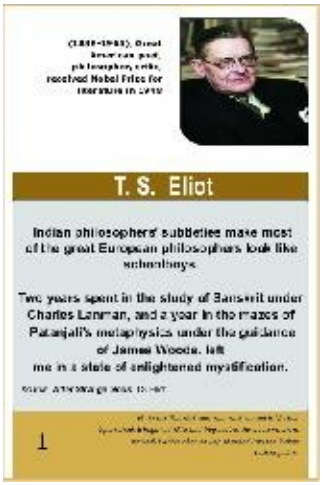
When will India appreciate its fathomless wisdom?

By : sgewali

What is Indian wisdom? Know the answer from the world renowned intellectual giants



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When will India appreciate its fathomless wisdom?

-- Bikash Sarmah

No matter how our self-styled secularists vilify ancient Indian or Hindu wisdom, there is an element of eternity and universality about that treasure trove. It is a great work of reason and analysis. And there is no confusion in the discourse. Such is its universality that the intelligent Westerner woke up to it long ago and discovered the wealth therein. Such is its practicality that when Albert Einstein deconstructed the long-held Newtonian world view in the early part of the 20th century, and when quantum mechanics from the other side revolutionized the whole course of physics and brought about a paradigm shift in our perception of matter and energy, the founding fathers of the evolving field had already taken resort in Hindu wisdom, and to their utter surprise found that Hindu wisdom and the broader framework of Eastern philosophy talked in the same language as modern physics was beginning to do. And it was not restricted to physics or mathematics alone. Even Western writers and philosophers began to appreciate Hindu wisdom, but not without struggling to comprehend the non-Newtonian Hindu world view â used as they were to a discrete, Newtonian notion of fundamentalism, both in the material and non-material world.

As acclaimed physicist and thinker Fritjof Capra says in his classic The Tao of Physics, â â The picture of an interconnected cosmic web which emerges from modern atomic physics has been used extensively in the East to convey the mystical experience of nature. For the Hindus, Brahman is the unifying thread in the cosmic web, the ultimate ground of all being... In Buddhism, the image of the cosmic web plays an even greater role. The core of the Avatamsaka Sutra, one of the main scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism, is the description of the world as a perfect network of mutual relations where all things and events interact with each other in an infinitely complicated way.â â

Such world view brings a lot of discomfort to the typical Western mind brought up in a culture that emphasizes only rigid fundamentals and overlooks the varied possibilities beyond the confinement of fundamentals, unlike in the Hindu system that rejects such fundamentalism and espouses a notion of the world, both material and spiritual, that jells wonderfully with the implications of the theories of modern physics. But how many know this? It is in this context that a compilation of Western thoughts on India and its ancient wisdom, titled **"Great minds on INDIA"**compiled by Salil Gewali and published by Academic Publications, Shillong, is pertinent. It captures the best of comments by Western intellectual giants on Hindu wisdom and its timelessness, reflecting also on the parallels between modern physics and Hindu wisdom. Let us hear some of them.

Werner Heisenberg, one of the founders of quantum mechanics and celebrated for his epoch-making Uncertainty Principle in quantum mechanics that rejects the Newtonian assertion of predicting the position and momentum of matter simultaneously, glorifies Hindu wisdom thus: â â After the conversations about Indian philosophy, some of the ideas of quantum physics that had seemed so crazy suddenly made much more sense.â â If Einstein says that â â we owe a lot to Indians who taught us how to count, without which no worthwhile scientific discovery could be madeâ â , Julius R Oppenheimer, the father of nuclear

bomb, goes further: â â What we shall find in modern physics is an exemplification, an encouragement and a refinement of old Hindu wisdom.â â

Come to TS Eliot, who needs no introduction. He says: â â Indian philosophersâ subtleties make most of the great European philosophers look like schoolboys.â â What Eliot means, in other words, is that when it comes to subtlety â that is, to the delicate refinement of ideas â most of the great European philosophers should rather be huddled in a classroom with an Indian philosopher teaching and guiding them. That is why Francois M Voltaire, one of the greatest French writers and philosophers, admits thus: â â I am convinced that everything has come down to us from the banks of the Ganga â astronomy, astrology, spiritualism etc. It is very important to note that some 2,500 years ago at the least Pythagoras went from Samos to the Ganga to learn geometry... But he would certainly not have undertaken such a strange journey had the reputation of the Brahminsâ science not been long established in Europe.â â And that is why Ralph Waldo Emerson, great American author and essayist, confesses to having been â â hauntedâ â by the Vedas. â â In them (the Vedas),â â Emerson says, â â I have found eternal compensation, unfathomable power, unbroken peace.â â And hence the candour, again, of Arthur Schopenhauer, one of the greatest German philosophers and writers: â â In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life; and it will be the solace of my death. They are the product of the highest wisdom.â â

Perhaps the best eulogy for India, as it truly deserves, has come from Frederich von Schlegel, acclaimed German writer, critic, philosopher, and one of the founders of German Romanticism: â â There is no language in the world, even Greek, which has the clarity and the philosophical precision of Sanskrit, and this great India is not only at the origin of everything, she is (also) superior in everything, intellectually, religiously or politically, and even the Greek heritage seems pale in comparison.â â

The booklet, What is India? is doubtless a unique venture, and the publishers deserve kudos for having accomplished such an onerous task as to compile comments on India and Hindu wisdom by a galaxy of Western intellectual giants and then to choose the best and the most relevant ones. The tragedy, however, remains: a pseudo-secular dispensation as we are blessed with at the Centre would hardly initiate any move to popularize ancient Indian wisdom, which is essentially Hindu, and call upon the youth of the country to rediscover their past and marvel at the sheer effulgence of Hindu wisdom â stemming not from any dogmatic, fundamentalist and conditioned world view, but from a holistic way of life and its liberating experience. This is so because the word â â Hinduâ â will invariably echo in any discourse on ancient Indian wisdom and the countryâ s perverse, self-styled secularists will discover a â communalâ agenda there â â against our pluralist ethosâ . These poor souls do not realize â nor do they want to â that whatever pluralist ethos the country today takes pride in and will sustain for all times is due solely to the Hindu way of life, a preponderant way of life in India. Why, look at how the other by-product of Partition, including Bangladesh, has evolved.

Our rich past must remain our greatest inspiration and inform our engagement with the world. Even quantum mechanics and all of its later avatars recognize that fact of life. Let us all be proud of it all.

(The writer is the Editor of â The Sentinelâ , a Guwahati-India-based, daily)

Preview of the book may be visited at : http://www.scribd.com/doc/36498555/What-is-India#fullscreen:on

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