

THE LIMITATIONS OF INTELLECT

by

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Since the intellect is our predominant instrument, religious exercises are likely to become excessively intellectual in their character, rather than being comprehensive. Often man has a predilection to be proud of his intellect, and it is well known, as it is said, "Pride goeth on horseback and cometh back on foot."

It is a satisfaction for many people to be regarded as intellectuals, and that the intellect is not the whole man is easily forgotten. The complacency arising out of the desire to be rational, intellectual, and on par with modern thinking is deleterious, finally, in the interest of the spiritual search of the human being.

That we are not wholly intellectuals will be seen when we are emotionally upset, counteracted by society, opposed in any manner, and we are irate, annoyed, and in a state of anguish or roused into anger. There is no one who is incapable of getting angry, which demonstrates the irrational character at the root of even the intellect of the human being. These things are brushed aside as non-essentials in the intellectual anxiety which man demonstrates even in his religion and spiritual exercises. There is a pride even in religion, and one can be proud of his own spiritual adventures. Pride is not necessarily a visible form of evil in

the world. It goes with holiness, and it can go with even God Himself as we conceive God in our intellects. Religious and yogic exercises such as classes commonly held in various parts of the world—watching the breath, for instance—are considered as a sort of meditation by forcefully exercising the will to concentrate on certain nervous centres in the body. Many are fond of concentrating on the centre between the two eyebrows, and feel a sense of pride in having achieved this concentration. There is a subtle desire to be recognised as religious in a world where recognition is the supreme value, where nothing else cuts ice. Here we are on feeble ground and seem to be walking on a dangerous precipice.

It is not true that man is predominantly intellectual. A point which Bergson made out in recent years in his great thesis called *Creative Evolution* is that man is basically irrational, and his rationality is an outcome of an irrational hypothesis that is always concealed by this reasoning power which cuts the world into the subjective side and the objective side, while there are no such sides in nature. Bergson wrote hundreds of pages on the harm that the intellect has done to man in his search for reality by duping him into the false notion that the intellect is the supreme faculty in the search for truth or knowledge of reality—which it is not. Man is not a psychological function such as analytical understanding, which is an aspect of the way in which the internal organ operates; and man is not merely an organ, even if it be an internal organ. Man cannot be identified with the mind, with the intellect, with feeling, with volition, with memory—all which are no doubt parts of human nature, yet none of them individually, separately, can be identified with human nature.

The spiritual search is not a psychological search; this is why it is distinguished from merely a psychological study. Religion, which can many-a-time be identified with spirituality in its essential, basic qualities, is not an operation of any psychic instrument of the human being. In fact, it is an operation of the whole of man. It has been dinned into our

ears by teachers of yoga that in yoga, in mysticism, in true religious pursuits, in spirituality, the whole of man reacts to the whole of the universe.

This wholeness of ours in a very intriguing peculiarity, which can easily be mistaken for the way in which we are used to thinking in our day-to-day existence. Now we are thinking in a particular way, here in this hall, during the hour of Satsanga, but this way of thinking is not the whole way of thinking that we are capable of. There are other ways of thinking which we can adopt under different conditions than the condition that is prevailing now, here in this hall. Hence, there are other aspects of our personality which do not get caught up into action at all times. The main item being ignored in the subliminal levels of human nature is the emotion and the feeling. We do not like to be called emotional and sentimental people; we would like to be called intellectuals and rationals. We feel that emotion is an evil, it is a kind of defect, and to be too feelingful and not be sufficiently endowed with rationality and a scientific outlook of understanding is *infra dig* in human society. It is difficult to understand why the intellect has been worshipped so much as a kind of demigod, while it does not seem that the intellect is dispassionately working as a sort of super-rationalistic instrument. That it is conditioned by our instincts is a very, very poignant point made out by psychoanalytical studies. We use the intellect to justify our feelings and our faiths, our traditions—even our whims and fancies, and submerged desires.

Reason is a very convenient tool to argue out our desires, which become demonstrably rational in scientific language when they are cast into the mould of this peculiar instrument we call intellectuality, which itself is difficult to define. We do not know what intellectuality means, though we seem to be acquainted with it and take for granted that we understand it thoroughly. It is a subtle mechanism which defies complete definition, but which can easily lead a person astray into the belief that it is the whole guide in human life. Rather, if we are a little more honest to ourselves, we will realise that

we are guided more by our feelings and emotions than by our reason and philosophy, though we would not like this to be the fact, and we would not like to be told that this is so. We would resent any kind of statement of this type. Philosophers are not emotional, instinctive people; yet all are not philosophers in the sense it has to be or was expected to be.

There is some remnant of the level from which we have risen in the series of evolutionary movements. That there are 84 *lakhs* (8,400,000) of species into which an individuality is born is told by our scriptures, which means that the human species is not the final word in the process of creation. We are also told that in order to reach this level of humanity we must have passed through many millions of other than human species whose remnants naturally persist in the psychic residue of our personality. Bergson even goes to the extent of saying that instinct is nearer to reality than reason or intellect. He is right in one way, though we may not understand in what way he is right because animals seem to have a greater instinct to catch things than human beings due to the spontaneous activity of their nature, free from the laboured operations of human reason. The intellect is not always spontaneous in its working; it requires great exercise and premeditation. But instincts do not require such labour; they are automatic. Computer-like they act spontaneously, and they catch the atmosphere in its essentiality. If we have been other than human species sometime, those instincts will persist in us, and will not permit us to be wholly intellectuals. We are capable of weeping and crying even if we be intellectuals. There can be times in the lives of people when they shed tears, and shedding tears is not an intellectual activity. It is some force other than intellectual, which is deeper and hiddenly present in man—the instinct of affection, love and hatred which take manifold forms and even get intellectualised.

Social rules and regulations sometimes act as impediments in being honest in life. Because we have to go with the world, where the world is honoured only for its reason, intellect and science, anything that is connected with

feeling is a persona non-grata. It is not a friend. Thus, we seem to be caught up in a network of certain social traditions and make-believes which hit upon us very hard and tether us down like prisoners in a cell of ignorance and continued habits, whether they have any relevance to fact or not.

Hence, mere intellectual exercise of a religious practice, which sometimes is very much honoured and adored among circles of seekers—such as kundalini yoga, hatha yoga, the concentration on breath, and so on—are all good enough in their own way and nothing is wrong with them, but they are not adequate to the purpose. There are secrets in man which even angels cannot easily know. God only knows what is inside us; even we cannot wholly know what is within us. So, it is a part of wisdom to be a little cautious in counting the various components of our nature, the building bricks of our personality, and see what stuff we are really made of. The occupations of life prevent us from being leisurely in our thinking, and we are very often carried by the drift of the vocations of life. The office work, the industry and the business, the shopping and what not keep us so busy that there is not enough leisure to go deep into the substance of what we are made of. We seem to be made out of only social relations in the sense of the atmosphere in which we are living at every given moment of time. When we are in America, we think like Americans; when we are in England, we think like the British; when we are in the midst of orthodoxy, our thinking is orthodox, so that we do not know what exactly the true environment of ours is. But there is an environment of our own which we rarely encounter on account of the flood of social air that blows over us. Even if we have a very small social circle such as a four-member family, we cannot be wholly true to ourselves. We are controlled by our father, our mother, our brother, our sister, and many other relations of this kind. We cannot be wholly ourselves even in a small family, because we are afraid of what others think; and it is much worse if we are in a larger community where every eye gazes at us.

This is the reason why we are advised to sometimes be alone to ourselves for a long period of time to watch ourselves, unknown, undiscovered, unbefriended, unseen, as far as possible. The emotions within us may become violent when we cut off all chances of their coming into play in the conscious level. We are comfortably placed in a web of human relations, which is why any kind of emotion that is annoying does not find a suitable outlet to manifest itself. We have security as long as we are in an atmosphere of friendly relations. We know there is some protection around us, and there is also a feeling that in a conducive atmosphere there are chances to manifest any part of our nature; and this satisfaction itself is a promise given to the emotions that they shall be taken care of. A person who fasts knows that one day he will eat, and so he does not feel worried as much as a starving man who has nothing to eat. A person who has nothing to eat, who is utterly poverty-stricken, is more worried than a person who fasts deliberately for one month continuously, because fasting has a promise given from within that after one month he will have a good meal. But the starving man does not know when he will get what.

So, in a comfortable society and a secure atmosphere, submerged feelings will not manifest themselves, because even though they are not allowed to come out and need not come out, they are told that there is a chance and possibility of their coming out—a promise is given. If we promise our creditor that he shall be paid after two months, he goes with satisfaction because the promise is given. But if he knows that we are not going to pay, that is a different matter. He will rebel, revolt, shout, scream, and stand at our door. This rebellious attitude of our feelings will be known to us either when we are wholly opposed by our atmosphere in every way or when we are totally alone, left to ourselves on a mountain top with no chance of satisfaction of any kind for a protracted period. We will be dreaming of the pleasures of the world. If we go far, far away from human reach, the desires become more and more poignant and restless because they know they cannot get anything they want. But if

we live in the midst of a city there is a promise, though we may not have these emotions. The security that we feel is very important. An insecure person is in hot water.

Knowing this feature in us, we may do well to bring out these instincts within us to the surface by having a conscious dialogue with them, as politicians sometimes hold dialogue even with opposition parties for a particular purpose. We cannot completely ignore their existence for all time, though they are opponents. There are opponents in our own body, not merely outside in society. There are thoughts which we ourselves would not like to think. There are urges within us which we would not like to count, because they are censured aspects of our nature. Why are they censured? They cannot be rationally explained, because this again is a result of the circumstances under which we are brought up. If we are brought up among Bushmen in Africa or primitives in central India, or other types of cultures which are opposed to them, our behaviours and our feelings will be quite different. There is some truth in our doctrines and sociological sciences that man is a product of society. Though it may not be a hundred percent true, there is a large percentage of truth in it, because we know very well to what extent we are influenced, even in our thinking, by social traditions and family forms of upbringing.

These limitations imposed on us act as barriers in our yoga practice. In a very, very important sense, the human relations around us are not always contributory to success in true yoga. But we have to make the best of a bad bargain, and this is what people generally do. A dexterous inner adventure may have to be undertaken by every student of yoga by holding internal dialogue with himself for the purpose of bringing out the deeper roots of his own nature, which are not intellectual or volitional, but primarily emotional.

The Bhakti Marga, or the path of devotion—one among the yogas—has understood this difficulty very well, and has prescribed several methods of melting down human feelings into what we usually call love of God. It is not easy to love

God. We can fear God, but not love Him so much, because love is manifest only where there is beauty and pleasure. It cannot be manifest where there is terror and power and justice, as in a court. It is hard for us to love a chief justice of a supreme court, because the peculiar operation within us called affection or love, devotion or emotional affiliation, is born out of the recognition of a glory in the object and not merely a fearful atmosphere around it. The object is beautiful when a kind of pleasure is recognised in it. Beauty is defined as pleasure externalised or objectified. When the pleasure that we seek within ourselves is poured upon an object, it looks beautiful. So it is pleasure that is seen as beauty in the object; it is not the object by itself that is seen there. We cannot say which object is beautiful at what time. This is a very hard thing to define scientifically. Different things appear beautiful at different times on account of different longings from within us. Our longings are not uniform from birth to death; they vary in their intensity and even in their shape and contour. Hence, no one has loved only one thing from birth to death. That is not possible because we move with the speedy carriage of evolution, and therefore, like a passenger in a moving train, we do not seem to be coming in contact with the same object even the next moment, because the train is moving fast. So, as and when the urge of emotion changes within ourselves, we recognise different centres of attraction.

We always are accustomed to see beauty, glory and pleasure in the world, but we cannot see it in God. The moment we utter the name of God, there is a sense of fear within us. We are not enamoured of God, actually. We are frightened of Him, for a reason which each one's deepest heart knows. Because of the rigorous system which God's law seems to be operating, we cannot love Him as we love our parents, our husband, our wife, and so on. But this is a false attitude of human nature. God is not merely justice and power, science and physics, law and mathematics, and so on. He is not a police commissioner or an army general, but a source of beauty and abundant glory; pleasure in its extreme

form, inexpressible bliss, oceanic joy. We cannot conceive the beauty of God, though we can imagine some sort of power of God. Omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence are all conceivable to some extent, but the beauty of God is unknown to us. We cannot know how God can be beautiful. He is a great father, the temporal creator, the supreme judge who will punish us and reward us like an officer of the supreme government. But beauty is a subtler secret which silently creeps into us in a most private manner, and does not operate publicly like the mathematical calculations of an engineer.

The Bhakti Yoga Shastra, or the system of the practice of devotion to God, can be said to be in many respects deeper in its fathoming the nature of man than the intellectual feats of logical thinking. There is some peculiar significance in the very unpleasant statement we have towards the end of the Eleventh Chapter of the Bhagavadgita, wherein the great Lord, in His Cosmic Form, says that nothing that man does can make him fit for this vision—not all that he has studied, not all the charity that he has done, not all the austerities, not anything that he does can be adequate for the purpose of this glorious vision of the Universal Being. But what is the means of contacting God in this glorious form of supreme immeasurable completeness if nothing that man, the puny individual, does, can be adequate? The verse in the Bhagavadgita is simple to understand, but it's meaning is very deep. *Naham vedairna tapasa na danena na cejyaya sanya evam-vidho drastum*(Gita 11.53): "Not by scriptures, not by *tapas*, not by sacrifices can I be seen." How can You be seen, then? *Bhaktya tu ananyaya sanya aham evam-vidho* (Gita 11.54): "This form of Mine can be beheld only by devotion, love." What sort of love? It is not the shallow affection that we pour on brittle glass in this world. It is the very substance out of which love is made. Love rises from the spirit in man; it is not a character of intellect or any of the psychological functions taken at face value. When the root of our personality is shaken, we are said to be in love; and we can also hate, as a counterpart of this love. But, basically,

hatred is not our essential nature. Hatred is a superficial air that the opposite of our psychic personality puts on, but at the root we are all spirits which is all bliss, illumination and love.

Hence, when it is said that only through Bhakti we can reach God in His universal reality or form, it is not an emotional reaction that is taught here, but the great teaching that only spirit can contact Spirit; because all love, even transient affections in the world, are ramifications through the media of psychic operations of the great glory of Self love. The love that we have for our own selves, the intense loves sometimes we pass through in our lives by coming in contact with objects of terrible attraction, give an indication to the extent to which God can be loved as beauty. If we little insignificant bodies can be thrown out of gear wholly by certain things in the world which can pull us in their direction to such an extent, and use all our love even to the point of death, what the beauty of God and the glory and the joy that we can experience in Him could be is something which may demand deeper consideration and meditation than we are usually capable of.

Hence, in our meditations, in our spiritual exercises, we must bring the whole of our being into light, and even the dark corners have to be lit. Even the ugly things have to be brought out so that everything is arrayed for conscious inspection, understanding and handling in the proper manner, proper way, so that nothing is left out, unseen, ignored or rejected.

Religion, when it is practiced as the whole vocation of one's life—spirituality as it is to be understood correctly—is the whole of us rushing towards the whole reality of the universe. Here is an essential point for us, requiring leisurely contemplation.