

Last month I was invited to attend a lecture by Professor S.N. Balagangadhara of Ghent University, Belgium. He spoke on ‘Being Hindu’ for almost an hour. There was nothing that he said to really address the idea of ‘Being Hindu’. In fact, following the principle of *apoha* (negation) enunciated by the famous medieval Buddhist critical realist Acharya Dignaga, he spoke on “what is not Being a Hindu”. The message was lost amidst bombastic statements flowing through his flamboyant personality. But his message was stern: “Indian culture is to be deliberated in the language of the twenty-first century, as the new generation is not interested in the gibberish stories of the colonizers in the name of Indology.”

But, what should be the mode of non-Indological narrative? Professor Balgangadhar proclaimed: “Scientific language”. For him, science is universal and the language adopted for understanding physical universe ought to be deployed to understand the epiphenomena of human mind, our culture. The whole gamut of his thought is fallacious. If indigenous thought-mentors have to shed the cloak of Indology, they ought to drop the epistemic baggage of the west that produced such positivist knowledge traditions. Not only the mode of inquiry, but even the gestures of enquiries, the object of inquiry, the framework of inquiry has to be based upon non-western pedestal.

While the discussion was in full-swing, a brilliant young scholar, Priyadarshi Dutta raised a valid point. It is only subsequent to the advent of Indology that the convention of speaking while standing on two legs was borrowed by Indians. The idea pierced like an illuminating streak.

In Asian tradition, teaching is always imparted while sitting cross-legged on the floor. Our sages (ऋषि) composed the treatises while sitting cross-legged. Buddha, Nagarjuna, Dignaga, Abhinavagupta, Vyasa, Valmiki are the greatest masters of this soil. None of them taught while standing. India’s own vibrant tradition of debate brings in the image of sitting opponents on floor. Our singers would sing in similar posture. In fact, Gandhiji adopted this traditional method of conveying thoughts and was much more effective as compared to the modernist leaders groomed in standing genre of public speaking.

This tradition of teaching while sitting on floor is prevalent across Asia. Chinese sages, Japanese monks and Muslim fakirs adopted this habit. Is there any correlation between thinking/speaking while sitting cross-legged and Asian mode of inquiry and language? Is cross-legged sitting posture conducive to developing *ontology of closure* in which everything is beaded in the cyclical perspective? Do that make Asians less prone to pursuing the politics of expansionsim? Similarly, is there a correlation between thinking/speaking while standing and the mode of inquiry? Is the different paradigm of thinking merely a byproduct of our physical postures and gestures? Does sitting cross-legged bring a sense of harmony and balance in our thought and action? Does standing with wide-open legs induce a mode of activating quest for *ontology of expanse*? Does the root of imperialism and linearity paradigm lie in the standing posture prevalent in the West?

There are clear differences between position of caring in Asia and the West. While in India, mothers hold the baby in the couching position, it is convenient in the west to carry and care for the baby in the standing position. Across Asia, traditionally people eat while sitting on the floor, but we are witnessing the influx of buffet system in which people partake meals in standing position. Sitting and serenity appear correlated. It is not a surprise that in Tantric Buddhism, which investigates the mind with as much discreetness as feasible, even the Bodhisattva is depicted sitting in *yab-yum* position with his consort, *Vajra Varahi*. If Asian tradition of thinking emphasizes contemplation and intuition, such thinking has foundation in the sitting position.

Martin Heidegger, the German philosopher was engrossed with understanding gesture and thinking in Asian tradition. With the sophisticated brain imaging techniques, one can fathom how mind responds in different postures and gestures. What region of brain gets stimulation with change in postures? Hopefully, in coming days we can have synthetic study of such features under the new discipline like Cognitive Neuro-physio-science.

But in a programme where the best of ‘Hindu Minds’ congregated to discover ‘Hinduness’, serious intervention made by Priyadarshi Dutta was scoffed at. What is Being Hindu? At least, not being a standing preacher. Our

discourses of *sanatan parampara* are still carried through the sitting *mudra*. If something is to be seen as essential, then the art of sitting cross-legged must be counted as the most tangible phenomena. But, with the change in the government, there is little movement towards new posture. In fact, the new government is focusing more on standing and less on rediscovering “old postures in new system”. The Ministry of External Affairs has directed its spokesman to address the media in standing position using podium. This mirrors the spokesperson of the western governments.

Our wisdom-masters conveyed the most profound teachings through mere gestures. We excelled in embodiment of thoughts. But thinking beyond reason has since been forfeited and has given place to the primacy of reason, that too, of only western variant. Image of divinities with folded legs and folded fingers (*mudra*) have enthralled our civilization for millennia. In fact, our thinking is rooted in the orientation of condensation and miniaturization. The Sutras would convey manifold meanings to a listener. The Sutras could be condensed into few-line shorter *dharanis*. Finally, *dharanis* could be condensed further into mantras, mantras into mere phoneme, thence further compressed into *nada*, bindu, and finally complete silence. Deepest wisdom would be communicated through wordless silence.

Similar compression technique of thinking is ubiquitous in the *extremity* of the Orient, in Japan. Japanese culture revolves around the concept of reduction/compression-the *Chijimi*. Japan traditionally gained the Mastery of the Miniature (*Chijimi shikoo no Nihonjin*). The Japanese fan (*sensu*) can be folded up. *Origami*, the art of folding the papers, is highly evolved in Japanese culture. *Kimono* is the folded clothes, *Futon* is the foldable mattress, *Byobu* is the folding screen and so on. Japanese excel in growing dwarf plants (*bonsai*), and creating miniature gardens (*hakoniwa*). *Haiku* and *tanaka* poetic forms are examples of this compression in literature. Similarly, *Zen koan* is the prime example of compression of consciousness itself.

It is not a surprise that Japan dominates the post-industrial new technology where focus has shifted from building mega-structures to creating miniature machines. May it be little cameras, small watches, mobile handsets, computers, laptops; the Japanese have excelled in the new technology due to the cultural bedrock of compression.

What is required today is an epistemic rupture and to pave way for other modes of knowing. We must sit down and start recollecting our ancient wisdom in compressed forms. Peddling sophistry and polemics devoid of any wisdom is surely a way of *Being Not a Hindu*. But, this necessitates change in postures and gestures. The radical break can only come from the top. What if our top political leadership starts speaking while sitting on a podium (not on chair but on the spread mat) following the footsteps of Gandhiji! What if our cabinet meetings are held with the ministers sitting on a carpet!

The current issue of the Journal of Indian Research focuses on this theme of non-western mode of knowledge. The cover of the Journal carry the image of seven Asian masters of wisdom (*saptarishis*, सप्तर्षि), all in sitting position forming a chakra around the book of wisdom. We hope to rejuvenate the debate over western and non-western modes of knowing and enrich our understanding better. I would also like to take this opportunity to extend my heartiest greetings to all the contributors for putting faith in the visions of this nascent journal!

– Niraj Kumar