

SPACE IN CONSCIOUSNESS

By Aju Mukhopadhyay

Consciousness an Inner Space

Thousands of years ago Indian Upanishad declared, “This is he that is awake in those who sleep.”¹ This Consciousness has been identified by Sri Aurobindo as the “Superconscient Divine Purusha”. Sri Ramana Maharshi conceived consciousness as a force behind every object and living form. He identified it as the Self, the Atma, absolute silence. Consciousness is one which pervades the whole existence; from material to vital and mental world and beyond. Not only mind or its awareness, nor matter nor senses; every being, everything is replete with consciousness. Everything is conscious, from stone to human being, at different levels. Consciousness is an inner space.

Ordinary consciousness is awareness through intellect, mind and senses. Cosmic consciousness is beyond them. It is awareness at the universal level; universal matter, energy, mind and forces. Spiritual consciousness is awareness of Self, Spirit and the Divine. Sachchidananda (Existence, Consciousness, Bliss) is usually conceived as the highest state of consciousness. Gnostic beings live in the Supramental consciousness as Sri Aurobindo coined the word, being the last grade so far conceived in the ascent of mind to truth consciousness.

Use of Outer Space in the Ancient World

Hanuman’s Leap into the Higher Space

We find Hanuman in *Ramayana* creates wonder and havoc against enemy in crossing space by leaps in wind-speed, himself being a legendary son of the God of Wind. When Sita, wife of Rama, was abducted and captivated in Lanka (Now Sri Lanka) Hanuman chose to approach her at the quickest time by leaping over the vast sea from the Indian shore. We see him leaping to the mountain peak (Gandhamadan) where a particular herb, *vishalya karani*, was available to save the life of war-wounded Lakshmana. Not knowing the exact plant he uprooted the whole mountain top and leaped carrying it to the physician- healer.

Space was covered not by flying like birds but by leaping to a long distance in enormous speed. Hanumans (Vanaras) weren't just monkeys but humans: "Since they spoke a human language and since their women had no tails and have been described like the other women of the human species . . . Vanaras were also human beings but accustomed to live in the hilly regions, forests, and banks of rivers." 2

Ramayana and *Mahabharata* are the creations of Vedic Rishis. *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are the oldest extant epics of the world. "If the Hindu traditional view is accepted, then the date of Valmiki and his composition will be around 4400 B.C." 3 *Ramayana* has a living influence in India and its neighbourhoods. It is a myth, a living folk tradition. Hanuman lives among men as part of this tradition. Valmiki was the poet of the epic, *Ramayana*.

Gilgamesh's journey through the Nether World of Death

Gilgamesh, the demigod and hero of Uruk, decides to steal trees with Enkidu from a distant cedar forest forbidden to mortals. Gods decide to punish Enkidu for this transgression. He takes ill, suffers immensely, and shares his visions of the underworld with Gilgamesh before he breaths his last. Gilgamesh is heartbroken.

He moves through difficult and dangerous mountains and forests in search of immortality. He journeys with Urshanabi the ferryman on his boat across the sea and through the Waters of Death to reach Utnapishtim, endowed with eternal life by the Gods. Gilgamesh fails in the test and Utnapishtim asks him to return to Uruk. Before his death he finds consolation in the city he abjured as a magnificent piece of achievement. (*Epic of Gilgamesh*)

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ISRO has been launching great satellites from time to time. Countries like North Korea are daringly exploding highly powerful bombs in space. Russia, China, Britain and France are veterans in the field. Powerful countries are racing with each other using vast space. Airplanes move covering thousands of miles from country to country using the sky-space which is reminiscent of the moving chariots of the folklore across the sky driven by winged horses.

Nachiketas Journeys through Inner Space to God

Here is another journey in the story of Vajashravasa, his son Nachiketas and of Yama, the king of Death and Law. Yama is immortal and in possession of Eternal Laws.

Vajashravasa gives out every possession to become free in life. His son Nachiketas eagerly asks to whom he would be given as the last possession of his father. And the father gives him to Yama, the Lord of Death. Pious Nachiketas lives three days and nights in Death's home doing all that a Brahmin guest would do. Pleased, Yama asks him to choose three boons. The first boon he asks is his deliverance by Yama so his father might be released of all passions for him and thus might sleep sweetly. This granted, Nachiketas wished for that heavenly flame which gives immortality. Yama described this flame to be in possession of infinite existence, dwelling in the cave of our being. This granted, Nachiketas asked for the third boon; a knowledge of all knowledge; knowledge of the Divine Himself. But the Yama wished him to ask for any worldly possessions and riches for this was the rarest of rare things to ask for but Nachiketas insisted on knowing the truth. Yama agreed to give him the knowledge and taught him regularly the knowledge about God. At last Nachiketas realised God and became free from stain and death. (*Katha Upanishad*)

While Hanuman leaps in the sky, a vast space above us, Gilgamesh journeys through waters of death following Enkidu's vision of the underworld to find immortality. These are journeys in the outer space beyond earth. In contrast to the journey of Hanuman and Gilgamesh or of the moderns the journey of Nachiketas was in the inner space of consciousness; the Yoga of realising God. He successfully gained immortality while Gilgamesh failed in it.

Scientific and Speculative Philosopher's Ideas about Consciousness

Materialism is based on solid knowledge, its proponents claim, maybe with certain exceptions. Scientists and speculative philosophers have recently been dragged into the idea of consciousness though it appears vague to them as they haven't got a sure clue to it so far.

Francis Crick and Christof Koch of the IT, California have found a clue to consciousness which is related to DNA. They have held that examination of neurons and the interactions between them, their binding together, could help scientists to create a scientific model of consciousness which is analogous to transmission of genetic information by means of DNA.

Stressing on visual awareness they feel that neural underpinnings of the sense of sight may lead to an awareness of the self which is unique to humans. Their arguments are based on the fact that any interference in the functioning of brain's 50 billion nerve cells tends to alter subjective experience in a definite way.

Researchers at Northwestern University suggest that consciousness lies well within the realm of scientific inquiry- as impossible as that may currently seem. Although scientists have yet to agree on an objective measure to index consciousness, progress has been made with this agenda in several labs around the world.

“The debate about the neural basis of consciousness rages because there is no widely accepted theory about what happens in the brain to make consciousness possible,” said Ken Paller, professor in Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences at Northwestern.” 5

Quantum physicists think that mysteries of the mind may be related to the mysteries of quantum mechanics. But it is more speculative than the neuron theory for there is no definite link between the two, it has been held. Some researchers have found that the electrical activity of the brain cells fire in synchrony but it is not known if that relates to behavior.

Professor Ashok Sharma, former scientist at Harvard University, has tried to define the science of consciousness. He says, it is a non-physical entity, which is essentially different from the four basic entities of space, time, energy and matter of the conventional science.

“Consciousness does not have any physical attribute or property or action, but is endowed with autonomous will power of creation, retention and annihilation of the knowledge of an individual or that of the universe. Quoting the Upanishads (*Shvetashwatara*, 6/19) he says that consciousness itself is non-differentiable, inactive, placid, indescribable and non associative.” 6

“Colin McGinn, a philosopher of Rutgers University, argued in his 1991 book, *The Problem of Consciousness* that because our brains are products of evolution, they have cognitive limitations.” 7

David Chalmers, an Australian philosopher of Washington University maintains that “None of the physical theories addresses the most fundamental question about the mind: why is the performance of these functions accompanied by subjective experience?” 8

Koch holds the view that philosophy has least chance of giving insight about the mind-body relationship or the question of free will, admitting that science may not be able to solve all the mysteries of the mind. He advises philosophers to remember what their forebear, Ludwig Wittgenstein once said, “Whereof one doesn’t know, thereof one mustn’t speak.” 9

Sir J. C. Bose was not an ordinary Scientist

V. A. Shepherd, in his article, “At the Roots of Plant Neurobiology: A Brief History of the Biophysical Research of J. C. Bose”, wrote,

“Bose’s conclusions that all plants possess a nervous system, a form of intelligence, and a capacity for remembering and learning, was poorly received by prominent electrophysiologists of the time. One hundred and fifty years after Bose’s birth, concepts of kin-recognition, complex foraging strategies, intelligence, learning, and long-distance electrical signaling in plants are featured in the mainstream literature. Recent advances in both neurobiology and plant cell biology are uncovering some surprising similarities between plant cells and the neurons of animals. . . . Plant neurobiology now aims to understand how plants perceive, remember and process their experiences, coordinating their behaviours via integrated information networks, including molecular, chemical, and electrical levels of signaling.” 10

Sir J. C. Bose proved that metals are as responsive to stimuli and pressure as the plants; “A universal reaction seemed to bring metal, plant and animal under a common Law. They all exhibited essentially the same phenomena of fatigue and depression, with possibilities of recovery and exaltation, as well as the permanent irresponsiveness associated with death.” 11

Sir Jagadis Chandra Bose’s declaration that all living and non-living species of the world are originally One or his assertion that “Everything in man has been foreshadowed in the plant”, draws our attention towards a comprehensive philosophical idea of the scientist that there is a link between beings and non-beings. Though he did not define consciousness he perceived it through his integral vision which a contemporary yogi defined with reference to his discovery.

Yogi-Philosopher's definition of Consciousness

Sri Aurobindo, the greatest adventurer of consciousness, wrote in *The Life Divine*, "There is a superconscient in us as well as subconscient, a range of conscious faculties and therefore an organisation of consciousness which rise high above that psychological stratum to which we give the name of mentality. And since the subliminal self in us thus rises in superconscience above mentality, may it not sink in subconsciousness below mentality? If so, we must suppose in the plant and the metal also a force to which we can give the name of consciousness"

"The seeking and shrinking of the plant, its pleasure and pain, its sleep and its wakefulness and all that strange life whose truth an Indian scientist has brought to light by rigidly scientific methods, are all movements of consciousness"

"Mind and Matter are rather different grades of the same energy, different organisation of one consciousness Force of Existence." 12

Conclusion

Space is infinite as well as finite. By going into physical space we can vie each other for occupying the best space, engage in warfare using space but rising through the inner journey of space in consciousness we can achieve Peace, Unity and the Divine.

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Bio

Aju Mukhopadhyay, settled in Pondicherry, is a bilingual award winning poet, author and critic, writes fictions and essays too. He has authored 30 books and received several poetry awards from India and USA besides other honours. He has published two volumes of short stories some of which have been chosen for noted anthologies. He has contributed essays on literary and environmental subjects in more than 50 scholarly books. He is a member of the Research Board of Advisors of the American Biographical Institute and registered in the Who's Who of Sahitya Akademi, India. He is Vice President of the Guild of Indian English Writers, Editors and Critics. A member of many national literary and environmental institutions, he is also published as writer on animals, wildlife, Nature and Environment.

He has so far published seven books of poems in English besides two in Bangla. One more book of poems is ready for publication. Eight books contain critique on his poetry among others besides such critiques on his poetry and fiction scattered in several magazines. His poems may be broadly categorised in three groups: On Nature, poems with spiritual overtone and feelings and poems on social, political subjects, some of which may be categorised as rants. He is very subjective in his subtle feelings and expressions. He is known as one of the noted writers of Haiku and such genres of poetry from India. Such works by him has been published in many international magazines and ezines. His haiku has been specially chosen by some editors and

awarded ranks on merits. Quite a few of his poems of the Japanese variety have been published in international anthologies and collections. He has his poems published in 16 anthologies which include two recent publications one of which is an Indo-Australian anthology of poems by three poets each from Indian and Australia, titled Poetic Conventions. He edited some literary magazines in Bangla and is placed in the Editorial Board and Advisory Board of some literary journals for Indian English writing. As Guest Editor he edited <http://twenty20journal.com>, an American Ezine for its Indian Edition; Summer Issue No. 3, 2011.

Besides the awards many of his poetic works have been acclaimed and honoured like one of his poems remaining at the top of the list of poems in www.asianamericanpoetry.com from December 2007 for about three months and inclusion of his poem in the list of top ten recent poems by www.Poetsindia.com. Lucidity Poetry Journal from Sugar Land, USA has awarded him Certificate of Merit for his poem, "Structural Violence" in June 2011. The American Biographical Institute offered him the American Order of Merit.

Following are the books of poems published by him in English. The Witness Tree, In Celebration of Nature, The Paper Boat, Insect's Nest and Other Poems, Aju Mukhopadhyay's Poems on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Short Verse Vast Universe and Short Verse Delight. The last two are books of Haiku and Tanka with some essays on the subject of Japanese short verses.