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East–West Cultural Relationship: Some Indian Aspects

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Preamble

Cultural space knows no official boundary. Civilizational interaction, recorded and unrecorded, is an ongoing process. Diffusionism and parallelism get interfused in civilizational studies. To think of one-sided borrowing or lending in the realm of culture rests on bias or prejudice, perhaps both. To think that originally there was only one culture (Egypt or India or China) and that all other cultures are its diffused or dispersed form is incorrect, both theoretically and evidentially. Comparably incorrect is the anthropological hypothesis that different cultures, in response to diverse social and natural stimuli or conditions, developed quite independently and in parallel manner. Once we believe, as I think we must, that cultural space is a continuum, the parallelistic thesis is bound to collapse. If, on the other hand, we *totally* reject the possibility of independent, relatively independent, origin and development of different cultures, we are obliged to deny the differentiable identity and personality and distinct cultures. To deny cultural pluralism is psychologically untenable and ideologically pernicious, and I have argued the point at length elsewhere.[1]

Insights of comparative linguistic studies clearly show that the supposed line of demarcation between Asia and Europe is purely fanciful, nothing more than a theoretical construct. Demographic migration and immigration have been an all-round and ongoing process from time immemorial. Only a part of this process has been recorded in the history but its truth is easily capturable from the history of languages, their development and transformation. The point may be clearly illustrated from a wide spectrum of Indo-European words for elements like earth/land, water, sky/heavens, air/wind, sun/fire and their cognates. Kinship terms, numerals, words for animal life and plant life also bear out the point. The terms for expressing abstract concepts like social relations, law, religion and philosophy, etymologically

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traced and semantically explicated, further buttress the close affinity between eastern and western cultures.

To take a concrete example, the stem word for 'seen' (Greek, Latin and Balto-Slavic) and 'knowing' (Greek, Celtic, Germanic, Balto-Slavic and Indo-Iranian) is *weid*. To it are traceable Sanskrit *veda*, Greek *oida*, Latin *videre*, Gothic *wait*, French *voir*, Romanian *vedea*, Slavic *vidu* and Russian *vid*.[2] In Sanskrit the word for both 'philosophy' and 'seeing' is *darśan* and the 'philosopher' is known as *seer*. The Sanskrit word *vidyā* stands both for 'knowledge' and 'science'. This short comparative linguistic excursion is perhaps enough to show that the speakers of the languages concerned were intimately related both linguistically and culturally. Whenever peoples move from one place to another the first and the foremost important item they carry in their cultural baggage is language. With language go myth, folklore and the entire belief-system.[3]

Cultural subsoil of politico-military events and processes

Another much neglected but promising source for understanding inter-cultural and inter-continental relationships is found in the socio-political fallout of such well-known invasions as those of Alexander, Darius and Attila. The general inclination of historians to highlight the political and military aspects of past events, sadly neglecting their cultural pre-conditions and consequences, is extremely unfortunate.

In this connection, illustratively speaking, we may profitably recall the impact of the invasion of Darius I, perhaps the most famous Achaeminid King, who conquered the vast areas of North Africa, Eastern and South-eastern Europe, Southern Russia, Central Asia, and a part of Northern India. The presence of Persians in this area for a long time, from the 6th to the middle of the 4th century BC, not only brought the concerned people of this Empire close to each other but also formed a sort of bridge from Asia to Europe. This is partly because some of the Achaeminid kings were good administrators.[4] Further, it may be remembered that the Persian Empire both preceded and outlived the Achaeminid dynasty. The fact that the Persian Empire was not monolithic and that it left local satraps and peoples to carry on their ways of life according to their own rules and customs under the general, rather nominal, framework of the Empire, resulted in a considerable mixing of different ethnic groups and their languages. The silted and layered effects of this mixture spread over millennia must be taken into account before we focus our attention on the specifics of how the East influenced Europe.

Another notable military wave from Central Asia across most of Europe and North Africa is attributed to the King of the Huns named Attila (434–53 AD). Aided by his brother Bleda, Attila defeated the Roman Emperors, both eastern and western invading the Southern Balkan Province, Greece and thereafter Gaul and Italy. They conquered from the Alps and the Baltic in the west to the Caspian Sea in the east, forcing the Roman Emperors to enter into treaties with them. Attila's diplomatic negotiation with the Eastern Roman Emperor, Theodosius II, aided by his brother Bleda, and his negotiation with the Roman General in Gaul, Aetius, the Western Roman Emperor, Valentinian III, and the King of the Visigoths, Theodoric I, are

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indicative of his diplomatic skills. Attila appears in legend under the title Etzel in the *Nibelungenlied*, and Atli in Icelandic sagas. Admittedly, he was not a benevolent king, but he was an extremely successful General, gifted with a keen diplomatic sense. He has been described by historians as a man of austere character, a persistent negotiator and by no means pitiless. What is most important in this context is to recall that Attila's vast empire and the process of establishing it involved extensive ethnic interaction.[5]

Compared to the westward invasion of Darius and Attila, the eastward invasion of Alexander [356–23 BC] seems to have proved more influential in terms of its cultural consequences. Taught by the famous philosopher Aristotle and brought up under military discipline by his father, King Philip of Macedonia, Alexander was equipped to be not only a successful military general but also a very able administrator. Having conquered Asia Minor, the Mediterranean Coast and Egypt, he advanced on the Persian Empire and pulverized it. Before advancing on India, Alexander subjugated Central Asia as a precautionary rearguard action. His conquest of North-west India and short stay there left a lasting influence, forging an Indo-Hellenic relationship of rich philosophical and scientific consequence. There is a legend about Alexander that on his arrival in India the first person he wanted to meet, and did meet, was a vedic scholar. Its philosophical undertone is unmistakable. The Alexandrian system of administration made the Greek presence in Asia very effective and durable.

In brief, it may be safely said that the political and military movements of Darius, Attila and Alexander are symbolic of the large-scale and long, not obviously peaceful, interaction between the East and the West. It would be foolish to ignore the cultural subsoil of these politico-military movements, and during the medieval and the modern periods the colonial expansion of Europe across the globe, and into the East, in particular, has not been very peaceful. This is not to deny, however, that the European presence in the East did not have many positive aspects.

The movement of ideas

To understand the influence of ideas of eastern origin on western countries, and the exchange of theories between these two adjoining regions one must have some conception of the main geographical routes from China and India to Europe along which civilizational ideas (philosophical, scientific and technical) used to travel. Of the land routes, several in number, four may be identified as most important. One ran from the north-east sea coast of China through important places, like Suchao and Turfan on the Black Sea. Another route, branching out from the same route in West China, running through Khashgar, turned north-west over the Caspian and finally touched the northernmost route. The third route, perhaps the most important one, ran from Northern China, via Khashgar, Taskhent, Samarqand, Bokhara, Merv, turned south of the Caspian and reached the north-east Mediterranean coast, touching Edessa on the way. The fourth important route led through Khotan, Begram and Bactra, touched Merv, Hamadan and Damascus, then moved southward to Gaza and beyond (to Alexandria). The fifth route extended to Taxila, came down to India,

connected Taxila with Ujjain, Broach and Pataliputra and the port towns at the mouth of the river Indus.

There were two other routes directly connecting China with India: one through the Himalayas, and the other through Burma and North-east India. Besides these notable land routes, there were three routes from Southern China passing through the Straits of Malacca and the Bay of Bengal, touching both the east and the west coast port towns of India, leading to the Red Sea. There were direct sea routes to West Asia and North Africa from Broach and several other port towns of the west coast of India. There was a sea route from Tamralipta to China and Japan, touching Burma and South Asian port towns. While some of these sea routes passed through the Persian Gulf, others made use of the Red Sea. When, due to political uncertainty and turbulence, the land routes used to be unsafe or non-operational, the sea routes proved extremely useful, not only for trade but also for the travel of ideas. The destinations connected by these routes on the east and southern coast of the Mediterranean linked China and India with the Hellenic and Roman worlds.

It is not easy to count all the scientific achievements in different branches of knowledge of the ancient and medieval Indians. In the process of developing their concepts, India was, undoubtedly, influenced by, and in turn influenced, China, the Arab and the Hellenic worlds, as is evident from the history of mathematics, astronomy, medicine, physics and philosophy.

To begin, I would like to refer to the vedic origin of the concept of *Nakṣatra* or constellations in the *Rig-Veda* and other *Vedas*. The concept figures several times in the *Atharva Veda* where we find the specific names of 27 constellations. The science in which these constellations has been carefully studied is called *Vedāṅga Jyotiṣa* or Astronomy, which is one of the six *Vedāṅgas*, subsidiary sciences of the *Vedas*; the others are phonetics, ritual, etymology, grammar and matrix. This literature is available in the aphoristic style and its use-value was many-sided: construction of altars, the performance of rituals and several other practical affairs of life like timing of ceremonies and festivals. Valuable astronomical information is available from the *Sūlbasūtras* (the principles of geometry). The importance that has been accorded to astronomy, the science of light, as the fundamental paradigm is very instructive, both theoretically and practically, both externally and internally. In the Indian astronomical system light denotes both physical phenomena and spiritual phenomena. It appears from its internal contents that *Vedāṅga Jyotiṣa* was composed or compiled around 1350 BC. The measures of time in these systems are indicated below.

1 Lunar year = 360 *tithis* [*tithi* = a lunar day]
1 solar year = 366 solar days
1 day = 30 *muhūrtas* [moment]
1 *muhūrta* = 2 *nāḍikas*
1 *nāḍika* = 10 –1/20th *kalās* [one-sixteenth of the moon's diameter]
1 day = 124 *aṁśas* [parts]
1 day = 603 *kalās* [a digit or any single part or portion of a whole]

In different books of astronomy, earlier and later, there is disagreement on the question of how many days make a week. The seven-day week was recognized by

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Atharva Jyotiṣa. Named after different gods, the days are Sun (*Āditya*), Moon (*Soma*), Mars (*Bhauma*, or *Sun of the Earth*), Mercury (*Budha*), Jupiter (*Bṛihaspati*), Venus (*Bhārgava* or the Sun of *Bhrigu*), and Saturn (*Śanaiścara,* the slow-moving planet). In the history of Indian astronomy we find several important names: Āryabhaṭa I (c. 476 AD), Brahmagupta (*c.* 598–665 AD), Varāhamihira (Ujjain 6th century AD) and Āryabhaṭa II (*c.* 950–1100 AD).

The science of *Jyotiṣa* has three divisions, *Siddhānta*, *Saṁhitā* and *Horā*. In its full scope *Jyotiṣa* consists of three sections and is divided into six branches: *Jātaka* (horoscopy), *Gola* (spherics), *Nimitta* (omenology), *Praśna* (astrological query), *Muhūrta* (auspicious moment or time) and *Gaṇita* (astronomical computations).

In the Indian astronomical literature the word most frequently used is *Siddhānta* which stands for the Treatise dealing with various measures of time from a *truṭi* up to a *Kalpa* (a period of 4320 millions of years of mortals or 1000 *yugas*), which culminates in a deluge, planetary theory, arithmetical computation as well as algebraic processes. These questions relate to intricate ideas and their answers, the location of the Earth, stars and planets, and descriptions of the use of instruments. In the Indian tradition we have five *Siddhāntas* (literally, system of conclusions): the Paulisa, the Romaka, the Vasistha, the Saura and the Paitamaha. Various commentaries are available on these *Siddhāntas.* Time and again these commentaries were refined and improved. For example, Brahmagupta's views have been corrected by Bhāskara II. Lack of space and the limits of my knowledge on the subject mean that the details of these systems cannot be elaborated here.

In the vast literature on the history of mathematical astronomy in India there are two points which deserve special mention and our close attention. First, for obvious reasons, i.e. identical scope and subject-matter of investigation, it, like other astronomical systems of other countries, e.g. Greek, Mesopotamian, etc., is repetitive in character. But, it needs to be borne in mind that repetition and correction kept Indian astronomy dynamic. Second, there is a persistent controversy whether Indian astronomy is innovative in a substantive sense or merely imitative. Indian astronomy in its long career, as already indicated, has interacted with various other astronomical systems as developed in different countries. For example, it was influenced by the Mesopotamian system (via Iran in the 5th century BC), and is said to have been influenced by the same Mesopotamian system as interpreted by the Greek scholars (in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD), again, directly by the Greek system (in the 4th century AD). Fourth, some commentators observe that it was influenced by the Iranian system (8th to 10th centuries). Finally, the Copernican system was accepted due to the European influence, mediated by England, on Indian thought in the 19th century.

Critics like David Pingree are of the view that there is no originality in the development of Indian astronomical thought and that every change in its course was due to external intellectual stimuli.[6] This critical view has been echoed by other writers, such as Randall Collins,[7] who apparently have been unduly influenced by the ideas of Alberuni (11th century AD) and David Pingree. This view has also been effectively contested by recent writers who have gone deep into the subject. B. V. Subbarayappa and K. V. Sarma, who have thoroughly studied the sources of Indian astronomy, point out that though it has been influenced by other astronomical

systems of external origin, its originality or innovative character is unmistakable.[8] 'Influence' does not mean total and causal determination. A somewhat similar view has been expressed by R. Billard, B. L. van der Waerden, and particularly S. C. Kak.[9]

It should be mentioned here that the Portuguese Catholic scholars who came to India in the 15th century in the wake of Vasco da Gama's arrival in Calicut, Kerala, India, became acquainted with the Kerala school of Indian astronomy, which had a distinctiveness and carried some of its valuable manuscripts to Lisbon from where they reached the Vatican. There is a hypothesis, yet to be verified, that Copernicus during his years in Italy had access to some of these materials. Some Indian scholars, notably C. K. Raju, are currently engaged in research on this intriguing and little-explored area.

India on numerals, algebra and the symbol for zero

Many historians of mathematics agree that the civilizations of China and India are much older than those of Greece and Rome, but often they qualify the assertion and claim that these civilizations are not older than those of the Nile and the Mesopotamian valleys.[10] However, some of the mathematical notions of Indian origin suggest that they are older than the comparable notions which emerged in other civilizations of antiquity. As suggested before, this is not to rule out the possibility of their interaction over the millennia.

Indian thinkers' contributions to the science of numerals are noteworthy. In this connection, the names of Medhātithi and Medhyātithi, both belonging to the *Kaṇva* family, deserve special mention. The notions in question may be found in different verses of the *Rig-Veda*.[11] References to numerals from 1 to billion are found in different parts of the vedic literature. Medhātithi's lasting contribution to the science of numerals is the concept of powers of 10. That the names of numerals are not entirely symbolic and meaningless has been pointed out by the great lexicographer and etymologist, Yāska.[12] He points out that 1 is a number and is so named because it pervades other numbers, i.e. oneness is present in all numbers. The philosophical underpinning of the proposition is unmistakable.

There is a dispute over the age of the Indian system and its entry date into Europe. The use of numerals in India can be traced back to *Nana Ghat* inscriptions which date from the early part of the 3rd century BC. Before the introduction into Europe of the algorithm of Indian origin, marked by the zero, it was *not* there. But the transmission route of the Indian system to Europe was admittedly facilitated and effected by the Arabs as dragoman. But earlier in Europe, instead of unit counters they were placed in column ciphers, with values of 1 to 9. It is not easy to say whether India had a system for writing numerals in vedic times. Perhaps it developed later on. The place-value of numerals (places for units, 10s, 100s, etc.) is found in inscriptions and gift-plates from the 6th to the 8th century.[13]

In India, algebra developed as the handmaid to astronomy. Astronomical observations are recorded in the *Vedas* and their systematic forms are found in the *Vedāṅga Jyotiṣa* (*c.* 200 BC). Perhaps the most original astronomical work was authored by Lagadha Muni around 1200 BC. It is recognized that before Āryabhaṭṭa

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(499 AD), Indian algebra, aligned to astronomy, did not receive its rigorous formulation. The *Āryabhaṭiya* is a brief descriptive work consisting of 123 metric stanzas. It was designed to supplement rules of calculation used in astronomy and mensurational mathematics. It was not intended to be logical in the deductive form. The second part of the work is on the reckoning of time and on spherical trigonometry which, according to Boyer and Merzbach, left 'a permanent impression on the mathematics of later generations', through the decimal place-value numeration.

Scholars like Needham, who admittedly paid much attention to the history of Chinese mathematics, did not neglect the important issue of interaction between Hindu and Arab mathematics. According to him, if the original use of the written zero symbol cannot be conclusively ascribed to the Hindu culture of India, it may plausibly be argued that it was due to the hinduized settlers of South-east Asia where the influence of India and that of China got interfused. He writes: 'we are free to consider the possibility (or even probability) that the written zero symbol, and the more reliable calculations which it permitted, really originated in the eastern zone of Hindu culture where it met the Southern zone of the culture of China'.[14] Several other important mathematical innovations are attributed by Needham to both India and China: the rule of three, the proof of the Pythagorean theorem, the rule of false position, indeterminate analysis of algebra, and the Pascal triangle of binomial coefficients.[15]

Philosophy and yoga

One of the most important Indian contributions to the world in general and Europe in particular is to be found in its philosophy and spiritual tradition. The typical European, rather western, notion of Indian philosophy is narrow and baseless. What is worse, for the typical Euro-American writer, Indian philosophy cannot be differentiated from religion, and both are other-worldly and life-negating. However, this is not to deny that some of the best European minds have studied Indian philosophical and spiritual tradition in depth and in detail, and it is their works which have proved to be of immense value for understanding the true relationship between Europe and Asia with special reference to India.

But mainstream European thought was and still is either indifferent to, or misinformed about, Indian philosophy and its spiritual heritage. One of the main misunderstandings consists in thinking that Indian philosophy is incurably metaphysical in the most pejorative sense. It is curious to note that British thinkers who, because of the close colonial association of Britain with India were expected to know India better than others, miserably failed to represent the country and its philosophy and religion in their correct perspective. It is mainly due to selective German and French indologists that a reasonably accurate form of Indian philosophy could be made available to the European readers. To most of them it was merely a part of indology, and that too turned out to be a part of xenology, the stranger's study of the stranger, from the Greek word *xenos*.

This xenological image of philosophy presented to the European philosophical mind is particularly sad inasmuch as the peoples of these two continents have

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been interacting for a very long time. This unfortunate outcome may be attributed mainly to two considerations. The philosophers of Europe did not trouble to take the necessary interest in and to have respect for Indian thought. Their pro-colonial mental backdrop prevented many of them from understanding the true Indian philosophical tradition. Except for Schelling, Schopenhauer, Goethe and Max Müller, only a few writers on the history of philosophy paid serious attention to the depth and detail of Indian thought. K. Krause, a famous follower of Schelling, rightly lamented the manner in which 'the Indian science . . . earlier . . . was given short shrift under the ignominious title of barbaric, i.e. non-Hellenic, philosophy'.[16] Even the writings of Schelling himself and his followers show a lot of reservations about India. After all, to them, it was a part of the Orient. But, because of their empathy (though fragile) for India, they differ from the strident critics like James Mill (1773–1836) and Hegel (1770–1831), two contemporaries. Both Mill and Hegel had studied the then available literature on India, though from different standpoints, but because of their highly biased minds they had only a negative understanding of India. To most of them, study of Indian philosophy, as part of oriental philosophy, was merely a preliminary and faltering step towards Europe's self-understanding. Eurocentricism has badly spoiled the tradition of indic studies of Europe, from Hegel to Husserl and Heidegger. To have regard for one's own country one need not develop disregard of others.[17]

The first point which I should like to highlight is that Indian philosophy was *not* necessarily metaphysical or religious. In the broad spectrum of Indian traditions there were many systems which exhibit naturalism, materialism and hedonism. European historians of Indian thought tended to forget that there had been many pre-vedic, non-vedic and even anti-vedic schools of thought which were quite popular with the people (*Lokāyata, Cārvāka, Kāpālika*, etc.).

It would not be out of place to recall that both Buddhism and Jainism, which survive even today, do not accept the proclaimed infallible authority of *Veda*, and yet in the liberal framework of Indian philosophical thought they continue to occupy a place of honour and importance. A more important point to be remembered today is that even some of the mainstream Indian thoughts like *Sāṁkhya* (the philosophy of number), *Vaiśeṣika* (the philosophy of particularism or Atomism) and *Yoga*, in their earliest formulations, are found to be secular, i.e. had nothing to do with God. Recognition of God in the composite systems like *Sāṁkhya-Yoga* and *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* turned out to be a later development, understandably due to the increasing influence of Vedic thought.

Writers like B. N. Seal are still inclined to describe Indian philosophical systems as 'positive sciences'. His monograph, bearing the title *Positive Sciences of the Ancient Hindus*, forcefully argued the point that there is a persistent scientific element under the metaphysical surface structure of Indian philosophical systems.[18] Seal and other scientifically minded writers point out that a strong undercurrent of naturalism sustains the supernaturalism of the metaphysical systems of Indian philosophy. The *Sāṁkhya* thinkers, somewhat like Pythagoras, believe that numbers are the basis of reality at all its levels, physical, somatic and mental, and that this explains the mathematizability of all the domains of reality. For example, it is pointed out that the concept of *Prakṛti* (nature) is to be understood as the first foundation of all physical,

somatological and mental phenomena. A comprehensive account of the evolution of matter is found in the *Sāṁkhya-Yoga* system. Even the genesis of the infra-atomic unit-potentials of atoms is analytically discussed in the pro-naturalistic *Sāṁkhya-Yoga* system. In the Indian tradition, atomism is not peculiar to the *Vaiśeṣika* school which is very old and traceable to the epic period. It is to be found also in schools such as Jainism, Buddhism and even Vedānta. Most of the western writers on Indian philosophy neglected this naturalistic aspect of Indian thought. Except for the professional historians of Indian philosophy few will believe that even the famous vedantic thinker Śaṅkara wrote on elementary atomic particles and the principles of their permutation and combination, giving other writers an opening to the world of the senses and of science. His doctrine of Quintuplication (*Pañcīkaraṇa*) deserves to be remembered in this context. To him, *māyā*, is the principle of *materialization* of what is immaterial or spiritual. Contrary to the illusionism ascribed to *māyā*, it is the power of actualization or objectivation of what is possible or subjective.

Indian philosophers have written extensively, among other things, on (i) the conception of molecular motion (*parispandana)*, (ii) analysis of motion, (iii) cause and types of motion, composition and gravity, (iv) composition of forces, (v) typical cases of curvilinear motion, (vi) vibratory motion, (vii) rotatory motion, (viii) motion of fluids and (ix) measurement of motion. All these fundamental physical concepts have been discussed at length and with persuasive examples. Reference may be made also to the concept of (x) units of space and time, (xi) components of velocity, (xii) relative motion, and (xiii) serial motion. Hindu (xiv) ideas of acoustics, and (xv) analysis of sound, echo, pitch, intensity and timbre, in musical sounds have been delineated at length.

Plant and animal life received extensive treatment from writers like Caraka and Suśruta, and Umāsvāti's zoological taxonomy clearly bears out the empirical interest of Indian thinkers.

India's tradition of grammar and linguistics is perhaps the oldest in the world. The rigour, rules and comprehensiveness of Panini's grammar (*Aṣṭadhyāyī*), written sometime between 700 and 500 BC, evoke awe and admiration even among the most modern linguists.[19] That there had been several other great grammarians before Panini is referred to in his own work. He was in turn succeeded by a long line of grammarians from Kātyāyana (250 BC) and Patañjali (150 BC) to Bhartṛhari (*c.* 450–510 AD), Maṇḍana Miśra (*c.* 690 AD) and Helarāja (*c.* 980 AD). Other famous grammarians and linguists who deserve special mention are Bhaṭṭojī Dixit (1590), Konda Bhaṭṭa (1640) and Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa (1714).[20]

In the Indian tradition grammar, right from the beginning, has been treated as a distinct philosophical discipline, distinguishable from astronomy, architecture, agriculture and the like. In its analytical aspect, on which Panini and his early followers lay emphasis, the philosophical character of the discipline is not explicitly articulated. But in the main work of Bhartṛhari, *Vākyapadīya*, the philosophy of language receives clear and explicit exposition. In the vedic literature *Vāk* has been accorded a special ontological status. Language is said to be *essentially* in the nature of expressiveness (*sphutan* or *spuran*) and it is claimed to be the reality itself. These extraordinary words are traced to *Veda* itself and the point has been expounded by other writers like Maṇḍana Miśra, in his work *Spotasiddhi*.

It must be mentioned here that the *spota* theory of Bhartṛhari and Maṇḍana Miśra has been criticized by Mimamsakas like Kumarila Bhaṭṭa and Buddhists like Dharmakirti. The grammatical tradition of India is rich in diversity, but it developed through dialogue and debate between defenders of different schools. Rightly followed, Indian grammatical tradition is a notable contribution by India to world culture, particularly to the discipline of comparative linguistics (especially with reference to the Indo-European family of languages).

Yoga

The word '*yoga*' literally means 'union'. It is nothing esoteric or mysterious. Life itself is *yoga* with the cosmos. Man is believed to be a microcosm and, through practice of *yoga*, it is claimed, he can realize his unity with the macrocosm or the universe as a whole. *Yoga* is a path of self-realization, which may be theistic and atheistic. As said before, many atheistic philosophical systems of India, like Buddhism, Jainism and Tantra, developed through different systems of *yoga*. It should be added here that some forms of Tantra are clearly theistic.

The system of *yoga* ascribed to Patanjali is most elaborate and has rightly received widespread attention because of its philosophical underpinnings and practical implications. The main aim of *yoga* is purification of the body–mind complex facilitating the path of self-perfection and self-realization. Diseases and infirmities of the body, and turbulence and pain of mind are believed to be controllable and even removable through the sustained practice of *yoga* under the guidance of a competent teacher, or *guru*. This discipline, *śāstra*, is too intricate and subtle to be mastered unaided by a *guru*.

Different systems of philosophy and religious sects have been following different paths of *Yoga*. The practical rules and philosophical principles of different systems of *Yoga* have been elaborately laid down. But, as indicated before, the most important part of *Yoga* is not theoretical but practical, and this practice requires expert guidance.

As expounded in the *Bhāgavād Gītā*, the main three systems of *Yoga* are known as *Karmayoga* (*Yoga* through work), *Bhaktiyoga* (*Yoga* through devotion), and *Jñanayoga* (*Yoga* through knowledge). According to legend, the *Gītā*, a long beautiful poem, is an articulation of the dialogue between *Krisna* and *Arjuna* on the epic battlefield of *Kuruksetra* as depicted in the *Mahābhārata*. It is said that Arjuna, the best fighter of the *Pāṇḍava* camp, was unwilling to fight on the grounds that to kill kin of the rival camp, *Kurus*, would be unjust, and it was left to Krishna, his friend and charioteer (but really God himself in disguise), to convince him that a just war against wrongdoers is religiously sanctioned and ethically obligatory. It is very unlikely that such a long dialogue of deep philosophical significance could take place in the midst of a battlefield. Be that as it may, this work had its lasting influence on the Indian mind over the centuries, and many great philosophers and statesmen from Śaṅkara to Sri Aurobindo and Gandhi have thought fit to write commentaries on it. Even Hegel himself translated it.[21] According to Radhakrishna, 'the *Bhāgavād Gītā* is more a

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religious classic than a philosophical treatise'. Its contents are a persuasive expression of the aims and aspirations of people of all kinds.

The recommended pathway affirms that work or action (*karma*) is to be done without craving for its results, good or bad. The work should be non-impulsive. It is a kind of sacrifice without yearning for any outcome. If man wants to attain freedom and perfection he must perform his work as a form of self-giving, without being enslaved by the habit of working in a mechanical way. This is called *niṣkāma karma*, performance of work untainted by craving, *kama*, for its fruits or results. All our sufferings are rooted in our expectation of, or attachment to, good results or success. If one can be free from this kind of attachment, one becomes free in the truest sense.

The way of knowledge is recommended particularly for those who are spiritually inclined to know the inscrutable ways of self-expression of the Supreme Reality. The really wise man in action sees inaction, and action in inaction and only the accomplished *yogi* can attain this high cognitive state of utter detachment in consciousness. The perfect knower is truly liberated. The aim is attainable through humble reverence, by enquiring, and by selfless service. On earth there is nothing equal to perfect purity to true wisdom. This wisdom is born of a kind of faith (i.e. reverence), not from discursive reasoning.

The other path that leads to the highest freedom lies in the practice of cultivation of devotion. Devotion is the total surrender of the devotee to the Supreme Being. It entails self-effacement, freedom from all sorts of pride, egoism and sense of agency. The true devotee gradually realizes that he is not the real doer; what he does is really being done by God. By surrendering himself unreservedly to the will of God one realizes the highest state of bliss (*ānanda*) and self-fulfilment.

It is interesting to note that the importance of meditation is being widely realized by people from all walks of life. Modern life – shaped, almost overwhelmed, by industrial culture and marked by vaulting ambition, continuous conflict and unbridled competition – struggles to deliver peace and satisfaction. It is not surprising that *Yoga* is being increasingly accepted in the West, particularly in industrialized countries where wealth and ambition tend to consume the native goodwill and noble sentiments of human beings. Indian *Yoga* is found to be more acceptable than Indian philosophy in the Euro-American world. The healing and the relieving powers of *Yoga* are being increasingly introduced into different places of work, official, industrial and even in prisons. During the last 50 years or so many Indian *yogīs* of uneven attainment have found their way to the western world. *Yoga* is a recognized cure for mental illness of different forms. It symbolizes the ordinary mortal's mental or spiritual response to the needs rooted in countless cravings. Our ceaseless mental *out*goings need to be regulated by ever deepening *in*looks.

Sri Aurobindo claims to have synthesized different Indian systems of *Yoga* in his system of Integral Yoga (*Pūrṇa Yoga*). He is one of those outstanding scholars and statesmen who devoted the latter part of his life to *Yoga* and writing extensively on the subject. His later life of seclusion and the practice of *Yoga,* rightly understood, is a life of intense spiritual action, leading to the widening and deepening of consciousness. This mode of living is bound to remind one of the teachings of the *Gītā* that the wise man sees action in inaction and the converse. It seems to me that *Yoga* is not peculiar to the Indian tradition. In all other civilizations, its spiritual and

practical analogues are certainly to be found. Because life itself is *yoga*, a union of man with the Universe. By interiorizing its consciousness, the *self* knows its presence in *other* selves, and the presence of *other* selves within itself, and finally *realizes* their unity. That explains why the yogic spirituality of India is being increasingly appreciated by people all over the world. *Yoga* is not to be confused with this or that religion. It is truly universal.

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