

## Mind in the Indian Perspective by Nitya Chaitanya Yati

Everything is said to be in the mind. But there is no mind to be seen anywhere. There are people who do not believe in God or soul or spirit, but they all believe in the existence of the mind.

What is this mind which is so universally accepted? When we closely look at the phenomenon called mind, we can see that the mind is not an entity in itself. In a living person there is a streaming consciousness in both the wakeful and dreaming states. Even in parts of the body where a sensation is not immediately felt, potential energy exists which can be evoked actively.

Thus, to begin with, we can give the following definition of mind: it is an ever-present vibratory principle of animation in a living body—it is that which distinguishes a physical organism from inorganic matter. It is called “mind” without critically considering the exact characteristics of this animating principle. Although the word ‘mind’ is spoken of as a noun, it is functioning as a verb and sometimes it may change into an adverb or adjective. The physiological function by which an organism becomes aware of itself and its environment is called ‘mind’. It is a qualitative function of the entire organism, which is often located in a specific form within a spatio-temporal continuum.

To understand the mind implied in the writings of Indian rishis the entire content of awareness that is felt by all throughout their lives is to be studied from both an absolutist standpoint and a relativistic position. The totality, which implies a non-dual concept of the absolute, *paramartha*, can be described with the short English word ‘all’. Its Sanskrit synonym is *sarvam*. The significance of the term ‘all’ is that it does not allow anything to be left outside of itself. One’s concept of ‘all’ is an ever-growing

reality. The more you know the more is included in the concept of 'all'. Thus 'all' is a progressively self-enriching concept. In the Vedanta system the concept of the ever-expanding 'all' is technically called *brahman*, meaning that which is ever extending into infinitude. This term includes in it the knowledge of both the perceptual and the conceptual.

In the totality of such a being, there paradoxically always exists a dual principle. This dual principle consists of an unchanging law and countless trillions of transforming entities that are subjected to change by the changeless law. The Indian rishi calls the law *dharma*, and that in which the law is operating the *dharmi*. Like a word and its meaning, the law and the lawful cannot be separated. A major field in which the law operates in its purest form without having the necessity for a gross or concrete medium to express itself is in the context of mathematics.

In Sanskrit pure consciousness is called *chit* and its existential verity substantiated by an animated state is called *chetana*. From the function of a tiny particle or monad to the conglomeration of the galactic system of the universe, everything is sustained by an innate law that gives coherence to its structural aspect. The same law also determines the functional rhythm of all devices, whether naturally evolved or artificially created.

Natural laws are essentially mathematical. They are not stated anywhere as is the case of manmade laws, but they can be inferred from the manifestation of things and the interaction between physical, chemical and physiological bodies. Everywhere we see the operation of law, but the laws themselves are not perceptual. Human reason has a rare power to induce from patterns, reactions, and interactions the pros and cons of law.

According to Charaka, the manifestation of a law has three stages. The first is a secretive causal function recognized as *karana*, which is held away from the conscious mind, as in the case of the genetic codes in a DNA/RNA helicoid. The second stage comes in the form of urges or compulsions of which a large area remains hidden in the unconscious and a small part enters into the

preconscious in the form of a desire. The final aspect is a sportive supply of energy like the burning of a missile, which prompts an organism to move through a series of actions either consciously willed or compulsively performed. The intensity of the will to act takes the dual form of inhibition or obsession. If the volition is normal and part of the natural performance of the growing organism, the expenditure of energy will also be rhythmic and harmonious.

There is one common idea shared by all systems of Indian philosophy. Incidentally, I may add here that in India there is no separation of philosophy from religion or psychology. Two poles are marked in all systems, and everything is happening in a parameter that connects these two extreme points. One is a self-luminous principle from which awareness, meaning, value and goal ensue. The other point is the material that has no consciousness of its own but is an absolutely necessary counterpart to be illuminated, fashioned, cultured, to undergo evolution, and to express the purpose and meaning of evolution. These two counterparts are termed variously in various systems. Roughly they can be called spirit and matter. In the Saivite philosophy these are called *Siva* and *Sakti*. In the Samkhya system they are called *purusha* and *prakriti*. In Vedanta they are *chit* and *achit*. In the Mimamsa school they are *dharmas* and *dharmi*. In the Vaishnava system they are *sesha* and *seshi*. In English these two dual aspects are generally termed the self and the non-self.

The self can be conceived at three levels—cosmological, sociological and individualistic. To understand these three faces we may begin with the most finite of human beings, the single cell from which an entire organism grows into shape and maturity. The person has to live with an identity which can be differentiated from several organisms of the same species and from the concomitant species of the same genus. Again, within the same organism each organ has to differentiate its function from other organs, with which many interrelations are to be established for the natural functioning of the individual from its infancy to old age, during

which time it is expected to live a meaningful life realizing the purpose for which it has assumed a particular shape and dynamics. This corresponds somewhat with what the geneticists want to explain as a descriptive science of evolution. The single cell that divides, proliferates and changes into innumerable forms of morphological details, anatomical structure and metabolic function is the elaboration that is made in the material that is to be prevailed upon by the spirit, which is to be understood later as the *jiva* or persona of that particular individual.

To commence our study at this stage, the archaic physicians of India, Charaka, Sushruta and Vagbhata, begin with the qualitative aspects of *tanmatras*, which are initially illuminated by the spirit as potential sources of sound, touch, form, taste and smell. The carriers of these sensations are postulated as monads that can assume a more concretized or gross dimension to energize those entities and put them to various patterns of operation, which in turn facilitate both the formation of an organism and its continuance in function. The triple principle of factual reminiscence of parental function, collective correlations going into mosaic generality, and a stabilization into characteristics, are taken care of by the triple *gunas* or modalities of nature—*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*.

The entire process, which can be traced from the causal programming of an embryo to the subtle interaction between the several cells of its proliferation and up to the ultimate being into which such an organism culminates, is looked upon as the working of the *antakarana* or inner organ. This inner organ is subjected to four frames of reference, which are held in unity by the meaning of each individual's life. The first frame of reference is the physical foundation of life, such as spatial occupancy, dispensing of energy, programming with special activities internal and external, experiencing the essence of personal life, and ultimately culturing a replica of each passing event to be used later as a memory tag. The second frame of reference comes from the alternating phases of day and night of heliotropism and geotropism. The third frame

of reference has specific reference to patterns of consciousness, namely, first the interrogating consciousness, *manas*; second the recall of memories, *citta*; third is judgment for relevancy, *buddhi*; and the fourth is personal affectivity or *ahamkara*. The last and final frame of reference is in relation to the inculcated conditioning both at the level of understanding and at the level of the consequential reflexes of learning that are established in the organism as a whole.

This in general is the picture of mind with which an Indian assumes his various responsibilities, such as those of a parent, a teacher, a therapist, a reformer, or as an inculcator of cultural and spiritual values.