



Science and Philosophy of Our Inner Transformation

Gopal Chandra Bhar

Our Inner Time: Psychological and Physiological

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA SAID: 'If we are developed from animals, the animals also may be degraded men. ... Our struggle for the higher life shows that we have been degraded from a high state.'¹ Time flies, crawls, and races. Like tide, time waits for none, but in dramatic moments it also stands still. There are popular accounts of how Albert Einstein's relativity theory could be explained to a layperson: 'An hour sitting with a pretty girl on a park bench passes like a minute, but a minute sitting on a hot stove seems like an hour.'² This is psychological time and has to do with how hard or

warm we experience the passage of time. This is determined by our attachment, emotion, and so on, by the degree of attention to events when they occur. It is a personal time generated within our body, which is perhaps best understood as against our awareness of common chronological time. It passes relatively swiftly for us while we are enjoying an activity, but it slows down dramatically if we are waiting anxiously for something we like.

The elasticity of this kind of time is perhaps best appreciated when we are the spectators of the performance of a concert or a lecture or in meditation. We have another time called physiological time, which consists of a series of organic

changes undergone within a human being from the beginning of one's embryonic life to one's death. Some of these states are rhythmic and reversible, while others are progressive and irreversible. Our bodies are chock-full of living clocks that govern us all along. Physical time is foreign to us, whereas this inner physiological time is of our own spring from within. Solar time flows at a uniform rate consisting of equal intervals. But the physiological time differs from one person to another. The body is an ensemble of organic movements, whose rhythm is very fast during infancy, much less rapid during youth, and very slow in maturity and old age, when our physiological activities begin to weaken our mind.

It is because of the different individual physiological times, that physical and mental maturity come early for some and late to others. But society never thinks of advancing schooling age for someone who reached early mental maturity nor does it think of lengthening retirement age of one beyond sixty to those having their physical and mental capabilities intact. It is also in the same context that we, particularly in a joint family, experience a generation gap between young children and their grandparents, and even between children and their parents in these days. Because of this generation gap they live in different temporal worlds in spite of living in the same family.³ And for the same reason, a mother cannot treat her daughter as her own sister. Our failure to match in social structures, the rapid gains in longevity, health, and style of life has led to such unintended consequence of creating a poor fit between social institutions and people's capabilities and responsibilities at every age.

We all have the same amount of time but it is just a matter of how we utilise it. In order to produce greater results, one is required to change one's strategy with respect to time. On the

Internet, time has, in essence, triumphed over space. The temporal boundary that separates one place from another is abolished by making the entire world a global village. Only proper time management can bring success in life. Thomas à Kempis said: 'You will always be glad at evening if you have spent the day well.'⁴

Our Inner World and Outer World

Carl Jung, the noted psychiatrist and psychotherapist of the last century, on studying human behaviour, classified them as extrovert and introvert.⁵ These people make decisions based on two very different sets of criteria: thinking and feeling. When a decision is based on logic and reason, they are in the thinking mode. When a decision is based on a value system, they are operating in the feeling mode. **Our entire life is not fully governed by either, though decisions are made entirely by thinking or feeling processes.** Most decisions involve some thinking and some feeling. Normally the thinking mode comes from the brain while the feeling mode comes from the heart. We all are accustomed to both the modes, but we often put more trust on one mode or the other depending upon our inbuilt or inherent values like the two categories of our inner time. But the parents want their children to be specialised in their chosen field without any attention to the children's inbuilt talent or tendencies. The dynamics of both these worlds are entirely different like inner times.

The extrovert category naturally likes to stay with the external world of friends, television, mobile, and so on in their leisure time, while the introvert category prefers to be with their own internal world even forgetting their body-self. Each is imprisoned in its own activity. We know much about the outer world, yet very little of the world within us. That's why our environment wields such inordinate control over us. For

people belonging to the extrovert category, it is very difficult to enter into the spiritual world, where the primary need is silencing the mind itself as demanded by yoga scriptures. Sri Ramakrishna's basic message for us, especially those entering spiritual life, is the harmonisation of one's thought and speech. Success, even in worldly activity, demands that it should be in tune with thinking and speaking.

Our entire educational system aims at teaching how to tackle the external world irrespective of one's internal world. The so-called gentle-people, established in worldly knowledge, constantly try to run their life through suppression of truths of their inner world. Danah Zohar and Dr Ian Marshall rightly commented while connecting intelligence with spiritual intelligence: 'From the moment we begin school we are trained to look outward rather than inward, to focus on facts and practical problems in the external world, to be goal-oriented. Virtually nothing in Western education encourages us to reflect on ourselves, on our inner lives and motives.'⁶ This internal world is full of tendencies of our earlier life remaining dormant in the subconscious mind.

One becomes successful if one's inner world is strong. Only for children and the insane, the two worlds are the same since they do not usually talk rationally with reference to reality in the present world. Children are loved by all due to this simplicity. To be spiritual one has to go through a transformation of one's inner world from one's inbuilt samskaras. Mere outward or objective transformation makes one religious. For spirituality, one needs subjective transformation and this requires prolonged and rigorous spiritual practice for many years and a genuine spiritual experience must transform the character of the experiencer. Inner life primarily concerns one as a spiritual being. One can become learned by another's learning but can be wise only by one's

own wisdom. The discoveries of the inner worlds of Moses, Jesus Christ, Buddha, and Sri Ramakrishna are far greater than the discoveries of Columbus and Newton.

We usually live in the outer world almost unaware of our inner world. But spiritual persons usually live in their inner world. Sri Ramakrishna could stay in both the worlds, a special characteristic state termed as *bhavamukha* in Sri Ramakrishna literature. The expression of such state often comes out through a Bengali song: '*Dub dub dub rup sagare amar mon*; O my mind, dive deep into the inner world of gems.' Sri Ramakrishna also used to sing the mystic poet Ramprasad's Bengali song: '*Mon tumi krishi kaj jano na*; O mind, you do not know how to cultivate the land.'

Apart from this, some dedicated scientists, artists, and litterateurs also often live in their inner world. Their behaviour in the outer world is often seen as insane. This happened to the English poet P B Shelley and to some of the great scientists as well. This harmonisation is the greatest problem that one faces in life. That's why Swamiji said:

We are caught, though we came to catch. We came to enjoy; we are being enjoyed. We came to rule; we are being ruled. We came to work; we are being worked. All the time, we find that. And this comes into every detail of our life. We are being worked upon by other minds, and we are always struggling to work on other minds. We want to enjoy the pleasures of life; and they eat into our vitals. We want to get everything from nature, but we find in the long run that nature takes everything from us—depletes us, and casts us aside.⁷

The Architecture of Our Subconscious and Conscious mind

Our thoughts and emotions comprising our mood and sentiments produce strong

impressions on the face, which is like an advertisement board depicting what is going on inside the mind. On the face, one can hardly hide our thoughts though we may foolishly think that we have kept up our thoughts in secret. Thoughts of lust, greed, jealousy, anger, revenge, hatred, and so on, at once produce their vivid expressions on the face.

All memories, feelings, and thoughts that are out of conscious awareness are by definition 'unconscious', also termed as the subconscious. The conscious mind is constantly supported by unconscious resources. By halting our thoughts, stilling our minds, engaging in mental silence, we give ourselves mental rest, when it comes up with the very best of thoughts that can deliver more truths of life. Yoga is an exalted state of the mind. It starts with stopping of the thinking process.

The aim of yoga is not only to control the surface of the mind but also to rein the mind in depth, thereby requiring establishment in moral values. It is self-administered, drugless psychotherapy.

Access to the subconscious mind therefore comes from calming the surface and on coming in contact with certain external factors when the necessary conditions are fulfilled for these subtle impressions to manifest. And this may happen while going to sleep, under drug or alcohol, or even in coma when the play of conscious mind is withdrawn, even though the subconscious mind continues to control all the vital processes and functions of our body. Most activities of the human brain are unconscious and routine. The condition of a person's vegetative life is regulated in an unconscious fashion. Without any conscious choice on our part, our heart is kept functioning automatically, and the vital functions of digestion, blood circulation, and breathing are carried on by our subconscious mind through processes independent of our conscious control.

Almost all of our activities involve subconscious to conscious processing. So all the conscious processes are bound to be influenced by unconscious pre-conditions, such as past experience and emotions. Every thought, word, or act of a person goes to form her or his tendencies, impressions in the subconscious state. That's why Swamiji warned us to be careful about what we do or think. What we are and do in the conscious mind is on the surface. An iceberg floating on water can serve as a useful metaphor to understand this unconscious mind. As only a small percentage of the whole iceberg is visible above the surface, the conscious mind is like the top of an iceberg, a small portion of the whole. We spend our entire life living on this surface of the mind. That's why the mystic Bengali poet Kazi Nazrul Islam lamented that our entire life is spent in floating on the surface while it should have been a deep inward-flowing river: '*Tomar jale roilam beshe jonam obdhi*; I have been floating on your waters all my life.'

Imagine our life as a flowing river. Throughout our life, we keep on floating on the surface of the river. Spiritual life is an attempt to go beyond the limitations of our present state and can be achieved only by transforming the conscious mind. There are three states of the mind: unconscious, conscious, and superconscious. The unconscious, apart from the instinctive drives, is a storehouse of samskaras or past tendencies. The instinctive mind is also the seat of passions, desires, sensations, and feelings of the lower order that we have in common with animals. The intellect is the mental principle that separates humans from lower animals. Our education system is aimed to enrich this. Apart from the intellect, the conscious mind comprises concepts, emotions, imagination, and intuition.

The next higher level is the awakening of the intuitive mind, being a part of the

superconscious mind, which sets in motion spiritual powers. The intellect uses the rational mind, while the intuitive mind uses the heart. The inspiration for transformation comes from the awakened heart, but the natural tendency is to follow the dominant mandate of our in-born habits in spite of better promptings. Sri Krishna rightly said in the Bhagavadgita that it is a natural tendency for one to go after one's own in-built nature. Even a wise person, aware of good and bad qualities, acts according to, in keeping with, one's own disposition or nature. Therefore, all living beings conform to and follow their nature.⁸

The conscious mind of the experiencer continues to create impressions under the surface of the mind and carry on as memory in the subconscious mind, but if we go deeper into the unconscious mind, we cannot readily remember. It is well known that our perceptions and cognitions are overwhelmingly determined by our subconscious minds. We are moved by our impulses, habits, and tendencies which are embedded in our subconscious minds. Thus, we live in the past and are not anxious to live in the present. In spite of our best efforts, we are forced to do certain actions, which are harmful, not only once, but repeatedly. When we are directed by an impulse, all our controls slip away, though we regret it later. Arjuna asks Sri Krishna in the Gita: 'Impelled by what does a person, though unwillingly, engage oneself in wrongdoings, as if compelled by force?' (3.36). All this behaviour only verifies that we are governed by our subconscious mind and that the conscious mind is of not much help. When we try to concentrate in meditation, the mind is also distracted to catch the depth as we normally cannot control the subconscious mind. So, the subconscious mind has a major role in shaping the future and the character of an individual.



There is no physical or chemical process to wipe out the imprints of the subconscious mind. Our mind is a slave to unexpected and undesirable forces lurking within us. The law of mass action in physical chemistry, propounded by Cato Maximilian Guldberg (1836–1902) and Peter Waage (1833–1900), says that the direction and dynamics of a chemical reaction are determined by the remaining amount of reactants: 'The substitution force, other conditions being equal, is directly proportional to the product

of the masses provided each is raised to a particular exponent.⁹ This law can also be stated in these words: 'At constant temperature, the rate of a chemical reaction is directly proportional to the active mass of the reactant present at that time.'¹⁰

The mind also operates on the same lines. Sri Krishna says in the Gita: 'For, by that very past practice, one is carried forward even in spite of oneself.'¹¹ The good and bad tendencies remaining in our subconscious mind will simply overcome the mind by their sheer mass and might put a person on a particular track, through the efforts made in previous births stored as seeds in *samskaras*. If the tendencies with which a person is born are good, the growth would be conducive to spiritual well-being. The abovementioned law says that the momentum of these tendencies will carry one a long way and a little effort will meet with great success.

There is no disparity in the world that one usually grumbles about. It is solely one's actions in this or previous life that cause apparently whimsical effects. The impressions of past acts will follow like shadows throughout one's life and there is no escape from it. There is no physical or chemical process by which one could wipe out all the imprints of past actions. In this context the thoughts of the French mathematician and moralist Blaise Pascal (1623–662) challenge us: 'We never keep ourselves to the present moment. We look forward to the future as too slow in coming, as if to hasten its arrival, or we remember the past to hold it up as if it had happened too quickly. We are so undiscerning that we stray into times which are not our own and do not think of the only one that is truly ours, and so vain that we dream about those which no longer exist and allow the present to escape without thinking about it.'¹²

Transformation:

The Role of Neuroplasticity

Spiritual life is an overall transformation from different bodily and mental states. It involves turning inward and withdrawing from the external environment. But our present attitude, behaviour, and reactions are largely determined by our past experiences, as highlighted earlier, and continues to disturb our present life. For a spiritual aspirant, it is important to weed the mind out of all unwanted subconscious impressions and tendencies. We are to undermine the baser inclinations that have taken root in our subconscious mind. It is possible to sow the desired plant only after replacing the weeds from the ground and making it fertile. The furrows that have been dug should be smoothed by the newly ploughed ones. It is like cleaning an old dirty inkpot requiring persistent pouring of clean water, much like pouring good thoughts into the subconscious mind by the conscious mind. Apart from the conscious mind, our mind is comprised of the unconscious mind, lying below the conscious mind, and the superconscious that lies above the conscious mind. Thus, one has to organise three categories of transformations:

Transformation within the subconscious mind • The main fight in controlling the mind is against these impressions because they influence, inspire, and affect our creative urge. Planning is necessary to fight against these impressions with the conscious mind. Much of the early struggle in spiritual life is to free the conscious from the hold of the unconscious.

Transformation of the subconscious mind to the conscious mind • The more one's past is rediscovered and accepted, the more the unconscious mind gets transformed into conscious mind.

Transformation of the conscious mind to the superconscious • This superconscious is also

called *turiya* or transcendent when the mind is freed from all impressions, both of the conscious and subconscious levels.

To obtain anything in life, we must first examine whether our pre-programmed subconscious mind is right and is in tune with our present wish. If it is not in line with the wish, we better bring changes in our mindset and alter the programming. The best way to overcome the previous programming is to replace that programming with new programming. This means continued affirmations. We were programmed to do every single step we take. Every word we heard from someone, we took it and placed into our conscious mind.

All inputs to the conscious mind go into the subconscious mind for processing, which in turn creates a reaction, or what was processed is stored in memory for later retrieval. On coming in contact with certain external factors like environment, association, and so on, the necessary conditions are fulfilled for these inbuilt impressions to manifest. Everyone is born with a certain spiritual potential and if this is not actuated to the full extent, one's life would be in vain.¹³ If one does not consciously avoid impure company, one will be unable to remove evil tendencies from the mind. Bad company is easier to avoid by the conscious mind but the effect of our former imprinted bad company and impure thoughts thereof is far more troublesome to get rid of.

The seeds of desires are to be burnt, for which the first step is getting established in moral disciplines. Removal of bad *samskaras* is the solution suggested by Sri Ramakrishna and great masters. This means that the mind needs forcible and repeated assertion of higher nature and good *samskaras*, which are taken over by the subconscious mind. If the inbuilt tendencies with which a person is born are dominantly good and

the environment provided for one's growth is conducive to spiritual well-being, the momentum of these tendencies can carry her or him a long way and a little exertion or effort will meet with great success. So one should start filling the mind with nobler thoughts, clean bad *samskaras* with good ones since our brain and psyche are plastic organs.

The mind is forced to be occupied with good thoughts. One should continue to think spiritual thoughts or the precepts of Vedanta till one falls asleep and till death, as goes the popular adage of Vedanta: '*Asupteramriteh kalam nayet Vedanta chintaya*; spend time on thinking Vedantic thoughts till you fall asleep.' The mind can be controlled through habit and dispassion as said in the Gita.¹⁴ Sri Krishna also says that patiently, little by little, one must free oneself from all mental distractions with the aid of intelligent will (6.25).

Modern science supports this through the principles of neuroplasticity. According to neuroplasticity, thinking, learning, and acting actually changes both the brain's functional and physical anatomy. Neuroplasticity allows adaptation to any and all experiences, good or bad, and the changes we may encounter, freeing us from merely responding reflexively as a consequence of genetically determined hardwiring. The plasticity of the brain works in two directions; it is responsible for deleting old connections as frequently as it enables the creation of new ones.¹⁵ It means it has the ability to learn, adapt to its environment with all the challenges brought with it, and acquire new knowledge from fresh experiences throughout an individual's lifetime.

This happens through a change in the strength of the neural connections, adding or removing connections, and by the formation of new cells. This means that we have the potential

for successful intervention, but it also means that planned and unplanned interventions may have undesired, direct and indirect effects. Of course, what is desirable to one person may be undesirable to another. Some of our most stubborn habits and disorders are products of our plasticity. Once a particular plastic change occurs in the brain and becomes well established, it can prevent other changes from occurring. It obeys two key principles: requires repetition and an appropriate amount of intensity. According to yogis, it takes a practice of twelve years to achieve this plastic change.

With the attainment of these qualities, the automatic power that one generates in oneself is a spontaneous energy that speaks in its own language. It is the language of nature itself. It is the feeling of things, which is different from psychological functions. These feelings, which are supernormal, are nothing but the vibrations that are produced in harmony with the natural system of things. But our practice really helps us to break down the obstacles as the cultivator does for the irrigation of land as illustrated in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*.¹⁶ All weakness is dropped with one's original, natural divine perfection rendered free and fully manifest.

Some Indications of Inner Transformation

One cannot find one's own drawbacks until one has lived a life of continence. It is through pain and failures that one might reach the summit of spiritual life. But experience is the highest proof when it comes to changing one's temperament and outlook of life. Such a person does not display her or his strength but the very appearance, attitude, and behaviour reveal strength. Just like a thoughtful person may learn much of God's wisdom and goodness amidst the solitude of nature and its salient laws. In the words of Sri

Ramakrishna: 'When flowers bloom in the deep woods, the bees find them.'¹⁷ Further one cannot know and be a great judge of oneself, since facial expression, body language, words, behaviour, and actions can really be judged by others. Listed below are some of the visible qualities that signify inner transformation:

Tolerance: Progress in spiritual life is visualised through the experience of awakenings like conversion of ethical precepts into conduct and training oneself to be conscientious, detached, and temperate. As a result, inner struggle would appear to one, who otherwise has a truce with the lower mind. The attitude of a person with a developed mind is that we are not the only ones in the world who have been singled out to struggle, and these struggles are not to last forever.

A New Set of Values: When one grows to appreciate one's inner self, the attachment to the outer world gradually diminishes. Most relevant in this context is the quote of the Greek cynic philosopher Diogenes while roaming in a market: 'How many things I can do without.'¹⁸ One will perhaps be able to develop a new set of values. **Conserve mental energy by philosophically accepting inevitabilities of life, diseases and old age, fortunes, and karmic forces.**

Sensitivity: The development of a high degree of sensitivity of the sense organs in worldly dealings is an asset in spiritual life. Normally, the degree of human sensitivity varies from person to person. Some require physical assault, some rude words, while for the most sensitive, a mere gesture is enough for conveying disapproval. Nerves become more susceptible even to subtle forms of joys and sorrows. Such a person sees suffering everywhere as pointed by Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*.¹⁹ This means that most discriminative persons can see everything in the world as full of sorrow. The Gita says that just as fire is covered with smoke, every endeavour in this world is associated with some defects.²⁰ In this world anything having creative power is also

associated with destructive power. For example, water extinguishes fire but the very constituent of water, oxygen, when brought in contact with hydrogen, bursts into fire.

Suffering: We do not always think best in our cool hour. Tremor and sadness often agitate the soul far more powerfully than joy or security. They inject emotion and sentiments higher in intensity and momentum. The aspirant sees that all worldly suffering is a God-given opportunity for one's own spiritual benefit as if for testing one's strength and forbearance. The ideal of mukti becomes real only when one feels intense suffering. It is the time when the inner force acts in full extent.

A spiritual aspirant relates all problems in life with God. It is God's way to infuse in us the required strength to go through the inner struggles. Even great litterateurs like Rabin-dranath Tagore, mystic poets Atul Prasad Sen and Rajanikanta Sen created their best in the times of their difficulties. The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi said: 'Misery is truly a gift of God. I believe it is a symbol of His compassion.'²¹ 'Misery is a greater teacher than happiness', said Swamiji.²² The famous prayer to the Lord by Kunti, mother of the Pandavas, in the Bhagavata, illustrates that a true spiritual seeker aspires difficulties all through to get the presence of the Almighty just to develop one's discriminative power: 'I wish there were more of those calamities, oh Master of the universe, so that we could meet you again and again, for meeting you means that one no longer is confronted with a material existence.'²³

Acceptance: Accept all things as they come due to the effects of past actions and develop the wisdom to tackle situations without complaining and keeping an open mind. Everything that we encounter, read, or hear has something to teach us. A thoughtful person learns much of Almighty's wisdom and goodness amidst solitudes of nature and its laws like the Avadhuta in the Bhagavata.

Non-attachment: Develop dispassion towards the objects of the senses. When one passes through moral and spiritual tempests the test is whether we are becoming less attached; when the mind is away from sense objects, whether we are able to stand on our own feet. When one grows in inner values and the attachment to the outer world gradually diminishes, then one will perhaps be able to tolerate a few harsh remarks about this outer covering, thereby developing a new outlook.

Sublimation of Ego: The greatest sign of spiritual development is the sublimation of ego, which drops down to a minimum. In the language of Sri Ramakrishna, such a developed and sublimated ego is the ripe ego. Jesus Christ said: 'Thy will be done.'²⁴ One will have no separate will for oneself. The personality is totally merged with one's chosen ideal. Such a person will not display her or his strength or fear anybody else in the world as there is no duality. With the opening of spiritual vision, the inner meaning of everything becomes clear and thereby attains an unimaginable progress in any work.

The Golden Law of Adjustment: If, however, one wants to lead an idealistic life, one is required to follow Sri Ramakrishna, who taught the Holy Mother to 'adjust one's conduct according to time, place, and circumstances.'²⁵ He connects every action, every experience to spiritual growth. In the words of Swamiji: 'Adjust the microcosm (which is in your power to do) and the macrocosm will itself adjust for you.'²⁶

Conclusion

We are merged in our own world by creating our own inner time, psychological and physiological, the inner world through our inbuilt samskaras. 'The world is God and is real, but that is not the world we see. ... "taking the thing for what is not" ... We see reality, but distorted by the medium through which we see it', said Swamiji in

the *Inspired Talks* (7.33). So we have to struggle to control, to overcome, through scriptural disciplines including yoga. Swamiji assured: 'Relative knowledge is good, because it leads to absolute knowledge' (ibid.).

If the intentions and practices are sincere, selfless, and unwavering, matters are so arranged that one shall acquire requisite aids for spiritual pursuit from the so-called distorted medium as occasions arise. Thus, all the so-called resistance would cease, the personality becomes a fit vehicle for the transmission of perfection, as is illustrated in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*, which has this to say about the practice of truthfulness: 'Once a state of truth has been permanently established, each statement will form the basis for a truthful result.'²⁷ The practice of truthfulness develops and purifies the intellect in a remarkable manner and the mind of a person, who has acquired perfection in this virtue becomes like a mirror reflecting the divine Mind to some extent. One has to develop truthfulness to such a high degree. Such an aspirant becomes a mirror of truth and whatever one says or does reflects that truth. Naturally, whatever such a person says will come true; whatever such a person attempts to accomplish will be accomplished. 

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