Psycho-Analysis and Spirituality

by

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There are innumerable English jokes about how there is nothing a Scotsman likes better than a prolonged metaphysical discussion. Whatever truth there may be in this there is no denying that the Englishman of today, perhaps through some form of mental laziness, tends to be allergic to metaphysics or to subtleties of dialectic.

We are assured that in the Eighteenth century the leading officials of John Company learned in contact with Mogul courts to lard their conversation freely with tags from Hafiz and other Persian poets rather as they would have larded it with Horace in London; but for all that we may suspect that they remained strangers to the subtle symbolisms of this Sufi poetry. Warren Hastings was atypical in grasping the importance of the *Bhagavadgita* and sponsoring 180 years ago the first English translation.

Since 1785 there have been many translations into English of Hindu sacred texts and of commentaries on these texts, although there are still large fields almost untouched. Moreover books setting out popularized, simplified and distorted versions of Hindu doctrines are to be found in bookshops everywhere. Many of these claim to teach disciplines which give new powers to mind, memory or body. There are also gramophone records on sale giving instruction in *Hatha yoga* exercises and one Midland town has even organized large and very popular public classes in which some of the simpler *asanas* and control of breathing are taught to pupils whose aim—one may suspect—is a rather indefinite one of learning relaxation and getting better health.

Nobody could deny that an ill-organized body, undisciplined imagination and uncontrolled attention involve waste of precious energy and are a handicap in any serious undertaking, but all this is a very long way from the metaphysics or the spiritual paths which are the central concern of Hinduism and its sacred scriptures.

There is a gulf between the outlook of the world in which we live and that of traditional India and very few are the authors who have been able with true understanding to bridge that gulf and set out faithfully for the West what can be put into books of its doctrines. Some books have been distorted by methodical misrepresentation, others by powerful preconceptions in the writers' minds. Above

all, and very understandably, there has been incomprehension of subtle and complex ideas which Hindus would not have thought of trying to master without the personal guidance and experiment involved in actually following a spiritual discipline under a qualified *guru.*

In recent years Hindu doctrines have been approached by some Europeans from a new angle—that of one or other of the schools of analytical psychology. This does not apply to Freud, who was a skeptic in these matters, so much as to Jung and many who were in some degree his disciples. Jung's uncomprehending and arrogant approach to Hindu doctrines has been compared to that of a Chinese emperor to the learning of barbarians from the West. Notably his misunderstanding of the doctrine of the *Atman*, the Self, helped to falsify the whole of his interpretation. But other workers in this field have also gone exploring India and some have come to suspect that certain tenets of Western psycho-therapy based on a study of mental and psychic maladies among Europeans have not their supposed universal validity and that there are confusions between different levels and a blindness to realms beyond the psyche.

Some of the resulting books have been very slight but Western *Psycho-Therapy and Hindu Sadhana* by Dr. Hans Jacobs[1] can be welcomed for a number of reasons. The author tells us that from an early age he was concerned to find an answer for himself to some of the problems side-stepped by Western science. After study in the Vienna school he became a pupil of Jung from 1936 to 1939 and then practiced as a psycho-therapist, mainly in Australia, for nine years before going to Ceylon and India for four years. Since writing this book in Germany he seems to have returned to India. As he says he is personally responsible for the translation of most of the wide range of Sanskrit texts he quotes, it would seem that he must have made a serious study of Sanskrit.

From internal evidence one supposes the author's mother tongue to be German and there are occasional unfortunate turns of phrase, some of which may be due to careless proof-reading, but on the whole the style is admirably clear.

A good deal of the book is taken up with criticism—forceful and clear—of Jung and Freud and of the treatment of schizophrenics and psychotics by shock, chemical and surgical techniques. There are also, regrettably, extensive case-histories of his own psychotic patients, reproductions of the pictures they painted for him during treatment and his interpretation of those pictures. In all this part he appears to lose sight of the profound difference between psycho-analysis and Hindu *sadhana*[2] which he so clearly expounds in other passages. It is as if he could not get away from his past.

A more important criticism of the book may be connected—if one may thus psychologise—with something in the author's past colouring his judgment. It is when he says of the traditional religious beliefs of the West as they come down to us that they

[1] Allen and Unwin, 1961.

[2] There is no satisfactory English equivalent and Dr. Jacobs rejects the frequent misuse of the word *yoga* as a translation.

are now too trivial, too insignificant and too used-up to be any longer usable. Nobody could dispute that they are denied or ignored by a very large part of our peoples today and are often presented in a form so watered-down as to be barely recognisable, but it is not intelligent of Dr. Jacobs thus to denigrate the value of what remains. He tells us he has traversed India from its Southern tip to Kedarnath, from Bombay to Calcutta, that he has lived in Banaras, that he watched the great gathering of Kumbha Mela (which takes place only once in twelve years), and that he has taken part in sessions of prayer and chanting, of *japa*, lasting round the clock and he has also had the benefit of contact with some of the great exponents of orthodox schools of Hindu doctrine and spiritual practice. He will have seen how the peoples of India, often excitable and credulous, are very much swept up in the agitations of corrupt politics and the industrialising and modernising of their country, and are often, as he says, seemingly indifferent and skeptical about religion. But he must surely have seen that underneath all this there is still widely persistent a belief in the reality of the Goal spoken of by the sages of old; even if the genuineness of this or that *sadhaka* may be questioned in circles of Western-style culture, the idea of the Delivered Sage will be in some sense venerated. And this could not persist apart from the omnipresence of something of the Hindu tradition—its external forms as well as its devotees and sages.

The great merit of Dr. Jacobs's book lies in his sympathetic and understanding exposition of the Hindu point of view. He shows very clearly the nature of the blinkers worn by most Indologists and especially by many of the Germans. Among the exceptions he singles out René Guénon, whose expositions are the more remarkable because he never went to India, and Sir John Woodroffe, who managed to combine with a distinguished official career study under a *guru* at Banaras, and is indeed believed by many to have received the initiation of the *Gayatri* Mantra.

He warns us, not only against the prejudices of Indologists but also against those *ashrams* from which there today emanates a stream of literature in English and where one is liable to meet Americans and Europeans. In these he says that a teaching is presented which is in fact simplified, denatured and distorted. This is a sweeping judgment and indeed he himself cites with reverence more than one spiritual master—Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi is one of them—whose ashram is or was sought by European admirers. None the less the warning is valuable and he might well have taken warning to approach with more caution the writings of Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda.

A number of investigators have been intrigued and puzzled by the way in which some African tribes settle all their tribal problems by arriving without voting at a unanimous consensus of opinion, so firmly are we conditioned to a divisive, " this-or-that" way of looking at things. The traditional Hindu world exemplifies a strong adsorptive tendency; it relies on the general atmosphere to make one out of two, to ingest points of view which stray from orthodoxy. Even in our own times aberrant manifestations have been thus neutralised; probably Dr. Jacobs met persons who

would be considered traditionally fully orthodox but spoke admiringly of Vivekananda and Aurobindo having in mind only the positive aspects of their work.

We do not live in such an atmosphere. We are busily preoccupied with peripheral matters where fields of study are increasingly fragmented and often manage to hold in different fields an astonishing variety of mutually incompatible views.

St Bernard wrote with scorn of the many whose "supreme desire and only care it is to investigate the manner and order of things done. They call themselves natural philosophers but by us they are more rightly called vain and curious men." They represent what is the most admired aim of our modern educational system in seeking to meet the "need" for more rapid technological advance.

On the one hand many would define man as deriving from a fertilised ovum in which is imprinted a genetic pattern—a mathematical or physico-chemical formula—which determines everything of the subsequent cellular multiplication and diversification and maintains the structure more or less intact till it perishes. In this definition thoughts and memories are defined as electro-chemical impulses. Man is then no longer thought of as coming on the scene "not in entire forgetfulness but trailing clouds of glory"; from beginning to end he is in this view a material compound. But they do not apply such thinking to themselves. Scientists may devise elaborate series of experiments for the express purpose of proving that all animals including man are automata and that the inconvenient idea of bodily operations being purposive to a foreseen end can be safely eliminated as an unneeded hypothesis, but somehow they exclude themselves from the category of those whose operations are not purposive. For all their theories they none the less try to hide even from themselves the sharp ineluctability of their own death and decay, or to drape it in the fanciful periphrases of the "mortician."

Christians would no doubt say that besides the body and the genetic structure of the scientists there is an immortal soul, though they are not always very clear what they mean. Sometimes they think of the soul as something like the life-principle, rather as Hadrian probably did when composing on his death-bed the poem addressed to his soul:

> "*Animula, vagula, blandula,*
> *Hospes, comesque corporis,*
> *Quae nunc abibis in loca…?*"[3]

Sometimes perhaps they think of it as just themselves, "not leaving out the warts" but only the materiality. In any case all of us in the West are accustomed to envisage things historically—even immortality.

[3] Little, winsome, wandering thing,
Bosom friend and guest today,
Whither now, my soul away…

Modern logicians and mathematicians would say it is possible for a series not to have a first term in contrast to the common view that what has no end has no beginning, but human immortality is none the less apt to be envisaged as an endless extension of time after death which yet has its beginning at birth.

A very different outlook is to be found in the East and it is not easy for us to divest ourselves of our view of time and really understand it. There is a much more definite approach both to the idea of time and "outside time" and to what we are to mean by "man."

Scientists now assure us that psychic life in man begins some time before birth and that, if he is not considered as beginning at the moment of conception, his life really begins with his psychic life. Psycho-analysts even claim to have contacted and brought to expression intra-uterine memories. Be this as it may, it is rare for man to retain in adult life conscious memories even of the first year or two of life; in that period he seems to live in the moment and in the animal field of sensory needs and satisfactions while learning to interpret sensory data and to control bodily functions.

Such memories as we do consciously retain even from the first three years or so are usually connected with bodily discoveries or acute sensations. Even from the first four or five years the memories we retain are often in part spurious; either adults built them up by talk or we ourselves did so in frequent telling of them. On such grounds I strongly suspect my seemingly clear memories of Swinburne and of Queen Victoria; perhaps Dr. Johnson's memory of Queen Anne was also built up in this way.

Instead of taking man's life as starting before birth we might in another sense take it as starting after he begins to talk—not in isolated words recognised as symbols (in the original Greek sense of the word) for a particular object or for a whole category of objects, but in connected speech. At this stage a hierarchy of quality or value begins to be established, emanating either from himself or from his environment, and dreams and imaginations begin to range widely. I and other are separated.

The developments noticeable at this stage it is fashionable to explain, after Freud, as incidental concomitants of the development towards reproductive maturity. There is no need to rush to the other extreme and maintain that they have no close connection with sex because one believes their primary importance to be connected with the beginnings of a new and supra-sensory possibility, though one which in most cases soon fades into the light of common day.

At each moment we are assailed by a battery of potential stimuli to our various senses but we respond only to such as appear to be significant. Undeniably most men live out their lives on the basis that significance is attributable only, or almost only, to what concerns their "animal" nature—sex, food, physical danger, comforts, dominance of others and the like. Dr. Jacobs quotes an Indian saying that what we think we become, and it applies not only to our thinking.

If, as Blake asserted, the wise man and the fool do not see the same tree, it is because the former has learned to see the tree not as a *Cedrus atlantica* or as so much vendable timber but as a symbol or reflection from a supra-sensual order

When Plato related, or invented, his account of a feast or drinking party at which Socrates relates a story of his meeting with Diotima, he wrote for readers who in this sense had something of wisdom and were also familiar with the idea of the inadequacy of words in relation to things divine. Eleusis did not teach through words and, though Plato has warned us that we do not know all he taught, we can be fairly sure that words were not the sole means of instruction at the Academy.

The new horizons of which we catch glimpses in early childhood introduce us to the Muses; poetry, for example, is not just a matter of rhythms and surface meaning, for it seeks to convey through subtle overtones arousing in us sympathetic vibrations more than can be explicit in words. Among illiterate and "primitive" peoples one can still meet with diction and images which are in this sense poetry, but everything in our world conspires to banish divinities; even music tends to be regarded just as a sensory stimulant, its composition as mental ingenuity in producing novel and exciting effects. And, sad to tell, Indian music has begun to be affected in the same way as one cannot but note from the loud speakers which blare out sentimental music from films in every bazaar.

The intuitions of childhood are most likely to fructify where the climate of opinion favours belief in the existence of higher possibilities for man, where religious faith and symbolisms are in the air and, above all, if there is contact with someone in whom the possibilities in question have been in large measure actualised. But our society is dedicated to a worship of technics and quantity. The economics of machine production require the making of large batches of goods as nearly identical as possible and this in turn requires that the mass media of propaganda should be directed to creating a corresponding market. Uniformity in "keeping up with the Joneses" must be inculcated so that these goods come to be regarded as necessities. Suitable titillation of sex appetites disastrously becomes a means for inducing a conviction that fullness of life means a more elaborate standard of living. Fortunately for the advertisers there is, alas, no limit to the number of things people can be trained to look on as necessary.

It was not always so in the West. Such founders of the modern scientific method as Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo deliberately abstracted from the total range of impressions we receive from nature those elements having quantitative aspects between which mathematical relations could be shown to exist and held other qualities to be wholly subjective and without existence apart from our senses, but we must remember that Copernicus had been influenced by the Pythagorean and neo-Platonic doctrines he had met in Italy to believe that numbers were primarily symbols of quality and that somehow mathematics held the key to the manifest universe. He cannot be supposed to have foreseen that the scientific method would lead to the vivid world of the Middle Ages, rich in beauty and instinct with purpose, being dismissed by science as an illusion, and the real world being conceived as consisting of "material particles" moving according to mathematical laws.

For anyone literate in elementary algebra $4x=y^2=2(x+y)$ is a precise statement, but it is a statement about quantities only, whereas in human experience there is always

some element of quality. The stronger the element of quality the less can the words of prose fully and explicitly correspond to it. Words have not only such private and personal associations as psychologists lay stress on in their free association tests, they also often have "historical" associations for a given society and at least some have a well nigh universal significance as symbols. "The Tao which can be named is no longer the Tao," and the nearer to the Tao, we might say, the less can words directly serve to define.

"Whatever is here is there; Whatever is there is here: From death to death he goes who sees things here as different." This dictum of the *Kathopanishad* could be paralleled in many other sacred writings. It is possible to study the material and psychic worlds as books in which are reflected truths that lie above and outside the world of form. If that is not the case with modern science is it not because scientists have prejudices, false preconceptions and blind spots—they are not unique in this—and so pose loaded questions, carry out loaded experiments and refrain from asking themselves questions about "awkward" phenomena?

But, to return to the Hindu approach to the questions of time and man's relation to it, it is useful to recall what was more than once said by Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi: "Why do you want to know what you will be before you know what you are now? If you do not understand yourself, what is the use of trying to understand the world?" Certainly Hindus speak of leaving the body at death only to be somehow reborn, but the real Goal is envisaged as a Deliverance or a Realisation going beyond conditions and so also beyond time.

"If thy bonds be not broken while thou livest," sang Kabir, "what hope is there of deliverance in death? It is an empty dream that the soul must pass to union with Him because it hath passed from the body. If He is found now, He is found then, if not, we go to dwell in the city of Death."

Both in Hinduism and in Buddhism there exist disciplines related to the question: "Who am I?" They sound rather like stripping an onion of its skins: not this; not this; not this. The very process of thought is stilled and what remains is in one sense no thing, in another a vision of Reality. The *Mahasatipatthana Sutta* describes an analogous Buddhist practice for the setting up of Mindfulness, one which would appear horrible to an unprepared Westerner who tried to carry it out. It calls for sitting in a suitable posture in a quiet, solitary, place and establishing by meditation and visualisation a tranquil consciousness of the body as impermanent in all its doings; then it must be realised as dying, as dead, as decomposing, as reduced to dust; there follows a dispassionate externalising in turn of all feelings, all thoughts and all ideas. It must be deeply understood that none of all these have real existence.

But it would be quite wrong to suppose that this leads to a negative result as might seem inevitable from a Western standpoint.

Dr. Jacobs believes that the essential content of Hinduism will come to be known and rightly understood by at least an elite in the West and will then have as great an effect as the Renaissance, though in the sense of a true spiritual rebirth. I would be

glad to feel able to share his confidence but can only pray that his own *sadhana* may be protected from error and blessed.

He quotes from the *Kularnava Tantra* one warning passage worth requoting. "In this world are countless masses of beings suffering all manner of pain. Life ebbs away as if it were water out of a broken pot… The individual soul passes through hundreds of thousands of existences. Yet only as man can he obtain the truth. It is with great difficulty that one is born as a man. Therefore he is a self-killer who, having obtained such excellent birth, does not know what is for his good. Some there be who, having drunk the wine of delusion, are lost in worldly pursuits, reck not the flight of time and are not moved at the sight of suffering. There are others who have tumbled in the deep well of the six *Darshanas* (the orthodox Hindu schools)—and *are* idle disputants tossed on the bewildering ocean of the *Vedas* and *Shastras.* They study day and night and learn words. Some again, overpowered by conceit, talk of *Unmani* (the state beyond thinking) though not in any way realising it. Mere words and talk cannot dispel the delusion of the wandering… What then is there to do? The *Shastras* (sacred texts) are many, life is short and there are a million obstacles. Therefore their essence should be mastered…"

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