

The Living and Mission of Jiddu K. Krishnamurti

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Abstract

The present article looks at mind and consciousness from the perspective of the eminent Indian philosopher, Jiddu Krishnamurti. His thought in total awareness as being essential for a free mind. Human being always learned from their past, and it was important that they looked inwards and freed themselves from self-perpetuated torment. It was also essential that they avoided repression. The society in which we live should be organic, where, although individuals had no choice but to dwell in that society, it was one where the interests of the individual and society were the same. He also maintained that religion was always the result of past conditioning. A mind should be investigative and scientific. One could not get pleasure without difficulty, for which living in totality, not in segments, was a must. As frequently dwell on one part of the consciousness and miss its holistic aspect. One must unearth the mind layer by layer to achieve complete growth. Deeper delving into it and a study of J. Krishnamurti's philosophy is a must for the understanding of human consciousness, in a manner that is simple, yet intangible and deep.

KEYWORDS: Mind, Consciousness, Krishnamurti, Society, Philosophy.

Jiddu Krishnamurti is unquestionably one of the greatest and the most influential philosophers of our times. He is extensively regarded as a radical and insightful thinker who lived through the most tumultuous part of the twentieth century that witnessed not only the phenomenal growth of science and technology but also saw the two World Wars, the crumple of traditions and ideologies, the savage destruction of the earth and rapid deterioration of quality in every aspect of life, in the world. The uniqueness of Krishnamurti as a thinker lies in his uncompromising position that fundamental change in the human consciousness, in each one of us, alone can bring about a lasting and meaningful change in society.

Krishnamurti contends that the individual and world problems are due to the fact that we have been living in the background of the traditional mind for millennia. We are the victims of unending suffering, since we are the traditional people all through the history. Tradition means carrying over the content of consciousness, which is the past put together by thought. Our responses to the present are from the past, the memory stored up in the brain cells. Even the so called modern or post-modern people are traditional, for their ideas and actions, too, are traditional in the sense that they are only the reactions of the past to the present. Krishnamurti uses the term "tradition" in its special sense of 'traduce' besides its ordinary sense of 'tradere'. Traduce means to 'betray, to ridicule and to be untrue' and tradere means 'to give, to hand over, to inherit'. According to Krishnamurti, tradition means betraying the 'what is' by meeting it with knowledge which is the past; it is reducing the fact to an idea, truth to thought and translating the

new in terms of the old. Tradition also means to hand over the ideas mechanically without understanding and appropriating the spirit of their meaning and living by it. Krishnamurti maintains that, it is only the mind which is absolutely and unconditionally free from tradition in both the senses of the term alone can meet the 'what is', the present, the new as it is. It alone can 'see' truth as truth, false as false and truth in the false. Freedom from tradition is of paramount importance for bringing about a radical change in the social reality. Revolution means the total transformation of the traditional mind, not through time and knowledge but awareness without choice, attention without concentration, or observation without the observer, the product of thought, knowledge and time.

Jiddu Krishnamurti is an exceptional personality. He is not a philosopher in that he has not formulated a school of thought or beliefs; he is not a poet though he has written some exquisite poetry; he is not a huge writer of books, nor is he the founder of a new religion though religions have sprung from men like him. The truth is that Krishnamurti is so universal that he is beyond classification. With no organization to back him and with no "followers", for more than 20 years he has travelled widely in Europe, India, Australia and America, lecturing and meeting thousands from all walks of life. Few have not drawn water from his well. What is overwhelming in Krishnamurti and what is his strange mission?

Krishnamurti is regarded by thousands as one of the great religious teachers of all times. His message is effortless to those who give it close attention, though extremely hard to implement. From 1930, when he emancipated himself from Theosophy, he has been travelling the world trying to find words to convey as clearly as possible to his ever-increasing audiences the solution he has found to the violence and sorrow of mankind. He maintains that there can be an ending of sorrow. If his own words are not understood, no amount of interpretation will elucidate them. One of the most fascinating aspects of Krishnamurti is the dichotomy between the man and his teaching. Jiddu Krishnamurti was born on May 11, 1895, at Madanapalle, 150 miles north of Madras, the eighth child of Telegu-speaking Brahmin parents. His father, Jiddu Narianiah, was a rent collector employed by the British, so the family, though obscure, were not poor by Indian standards. Krishna's mother died when he was ten, and nearly four years later, Narianiah, who had now retired and who had been a Theosophist for many years, moved with his four surviving sons to the International Headquarters of the Theosophical Society at Adyar, Madras, to work as an assistant secretary. The eldest son, Sivaram, who was to become a doctor, was fifteen; then came Krishna, not yet fourteen, then Nityananda (Nitya), three years younger, and finally Sadanand, aged five, who was mentally deficient. Soon after the move to Adyar, Krishna was picked out on the beach one evening from a crowd of other Indian boys by Charles Webster Leadbeater to be the vehicle for the World Teacher (the Lord Maitreya, the Christ). Most Theosophists at that time believed that the Lord Maitreya was soon to manifest in human form, as two thousand years ago he had manifested in the body of Jesus and before that in the body of Sri Krishna. Leadbeater, a leading figure in the Theosophical Society, who claimed to be clairvoyant, chose this particular boy because of the beauty of his aura which, he declared, had not one trace of selfishness in it. Leadbeater could hardly have chosen him for his outward appearance, for the boy was scraggy, dirty, ill-nourished, with crooked

teeth, his hair shaved in front as was then the Brahmin custom, and with a vacant, almost moronic expression. Moreover, he had a persistent cough and a weak, sickly look resulting from the many bouts of malaria he had suffered throughout his childhood.

Two more Krishnamurti books were published in 1973 by which time his books had well-nigh ceased to be reviewed. The difficulty of reviewing them is easily understood, but John Stewart Collis, who is unknown to Krishnamurti, took up the challenge when he reviewed the first short one, *Beyond Violence*, in the *Sunday Telegraph* in March '73. The second book, *The Awakening of Intelligence*, edited by Cornelia (Nelly) and George Wingfield Digby, is the longest and most comprehensive of all Krishnamurti's works. 530 pages long, with sixteen photographs of Krishnamurti by Mark Edwards, the volume is made up of seven parts, including 'Two Conversations between Krishnamurti and Professor Jacob Needleman' at Malibu in 1971; 'Two Conversations between Krishnamurti and Alain Naude,' also at Malibu in 1971; 'Two Conversations between Krishnamurti and Swami Venkatesananda' at Saanen in 1969, and a 'Conversation between Krishnamurti and Professor David Bohm' at Brockwood in October 1972. Dr Bohm, who had been a friend and colleague of Einstein's at Princeton in the forties, is the eminent Professor of Theoretical Physics at Birkbeck College, London University. He had first become interested in Krishnamurti on coming across *The First and Last Freedom* by chance in a library. He had attended K's talks at Wimbledon in '61 and since then he and his wife had frequently been to Saanen and Brockwood and had held many discussions with Krishnamurti. He was made a trustee of the Krishnamurti Foundation, England, in 1969. He is the author of several books on the quantum theory and relativity, and since the publication of his latest book in 1980, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, which propounds a revolutionary theory of physics akin to K's teaching of the wholeness of life; he has been widely recognised for his controversial scientific discoveries. One of the many remarkable things about K is the equal ease with which he talks to a Swami or a Western scientist, an industrial millionaire or a Prime Minister. He has discoursed on meditation with the Dalai Lama and would have no apprehension in conversing with any of the world's great philosophers, yet he is undoubtedly a shy, diffident man who shuns ordinary conversation, has read very little (and that little forgotten) and who has no intellectual pretensions. The answer to this anomaly is, I think, that he perceives some truth as clearly as he can see his own hand. No counter-argument can disturb such a clear vision. While others discuss and argue about the theory of X, Krishnamurti actually holds X like an apple in his hand.

Krishnamurti denounces philosophy in the sense of a tradition of theories, ideas and ideals. He does not subscribe to the concept of philosophy as a corpus of justified true beliefs or an activity of advancing arguments to convince others of something. Philosophy is not an intellectual activity of clarifying conceptual confusion, nor a theoretical enterprise, nor an exegetical exercise of disputing the prevalent ideas and inventing novel ones. Philosophy is not a speculative activity of system building, a construction of grand eloquent theories which have industrialised the human mind and dehumanised the human being. To Krishnamurti, philosophy is not the love of concepts, not a series of theories, but the love of truth in the sense of its actual realisation and living by it in daily life. It is not a pursuit of abstraction but a practical discipline of bringing about a radical change in the mind by comprehending truth beyond thought, wisdom

beyond knowledge. The function of philosophy is discovering intelligence which is holistic, sane and compassionate. Philosophy is the praxis of living in accordance with facts without fiction, truth without reducing it to ideas. Its concern is the creation of a new, a true and an integrated human being who is in harmony in relationship with people and nature. Philosophy is setting out on the voyage of the uncharted sea of truth, a meditative journey into the unknown. Despite categorical denial of all philosophical traditions as traitors of truth, Krishnamurti's philosophy may be said to be in consonance with the philosophies of Advaita Vedanta, Nagarjuna and Wittgenstein. It comes close to the Advaita Vedanta if Vedanta means the actual realisation of the non-dual absolute truth by ending all knowledge about it. Vedanta literally means, the ending of knowledge, and, not merely the Upanishads, which are the end part of the Vedas. Krishnamurti himself subscribed to the view that his philosophy may be regarded as Vedanta if it means, 'freedom from knowledge and practice'. But Krishnamurti does not accept the traditional Vedantin's view that acquisition of the knowledge of the Upanishads and the practice of the path thereof are the sine qua non of freedom or salvation. Krishnamurti maintains that freedom from knowledge which is tradition is absolutely essential at the very beginning of the inquiry into the truth. In this sense, Krishnamurti claims, that he begins precisely where the traditional Vedantins stop. To him, freedom is the first and last step in the observation and understanding of truth. Krishnamurti's philosophy is also akin to Nagarjuna's philosophy of emptiness which teaches the absence of inherent being of the phenomena. To Krishnamurti truth is emptiness of everything that thought has put together. He holds that emptiness is the truth of being of everything—things, people and ideas. Nagarjuna's notion of tathata is similar to Krishnamurti's truth, the 'what is' which is beyond words, concepts, or systems. To both, truth is all inclusive, harmonious and quiescent which is beyond desire, attachment and hatred. To Nagarjuna, transcendental truth comprehends the absence of intrinsic nature of the phenomenal truth. To Krishnamurti, truth is freedom from the nature and structure of thought which is conditioned and limited. And, Krishnamurti's notion of the silent mind, which is of the nature of truth, may be likened to Wittgenstein's notion of the transcendence which is beyond language. Wittgenstein's statements that 'whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent' and 'what is not said is more significant than what is said' come very close to Krishnamurti's view that the unknown is far more profound than the known and being is more important than becoming. His lectures and writings have global appeal. He emerged as a phenomenon in contemporary times. My fascination for Krishnamurti lies in his being a thinker of Indian origin who was boldly critical about tradition and looked for radical change. His immediate concern throughout his life was human predicament and the way out of the labyrinthine world. He picked up many themes, such as identity, division, conflict, violence, world disorder, education and religious life. I believe that 'tradition' and 'revolution' are the basic themes of Krishnamurti and also invariably are related to each other. Though both these concepts are popular concepts of his time, the way he presented them adds new meaning. Tradition and revolution are historically constructed categories and considerable literature is available in this respect. The discourse of social change and world order are invariably linked with the ideals of tradition and revolution. Krishnamurti goes beyond known liberal and Marxist positions. For Krishnamurti, individual is central. He takes care of the individual as rational and universal. He extends this rationality to criticise the tradition, past, religion and belief. In

order to understand the reality as a whole in its freshness as what is, he even rejects the verbalisation, thought, memory and the social-cultural process. He rejects the social, which he considers as a source for the existential problems. He understood the problems are due to partial and prejudiced understanding rather total understanding. He demands nameless experience for better understanding of the world. He thinks choiceless awareness keeps the individual away from the existential problems and conflicts. He finds the solution to all existential problems in individual. He argues for change in the individual psyche or psychological revolution. He maintains a position that change in the individual psyche will automatically bring in the world since 'you (individual) are the world.' The state of revolution, he identifies, with religious mind is meditative and silent. It is a state of joy filled with love and compassion. Krishnamurti's use of the term 'revolution' has its own historical meaning. He not only extends this word to connote total change in the psychological realm of the individual, which he believes that it encompasses all the fields of life, but also calls it a religious revolution. As we know, in the context of revolutionary change, religion has negative connotation. Though Krishnamurti is critical about organised religions in this sense but upholds the idea of 'religion' by giving it a different meaning. The question arises here, is can't he speak about revolution without referring to religion? One thing is clear that Krishnamurti has invented new language of his times, which has predominantly liberal tone. He is critical of both tradition and revolution in his own terms, which goes against the historical notions of both of these terms. At the same time, he mediates both tradition and revolution through 'religious revolution'. This kind of position makes it difficult to locate him in known philosophical and political positions. In contrast to western modernity, the western educated Indian intellectuals are engaged with Hindu religion or tradition either by redefining or reforming it. In the wake of identity politics and it is certainty in radical transformation of society, scholars have started relooking at Krishnamurti's writings. He dismisses any identity other than human which is an abstract and universal ideal that came up with liberalism. In other words, these struggles came with alternative philosophical frameworks against the dominant liberal position. His ideas expose the limitations of liberal ideas aimed to transform the world on the path of progress and limits of identity struggles. Krishnamurti states that thinking derives from accumulated memories, knowledge and experience. Initially thought may have arisen through conditioning or in response to a particular challenge. Krishnamurti states that knowledge grows from experience and this experience creates thoughts and images. Because it has accumulated from the past, any choice based on knowledge is of the past and may cause confusion or disorder in the present or future, Furthermore, since thought is always old, it cannot bring anything new into being. Readers should make their own observations in living and thereby discover whether Krishnamurti's statements are fact or fiction. It is in this framework that Krishnamurti's rendezvous with edification is of paramount significance, namely his emphasis on the relationship between education and society in terms of the transformational potential of education. This aspect of Krishnamurti's teachings is the cornerstone of his educational thought and can make a significant contribution to evolving a sensible policy that concerns itself with change through 'right' education.

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