

II-6. Clash of World-Views

Zen is like a man hanging in a tree by his teeth over a precipice. His hands grasp no branch, his feet rest on no limb, and under the tree another person asks: "Why did Bodhidharma come to China from India?" If the man in the tree does not answer, he fails; and if he does answer, he falls and loses his life.

-Paul Reps in *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*

About 4000 years ago parallel to the developments along the Ganga Valley, a different world-view had evolved along the Euphrates and Nile rivers. Its focus was centralized power. The idea of omnipotent was backed up by the priests who concocted omniscience. The reverse also came into play as the herders and horseman justified their conquests in the name of omniscience. Around 700 BCE the horsemen who called themselves *Ary* (Aryan in English) introduced the horse to the Ganga Valley region, and claimed the territory wherever the horse went. The Vedic thought with distinct ancient Persian and Middle-Eastern roots moved east of Sindhu valley over several centuries. Relatively small in numbers, these people with lighter skin celebrated horse as a divine symbol of the superiority of their class and knowledge. Their wars and violence against native populations is possibly the subject of Mahabharat and Ramayan Epics. They asserted the hand of 'unknowable supreme' in the workings of the world, including the affairs of Man. In their onslaught they took up many of the local traditions and myths. Their practices and beliefs solidified into dogma around 700 BCE as codified in Jamini Sutr and Manu Smrti which were used centuries later to establish the system of birth based castes.

Vedic idea of knowledge is as the grace from omniscience that is validated by omnipotence. It collided with the tradition of Ganaga valley where Arihants has surmised that the world is intelligible to humans through human efforts. Mahaveer refuted the ideas of grace and judgment. He opposed the caste system, and appealed for compassion towards all living beings. For his stand against rituals and violence Mahaveer is to this day credited as a reformer of the Hindu practices and thought. However both sides stand turf even to this day: **One with the belief that there is no reason to believe in omniscience, and the other with the conviction that there is no evidence against omniscience.** A generally peaceful coexistence has prevailed. It is worth examining the roots of the conflict and the solutions that evolved. At the dawn of 21st Century, the deeper issues are still very much relevant in the international context. It goes right to the crux of the beliefs and practices through which perceptions and knowledge interact and guide rational behavior and conduct to improve human condition.

The criteria-based secular approach towards human knowledge is now universally recognized. Yet it is not as widely practiced. It continues to be at odds with ancient belief systems thrust on the mass-psyche. For example, in line with the belief system of Ary, the dominant belief systems of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions also assert the hand of 'unknowable supreme' in each and every-thing including the affairs of Man. The same sentiment is rooted in the Platonic universals. Such idealizations, not necessarily rooted in practice, have permeated into most, if not all, of the offshoots of the Western Philosophy and thought where ideas appear to have independent validity without being practiced.

Insight: Mathematics adheres to the consistency of the initial axioms and the derived relations have internal consistency with the axioms. Such constructs are rational and conform to reality, but not necessarily real. Demonstrated consistency beyond the initial axioms always requires additional axioms and proof.

Insight: It is far too dangerous to implement random and untested thought. Ideas judged to be rational are all too often implemented ad hoc by those who do not follow the same dictates. As a matter of fact Plato's Republic continues to be a favorite source of inspiration for many despots, autocrats and dictators whose whims subject humans to vagaries of wars. In terms of the futility of approach, the record of divine insights is not enviable.

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