



Journey of Human Mind and Intellect in Search of Truth and Reality

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Abstract

Science and spirituality are the two most engaging disciplines of academic interest to many which essentially centers around the basic inquiry of human mind in search for the ultimate truth and reality of the natural world. While spirituality ventures into the inner world of the self in contemplative modes to access the truth in spontaneous revelatory process, science on the other hand giving primacy to matter, analyses the outer world following a different rational path based on abstract mathematical logic. After a long arduous journey of several centuries, twentieth century science has been able to see glimpses of the truth of the same kind as has been envisaged by spirituality in some sense. We attempt here to provide a brief narrative of this journey of human mind and intellect in search of the ultimate truth and reality.

Key word: Truth, reality, matter, reductionism, Quantum weirdness, Big Bang, Relativity, Leela.

We would like to narrate here the story of the journey of the human mind and intellect ever since the dawn of civilization in search of Truth and Reality along two different paths that unfolded before it. One path was leading the human mind towards the 'inner world' searching for the 'self', the meaning and the very purpose of existence to realize the transcendental Truth and Reality on the basis of pure deep contemplative thoughts. The other path, directed towards the 'outer world' of objects and phenomena, is purely mechanistic, reductionist and materialistic in approach with the concept of the cosmos based on rational thoughts and empirical observations. -

The travellers of the 'inner world' discovered the unit source of all existence as an attribute-less potentiality in the transcendental realm, which they called by various names as God the Absolute Truth and Ultimate Reality. This attribute-less unit source of all potentialities in fact is nameless and formless. Vedic seers called it Nirguna Brahman, which unfolded itself to 'Purusha' the cosmic consciousness and Prakriti the unmanifested physical world according to Hindu Shamkshya darshana belonging to Indian



Spiritual Philosophy. 'Purusha' the cosmic consciousness of infinite potentiality breathed dynamism to the inert and un-manifested physical world to manifest itself with the emergence of space, time, matter and forces and create perpetual networks of dynamic patterns with things and beings. The seers saw the intrinsic interconnectedness of everything that exists and happens in the external phenomenal world. They also saw the unit source within the 'self' and the 'self' within the unit source. They called it the 'Universal Self' to declare it as 'Aham Brahmasmi' or 'Tat Tvam Asi' meaning 'I am Brahman' and 'Thou art that'. The phenomenal world, which due to its interconnectedness, they proclaimed as our own family - 'Basudhaiva Kutumbakam'. This external world which appears to our ordinary senses as true and real, is not eternal but only transitory and 'illusion' created by the source. These ideas have been described metaphorically in various ways in all spiritual traditions.

However the travelers of the path of reason and empiricism giving primacy to matter and the forces of their interaction went on in a reductionist manner, peeling layers after layers of their so called material reality of the external world, banishing the role of mind and consciousness from their search. They branded the findings of the spiritual domain as speculative and baseless - sheer mysticism. They did not grant any legitimacy to the world body of spiritual wisdom. While the travelers of this path have been extraordinarily successful in unearthing many mysteries of the material world and crafting advanced technology; they have left human psyche in a state of limbo considering consciousness and freewill as mostly fictitious; the universe as ad hoc, random and devoid of any purpose or meaning. The path is a continuation of the one that the majority of humanity is currently following on their journey. In the process of giving primacy to matter the travelers of this path-called the scientists, have discovered the laws of nature by rationally studying the nature and finding regular patterns in the empirically observed data. They have unfolded mystery after mysteries probing deeper and deeper into the core of the material existence to find more mysteries lying in the microscopic realm of the subatomic particles - landing them in a quantum world of uncertainty and weirdness. There the microscopic objects are not isolated solid and inert entities as we find in their bulk property. They are inherently interconnected and randomly dynamic. The matter in them has been melted away in the form of an all pervading field of energy. These so-called building blocks of matter are nothing but the excitations of the fields as packets of energy. These energy quanta, which we still call particles like electrons, quarks, protons and neutrons etc. have the dual property of simultaneously behaving as a particle or a wave. They propagate like a wave being everywhere at the same time until we attempt to see and locate them and under observation only they appear as particles. It seems as if they have a mind of their own to read the intention of the observer in observation. There are many other quantum weirdnesses such as quantum entanglement that speaks about the non-locality nature of instantaneous influence across the space barrier of indefinite dimension. The quantum



frenzy of the quantum vacuum of absolute nothingness buzzing always with bubbling quantum fields of particles and forces-constantly creating particles and annihilating them instantaneously like the ocean sprays. This quantum vacuum is the ultimate source from which all the building blocks of matter and their forces of interaction have been created. The scientists have realized that probably the end game lies in successful attempts for the unification of all the fundamental particles and forces into a super grand unified scheme - they called the unified field theory. Probably they have found the address of the ultimate source of all existence in this 'quantum nothingness' which the Buddhists used to call 'Sunyata' and Hindus used to call 'Brahman'. But they have not made much progress either in their chartered directions or also in understanding the 'inner world' of mind and consciousness.

However in their long and tortuous journey on the path of reductionist materialism, the human mind surely has gained intimate knowledge of the workings of the universe and this expertise gave us the greatest gifts as the fruits of technology. But in an act of cosmic irony, this expanding island of knowledge found itself surrounded by ever longer shores of ignorance. We are truly surrounded by perplexing enigmas. Apart from the quantum weirdness of the microscopic domain we have mentioned earlier; we find also in special relativity that there exists an upper limit to how fast information can travel in space (the constant speed of light) which results in the surprising malleability of space and time and passage of time can vary for each observer depending on his state of motion. Even time, a notion so central to our experience of reality, seems so far from our intellectual grasp as it appears to be an emergent property. Matter itself eludes the grasp of our mind, since neither the notions of fields nor particles suffice to capture its essence. The question of cause and effect cannot be upheld in time alone. But this cause-effect relationship called causality is upheld only in the mystifying weaving of space and time into a four dimensional fabric of space-time, where borders of space time are blurred and reality appears as an inconceivable four-dimensional atemporal one. Force of gravity turns out to be an illusion created solely by the unseen curvature of space-time in Einstein's general relativity. Humanity's greatest achievement in cosmology is probably the discovery that the universe forever is expanding at an accelerated rate. But it is a profoundly unsettling fact that 95% of the contents of the universe is, embarrassingly, not accounted for in the available theories of the cosmos. This major portion of the contents is designated as dark energy (70%) and dark matter (25%). The matter that we boast to describe and explain as the reality constitutes only about 5%. The list of paradoxes faced by modern physics goes on and on. It appears as though every explanation creates more new problems - the closer one looks, the more one finds to be explained.

Even more troubling is that there have been multitudes of cosmic coincidences of the universe to have reached this exact state during its 13.8 billion



years of history harboring life and sentient beings at least in one of the planets like planet earth in billions of stars of billions of galaxies. For instance, the perfect fine tuning of physical constants allowing a complexly structured universe to emerge from the primordial cosmic energy soup after Big Bang, the unseen universal force driving the cosmos to ever greater structure and complexity, the forging of heavy elements like carbon and oxygen in stellar furnaces to be distributed across space by supernova explosion; special properties of carbon, oxygen, water, nitrogen and phosphorous as necessary prerequisites of life; the exact positioning of Earth in our solar system; the accumulation of liquid water on earth; the emergence of the first biological replicators on earth; the appearance of cyanobacteria, the first organism to harness energy from Sun by photosynthesis; the self-organized engineering of complex life form as cells (Eukaryotes), the evolutionary burst 540 million years ago called the Cambrian explosion filling the seas with unprecedented diversity of organisms; the emergence of insects, birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, dinosaurs etc. rendering evolutionary process chaotic; extinction of dinosaurs allowing mammals to dominate; demise of several early human species leaving one lineage of homosapiens as the sole conqueror of the solar system due to the emergence of consciousness and the capacity of abstract thought leading to language and culture. There are many more such accidental issues in the ultimate design of the universe to its present state. This is the stunning tale of cosmic evolution fraught with chance inviting various explanations. This apparent fine-tuning, however accidental, seems ubiquitous. The cosmologist Andrei Linde remarks -

“There are many strange coincidences in our world. The mass of the electron is about 2000 times smaller than the mass of the proton. Why? The only reason is that if it were even a little different, life as we know it would be impossible. The masses of proton and neutron almost coincide. Why? If the masses of either were even a little different; life as we know it would be impossible.”

Such utterances come very close to questioning the materialistic and reductionistic orthodoxy, considering life as 'just chemistry' and mind as 'just computation'. But the origin of life and explanation of conscious experience remain troubling us with difficult problems, despite the availability of what should be more than adequate biochemical and neuroscientific tools to expose the details. So at the fringes of knowledge, the human mind is challenged by perplexing mysteries in choosing to travel on a path (of materialistic science) that has no milestones indicating 'purpose' and 'meaning' of existence. This is mostly due to the influence of the most obsessive and passionate Western mind in favor of the materialistic route denigrating Eastern mind as primitive and as a result, humanity has now realized that in return of the gifts of the ocean of knowledge and the fruits of technology; the price being paid is in alarming dimensions threatening complete extinction of life from the surface of the Earth. This has been aptly



narrated in a bestselling book - "The Passion of Western Mind" by the historian Richard Tamas (2010, page 362). We may quote here his words in writing as-

"Traditional structures and values (in human society) were crumbling. With an unending stream of technological innovations, modern life was subject to unprecedented disorienting rapidity of change. Gigantism and turmoil, excessive noise, speed and complexity dominated the human environment. The world in which man lived was becoming as impersonal as the cosmos of his science. With the pervasive anonymity, hollowness and materialism of modern life, man's capacity to retain his humanity in an environment determined by technology seemed increasingly in doubt.... But compounding these humanistic critiques were more disturbingly concrete signs of science's untoward consequences. the critical contamination of planet's water, air and soil, the manifold harmful effects on animal and plant life, the extinction of innumerable species, the deforestation of the globe, the erosion of topsoil, the depletion of groundwater, the vast accumulation of toxic wastes, the apparent exacerbation of the green-house effect, the breakdown of ozone layer in the atmosphere, the radical disruption of the entire planetary ecosystem - all this emerged as directly serious problems with increasing forces and complexity."

This is not the sole voice raising concern, but the entire world body has now joined the chorus searching for remedial solutions, looking for values, meaning and purpose of existence in Eastern Wisdom. May we hope that Ancient Indian Wisdom can serve as a guide for humanity again at this critical moment?

Conclusion

In our journey of narration of the two groups of travellers on their two different paths, we are probably approaching the cross road, where both the groups may meet to shake hands and understand each other for the preservation and welfare of all humanity. Ancient Indian wisdom may guide the human race how to live in peace and harmony with nature, however mystical or metaphorical in its description it may be. The deeper meaning and the philosophical contents of all the descriptions in the spiritual context to some extent, has been reflected in modern physics. As for instance, according to the basic myth found within the traditional lore of ancient India, existence is seen as a play or 'lila' of the unit source - 'the Brahman'. In the words of the famous Indologist - Allan Watts (1971, p.99)



"In the beginning - which was not long ago but now-ever-is the Self. Everyone knows the Self, but no one can describe it, just as the eye sees but does not see itself. Moreover, the Self is what there is and all that there is, so that no name can be given to it. It is neither old nor new, neither great nor small, neither shaped nor shapeless. Having no opposite, it is what all opposites have in common. It is the reason why there is no white without black and no form apart from emptiness. However, the self has two sides, the inside and the outside..."

Because of delight the self is always at play and its play is called 'lila', is like singing or dancing, which are made of sound and silence, motion and rest. Thus the play of the Self is to lose itself and to find itself in a game of hide-and-peek without beginning or end. In losing itself it is dismembered, it forgets that it is the one and only reality and plays that it is the vast multitude of beings and things which make up this world. In hiding itself it is remembered, it discovers again that it is forever the one behind the many, the trunk within the branches, that it seems to be many is always 'Maya', which is to say illusion, art and magical power.

The playing of the Self is therefore like a drama in which the Self is both the actor and the audience. On entering the theatre, the audience knows that what it is about to see is only a play, but the skilful actor creates a 'Maya', an illusion of reality which gives the audience delight or terror, laughter or tears. It is thus that in the joy and sorrow of all beings, the Self as audience is carried away by itself as actor."

This may be similar to the quantum frenzy of absolute nothingness, the buzzing and bubbling of the quantum fields with unceasing creation and annihilations of virtual particles in modern physics.

So if that is the story in essence depicted symbolically through a myth, it certainly conveys the meaning and purpose of existence for a peaceful living in harmony with each and all in nature. We may now end our journey here by reminding the Vedic shanti patha mantra—

**"Antareekshyah Shantih, Banaspataye Shantih; Aapah Shantih;
Pruthibi Shantih; Shantihreva Shantih.**

**Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah Sarve Santuh Niramaya; Sarve Bhadrani Pashyantu;
Ma Kashchit Dukshavak Bhavet. Om Shantih, Shantih, Shantih."**

Om Tat Sat.



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