

SCIENCE OF MIND IN THE PHILOSOPHIES OF THE WORLD

-A Dialogue between Science and Philosophy-

Conference Room-1, India International Centre, Delhi

November 12-13, 2021

A two-day seminar cum webinar convened by the World Buddhist Culture Trust brought together a select group of academics and researchers as well as concerned citizens to discuss and examine how the **science of mind** is understood from the point of view of various philosophical and thinking traditions, exploring contributory connections in furthering the values that are of great importance to the flourishing of human society. It was noted that the elusive mind has been sought after by scientists and philosophers alike. How far have the scientists got? How close have the philosophers got? Are the two traditions related in any aspect?

It is said that science was born from the womb of philosophy and carried its name for some centuries in the west. Indeed, Science was first known as natural philosophy. The term 'science' is derived from scientia, a Latin word which refers to knowledge generally; the term 'scientist' was coined only in the 19th century when it had clearly developed methods of enquiry that were unique to itself, i.e., not shared by philosophy. In Sanskrit too, Vigyan is knowledge, today, in common parlance, we understand it mainly as science.

Here, it should be mentioned that by the term 'science' or 'Vigyan', we refer to the systematic and reasoned explorations of phenomena that most systems have uniquely undertaken from the beginnings of their philosophical tradition.

Everyone agreed that human being is unique from all forms of life on earth. Using their hands with appposable thumbs, humans are able to fashion tools and machines. The brain which is the instrument for the mind provides us the faculties of reasoning, comprehension, memory, imagination, power to utilize the perceptive senses, distinguish emotions such as love and hate, kindness and jealousy, happiness and suffering, compassion and anger, and dozens more in the quest for "being and becoming".

Scholars referred to the teaching of Socrates, works of Plato and other Greek philosophers as well as those in Indian philosophy from ancient times to modernity, touching upon Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Vedanta and Sankhya. Viewpoints from Jainism and Buddhism based upon several ancient and modern texts provided further enlightenment. The Christian and Sikh perspectives were complemented by two presentations that focussed on the works of Islamic philosophers such as Avicenna and Sadra and Sufi concepts of Muraqaba, and Zikr for disciplining one's mind to align with divinity.

The nexus between body, mind and spirit was explained in multiple ways. The term "human spirit" interchangeably used with Atman or rational soul, manifests a great deal of conscious subjectivity. The mind could be taken as the reasoning power of the human spirit. Therefore, "the spirit" is like the lamp; the mind is the light which shines from the lamp. "The spirit" is the tree and the mind is the fruit. The mind is the perfection of "the spirit", and is its essential quality, just as the sun's rays are the essential attributes of the sun. The connection of "the spirit" with the body is like that of the sun with the mirror; there is no descent or entry into the body. The light does not enter into the mirror.

Whatever an individual may or may not know about the universe, one thing was quite clear: a human being's subjectivity is the most basic condition of his existence. The body is subject to the laws of the phenomenal world. The spirit is not. Physical and chemical laws do not control the rational soul. The love for beauty, social and emotional sentiments, human affection, friendship, and intelligence, all these and other manifestations of the soul are not under the control of the laws of nature. Thus, "the spirit" is different from the body; the immortality of the soul does not depend upon the body. Encompassing attributes of the lower forms of existence such as the mineral, the plant and the animal, the human being is infinitely superior. Humans communicate with others through listening, speaking, and writing; through silence and non-verbal actions. Inwardly, there are the powers of reflection and meditation, the freedom to change one's mind, heart, and belief.

Participants at the seminar did not have to address issues of basic survival that confronts most human beings. The focus was to find points of convergence in the wide-ranging philosophies, both Eastern and Western. Sincere attempts were made to understand the biggest dilemma facing all human beings in present-day society at a time when Covid-10 had wreaked havoc in the lives of countless millions. Taking a multi-disciplinary approach, speakers stressed that a scientific inquiry to understand the "mind" must allow for larger doses of mysticism. A healthy mind ensures a healthy body and when uplifted towards transcendence it produces arts, aesthetics, unravels the mysteries of the physical world and aspires towards the invisible ultimate reality. At the collective level it enables humanity to build civilizations and to progress spiritually and materially.

Despite preoccupation with the myriad needs to survive, and even more to thrive – food, water, clothing, and shelter, rest and sleep – there is constant striving all the time. As a baby, one needs a mother, and also a father's presence, to nurse, nurture, and train until one can strike out on one's own. Additionally, one needs a safe and secure environment; education and a measure of freedom. Most people, whether through upbringing or choice, care about God enough to believe there is one, and follow the teachings of those who have spoken in His name, hence the emergence of various religious and spiritual paths.

And yet what is it that holds humanity back from reaching its full collective potential? The primary disease that disturbs one's peace of mind is disunity at all levels of human existence. Civilization itself does not arise merely from material progress, but rather is defined by and founded upon the ideals and shared beliefs that weld society together. Clearly, the perversion of human faculties has contributed to much of the confusion in society and conflicts in and between individuals. "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed," declares UNESCO in its Constitution.

The seminar did not provide all the answers but urged all to make this world a better and happier place by going beyond one's individual needs and helping others to meet theirs. When the survival of the planet is at stake one does not have any choices. What uniquely defines the human experience is the transcendent components of life. It is this dimension of mindfulness that enriches, ennobles and provides direction to human beings. It is this dimension of life that unlocks the creative capacities within human consciousness and safeguards human dignity.