



Vidyankur
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VIDYANKUR



ISSN: 2320-9429

VIDYANKUR

**Journal of Philosophical
and Theological Studies**

July-Dec 2019

XXII/2

Editorial: Being Humanely Human

Derin Vaz

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Rajesh Vijayakumar

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Friendly or Frightening?

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from Indian Perspectives to Modern Generation

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Vidyankur: Journal of Philosophical and Theological Studies (VJPTS) is a peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal. It is a bi annual journal published in January and July, seeking to discern wisdom in our troubled times. Inspiring and short academic articles (3,000-4,000 words) beneficial to the educated audience are welcome. It attempts to foster personal integration through philosophical search, theological insights, scientific openness and social concern.

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Site: www.vidyankur.in

Email: indianjournal@gmail.com

ISSN: 2320-9429

OCLC: 233921404

LCCN: 2008306810

The cover depicts the gentle cosmic gaze on the life in precious earth within the cosmic background

Printed at Kunal Offset 412, Kakasaheb Gadgil Rd, Shaniwar Peth, Pune, Maharashtra 411030



Editorial

Being Humanely Human

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur has claimed that “Every understanding is self-understanding.” When we try to understand other human beings or any technique, we are throwing more light ourselves.

It is in this context that we need to perceive the meaning of the Delphic maxim, “know thyself” (“*Γνώθι Σεαυτόν*”, or “Gnothi Seauton”)

Knowing ourselves truly leads us to understand appreciate how human beings are. It leads us to ask questions like: Who am I? How do I know? Who is a human being? What are our concerns? How do we understand ourselves in the context of the larger world? Who is a human being? What is our responsibility to others? How can truly appreciate our humane nature?

To be humane is our sacred task. This encourages us to be compassionate not only to fellow human beings and ever to the

Cite APA Style: Pandikattu, Kuruvilla. (2019) Editorial: Being Human and Humane. Vidyankur: Journal of Philosophical and Theological Studies July-Dec 2019 XXI/2 www.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4127972 3-4.

larger world. It challenges us to treat others with kindness and compassion. Compassion urges us people to go out of our way to help the physical, mental, or emotional pains of others, including animals and plants. This compassion also must embrace the technological and scientific dimensions of ourselves.

Confronted with our technological success or progress, we are called to be responsible for ourselves and the larger reality. We are called to be both human and humane to ourselves and the other (including animals and techniques like Artificial Intelligence and Robots).

The world we live in is in urgent need of compassion, joy and hope. Can we be messengers of such joy and hope by making this world more compassionate, humane and inclusive?

So this issue of *Vidyankur* urges the readers to cultivate our sense of compassion so that we become truly human (to ourselves) and humane (to all others). May we experience the joy of living, the abundance of loving and the fullness of sharing with others!

The Editor



Vidyankur: Journal of Philosophical and Theological Studies XXI/2 July 2019 | ISSN P-2320-9429 | **5-16**
<https://www.vidyankur.in> | DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4159230
Stable URL: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4159230>

Being Human in the Age of Life 3.0

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Abstract: We are facing a shift, a shift from the carbon-based to the silicon-based form of life. Yes, the first two forms of cosmic evolution have been surpassed by evolution 3.0 i.e., *Technological evolution*. Unlike the first two evolutions, life 3.0 is rapid and capable of evolving in a fraction of seconds. When we say technology is advancing that means the human brain has been outsourced. Yes, the only relevant question in this phase is what it means to humanity? Will it lead to mass automation in the various fields of transportation, medical care, and other human working sectors? Will mass automation result in the *rise of a useless class*? And ultimately will it end in an age of *digital dictatorship*? Then what it means to be human in an age

Cite APA Style: Vaz, Derin. (2019) Being Human in the Age of Life.30.
Vidyankur: Journal of Philosophical and Theological Studies July-Dec 2019
XXI/2 www.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4159230 5-16.

of digital dictatorship? This write- up addresses the very relevant possibilities, effects and challenges of Technological evolution that pose before humanity?

Keywords: Artificial intelligence (AI), Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), Alan Turing, Life 3.0, Evolution 3.0.

Introduction

Max Tegmark, the American-Swedish physicist gave the title for the first chapter of his book *Life 3.0: Being Human in the Age of Artificial Intelligence* as “Welcome to the Most Important Conversation of Our Time” Yes, the time has changed, and now we have entered into the third phase of evolution i.e. technological evolution. And this third phase seems now the most important conversation of our time. Tegmark speaks about the three stages of life i.e. biological evolution, cultural evolution and technological evolution. Life 1.0 denotes the biological evolution; unable to redesign either its hardware or its software during its lifetime: both are determined by its DNA and change only through evolution over many generations. Life 2.0 denotes the cultural evolution, can redesign much of its software: humans can learn complex new skills- for example, language, professions- and can fundamentally update their worldview and goals. Life 3.0 denotes technological evolution, can dramatically redesign not only its software but its hardware as well, rather than having it wait for gradually evolve over generations. Yes, the time has come for a major evolution- Artificial Intelligence- the two questions that pose before us is when and what? When will it happen and what it means to humanity?

The father of artificial intelligence Alan Turing in his seminal paper *Computing machinery and Intelligence* has said, “I believe that in about fifty years’ time it will be possible to programme computers, ... to make them play the imitation game so well that an average interrogator will not have more than 70 per cent chance of making the right identification after five minutes of questioning.”(Turing, 1950). The signs of these prophetic words getting fulfilled have been signalled in May 1997 when the several time world chess champion Garry Kasparov was defeated by IBM supercomputer Deep Blue. In 2016 eighteen times GO (world oldest board game) world champion Lee Sedol has been defeated by ALPHA GO, a computer GO programme. It has been further enhanced in December 2017 by a programme called Alpha Zero by defeating another programme called stockfish 8 that can calculate 70 million chess moves per second. Alpha Zero took only four hours to prepare for the game against stockfish 8. Rather than the thousands of human moves from history Alpha zero performed fresh moves that are completely new to the human brain. The technical team revealed that alpha zero is a –self-learned system- that can create its own moves. Alpha Zero proved that even AI can be creative. These radical developments of AI programmes are likely to point to the fact that the next stage of evolution will be a reality in hundred years of time. That’s why it becomes the most important conversation of our time.

From Carbon to Silicon-Based Evolution

Life 2.0 i.e. Human life was carbon-based and in the next stage of evolution, it will be silicon-based. When we hear such kind of talks, we may think of it as fiction that will never correspond to reality. Clive Thompson, the science and technology writer says “The cyborg future is here. Almost without noticing it, we’ve outsourced important peripheral brain functions to the

silicon around us” (Kasparov 2017). If we simply check our day to day life it is very visible that how much we have outsourced our brain. From the simple calculation, data analyses etc. of intellectual capability and heavy lifting of physical capability we have outsourced the human capabilities to simple and complex machines. Google and Wikipedia have made us the instant expert of anything but actually, it doesn’t enhance us but rather it makes us dumber. Our capacity to calculate, analyse or to lift has been outsourced from us; which in turn makes us depend on them. “Automation has steadily moved up the ladder of emulating and surpassing human abilities” (Kasparov 2017). We live or we are in a stage of a major shift from human intelligence to artificial intelligence. The tremendous heap of outsourcing of the brain has already done. The simple speech, touch and face recognition in our cell phones are real-life examples of outsourcing of the human brain and it is a clear indication of how far we are relying on artificial intelligence without noticing it. Automated cars and drones are only a much more advanced stage of artificial intelligence. Marvin Minsky, an American scientist says the limitation of machines that we face today is due to the obsolete ways of programming. He tells “Today, we only tell programs some things to do_ without telling them why we want them to do” (Minsky 2006). Minsky believes that by overcoming this problem a better AI can be generated and rectify the present limitations.

This article gives the glimpses of possible dangers of Technological evolution and brings out the questions to be addressed in such a situation.

Richard Feynman in the banquet speech after receiving the Nobel Prize in Physics 1966 said:

That was the beginning of the idea seemed so obvious to me that I fell deeply in love with it. And, like falling in love with a woman, it is only possible if you don't know too much about her, so you cannot see her faults. The faults will become apparent later, but after the love is strong enough to hold you to her. So, I was held to this theory, in spite of all the difficulties, by my youthful enthusiasm (Minsky 2006).

As Richard Feynman says we have fallen in love with AI without knowing much about it. We have outsourced our brain to AI already. Now there is no point in asking the question - when will it happen? Because it's already there; the only relevant question then remains is what it mean to humanity or how far it can succeed? And fall in love with it.

AI: A Desirable Step

Professor Tegmark writes: “Larry Page said that digital life is the natural and desirable next step in the cosmic evolution” (Tegmark 2017). Mainly humans have two types of abilities they are physical and cognitive. Already we have devised many machines that can replace human or co-work with the human in many physical fields and at present, AI is developing in the cognitive realm also (already we have seen some examples of outsourcing of brain.). Marvin Minsky has expressed that if thinking can be understood as the step-by-step process that it is, then we can build machines - artificial intelligence - that not can only assist with our thinking by thinking as we do but have the potential to be conscious as we are. Yes, AI cannot take glucose or fructose as input like our

human body but what they can take as input are some numerical values in the form of some algorithms. Any human activity that can be turned into an algorithm can function as AI. Robin Gandy a British mathematician and associate of Alan Turing, has written “Human mind is fundamentally a serial machine, accomplishing its work through temporal sequences of processes, each typically requiring hundreds of milliseconds, for execution” (Gandy 1996). All actions, emotions and thoughts performed by human are mechanical and they can be turned into algorithms which can feed AI. “Our choices of the food to mates result not from some mysterious free will, but rather from billions of neurons calculating probabilities within a split second” (Harari, 2018). In other words, we can sum human being as a perfectly working biochemical algorithm; Life 2.0= biochemical algorithm. The Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari asserts in his book *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* “... emotions and desires are in fact no more than biochemical algorithm” (Harari 2018).¹ Then the evolution of the 21st century will be from perfect biochemical algorithm to numerical algorithm.

The evolution from a cultural or life 2.0 stage to a technological or life 3.0 stage is not a fictitious dream (we have already seen the possibility of shifting biochemical algorithm to artificial algorithms), but it is a hardcore reality amidst us. The AI scientist foresees that the shift from Life 2.0 to Life 3.0 will be complete in another hundred years. “In an artificial world, evolution can literally happen overnight. When evolution proceeds so rapidly, it is hard to say where it might go” (Morris 1999). Now the only relevant question is what it meant to be

¹ This book, I believe, is a very influential one, which will change the course of human discourse for a long time.

human? Will it be a good thing for humanity? Digital utopians² agree that we shouldn't worry about it; it will happen but is virtually guaranteed to be a good thing. But at the same time Luddites³ believe that it will bring a bad outcome. The coming days can be a) age of human plus machine or human-computer centaur, b) Human AI cooperation or competition c) or the age of AI. The future seems inconspicuous. As Luddites and digital utopians say if such a shift take place then the major problem that humanity has to face will be regarding the work. The technological evolution will result in *mass automation* in every possible field which will result in the mass displacement of the human worker. Such a mass displacement will lead to the *Rise of a useless class* and eventually will end in the *rise of a digital dictatorship*.

AI: Transportation and Healthcare Sectors

In 2015 Google provided the first fully driverless ride on public roads. Now at present Waymo LLC undertake the project to develop driverless cars which will be soon on our public roads. Like any other driver, the AI is able to drive the car. While driving the car a human predicts the intention of a pedestrian; a driver's brain recognises the biochemical pattern by analysing facial expressions, tones of voice, hand movements etc. before making a judgement. In the same way through the outsourcing of brain AI perform the same function of a human brain and often it outperforms human. "An AI equipped with the right sensors could do all that far more accurately and reliably than a human" (Harari 2018).

² Digital utopian is one who believe that the advancement in science and technology will bring an utopia.

³ Luddite means a person who opposes to new technology or ways of working.

“AI not only stands poised to hack humans and outperform them in what were hitherto uniquely human skills. It also enjoys uniquely non- human abilities, which make the difference between an AI and a human worker one of kind rather than merely of degree. Two particularly important non-human abilities that AI possesses are connectivity and updateability”(Harari, 2018).

When a human being drives a car each individual car is considered to be a separate entity. Statistics show that there are 1.2 billion cars alone on the road each day. So we can say that 1.2 billion individual entities are riding on the road in a split second, and the worst part is that each car’s ability to have a safe ride completely depends upon the varying ability of each driver. Whenever any miscommunication or a miscalculation occurs it ends up in an accident. “Today 1.25 million people have killed annually in traffic accidents (twice the number killed by war, crime and terrorism combined)” (Harari 2018). More than 90 per cent of these accidents are caused by human errors; somebody drinking alcohol and driving, somebody texting a message while driving, somebody falling asleep at the wheel, somebody daydreaming instead of paying attention to the road. Compared to human errors AI commits fewer errors and it also possesses better skills like connectivity and updateability apart from human skills. Once all cars are automated the whole 1.2 billion cars can be connected to each other - resulting in creating a single entity of car rather than 1.2 billion individual drivers. Since it is a single entity it has a better awareness regarding the position of other cars in the entity in advance. It can even know the direction and speed of the other car. So, by having an enhanced communication the traffic accidents can be reduced. The other advantage of using AI cars is updateability. Most of the violations of the traffic rule

happen because of the ignorance of the drivers. If a new rule is implemented it becomes a herculean task to update all drivers; but in an AI system, the traffic rule can be easily updated in a fragment of a second throughout the whole world.

The *Wired* article “How AI Is Tracking the Coronavirus Outbreak”(Knight, 2020) speaks about AI being used in tracking the corona virus. John Brownstein, a Canadian epidemiologist says that “it is critical to determine where the virus may surface if the authorities are to allocate resources and block its spread effectively” (Knight 2020). AI helps them to detect the spread of the virus. The use of AI in detecting the corona affected locations is an example that shows at present how AI works in the medical field. AI has moved from simple AI to AGI (Artificial General Intelligence)⁴ The Economic Time posts that “India is facing a shortage of 6000000 doctors and 2 million nurses”(PTI, 2019). Think of each cell phone as an AI doctor. Think of the reach it can make to the rural people of India who have no access to the doctor. By using the new “algorithms and biometric sensors, a poor villager in an underdeveloped country might come to enjoy far better healthcare via Smartphone than the richest person in the world gets today from the most advanced urban hospital” (Harari 2018). By running many alternative algorithms it is possible for a patient to access through her / his Smartphone not just a single authoritative doctor but actually a hundred different AI doctor. The most advantage of AI doctor is that billions of AI doctors can be updated within a split second regarding new medicine or a new form of epidemic etc.

⁴AGI falls under AI but AGI expects the machine to be equally as smart as a human.

Hence it would be madness to block automation in fields such as transport and healthcare because it protects humanity.

“What brain scientists are learning today about the amygdale and the cerebellum might make it possible for computers to outperform Human psychiatrists and bodyguards in 2050” (Harari 2018). These words are responsible for the good number of Luddites. Will it outperform human in future? Yes, it is pretty sure that AI will outperform human in many fields especially with regard to the job. The rise of the useless class will be the end result of automation. 17.78 million People work as a driver to earn their daily living. What will these people do if vehicles get automated? One of the main sources of income of a developing country is the sale of cheap labour. The out spring of call centres and IT parks in India are a visible example of it. Suppose an AI calling assistant is created then all the call centres will be out of a job. Some claim that at the one hand we lose Jobs but on the other hand, AI creates many new Job sectors like remote control, data analysis and cyber security. But how many of those who lost the job can be trained again to fit a new job? Or how many of them have the mental strength to face a major shift? What about the people in their 40s and 50s? Are they going to be trained again? “By 2050 useless class might emerge not merely because of lack of jobs or lack of relevant education, but also because of insufficient mental stamina” (Harari 2018). The result of mass automation is the displacement of many which in turn give rise to a useless class and their future is at risk.

Concluding Remarks

The further question that threatens us, Will technological evolution leads us to digital dictatorship? Yuval Harari in his book 21 Lessons for the 21st Century shares the possibility of a future where human becomes incompetent with the AI and further human is not even needed as a consumer to buy the product. He claims, “Theoretically, you can have an economy in which a mining corporation produces and sells iron to Robotics Corporation, the robotics corporation produces and sells robots to the mining corporation, which mines more iron, which is used to produce more robots, and so on.”(Harari, 2018), these robots can expand to the far reaches of the galaxy and they don’t want a human to buy it. This cannot be considered a silly possibility. Once human become useless then it points to the shift in authority from human to AI. Eventually, it will lead to a digital dictatorship where human have no value even as a consumer. Google algorithm is the best example of digital dictatorship in the present world. Who selects the best website in the world? The website which the Google algorithm rates as best becomes the best website. Human has nothing to do with it. The writers who want to publish anything online try to choose the words that are pleasing to the Google algorithm; otherwise, it may not get the right attention and care. “Notwithstanding the danger of mass unemployment, what should worry about even more is the shift in authority from humans to algorithms, which might destroy any remaining faith in the liberal story and open the way to the rise of digital dictatorships.” (Harari 2018). So our concerns should be: a) what to do in order to prevent jobs from being lost? b) What to do in order to create enough new jobs? c) What to do if, despite our best efforts, job losses significantly outstrip job creation? And most important; d) How to protect Humans rather than jobs?

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Article Received: April 4, 2019; Accepted: June 3, 2019:
Words: 3140



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**Vidyankur: Journal of Philosophical and Theological
Studies XXI/2 July 2019 | ISSN P-2320-9429 | 17-27**
<https://www.vidyankur.in> | DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4128032
Stable URL: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4128032>

Human Existence with Artificial Intelligence: Friendly or Frightening?

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Abstract: Technological advancements have transformed the human way of living, with its pros and cons. It has reached a point, where Man has started to become a mere spectator. It has replaced man from many of his traditional areas of expertise and has paved the way for many new innovations. Today a life devoid of technology cannot be comprehended nor be lived. Thus the technological evolution poses a fundamental question to us ‘Is our existence with artificial intelligence is going to be friendly or frightening?’ This essay tries to address this question by analyzing the possibilities, effects and challenges of Artificial Intelligence and carving out an optimal solution to it.

Cite APA Style: Vijayakumar, Rajesh. (2019) Human Existence with Artificial Intelligence: Friendly or Frightening? Vidyankur: Journal of Philosophical and Theological Studies July-Dec 2019 XXI/232
www.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4128032 17-27.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Friendly AI, Anthropomorphic Bias, Cyber Crime, Surveillance, Value-Loading, Goal alignment.

“The rise of powerful AI will be either the best or the worst thing ever to happen to humanity. We do not yet know which.” -Stephen Hawking

Introduction

Evolution is the invisible truth of our visible universe. What we see today is the product of 13.8 billion years of evolution. From giant galaxies to tiny life forms, all have undergone it. Some could not keep pace with it, while others adapted to its ever-increasing demands and evolved. Humans too are the products of this indispensable and imperative process. While evolution occurred in other species was mostly one-dimensional (biological), humans exhibited a multi-dimensional evolution. Over the last 66 million years, humans have witnessed biological, social, spiritual, moral, economic, legal, political, and technological evolution and they still keep evolving. From the dawn of the 18th century, technical developments have spearheaded this process. The world today has already witnessed the phenomenal shift from Steam Engines to Automated factories, from the ENIAC Computers to Big Data and from Neural Net devices to Self-driving Cars. Technically we have witnessed two main revolutions: the Industrial Revolution

This article analyzes the impact of Artificial Intelligence on human society and to derive the modus operandi for the human society for a better future, that makes the optimal use of this

and Digital Revolution. While the former revolutionized our work life and amplified our outputs, the latter has revolutionized our standard of living and communication systems. Today we are witnessing yet another revolution, AI Revolution, which is practically revolutionizing all our mental tasks and slowly replacing ourselves. Future may reveal whether it is a boon or a curse.

AI: The New Sensation

Beyond the realm of computers, the concept of AI is familiar to us as a fictitious entity with apocalyptic implications. The Hollywood blockbusters like Terminator, The Matrix, Avengers, etc., have showcased this picture of the AI system. But AI is no longer a fictitious entity of the future. It is already part of our world and making rapid strides in our everyday life. From the Amazon recommendations to Spam filters of our email accounts, from virtual assistants like Siri, Cortana, and Alexa to airline autopilot and self-driving cars are all powered by AI system. Space exploration, Manufacturing, Transportation, Energy, Healthcare, and Communication are a few other fields that have highly benefitted from AI. Thus, the way we live today is very much defined by AI systems.

AI: What Is It?

In common parlance, AI is the field in the computer world, which is devoted to developing systems that can learn to make decisions under specific circumstances, based on the available data. These systems will be able to perform tasks that would require human intelligence, like visual recognition, language translation, decision making, etc. While its humble beginning can be traced back to early 1950s, the emergence of ‘Big Data’ and advanced technologies of robotics and sensing have fuelled an explosion of interest in AI and its applications (Mathew and Neupane, 2018). Basically, AI systems can be classified as ‘Weak’ and ‘Strong’. Weak AI systems are the

machines that are designed and developed to respond to specific tasks or situations. They cannot think for themselves. Strong AI systems are those machines that are able to think and act just like humans. These are able to learn from their experiences. To date, there are no real-life Strong AI systems. The best representation would be the Hollywood portrayal of robots.

AI's Impact on Human Society

Most of us have experienced media-friendly AI applications like speech recognition, web recommendations etc., but AI has other widespread applications too. In the Healthcare domain, it fills the gap in human expertise to improve productivity and enhances disease surveillance. Automated diagnostic systems can give higher and accurate results at a faster rate so that the healthcare providers can work more efficiently. AI systems are capable to track and provide early warnings of possible epidemic outbreaks. In the administration domain, it improves the understanding and implementation of e-government applications and services. This drastically optimizes the government's service delivery and maximizes the services cost-effectively provided to the citizens. AI applications, like Artificial Intelligence for Disaster Response (AIDR), are efficient to plan and mitigate natural disasters. These applications process the overwhelming amount of information from different sources and sift out the necessary for rescue operations. In the Agricultural domain, AI applications help with disease identification in crops, Water management and drought monitoring by image analysis. Another field of application is Education. AI systems, like Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS), can take up the roles of tutors, teachers and administrators and thereby improving the teaching and learning process. It

makes education student-centred and personalized. This list can go on into other fields like Economy, Defense, Market, Surveillance, etc (Mathew and Neupane, 2018).

AI: The Dark Side

But is AI all saintly, or does it have a dark side too? The experience and current research suggest some potential risks. Anthropomorphic Bias and lack of Transparency are the two key areas of concern. Being developed and tested on data generated by humans, AI systems are also susceptible to biases. Such systems can exhibit discrimination systematically in critical areas of human life. Ad targeting is a typical example. Due to the complexity of AI algorithms, it is very difficult to isolate why a particular choice was made. Transparency becomes a deception when the system makes an unfair or unethical choice, leading to various liabilities.

A highly advanced AI system can result in human rights violation. Surveillance is processing personal data for the purpose of care or control, to influence or manage people. The use of technologies is leaving a huge amount of digital data both online and in the physical world. AI can process these endless data to keep track of our interests, locations, whereabouts, etc. This results in privacy erosion, which violates human dignity, personal autonomy, freedom of expression, freedom of choice, and freedom of movement. Our over-dependence on social media for information can be systematically manipulated by AI through automated Chatbots, fake news, and highly targeted misinformation. It can distort and manipulate public opinion on a very large scale and can lead to war, discrimination, hostility, and violence. Thus, AI can be a threat to the right to life and the right to equality. Cybercrime can increase due to AI misuse. It can lead to a proliferation of efficient forms of malware and spyware, through which identity, data and e-fund thefts can happen.

Cybercriminals with AI tools can become a risk to individuals, organizations and nations as such. But the greatest threat associated with AI systems is automation, which leads to Job loss. With the arrival of AI system, automation has become part of all domains. Today, many jobs which were traditionally considered to be impossible without human aid are no more so. For example, Competent Deep Learning algorithms have replaced dermatologist in cancer detection. AI-based automation will result in widespread disruption of labour markets and a major shift in the very nature of work (Mathew and Neupane, 2018). Existential philosopher Dr Viktor Frankl holds the view that work or job is one of the main aspects which gives meaning to human life (Fabry, 1988). Thus unemployment due to automation can result in existential problems (Andersen, 2018).

The Human Response to the AI Revolution

Weighing the pros and cons of AI, the future looks perilous for humans. But can AI-enhanced machines, as depicted in the famous movie ‘Terminator’, take over the world, wiping away the human race? Is that the next evolution that is in pipeline? There are four kinds of human responses to this dilemma. They are Optimists, Pessimists, Pragmatists and Doubters.

The Optimists foresee the future as a science fiction in which man is able to harness the speed and processing power of the AI systems by being directly connected to them. This will empower humans to avoid diseases, to slow down the ageing or even reverse ageing and finally making them immortal. Machines will take over all the work and humans will be left free to choose activities of their choice and time of work.

In Pessimist's view, the AI revolution will lead to such complex and powerful systems, that they will make humans an endangered species. They argue that as the machines become more powerful and intelligent, people will let them make all the important decision, as they will be flawless, unbiased, and produce better results. This will make us more dependent on them and afraid to make our own choices. Eventually, humans will be degraded to second rate status, making us their pets. This will directly impact our basic character to be free. Even though it may lead to a world that works perfectly, humans will no longer be humans.

The Pragmatists hold the view that the impending threats that AI can bring in the future can be mitigated by effective regulations and thus use AI to augment human skills. This will keep humans always a step ahead of AI or at least not in a disadvantageous position. Thus they emphasize research works on intelligence augmentation so that humans are always in the safe zone and capable of harnessing rich dividends from the AI.

The Doubters are sceptical and believe AI is impossible. So it is never a threat to humanity. For them, human intelligence and expertise cannot be replicated or be defined as informal rules. Even if the computers are provided with sufficiently advanced algorithms, they will be never able to replicate human intelligence, as human creativity is not always strictly rule-based. The human decision-making process often breaks the rules and becomes anti-algorithmic, based on the complexity of the situation. Thus the human creativity will never be duplicated by any AI algorithms. They will be always an insurmountable vacuum between the human mind and AI, like the paintings of masters are far superior to those of the millions of average painters (Makridakis, 2017).

The Pessimist view looks too naive. History has already proved that humans have an incredible survival instinct. We have adapted and evolved. When the industrial revolution resulted in automation, we did not stop working, but rather we created new jobs and reinvented others. Thus, technologies and innovations have always improved us and brought out the better in us. Similarly, AI too will bring out our better version. Let us not forget that the arrival calculators did not result in the extinction of mathematicians, but made them more efficient. They will free us from reiterating many tasks and thus reducing our work hours. AI can work and learn only within constrained parameters. So, they always will lack emotional intelligence and aesthetic sense, thus requiring a human mind guiding it to perform creative tasks, unless Singularity is achieved. Thus, it would be a folly to believe in the machine-Armageddon theory (Franklin, 2018). But rather it will take us beyond what we are today, making us superhuman. But we cannot also take the side of optimists, completely ignoring the potential threats. Proper measure in design and development need to be drawn so as to make AI as friendly as possible. Thus, we need to take the Pragmatists safe ground, to harness the advantages of AI to the maximum and reduce risks to the minimum. This calls for ‘Friendly AI’.

Human Future and Friendly AI

According to Fyodor Dostoyevsky, the mystery of human existence lies not in just staying alive, but in finding something to live for (Tegmark, 2017). Dr Viktor Frankl would define man as ‘Meaning Seeking Being’, which in turn is oriented to a goal or a purpose (Fabry, 1988). Goals are power sources of our life, something that makes humanity move ahead. Being ‘Goal-Oriented’, all our basic activities and complex works have goals behind

them. The very goal of inventing new technologies is to make our life more comfortable. This is the aspect of man has been passed on to machines too. The only difference is that machines fulfil their goals to utmost perfection until they are properly fueled or they break down, while man's efficiency varies, based on different conditions.

AI-safety pioneer Eliezer Yudkowsky defines Friendly AI as those systems whose goals are aligned to those of humans (Tegmark, 2017). These systems will peacefully co-exist with humans and work side by side. If goals are not aligned, then their ability to accomplish goals can turn into a threat, as they will prioritize their goals over ours. So the real risk with AI system is not the malice it has, but its competence. Thus, goal alignment is the priority in the AI world. It involves making AI learn, adapt and retain human goals. To learn our goals, AI must figure out why we do something and not what we want to do. For this, the machine requires the knowledge of our preferences that go unstated in our requests. The machine needs to observe our behaviours and thus study our preferences. This poses two challenges. Firstly an efficient way to encode and store a system of arbitrary goals and ethical principles and secondly to make the machine capable to figure out which system best matches the observed. Once this is achieved, machines will efficiently understand the what-why-how of something we are in need of.

But this is not enough. The mere knowledge of our goals will not make the machine adopt them. We may have to persuade them to choose our goals. This is termed as Value-Loading, similar to teaching children moral values. The process becomes harder as the systems grow in intelligence and become smarter. So the time window available to load our goals is quite short. Even if humans are able to resolve the problem of goal adopting, there is one more hurdle to cross. It is to make sure that the AI system retains the already loaded

human goals and does not displace them, as it grows more intelligent. Optimist argues that, if we can get our self-improving AI to become friendly with us by the process of goal-learning and goal-adopting, then we can guarantee retention of our goals, as it will try best to remain friendly to us. But there is always a possibility that a self-improving AI system, as it is growing in intelligence will evolve new goals and finding our goals contradictory to them, will replace them.

Thus the human future very much depends on the problems of goal-alignment, which are yet to be resolved. All of these are undergoing active research today and thus requires a significant resource allocation. Humanity as a whole has to collaborate and participate in this process, as our future heavily depends on it.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the AI in future will transform and revolutionize our social and institutional structures. But at the same time, it can also be a Pandora's Box. Thus the major challenge before us would be to maintain the status quo and move towards Friendly AI. While aiming for more intelligent and smarter AI systems, there should be also proper efforts of research and legislation to ensure the fair and appropriate use of AI systems. We need to develop local and global values that can be incorporated into the AI system, which will prioritize ethics and transparency, through interdisciplinary and international collaborations. Our future is destined to be shaped by AI, and the question is whether we are prepared to make them Friendly AI.

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Article Received: May 24, 2019; Accepted: June 3, 2019: Words: 2730



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Vidyankur: Journal of Philosophical and Theological Studies XXI/2 July 2019 | ISSN P-2320-9429 | **28-38**
<https://www.vidyankur.in> | DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4128059
Stable URL: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4128059>

Humanity and AI: Exploring the Significant Issue of Free-Will

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We have been reading about Artificial Intelligence (AI) in SciFi novels and watching it in SciFi films but none of us ever imagined that it would dawn on us so soon. Yes, the time of the AI has finally arrived and it is going to stay here with us. This totally unprecedented situation has given rise to several questions as well such, “What is likely to happen to our future as we are?”, “Whether we like it or not, are we increasingly being controlled by the AI?”, “Is there a future for humanity at all?”, “Is there something called the free will?”, Can the man-machine combination ensure our survival?” and many more along the same line. This article is a serious exploration of the above-mentioned questions.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Free Will, Morality, Wellbeing, Robot-Machine, Consciousness, Intelligence.

Cite this article APA Style: Joseph, Sebin. (2019) Humanity and AI: Exploring the Significant Issue of Free-Will Vidyankur: Journal of Philosophical and Theological Studies July-Dec 2019 XXI/2 www.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4128059 28-38.

Introduction

The successful formula of the near future is going to be “man-machine” (Bostrom 2014). This can lead to a technological disruption that can have a serious impact on the existence of humanity and the wellbeing of all. The machine is to be seen as an extended self of a human being who is often perceived as having free will.

This essay presents AI as a useful and unavoidable companion, which it really is, in the days to come; and guides you on how to get the best out of this unlikely relationship.

Although the advanced studies in Neuroscience and Genetics question the idea of free will today, over the centuries, many philosophers and theologians believe that civilizations evolved on a widespread belief in free will (Harari, 2019).

As we continue along the path of artificial intelligence we will be at a juncture where we may have to concede that it is not just a program, but a conscious being. The AI systems of Chabot are getting smarter every day and are becoming more human-like. People consider AI systems like Alexa and Google Assistant as extended self and some even have developed an intimate relationship with them, thus in effect treating them as an entity in itself. They are advancing themselves towards not just better computing power but with emotional intelligence (Cynthia 2003). This emotionally sound conscious being can claim to be possessing free will, thus making it an autonomous system that has its own rights.

The concept of free will is a complex topic. It is one of the most debated topics over the years. The concept has contributed a lot to the well-being of human society. Now we are at a juncture where a revisit to free will is possible. This paper makes a revisit to free will that is from an anthropocentric

approach to a new approach where all beings are equal. In the evolution AI, it is in the first stage and very soon can reach the level of AGI (artificial general intelligence) and then to ASI (Artificial superintelligence). In this future scenario, these systems can hack humans. The coexistence of humans and machines is going to be the new social system.

The Big Questions: From Philosophy to Engineering

Philosophers have been preparing for this moment for thousands of years. Questions like free will, the meaning of life humanity philosophers have been discussing this for thousands of years with almost zero impact on humanity (Cave 2016). Humanities and the classics have a role to play. In that, they are concerned with the big questions about the meaning of life and how to live a good life. A lot of questions are going to migrate from the department of philosophy to the department of engineering and the department of economics. Questions like what do you really want to do with your life are going to become far more practical than ever before. The given immense powers that technology is giving us and the ability to change yourself to change your body to change your brain is going to put enormous philosophical challenges in front of the average person (Harari, 2019). You need to make the kind of decision that for most of history were the stuff of thought experiments by philosophers. Philosophy in humanity, in general, are maybe more important than ever before. These problems have become practical problems of engineering and politics. Engineers are impatient. Designing a self-driving car, you cannot wait 5000 years you need to decide ethical questions and philosophical questions now.

The Complexity of the Problem of Technological Disruption

Technologies like AI will reshape the future of life itself. Technical disruption is a far more complicated problem because we do not want to give up on the immense potential of artificial intelligence and bioengineering. Besides, there is no agreement about what is the best outcome as many of the projects that frighten some people get other people extremely excited (Harari, 2019a). This is an intellectual problem and it is far difficult.

Shifting of Authority from Humans to Algorithms

Humans are hackable animals. This is the result of the combination of two enormous scientific and technological revolutions. The revolution in infotech and biotech which in the past decades have evolved separately but now are combining to become a single revolution results in the ability to hack human beings. It is based on insight from AI. Organisms are really algorithms and therefore algorithm can hack organisms. Biological knowledge multiplied by computing power multiplied by data equals the ability to hack humans. Hack human being means to understand me better than I understand myself (Harari 2017). Whoever understands me better than I understand myself cannot just predict my decisions and choices but can also manipulate my decisions and choices and increasingly take decisions on my behalf. It means the shifting of authority from humans to algorithms. Many governments and corporations and institutions throughout history had this ambition to understand and control humans. It was not really possible because they never had the biological knowledge of the computing power and the data necessary to do it. Shortly, some corporations and governments will have all these to systematically hack millions and even billions of people.

The Implication of the Shift in Authority

This could mean the end of liberal democracy and the end of the free-market economy. Liberal democracy is based on the insight that the voter knows the best and the voter is an ultimate authority in the political field. A free-market economy is based on the idea that the customer is always right. The ultimate authority in the field of economics is the desire of the customers. The political governments should represent the will of the people and the corporation should serve the will tell the desires of customers (Harari, 2019a). It is not a hypothetical question. The questions open up to them about human agency and about the very meaning of the free will. The problem of free will bothered philosophers for thousands of years. We now or will soon have the technology that will enable governments and corporations to manipulate and control the will of the voters and the desire of the customers.

Free Will

The idea of being in control of how we act the up to us-ness of our actions is all about free will (Frederick 2013). The free will problem consists of whether we are in control of how we act and what this control involves. This is considered to be the oldest and hardest problem in philosophy. The problem of “free will” is closely associated with the question of moral responsibility.

The free will problem consists of whether we are in control of how we act and what this control involves. This is considered to be the oldest and hardest problem in philosophy.

In the case of free will, you cannot live your life on the assumption of determinism. The “problem of free will” is often called a question of reconciling “free

will” with many of the many kinds of determinism. The “problem of free will” is determined by two things, the exact definition of free will and which of the determinisms is being reconciled.

It is the most sensitive subject. It is sensitive to religious people because without free will Judaism, Christianity, Islam and so on do not make any sense. It is a sensitive topic to an atheist as well because it seems to touch what human beings care about and makes us distinctly human (Cave, 2019). They are mortality, politics, law, religion, feeling of guilt and responsibility.

Free will is a scandal in philosophy because we have not made any progress. The reason why we have a special problem with free will is that we have inconsistent views of overwhelming reasons. The reason for believing we have free will is that we experience it every day. We have the experience of conscious rational decision making. The decisions are not themselves forced by antecedently sufficient causal conditions (Cave 2016). Human behaviour is part of the natural world and it looks like it ought to be explained in terms of cause.

Different Approaches to Free Will

Determinism is the thesis that all events are determined by a prior cause. We take an event and consider it as casual laws that govern the universe whatever they are. Quote from Humes inquiry “It is agreed that matter in all its operations is actuated by a necessary force and that every natural effect is so precisely determined by the energy of its cause that no other effect in such particular circumstances could have resulted from it”. He also argues that it is also true of human actions. And it can be a thesis of universal determinism. It is not just the physical world but also applicable to things like a moral world of people and actions. It is called causal determinism. This takes to the conclusion that the future is fixed and determined by the past.

The controlling factors which depend on our action are the environment we born into, the genes we were born with, the desire and feelings that come over us beyond our control.

Promoting Life without Free Will

The compelling mystery is that we have a robust experience of freedom but cannot figure out how to map it on to physical reality. We are not truly separated but we are linked to one another, we are linked to the world, and we are linked to our past and history. The linkage makes all matter. Pride and shame do not make a lot of sense in the final analysis but they were no fun anyway. The things like compassion and love to care about wellbeing make sense.

The role of luck in our lives appears decisive (Frederick, 2013). The moral significance of luck is very difficult to admit. It seems completely destabilized. The problem of free will is deeper than the problem of cause and effects. The experience of free will cannot map it on to physical reality. Free will does not correspond to a subjective fact about ourselves. The experience of free will gives us the conviction of free will and the general knowledge about how the world works give us the conviction of determinism. Viewing yourself as a system open to myriad influences makes change seem more possible. The self is not a stable entity. It is a mysterious process. The present is a mystery that doesn't get eradicated even when you have a story to tell.

We are discovering each moment by simply discovering what our life is. Think about the context in which you are going to make your next decision. The brain is making choices based upon beliefs and intentions and states that have been hammered into it over a lifetime. Physical

development is something you have no hand in. The totality of influences and states will be the thing that produces your next decision.

The religious answer to human evil is free will. Free will make the idea of sin. I am the cause of unbelief. Turning the variable of determinism and randomness free will doesn't any significance. There is no mix of randomness and determinism. This view according to religion is dehumanizing but actually, this process humanizes (Harris, 2020: 68).

Believing in free will then you say, well, this just reflects my freedom. And that's the end of the investigation. You will lose all curiosity and also all suspicion about where your desire and thoughts are coming from. Your desire reflects a large number of biological and social and cultural factors that are not under your control but might be increasingly under the control of somebody else. Freedom is not something you have freedom is something you need to struggle for.

Conclusion

We were never as free as we thought we were. There is increasing evidence that free will is always an illusion. In the past, you didn't have to pay a high price for believing in this illusion because humans were too complicated to be hacked by external systems. A thousand years ago many of your desires and decisions did not reflect free will. They reflected all kinds of biological and cultural factors. You could still believe in free will because nobody could really understand how you make decisions and nobody could manipulate people on the scale. Now free will might become one of the most dangerous illusions in the world because the easiest people to manipulate are the people who believe in free will. Because they do not believe that anybody can manipulate them.

Thoughts emerge in consciousness. We are not authoring them. We cannot think of them, we cannot choose them before

we think of them, which would require that we think of them before we think of them. If you cannot control your next thought you do not know what is going to be until it appears where freedom of will is. The experience of the present moment, even the simplest sensation is built upon layers of unconscious processing. The unconscious machinery produces not only our perceptions but our thoughts, intentions, actions, and decisions. This challenges the notion of free will and moral responsibility. Benjamin Libet found the time lag between the moment you think you decided to do something and the moment at which your brain decided. It is with the help of EEG and fMRI. The voluntary actions also can be detected before you become aware of them. Freedom means exercising my desire then you are already a slave. You are already a slave not of your biological mechanism you are a potential slave of somebody who knows how to pull the levels of what really causes you to desire one thing and not another.

In the evolution of artificial intelligence, we are at the transition period of weak AI to Artificial general intelligence. Here humans give the notion of free will to AI systems and take a sceptical approach to free will. The notion of being and free will to the AI systems make them responsible for their action and promote wellbeing in the world. Here we do not consider them as members of society but as a being, which promotes life and harmony to the whole world.

In the final stage of AI, that is Artificial Super Intelligence, the relation of man-machine and society is an open-ended question. The possibility of a human being as a wonderful memory is quite amazing.

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Article received: May 2, 2019: Accepted: June 5, 2019:
Words: 2650



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Vidyankur: Journal of Philosophical and Theological Studies XXI/2 July 2019 | ISSN P-2320-9429 | **39-49**
<https://www.vidyankur.in> | DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4128086
Stable URL: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4128086>

Levinasian Ethical Project and Its Relevance to the Contemporary Society

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Abstract: Renowned French-Jewish philosopher Immanuel Levinas posits a novel approach to philosophy. Levinas argues that traditional western philosophy, because of its overemphasis on reason, is far removed from the realities of day-to-day life. A philosophy that fails to address the pressing challenges of the time and that which does not impel one to reach out to one's neighbour is practically futile. Drawing inspiration from his Jewish roots, Levinas proposes ethics as the first philosophy. His bitter experiences as a Jew in the context of the Second World War served as the harbinger for his ethical project. In doing so, he introduces certain terms which are apparently familiar to us but are laden with meanings and symbolism. This article tries to argue that the Levinasian ethical project as it is proposed in his key writings is an antidote to the growing sense of alienation among different sections of society

Cite this article in APA Style: Tomy, Ivin. (2019) Levinasian Ethical Project and Its Relevance to the Contemporary Society Vidyankur: Journal of Philosophical and Theological Studies July-Dec 2019 XXI/2 www.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4128086 39-49.

today. Levinasian ethics prompts one to reach out to one's needy neighbours.

Keywords: Epiphany, Face, Ethics, 'The Other,' Levinas

Introduction

One of the greatest defects that plague contemporary human society is the brutal indifference to the plight of others. Pope Francis did not mince his words when he called this indifference a 'virus', which we must fight with. He says, "I do not grow tired of repeating, that indifference is a virus that is dangerously contagious in our time, a time when we are ever more connected with others but are increasingly less attentive to others." Indifference paralyzes and impedes us from doing what is right even when we know that it is right. Who is to be blamed for the proliferation of this culture of cold indifference? Perhaps the traditional western philosophy with its over-emphasis on the primacy of reason seems to have forgotten to pay sufficient attention to the plea of the downtrodden.

However, we have in the person of Emmanuel Levinas a man who sought to reconnect philosophy with the real life situations of the common man. He posited a new understanding of ethics, which has a direct bearing on the lives of our less-privileged brethren. In this article, I would like to explicate the ethical project of Levinas and its relevance in our contemporary society.

This article explains the ethical project of the French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. It tries to explore the relevance of Levinasian ethics in the contemporary society.

Early Life, Education and Background

Emmanuel Levinas was born to Jewish parents in Lithuania in the year 1906. After the migration of his family to France, he attended Strasbourg University and then Freiburg University. He was under the tutelage of the doyens of phenomenology; Heidegger and Husserl. Though he began his philosophy as a phenomenologist, he chartered a new course in that realm wherein ethics was given due recognition. His important works are *Totality and Infinity*, *Existence and Existents*, *Otherwise than Being*, *Time and the Other* and *Beyond Essence*.

Judaic Influence

Levinasian scholars would undoubtedly agree that his upbringing as a practising Jew has had a tremendous influence on his philosophical explorations. Levinas was a practising Jew and was well versed in Talmudic Hebrew. He has written extensive commentaries on Talmud. Some of the terms that one comes across in his works like ‘face’, ‘height’ and ‘epiphany’ and clearly of Talmudic origin. Levinas’ call for responding to the plea of the other, who is the poor, the orphan and the widow, is a clear indication of the Talmudic origin of his philosophy. He attempts to make the biblical love for the stranger a philosophically intelligible thesis.

Criticism of Traditional Western Philosophy

Levinas had strong reservations against the traditional western philosophy. He argued that the traditional philosophy with its overemphasis on reason was far removed from the life of common. Philosophy, according to him, nurtured nostalgia for totalising. It also sought to divide everything in terms of categories; human relations being no exception to this totalising tendency. Metaphysics was given prime importance in the philosophical circles and it was also considered the ‘first philosophy.’ Therefore, Levinas proposed ethics as the ‘first

philosophy.’ For Levinas, human relations were of greater importance than metaphysical speculations.

What compounded his disillusionment with the traditional philosophy is his experience during the Second World War. Being a Jew, Levinas saw for himself the plight of thousands of hapless victims of Nazi brutality. He disagreed strongly with his mentor Heidegger for his overt support of Nazism. Levinas sensed the need to reconnect philosophy with the stark realities of life and thus we have the Levinasian ethical project, which is primarily based on human interactions.

Levinas believed that the aim of philosophy is not to make us better thinkers or to understand better, at least not for its own sake. It is to get us to live better lives, to act with greater generosity and goodness, to be a better parent, a better friend, a better lover, a better statesman, a better teacher- all by acting towards others with more responsibility and concern than we do. Our goal should be to see, and act because we see that caring for others is the whole point of our lives at all; it is to respond to the “secret tears” of the other.

Highlights of Levinasian Ethics

Levinasian ethics is radically different from other schools of ethics propagated by philosophers like Kant, J Bentham or J S Mill. For Levinas, ethics is not a set of rules or moral codes. Ethics, for him, is basically optics. Ethics happens, literally before our eyes, as the face before us calls us into question. Ethics is ‘an optics’ as it begins as a vision, through which we intuit our ethical responsibility. It is all about relating oneself with the human Other. Levinas uses the word ‘ethics’ to refer to the face-to-face’, or ethical relation to the human Other. It is in the context of the human relation involved in ethics, Levinas brings the idea

of face-to-face relation. The ‘face’ of the ‘Other’ impels me, calls me to reach out to him or her. The face of the Other impels me to be ethical and responsible.

Now, the terms ‘face’ and ‘Other’, which are used extensively in the Levinasian discourse require further explanation. It may be noted that these terms are not used as they understood in the normal sense. What then is a face for Levinas? He writes:

A face is not like a plastic form, which is always deserted, betrayed by the being it reveals, such as marble from which the gods it manifests already absent themselves. It differs from an animal’s head in which a being, in its brutish dumbness, is not yet in touch with itself. In a face, the expressed attends its expression, expresses its very expression, and always remains the master of the meaning it delivers. A “pure act” in its own way, it resists identification, does not enter into the already known, brings aid to itself, as Plato puts it, speaks. The epiphany of a face is wholly language.

Levinas employs the word “face” with the greatest care. The face of the other person is not the appearance of the other person; it is not a collection of features given to visual perception. It has no parts, no components. The face means what it is: imploring, a plea of the weak to the powerful or the poor to the rich. The face is the way the other person presents herself to me.

Who then is the ‘Other’? The Other, Levinas contends, is not a member of any human species. It is neither a concept nor a substance. The Other is also not defined by properties nor by its character. It is neither a social position nor a place in history. The Other is not an object of knowledge or comprehension as well. Nor it is an object of description. The Other is the one that we ought not kill. The Other is absolutely other than the self. The other is the other oneself.

The way the Other appears in the face is described by Levinas as ‘epiphany’, which in turn is a visitation. The term visitation understood in its etymological meaning, underlines the act of coming from outside toward someone. Levinas also argues that the relation between the self and the ‘Other’ (whose face impels me to be ethical) is not symmetrical. It is an asymmetrical relation, wherein the ethical command to be responsible proceeds from the Other. If this relation were to be symmetrical, the Other becomes merely another me and it becomes no longer a stranger. The face of the Other makes a singular command because of this asymmetrical relation.

Levinas contends that in the face of the Other, there is an elevation, a height. The Other is higher than I. Height does not mean heavens, might, riches, etc. but the fact that the other person’s demand transcends my ‘being-at-home’. The Other is a stranger, widow and orphan because he is from beyond the familiar world of the ‘I’ The other is always the poor one, poverty defines the poor person as the Other, and the relation with the other will always be an offering and a gift, not an ‘empty-handed’ approach.

Responsibility for the ‘Other’

The pinnacle of the Levinasian ethical project is the notion of responsibility for the ‘Other’. Levinas acquired the concept of responsibility from the Judaic tradition. He takes this concept of responsibility from the Torah and gives it a philosophical explanation. Philosophically speaking, responsibility is a situation prior to any conceptualization. It is an obligation to respond to the Other, a responsibility to and for the other person.

What is the nature of this responsibility? Normally to be responsible means to be accountable for our actions and work. However, such a responsibility is a limited one; it is

founded on freedom. It has no value beyond free choice. We cannot be held responsible for what is beyond our freedom. Levinas disagrees with the priority of freedom over responsibility. He argues that man is invested with responsibility even when he does not want to be. Man does not choose to be responsible; he belongs to responsibility. It is not a result of free choice. Everybody is responsible for everyone. In short, I am responsible for my brethren when they are in distress.

Before the 'I' could choose to be responsible, it is made responsible. This would mean that 'I' is left with little choice but to be responsible. The face of the Other puts 'I' in a state of restlessness or ethical insomnia. This restlessness is so powerful that 'I' cannot escape it and makes himself/herself available to the needs of the Other. Levinas says that this responsibility conditions the structure of the subject itself. The face awakens the 'I' to responsibility, puts it in a 'restless unrest', an 'ethical insomnia'. The 'I' cannot escape this. The 'I' collides with the Other, and the Other becomes the 'spirit' or 'spirituality that animates and inspires the 'I'. Thus the 'I' realizes its responsibility for the Other, through the Other.

Relevance of Levinasian Ethics in the Contemporary Society

As I had mentioned earlier, Levinasian ethics is the most suited antidote to our society, which is marred by cold and cruel indifference to the sufferings of others. Levinas, by drawing an analogy from the Sacred Scripture, exhorts us to open to the plea of the needy. What makes Levinasian ethics original and pragmatic is its foundation on human relations. For Levinas, ethics is impossible unless people interact with one another and respond to the plea of the Other effectively. This makes his ethics universal and effective.

By being ethical, one cannot but shed one's ego and self-centeredness. The plight of the Other puts my ego to shame. It provokes me to go beyond my selfish interests and find ways and means to address the plight of the one from the ethical command proceeds to me.

Levinasian ethics is practical because it is connected with our day-to-day life. In ordinary life situations, we make choices. We make choices as to how to act, who to spend time with, who to share one's energy and resources with. Our answers to such apparently trivial questions chart the direction of our life. Historical, social, economic or political situations may differ from time to time.

I would argue that Levinasian ethics is relevant all the more in this world of ours today. The rise of populist leaders, the rise of majoritarianism, the continuing plight of refugees and other displaced people, the unabating violence against women and children and the indifference of the rich to the poor mar the ethical landscape of humankind. In these challenging times, a philosophy that gives heed to the cry of the poor, the orphan and the widow stands out a beacon of light at the end of the tunnel.

The moral philosophy as proposed by Levinas finds its application in our families and the society at large. We have numerous examples of generous person who spend their time and energy for their less privileged brethren who are abandoned in the streets and alleyways or dislodged in hospices. We have examples of government officials going out of their professional mandate to ensure that their fellow citizens avail the government benefits. The successful social movements that we have witnessed around the world stem from the sense of responsibility of the social leaders towards their fellow citizens. We see in our families the sick, the old and the disabled being taken

care of with love by our mothers, mothers and siblings. What moves them to do this is not the plea from the face of the Other, who is less privileged and is not in a position to fend for himself/herself.

Levinas' life and thinking were deeply affected by the trauma of the Nazi genocide, better known as the Holocaust. The unspeakable horror unleashed by the Nazis on hapless Jews brought about a drastic change in his philosophy and thinking. One of the reasons for the perpetuation of such unspeakable crimes against Jews was the indifference of the then international community to the plight of the suffering of Jews in various concentration camps. The society that we live in is no better. Our families and communities are plagued by this cruel culture of indifference. The hardships and pain of the other fail to make any difference in most of us. Levinasian ethical project comes into action at this juncture. It tells us to pause for some time in our pursuit of money and fame. It impels us to create a culture of encounter, of a fruitful encounter, of an encounter that restores to each person his or her own dignity as a child of God, the dignity of a living person. Most of us when encountered with the plight of others may at best exclaim: 'What a shame, poor people, look how they are suffering,' and then we carry on with no apparent change of heart. Levinas would go a step further and exhort us to respond proactively to this crying, pleading face of the other. Such a response will invariably curb the culture of indifference in our society.

Conclusion

Levinas and his ethical project is undoubtedly a perfect antidote to the virus of indifference, about which I referred in the opening paragraph. Levinas does not give us any rules or norms as such like many other moral philosophers like Kant, Aquinas, J S Mill or J Bentham. Levinasian ethics is defined

solely by human relations and interactions. This makes it flexible, tangible and practical. Though the terms ‘face’, ‘Other’ and ‘epiphany’ sound abstract, the message conveyed by means of these images makes his philosophy intelligible.

Levinasian ethics gives a clarion call to all men and women of goodwill who strive to rebuild the human society on egalitarian grounds. It gives direction to those striving to eradicate tears from the eyes of others. However, it may also be observed that Levinasian ethics, despite all its claims and merits, does not offer a panacea for all the pressing problems afflicting human society. I would say no theory can ever propose a universal solution to the very many challenges faced by humanity. Nevertheless, Levinas and his ethics remind us of our obligation to the less privileged in our society. The choice before us is either to pay heed to the plea of the Other or to ignore with cold indifference.

The ‘virus’ of indifference is far more dangerous than any other ailments that can plague humanity. Failing to respond to the desperate plea of our brethren make us less of human beings. Levinasian ethics, taking cue from the biblical command of love for one’s neighbour, urges us to live our meaningfully, by being available to others in times of their need.

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Article Received: April 4, 2019; Accepted: June 3, 2019; Words: 2880



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Vidyankur: Journal of Philosophical and Theological Studies

XXI/2 July 2019 | ISSN P-2320-9429 | **50-64**

<https://www.vidyankur.in> | DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4128105

Stable URL: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4128105>

Who Am I? Searching for Purpose and Meaning from Indian Perspectives to Modern Generation

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Abstract: A review article on the inspiring book, Shubhrangshu. (2019). *Zara's Witness: A soul journey into the nature of being*, highlights the philosophical quest for meaning and fulfilment from Indian traditions. It is a never-ending novel where a teenage girl is heroin, who searches for truth, permanence and values.

Keywords: Shubhrangshu Roy, Zara's Witness, Indian philosophy, Search for meaning, Indian world-view, Advaita.

Cite APA Style: Pandikattu, Kuruvilla. (2019) Who Am I? Searching for Purpose and Meaning from Indian Perspectives to Modern Generation Vidyankur: Journal of Philosophical and Theological Studies July-Dec 2019 XXI/2 www.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4128105 50-64.

Roy, Shubhrangshu. (2019). *Zara's Witness: A soul journey into the nature of being*. New Delhi: Hay House India. pp.204 Rs 299. ISBN: 9789386832900

This elegant and inspiring book, *Zara's Witness*, is a living translation of classical Indian philosophy to the modern youth or Gen Z. It uses fantasy, myth, science, music, poetry and other symbolisms to evoke the depth and beauty of our inner consciousness, as represented by the Indian psyche. It tells the story of a teenager seeking wisdom for herself in her life journey from the Ganges to the forest to the city!

1. The Compelling Plot

With elegant prose, coupled with the sporadic poems, the book tries to share the classical wisdom of Upanishads and sacred texts with the modern youth absorbed by contemporary virtual reality and discotheques.

This book aptly dedicated to “the one within” is an ongoing search to find oneself in all its depth and breadth. It has as its Purva Paksha the following sections: “Song of Creation”; “Illusion of Identity”; “The Essence of Being.”

The last two sections, “Song of Creation Revisited” and “The End of Story: The Game Begins” are conversations with the higher self of the teenage Zara, the protagonist of the story, before she ascends to the sky to confront the one and only reality of her being – I am who thou art, or thou art who I am. They reverberate in us the classical *Aham Brahmasmi* (“I am Brahman) and *Tat Tvam Asi* (“That thou art”).

In this sense, this book evokes in us “Noting Stirs” and in this very process “Everything Happens.” That is how human beings experience life and the novel does the same.

The last section of the book, or after-conversation, is “a copyright blueprint of the equation for everything in the Universe” articulated as “the essence of this and that” (p. 13 and 191). The attentive reader

will be able to find “this equation” interspersed throughout the narrative. The concept of time and space, as measured by ancient seers, is elaborated at the end of the book (p. 13 and 197f.). Thus time is smoothly blended to life and narrative (Ricoeur 2009).

a. Learning from the Bosom of Nature

The teachers in this captivating novel are elements of nature. Froggy (the frog), Elly (the elephant), the Wind, Monk!ee, Thunderstorm, River, Koel (the sweet-singing bird), Hyena, Rhino, Peacock ridge, etc., impart lessons for Zara and accompany her in her life journey.

The book deploys several tools used in other crafts and science such as literature, poetry, theatre, classical Indian and Western music, cinema, and quantum computing to narrate Zara’s inner exploration (p. 12) to arrive at her inner self. So, it is from her close intimacy with nature that Zara acquires the wisdom to lead her meaningful and fulfilling life.

b. Answering the Perennial Question

This picturesque book is an attempt to answer the eternal human question: Who am I? That search of a teen “meanders along the course of a river to its final destination in the sky where both the river and the human spirit merge at the end of the journey to discover the one eternal truth revealed to mankind since time immemorial—universal love” (p. 11). This search is a perennial one found in the whole Indian philosophy right up to our own times. Shubhrangshu Roy makes a very successful effort to make this search accessible for Gen Z.

c. The Never-Ending Story

For Shubhrangshu Roy, the nature of Indian philosophy and the diverse aspirations of it “not only spirals upwards, i.e., it ascends from one story to another, but it is also essentially

recursive. Which is to say, it is never-ending and almost amounts to the same thing being told over and over again through shifts in the storytelling from generation to generation, from one millennium to another. In a sense, there is actually no end, no conclusion. The storyteller and the story can go on and on (203). This reminds us of the *Neverending Story* of the German writer Michael Ende (1993), who has written a similar story for children and teens. Like a never-ending story, the narrator becomes part of the story and the differences between the story and the hero become indistinguishable. Here the individual self, liberated from the illusion of identity, follows the cycles of life, death and rebirth together with the whole cosmic processes.

2. Some Significant Themes

This fascinating book contains very important lessons for life and articulates the classical Indian philosophy for the contemporary youth. In this section, we pick and choose randomly, some important themes, without ever claiming that we are making an exhaustive list.

a. Ongoing Discovery of the Inner Self

Most of the themes in this book are philosophically profound and can be traced to the Indian classics. The basic question Zara asks is: “Who am I?” and “Where did I come from?” “You come from, yourself, Zara,” (p. 161), answers the river “in celebration.” “But how did I come here?” Zara wondered aloud. The reply was enigmatic: “You came here riding time, Zara. Time, indeed, is your father,” said the river. And how did I come here riding time?” Zara asked again (Ricoeur 2009).

“Your desire of you rode time here,” said the river. “Those words were your desire to become something that expanded in time,” the river said as Zara waited for the answer. “Your desire illumined your senses with the colours of the rainbow, Zara, so that you could reach out to your higher self within, just as the tendrils of the plant reach out for sunlight. And that light generated heat. And that heat created

the germ of life in you that we call the seed. And that seed is what you ceded of yourself within you, splitting you into two.” (p. 162).

The river elaborates on time. “Time is the distance you covered for the idea of you to become you and, therefore, turn full circle (p. 163)”.

In this discovery of the true self, and the illusion of identity, Zara listens to a sweet song, “*Jo tu hai, so main hoon; jo main hoon, so tu hai!* (What you are, so am I; what I am, so are you!) repeatedly in the course of this story (pp. 31, 90, 166, 182). ‘Have faith in yourself, Zara’, said the voice from within the pool. No one here is bigger than you, nor is anyone smaller than you are. Not the ant, not the housefly, not the butterfly, not the dragonfly, not the grasshopper, not the frog, not the monitor lizard, and, least of all, not the elephant. Come look again, little Zara, neither is there any joy for you around this place nor is there any sorrow . . . what you are, little Zara, so I am; what I am, so you are.” (p. 25). Precisely herein discerns the author the advaitic insight of the Indian tradition. Here the suggestion of Rhino to Zara is significant: “Remembah, whateva you do, whereva you go, you do it for your own good. Revel in the creation of your Universe. Live in exuberance, Zara.” That’s well said, Rhi!noo. replied Zara. “I am the creator of my Universe indeed. That’s for certain” (p. 114).

Laughingly the river adds: “I am what you are. Better still, I am what you perceive I am. Right now, dear Zara, you perceive me as . . . (p. 30)”. So, there is an intimate relationship between Zara and the river. The advaitic insight is that they are both one (Pandikattu 2001)!

In this manner, the search for the inner self, the real self, goes on. “Do not rest your eyes on what you see around. Do not seek the external manifestation of what really is within. Seek the

silence of your soul, seek the wisdom of your heart,” the monitor lizard strutted about, inspecting and instructing (p. 34). To realise this inner self, cleansing of one’s mind is essential. “Come, lemme cleanse your minds ... For when I am one with myself within, I rid myself of the dilemmas of my mind (p. 37).”

Then we realise that we are the universe. “Make the entire Universe your own. The river, the fish, the birds, the worms, the reptiles and all. And to make them your own, renounce the image you have of yourself, the river flowed on (p. 39).”

Realising the essence of everything leads to the same effect. “When you peel an onion to its end, you are only left with its essence. That essence alone is you. When you feel the essence, you absorb everything (p. 176).” Feeling the essence means giving up the ego or the false sense of identity. “The river helps you know yourself. Kill the I in you every day, kill all that you feel is yours (p. 59).”

The infinity of self: When you reach this essence and make the entire universe your own, you recognise the Infinity of your own self. “You taught me to fear the vastness of your expanse, which is also the vastness of my imagination. You taught me to fear the infinity of self. And then, you taught me to overcome my fear by submerging myself in my reflection in you” (p. 86), which is the infinity of one’s own self.

b. Continuing Search for Wisdom

The story of Zara is itself a journey, a journey towards the discovery of meaning and wisdom. Enclosed in a plasma bubble, Zara lands on the bank of the Ganges from the tongue of the glacier. She begins her life on the riverbank where the eternal question of “Who am I?” drives her on a journey from the forest to the city where she reckons that she can find her purpose. In her challenging and troublesome voyage, she experiences personal loss and materialistic pleasures which lifts her up to a higher level of consciousness.

The journey of life: When Zara decides to leave the forest and travel to the city, the hyena advises her, “The forest is irrelevant to your journey. You have to tackle the trees that stand in your way, instead. Your desire to reach the city must not get distorted by your fear, or else, you will lose yourself trapped in the forest, unable to reach your journey’s end.” (p. 112)

The author Roy himself adds. “I felt that Zara’s journey to the sky (to the high heavens, as it were) and what happens thereafter, should be left as an open-ended happily ever after (p. 203).

Purpose and Wisdom: This novel is a philosophical fantasy capturing the journey of a girl – from infancy to adulthood seeking the purpose of her life. “That search meanders along the course of a river to its final destination in the sky where both the river and the human spirit merge at the end of the journey to discover the one eternal truth revealed to mankind since time immemorial—universal love.” (p. 11)

In doing so, the writer Roy “combines the wisdom of the spiritual master with over 5,000 years of Vedic expositions in a series of hallucinatory journeys that deliver the core” (p.11) wisdom of the Indian traditions, for balanced global development.

This wisdom the teen acquires is one that comforts and smoothens the others. “The river feels the presence of visitors, but doesn’t drown in their joy or sorrow; It ought to be the same with your mind that harbours both the good and the evil (p. 67).” The same river avers: “It’s only the wise, like that giant banyan by my western bank, who actually soaks my water and give comfort to one and all (pp. 69-70).”

This profound experience of wisdom is available to everyone from everywhere. “And that’s exactly how each of us, at every level of awareness, discover that every creature here is a

gatekeeper of wisdom. We all draw our arrogance from access control to the ultimate wisdom that really seems beyond our individual grasp,” the grasshopper said (p. 41).

Once we acquire this wisdom, we will use it for the common or collective good. After attaining the power of our knowledge, “wise travellers use their knowledge to read the past and interpret what they see around to chart their future path (p. 112).”

c. Existential Predicament: Suffering and Death

That there is so much suffering in our lives is self-evident. The hyena gives almost the Buddhist precept through a hymn” “Thoughts lead to affirmation, Affirmation to desire, Desire leads to thirst, Thirst to craving (p.113).” He gives a trick to live in this world of suffering and affliction. “The trick is to achieve without action, to speak without a word (p. 113).” The solution to the sorrows of life has to be sought within. “Your sorrow comes from within. Solve your sorrows within. Remember, there is no joy in the material things of life. The treasure lies buried someplace else (p. 121).”

When Zara experiences the loss of her friend Elly, the elephant, she is totally lost. “I understand that and respect your sentiments, Zaru [nickname for Zara]. But I must also tell you that it’s essential for you to experience everything in life, even a sense of loss. You must learn when not to jump the threshold. And this moment is your test of time,” (p. 126) the west wind comforted her.

Paradoxical Life: Suffering highlights the predicaments and paradoxes of our life. “That’s the nature of life. Growth gives way to decay. And out of decay, new life is born,” (p. 121). The author elaborates, “Whenever I chased joy, I drowned myself in tears,” (p. 121).

Nothingness: The paradoxical nature of life can be seen in Zara’s experience of nothingness (*sunyata*) as a whole (fullness). “And so, in the flutter of an eyelid, Zara was reduced to Z.E.R.O., at which

point, she let out a primordial scream: “I aaaaaaaaam Nothing!” And that, indeed, was the moment when her self became infinite in the great, and in the small, everlasting and changeless, the source of life, unborn, without the body and mind (p. 145).”

Roy elaborates in poetry: “From Nothing arises Consciousness .../That arousal is Movement/ This Movement is Reverberation/ That Reverberation is Energy/ This Energy is Power/ That Power is the Basis of Attraction? This Attraction is the basis of all Creation? That Creation is the Reverberation of Something? That appears as Nothing? This Nothing is the Whole (p. 146).”

d. The Solutions: Freedom, Knowledge and Love

The way out of suffering and the paradoxes of life is diverse. Some of the elements that I can trace in the novel are as follows:

Living the Now: Even though the novel, following Indian philosophical traits encourages acquiring knowledge, it makes it clear. “There’s bliss neither in knowledge nor in dedication. What’s there is there in you. Enjoy the moment (p. 121).” This Buddhist insight is central to understanding how Roy deals with the richness, diversity and complexity of life. “Live in the present, Zaru. Live now!” (p. 139) the west wind also pleads with Zara.

This enables one to enjoy life and experience the things of this world like a bouquet. “Look around. Not a single soul in this forest is perfect. Some can run, others can fly, while others can jump or swim. But we all are here together to make the forest what it really is. Be part of the bouquet, Zara (p. 123).” Though none of us are ideal of perfect, together we can make it livable, though we are not perfect or ideal.

For this purpose, a healthy and meaningful way of coping with our own emotions is vital. In our search for meaningful life we cannot allow ourselves to be blackmailed by our own emotions. “A healthy person, Zaru,” the wind went on, “has all the emotions, all the qualities, but doesn’t allow herself to be blackmailed by them. Be alert, Zaru.” Similarly, when Zara is encouraged to cultivate friendship, she is warned from falling in love. “You are weak, he is strong, Every friendship has a purpose. Don’t fall in love (p. 134).” This is because falling in love is being blackmailed by emotions.

The answer is simple and straightforward: “Just surrender oversell as a log to the will of time and the artisan will sculpt you into shape,” (p. 128) the west wind said before blowing away.

Freedom: When we surrender unconditionally to the larger reality that is very much part of us, without being blackmailed by emotions, we attain freedom. “Retain your freedom, Zaru,” the west wind said. Don’t rest your mind on the objects around . . . on the body . . . on the person. Unshackle yourself, Zaru, lose your sense of the body (p. 135)”

“Yes, she’s [koel, the bird] entirely free, Zaru. And that freedom gives her such a lovely voice. If you hear them well, Zaru, no two birds in the forest sing the same. Each has her distinct voice. And yet, they all sing well because they all are free (p. 135).” But the beautiful peacock is “trapped in the image of his own beauty to be really free (p. 136).”

For Zara and us the path of freedom leads to fulfilment. “Just empty yourself within. Never be neither here nor there. Be either here or there. Be either in the city or the forest. Don’t keep standing at the crossroads forever. That, Zaru, is the essence of being (p. 136).”

Roy explains: “This is to say that when IOU Nothing, I am Free. This Freedom, therefore, is Virtual Reality. That Freedom is also Real because this Me that is Virtual is also that Me that is Real (p. 149).”

Knowledge: Another means of our own fulfilment is acquiring genuine knowledge. It is easy to obtain. “Just observe, Zaru, soak in the beauty of the moment to which you now belong, that’s knowledge,” (p. 141). There is a metaphysical basis for it. “That Universal is Knowledge This Knowledge of I resides in You. That Knowledge is what I Need. This Need is what IOU. That that IOU is the Trinity of Being (p. 147).”

Loving the Whole Universe: Another very significant way of achieving fulfilment is reaching out to the other and loving everything. Roy explains poetically: “This Creation leads to Preservation/ That Preservation leads to Ownership/ This Ownership between Two results from Ownership of One by the Other? . . . /And that, Zara, is the essence of Love (p. 158).”

“Keep looking, Zaru,” the west wind said in a calm, collected manner. “Love others as you would love yourself. But delink your emotions from physical attachment (p. 138).” As noted earlier, love should be disconnected from emotions or attachments. Such love gives you an abundance of power. If you yield to the power it can become a monster! “When you know that you are actually the monster of your own power, you rest in humility and in love of all (p. 51),” the river urged Zara.

Widening our vision: Once we reach out freely to others through knowledge and love, we become joyful and equanimous. “That’s good. You look cheerful again. Practice equanimity, Zaru, and don’t harbour a doubt (p. 137).”

In this way, Roy challenges us to widen our vision about ourselves and reality. After dissolving the illusion of identity, one becomes integrated with the other. “Call me whatever you will, *Jo tu hai, so main hoon.*” (“What you are, I am) (p. 94).

That is why the elephant rambles: “To the creature with limited vision, I might appear, at once, a log; at others, a pillar or two

or four; sometimes, a rope or even a barrel. But to the one with complete vision, I am what I really am, an elephant (p. 96).”

3. Experiencing Bliss

Finally, the goal and purpose of life is pictured as attaining absolute joy or bliss. This joy begins with the food we eat and moves on to experience the bliss of life in its entirety!

a. Beginning with the Food

After having travelled the assiduous journey, Zara’s tale invites us to experience the bliss that is our life itself. The novel delves into the simple and specific pleasure of food and eating. Relying on the Indian insight, “*sarvam annam*” (everything is food), Zara listens attentively, as she leaves the forest and reaches the city. “From food are creatures, that dwell on earth, produced; by food they live and again into it, they finally pass,” Nigella El (“I am the real me,” said the lady, but they call me Nigella El) (p. 175).

She elaborates on this profound truth. “Ah food! Well, I am food! I am food, I am food; I am the eater of food! I am the eater of food, I am the eater of food,” said Nigella. “Food, Zara, is the highest state of being,” she went on, “for truly life is food (p. 175).”

Food is good and it is everything. And it leads to higher bliss. “It is the infinite space of your heart, Zara, the dwelling of your soul. It is free from hunger, free from thirst, free from old age, free from death, and free from grief (p. 174),” Zara heard a husky feminine voice from across the oven.

b. Bliss of Being Human

Towards the end of her journey, Zara sings: “Floating beyond the horizon of reality,/ On a carpet of smoke,/ I see life abound in joy./ It’s a world of goodness, beyond grasp./ I leave my world far behind/ Flying over the clouds/ To a magical place – I find eternal joy.” (p. 187)

This leads to her feeling of calmness and completion. “I have arrived! Calmness manifest, That’s I. Countless arms rising high: “Om Shanti!” In unbounded joy, I find completion,” (p. 143). Here the turtle’s advice to Zara is relevant: “Bliss that comes and never goes away is bliss” (p. 127). The contribution of the little ant is remarkable: “When no desire, no movement in this world of yours arouses your passion, your energy, then, is dormant. There is no distress. There is no pain. And that state of emptiness, when there is no passion, no pain, no joy, is the state of bliss.” (p. 76)

The condition to attain this bliss is willing renunciation (p. 127) and self-control. “Different creatures do different things to master their Universe. In the end, we need self-control to be happy at all times, not sad (p. 78).” In such a situation fear evaporates. “There’s nothing to fear when you are in love. There’s nothing to fear when you are not in hate. There’s nothing to fear when you have nothing to prove (p. 81).”

At the beginning of her journey, Zara asked. “All this sounds too complicated for my age. Is this Universe really an illusion of my mind? Right now, I can dance with the glowworms on the promenade, climb up the Peacock Ridge tomorrow, and pick up those gemstones one day. And some time, when I grow up, I can even lose myself in the dazzle of the city lights to the applause of a thousand hands. The stars?” (p. 50). After her tedious journey, she realises the meaning of life.

I wish that Zara’s Witness also becomes a classic giving purpose, meaning and wisdom to today’s Gen Z. I wish that Indian philosophy with its liberative and humanistic vision discovers its valuable roots and make it relevant to the contemporary women and men.

Destruction and suffering are necessary parts of life through which we attain bliss. “That Destruction is Liberation. This, then, is the essence of the Universe, trapped within the bubble in a cycle of give and take, of good and bad, fear and hope, joy and sorrow, love and hate, peace and war (p. 187).” So at the end, she realises the paradox: “And in that complete collapse, life is liberated. And that life is *sva*. And from that *sva* pours forth *ha!* the seed of love (p. 188).” This is the *Svaha*, the denouement at the end of the prayerful mantra. That is the bliss of being human, in intimate connection with the whole universe (Pandikattu 2004).

Conclusion

Zara's Witness is a philosophical fantasy where Zara's life is explored in terms of human needs for fulfilment, happiness, and spiritual liberation. This book can be compared to two classic novels of the same genre. In *Siddhartha: An Indian tale*, the German novelist Herman Hesse (2007) explores the spiritual journey and search for the meaning of a young man by the same name during the time of the Gautama Buddha. In *Sophie's World: A novel about the history of philosophy*, a novel by Norwegian writer Jostein Gaarder (2012), the young teenager Sophie Amundsen is introduced to the history of philosophy through riddles, puzzles, symbols and the genre of story-telling, like Zara.

Like the two books mentioned above, I wish that *Zara's Witness* also becomes a classic giving purpose, meaning and wisdom to today's Gen Z. I wish that Indian philosophy with its liberative and humanistic vision discovers its valuable roots and make it relevant to the contemporary women and men. May we rediscover the depth and significance of “the Indian Ending” that the British historian Arnold Toynbee referred to! A fascinating novel that speaks of virtual reality, Gen Z, space warping, quantum mechanics and discotheque in the same breath as Indian philosophy can achieve it!

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Received June 24, 2019: Accepted July 2, 2019: Words: 4310



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