normality and social adaptability, but to extend it to a higher plane of existence - the plane of the super-consciousness.

These different approaches imply utterly different methods of study. In the west, psychology is studied more by the methods of physics. At times the aim is to carry out as accurate "measurements" as possible to create an aura of scientific methodology. But psychology is not physics. The basic categories of mind and soul, like happiness, motivation, concentration, suffering, etc cannot be explored in the same "exact" way as the basic categories of physics like mass, force, velocity, etc. This is one of the major weaknesses of western thinking. It places too much emphasis on the "exact" methodology of physics, a methodology, which by definition, must break down in psychology. Every methodology has its domain of applicability. So, by

definition, methods of physics must break down when we approach biology or psychology. Even in physics, the observations of Newton break down completely when we approach the speed of light. So what should be the proper methodology of psychology? In short and by definition, it should be a little more vague and need not be subject to exact proofs of mathematics and physics. This is the reason that instead of turning outwards for scientific data and observations, the Indian men of thought turned inwards towards their inner self, and whatever scientific theories they propounded were based on inner observation rather than the observation of the external world and external minds. They found the inner world so rich a territory for scientific exploration that they never felt the necessity of turning their thoughts outwards again. And the conclusions the Indian doctors of the soul reached through this method of introspection stand in stark contrast to the conclusions of western psychology based on methods of extrqspection. Thus western psychology can deal only with the sick mind, while the Indian psychology can deal with both the sick mind and a healthy mind reaching out for its full potential, and carry both of them to a higher level of super-mind or total-mind - just as Einstein extended Newtons theories and carried them to a higher level of truth. This is the Copernicus revolution brought about in the domain of psychology by Indian thinkers thousands of years ago, a revolution which puts western psychology standing on its head back on its feet again. Making "self-observation" rather than "observation" as the basis of psychology is a very simple but non-trivial point of view. To work out the full consequences of this approach is what Indian philosophy and psychology is all about. And the full consequences are the creation of a full psychological laboratory like the so many physical laboratories we see today. And this laboratory is yoga which turns psychology into a full science - a psycho-technology on par with technology but meant for the needs of the mind rather than the physical body. Yoga means synthesis. Yoga is the science which takes the various parts of a fragmented man and joins them together into a total-man a total that is greater than all its parts. If there is anything of permanent value that India has contributed to human culture and civilisation, it is yoga. Yoga is a complete science of the human mind and soul. For physical and biological sciences huge and expensive laboratories are required. But when we come to the psychological sciences, nothing of the sort is required. In yoga, man himself is the laboratory, and physical laboratories become superfluous. As soon as man sits down quietly, with the determination to look inside himself, a whole inner continent of rich and unexplored territory lies before him, and it is for him to choose what he wants to explore and acquire in this inner land of plenty. Mental peace, inner harmony, poetic inspiration, deep concentration? Everything is there. And if he wants to move on deeper into the unknown, he can even reach the limits of the inner continent - a feeling of unity and identity with the whole cosmos. The choice is purely his, and nobody else can or should decide where he wants to go, how far into the unknown he wants to venture. The guru is there to help him and guide him, not to force a choice on him.

In our modern world, nobody has time to explore the innermost depths of his being. Today man is satisfied if he is just free from tension and pressure. Today we are satisfied if yoga can give us a moderate amount of peace, harmony, and freedom from tension. But this is a limitation we set on our own goals. This is not a

limitation of yoga, or its techniques. Through yoga you can reach out in infinite directions. You don't even have to sit and close your eyes. A dancer's dance, a poet's or scientist's concentration on ideas, an athlete's concentration on the last mile are all valid yogic techniques to explore and realise yourself. That is why it is a science and has nothing to do with religion. It is all about sublimation and channelisation of your inner energies. The direction in which you want to sublimate and channelize is up to you. This also explains why one guru or one school of yoga does not suit everybody - just as one professor or subject does not suit every student at the university. If you want to go in one direction and your guru wants to take you into a different direction, there would definitely be a problem, just as if you want to study mathematics, and your professor advises you to study history, there would be a problem. But a great guru, like a great professor, must be able to feel in which direction you want to go, and what is your true potential. That is why they are called great. They can sublimate and channelize your energies in the right direction without your knowing it. Both Freud and Nietzsche knew the power of sublimation and channelisation of human energies, especially sex energy. But they had no techniques at their disposal. Their knowledge was purely theoretical. India has formalized these concepts into a technique. Indian philosophy says that every man has a hidden potential within himself, and it is within his power to actualise this potential. In yogic terms, this dormant potential is symbolised as the coiled serpent Kundalini sleeping at the base of the spinal cord - the source of sex energy. And it is up to the individual to arouse this sleeping serpent, and make it travel towards the head - the apex of existence. Again, how far you are able to carry it is up to you. The serpent Kundalini rising up to the navel, heart, and throat are all landmarks in the long journey of self-realisation and self-actualisation. Thus the idea of Kundalini gives you a framework for experimenting with your body, mind, and soul to realise your inner potential. It is a bona fide psychological laboratory. Of course, training and guidance is required, just as training and guidance is required before you start working in a nuclear laboratory.

In the end I summarise my Welt-Anschauung. Some philosophers and philosophies live for centuries. Others are more perishable than fresh fruits and vegetables, and do not outlive the latest fads and fancies of fashion-saloons. Why? The hallmark of a great philosophy is that it is always associated with some science. I give some examples. Einstein based his philosophy on physics. Russel based his philosophy on mathematics. Kant brought scientific and logical thinking to western philosophy, even though some of his conclusions are unverifiable by their very nature. And great philosophies rise and fall with the science on which they are based. For example, some western philosophers in 1920s based their philosophy on biology and "biological forces", but their philosophies never lived long, and died after a period of fashionable growth because the biological assumptions they made were incorrect. The days of biology had not yet come. Those philosophers were ahead of their times. It is only now that the days of biology are coming. The reason that Indian philosophy has survived for thousands of years is that it is based on the solid foundations of psychology and medicine. The reason that yoga has a permanent place in human civilisation is that it experiments with the human body mind, and soul, just as a physicist experiments with force, mass, and velocity. By definition, experiments with the body, mind, and soul should not be expected to resemble the

experiments with force, mass, and velocity. Psychology is not physics. One of the greatest weaknesses in western thinking is that it often tries to apply the "exact" methods of physics to the categories of psychology. This is neither good physics nor good psychology.

Now I state my opinion about some future directions of philosophy. Twenty-first century will be the century of biology and genetics just as twentieth century was the century of physics. And the basic development in philosophy of twenty-first century will be based on the foundations of biology and genetics, just as the basic direction of philosophy of twentieth century was based on the foundations of quantum theory and the theory of relativity. What I mean is that if a philosophy contradicted the reality of relativity theory or quantum theory in any way or form, it was no good and was doomed to die. Similarly, the philosophy of our century will have to take into consideration the developments in genetics. In a subtle way, this will change the very kind of questions we will ask in philosophy in our century. The philosophy of twentieth century was in the spirit of Kantian critique of pure reason in the sense that it jolted our thinking in the light of modern discoveries in physics. The philosophy of twenty-first century would be more in the spirit of Kantian critique of moral judgement in the sense that it will bring to the forefront our moral dilemmas of what is right and what is wrong arising from the discoveries in genetics and their implications for our existential concerns.

Thus a major slogan of philosophy of the twenty-first century would be:

"From critique of pure reason to critique of moral judgement."

It is a sort of about turn from the western mind to the oriental heart. Once more Indian philosophy and yoga would enter by the back-door and sit on the forefront.

Note: In 1981 this article was commissioned by the (THE) leading Norwegian newspaper. After some time the editor returned the article, saying that he had suddenly changed the format of culture page and this article would not fit this new format. But he paid 500 Krone for it. I am glad that the internet journal IJIMS has brought back this article to life after almost 40 years. Long live IJIMS and the internet.

Reference: Some thoughts on Interdisciplinary Studies are expressed by Rattan Mann in this journal vol 4 issue 3.

Written in 1981