



Philosophical perspective of Indian culture

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Abstract

Western thinkers have defined philosophy as the science of all phenomena of the universe with reference to their ultimate causes. The Indians seers, on the other hand, viewed philosophy as the search and accomplishment of the whole truth of life and being. According to them it is not only a mental or intellectual inquiry but also encompassed a conscious investigation of life. The purpose of Philosophy is to guide and fulfil life. However, the fulfillment of life is not attained merely contemplating on truth and being. The Vedic lore is replete with assertions that the philosophical urge ultimately culminates in the realization of Truth. It may appear somewhat strange that India as a nation should be secular one while our culture is deeply rooted in spiritual values. In India religion signifies the inner experience which reveals to the mind the real meaning and purpose of life, it is the very soul of our culture. This paper indicates the central characteristics of Indian culture as it has grown from its beginning to its present positions.

Keywords: Indian culture, spiritualism, materialism, consciousness, truth

Introduction

The materialism of life in the West has been built on the extrovert assumption that man is merely a compound of intellect and the senses. The entire endeavour of the Western intelligentsia has been devoted to the acquisition of the relative knowledge of Nature and provision of the material means of living. Philosophy follows science there and has restricted its field of investigation mainly to the perceptible nature. But relative knowledge is incomplete, and even delusive, if it ignores the absolute values. This error has been committed by the West with the result that chaos and unrest have been increasing there inspite of its sophisticated mode of living and opulence.

The West has no solution to this problem because; according to the Western psychological conception the attainment of perfect inner peace is practically impossible. On the other hand the relative knowledge of nature has been almost lacking in the way of life of the East, which is based on introvert values. In course of time the Eastern knowledge of the absolute degenerated and the mode of living became deformed. And of late the tide of Western relative knowledge, which has swept over the East, has made human life in this hemisphere confused and disharmonious, like that of the West (Avinashalingam 1974)^[1].

So the solution of the present psychical problem of the world is that the field of inquiry of the philosophy of life should be the whole being and the absolute Truth. Scientific research, which is based on the relative knowledge of the relative phenomena of nature, should be coupled with the quest of the absolute Being. Many Indian Philosophers and social scientists have offered a unique thesis, based on the synthesis of the creative faculty of the Indian philosophy and the relative knowledge of the West, to fulfil this universal need.

The philosophy of Indian culture: An analysis

According to Indian philosophy a fundamental unity lies at core of all religions and philosophies inspite of their seeming external diversity, because each of them reflects or partially indicates the Truth, or manifests one of the infinite forms of Truth. The need of today is a universal religion and integral philosophy devised by a synthesis of various cults and philosophical systems so far devised by man. The synthesis of various cultures is also necessary for an integral, universal civilization. The ancient Greek culture embodied the ideal of 'Satyam Shivam Sundaram' (Truth, Excellence and Beauty). Modern western culture has improved the living conditions by means of science and industry. The ancient Chinese culture strived to solve the problems of life from the social viewpoint. "Man, a social being" was the basis of the Chinese thought. Ancient Indian culture ordained the Self (Soul) as its main theme, agreeably to the eternal dictum of the Veda "Atmanam Viddhi" (Know thy soul). Thus these four great cultures evolved various aspects of the human personality the Greeks, the modern Europeans and the ancient Chinese and the Indians developed aesthetic sense, living conditions, social environment and the psychic force respectively. Their synthesis would provide a basis for one integral culture of humanity.

The concept of consciousness and its accelerated evolution is rooted in the ancient Vedic lore and the scriptures of almost all spiritual adventures of the world in some form or the other. In the present century this doctrine and its yogic technique have been unraveled by many contemporary Indian social thinkers in a unique manner to suit the modern intellectual mould of mankind.

Western thinkers have described consciousness in abstract terms as the faculty of knowing, and the totality of a person's

thoughts and feelings. On the other hand Indian seers found in their inner perception that consciousness is a living force which is capable of being evolved to higher planes. It is concrete as an electric current, but the main difference between the two is that while consciousness is an animate and growing force the electric current is not such. The Vedas mentioned consciousness as 'Agni', the mystic fire, and ancient Yogis described it as 'Jeevan Shakti', the force of life. In Tibetan Yoga it has been termed 'Silver Cord' and several disciplines have been prescribed for its infinite expansion.

There are three main, stream in a living body blood, vital force ('Prana') and consciousness. Their main flow is either downwards or diffused throughout the body. However, the ancient Yogis discovered in the laboratory of their spiritual realization that, if the flow of these three streams is turned upwards to the apex of the head, the human personality acquires tremendous power physical, mental and spiritual. For this purpose, the Yogis devised special techniques, e.g. 'Shirsasana' and other postures for the blood, 'Pranayama' for the vital force and Yogic disciplines for the consciousness. By constant yogic practice the individual consciousness, not only rise upward but can expand beyond the gross physical body. On the other hand, consciousness is capable of being evolved, in quality so to say, upto the highest Supramental level, within the human body or outside it, in a infinite silence. And then peace, power, freedom, knowledge and bliss become manifest. Therefore the yogis came to the supreme conclusion that the true evolution of man does not lie in becoming more and more intelligent or more and more saintly, but in being more and more conscious.

The Vedic Rishis discovered that the fundamental components of the entire creation are two, viz., 'Akasha' (ether or space) and 'Prana' (energy). Out of Prana all forces of the universe have emerged. Motion and thought are manifestation of Prana. The ultimate source of Akasha and Prana being the same primeval power ('Maha Shakti', the dynamic aspect of the Divine, in the terminology of Sri Aurobindo), these two are mutually convertible, i.e., Akasha into Prana and vice versa. And consciousness is the manifestation of that primeval Power in the universe, as on the physical plane sunshine is manifestation of the sun. According to the Mundaka Upanishad "By energism of consciousness Brahman is massed, from that, matter is born and from matter, life and mind and the worlds". Consciousness can be evolved to act on matter and transform it. The ultimate conversion of matter into consciousness and of consciousness into matter is the aim of Sri Aurobindo's Internal Yoga.

Modern science has also arrived at the similar conclusion that atom, which is the most minute indivisible from of all substances is composed of space, in which electronic charges move with tremendous velocity. Einstein has proved that matter and energy are mutually convertible and that matter is condensed energy.

According to Sri Aurobindo and eminent Indian Scholar, Consciousness is the self aware force of existence. It is a universal dynamic and creative energy, a presence without which nothing exists in the universe. In inert and insentience matter consciousness exists in the dormant state of nescience or unawareness, although matter appears to be inconscient. In vegetation and plants it exists in a sleeping or subconscious

state. In animals it is the primary stage and in man in a further evolutionary stage. But man is not the last rung of the ladder of evolution and is heading towards the next stage, that of Supramental being or Supermind. The further evolution (or transformation, in Sri Aurobindo's terminology) of the consciousness of man to the Supramental consciousness can be accelerated by the 'Sadhana' of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. In relation to the human body the various functions of consciousness are:

i) As inner consciousness within the body

According to the Swami Vivekananda mind is an instrument of action and formation, and not an instrument of knowledge. Spiritual life is a vast field of the evolution of consciousness. Knowledge comes from a higher consciousness which is evolved from the depth of the soul.

All great discoveries and inventions in the fields of spiritual and material sciences, all great works of poetry, literature, art, philosophy, administration etc. have been possible through the evolution of higher consciousness in man. This truth had been established by the Vedic Rishis (Monks). Modern science has stumbled upon the same fact without recognizing the role of consciousness in the evolutionary process of the human race. Albert Einstein, the originator of the Theory of Relativity, has said: "The mind can proceed only so far, upon what it knows and can prove. There comes a point upon a higher plane of knowledge, but can never prove how it got there. All great discoveries have involved such a leap."

With the ascent of the inner consciousness to higher planes the intellect becomes more and more subtle and refined. The Vedic Rishis have described the ascending grades of intellect ('Buddhi') as 'Dhi', 'Medha', 'Prajna' and 'Ritambhara'. The mind also mounts to higher planes of super consciousness, viz., Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuitive Mind, and Overmind. Ultimately, after crossing the barriers of the mind, one enters the realm of the Truth consciousness or Supramental consciousness.

ii) As a protecting envelope of the body

In this form, it is termed "Environmental consciousness" or 'Circumconscient'. Various Yogic have also described it as 'Aura' and 'Etheric body'. According to Sri Aurobindo, if one becomes aware of the consciousness one can erect a protective envelope around oneself, so that any vibrant (of lust, anger, violence etc.) gets dissolved in it like smoke, instead of entering one's body and harming it or moving it to action. Even the uplifted arm of an assassin or the leap of a snake or tiger can be stopped by it, as was witnessed on several occasions in the life of Gautama Buddha. The circumconscient can also be evolved as sufficiently sensitive to disclose to us a person's approach before hand or make us avoid a mishap just at the moment it is going to overtake us.

iii) As a stream of force emanating from the body

Through such stream of consciousness (termed 'Silver Chord' by the Tibetan Yogi's) one can direct an idea so that it enters someone's head in a far of place and shall make him act accordingly. One can also create a visionary body at a far of place or can bring information even from a distant place. One can see, one can feel across the continent, even the planets and

stars, as though distance did not exist. The limits of space do not hamper consciousness which can be anywhere it wishes in a moment if it has learnt to widen itself. When the consciousness of a Yogi becomes liberated from his physical body it expands in such infinite vastness that he lives always, occasionally materializing a visionary body. Instances of such liberated beings, who are devoted to some particular mission of the Divine, have been cited in the Theosophical literature and Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*. The universal and omnipresent force of consciousness evolves and then involves in a perpetual cycle in the universe. It is manifestation of the ultimate reality of the cosmos. The universal and omnipresent force of consciousness evolves and then involves in a perpetual cycle in the universe. It is manifestation of the ultimate reality of the cosmos.

Science has not been able to explain the real cause of phenomenon of gravitation. This can be explained by Yoga quite rationally as due to the presence of consciousness in each atom. To cite another instance, an American scientist, engaged in research into the nature and working of unicellular bacilli, discovered that although the organism consisted only of the nucleus, the protoplasm and the cellular wall, it was attracted by and drawn towards certain substances. During the seventeen years of his research he could not discover any scientific reason for this phenomenon. According to the Swami Vivekananda, there is "presence of the Divine in the atom". God is SatChitAnanda (Existence, Consciousness, Bliss). The unknown entity which the scientist failed to detect is consciousness (the 'SatChit') which animates the one-celled organism.

Sigmund Freud reiterated the conjecture of the Vedic Rishis that ninety-ninth of the consciousness of man pertains to the unconscious and subconscious realms. This vast storehouse of past experiences and latent knowledge is utilized for accelerate evolution of consciousness by Yogic techniques which have been devised by Sri Aurobindo after deep research of disciplines of the East as well as the West. Thus what would have evolved normally in the universe in millions of years can be attained in few centuries; what would have taken innumerable lives to perform and achieve can be realized by the individual aspirant even in his present birth. And the summit of such evolution is the manifestation of the Supramental consciousness and the appearance of the race of Supramental Beings on the earth.

Conclusion

Human has created a system of civilization which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding. Indian culture still contains in her culture and philosophy the key to reconciliation. The real import of a culture is revealed by the orientation it gives to the way of life and the type of men it moulds by its manifold creative facets. The essence of spiritual dimensions of Indian culture is wisdom. The concept of spiritual unity of all existence in Indian culture broadened the religious outlook of India people and fostered inter religious harmony. The Iranians, Greeks, the Arabs, the Mongols and finally the Europeans – all have contributed to the enrichment of Indian culture. All major religions of the world have also poured their ideas and visions into the stream of the cultural heritage of India. A science oriented

spiritualized culture of India will help to make a room for new field of research on physical sciences and social sciences.

Nothing but a radical change of consciousness can deliver the world from its present obscurity. Indeed this transformation of the consciousness is not only possible but certain. First consciousness must be transformed, then life, then forms, that's how Indian culture shows the path to new generation.

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