

WESTERN ENLIGHTENMENT AND EASTERN AWAKENING: TOWARDS A NEW SYMBIOSIS *

Subhash Sharma

The word 'enlightenment' has a special significance. The idea of enlightenment is rooted in the Western history and it came into existence with the primacy of reason as a basis for generation of scientific knowledge. Knowledge, which could not withstand the rigorous tests of reasoning and empirical verifications through hypothesis formulation and hypothesis testing, was rejected as unscientific and irrational. This path of enlightenment led to development of rationality based world-views. It contributed substantially to the development of science and technology leading to many improvements in material conditions of humanity.

Enlightenment project led to the emergence of the concept of modernity and the idea of the civic society. 'Light of reason' was brought to every aspect of life. The 'scientific temper' became the hallmark of 'progressive' views in the 'age of reason'. As new discoveries and new perspectives emerged the enlightenment project gained momentum influencing many disciplines of human thought and knowledge. It provided the intellectual foundations of modernity and its ethos. Its fundamental model of "man" was the homofaber model i.e. a man who believes in conquering nature and its forces. This 'psychology of modernity' pervaded every aspect of life.

Modernity led to human progress and 'progressive' ideas. However, with progress of modernity, many dysfunctional consequences of enlightenment project also came to surface. As a result a 'revolt against modernity' started brewing. Critique of modernity led to many new post-modern ideas and thoughts. These thoughts and ideas highlighted that philosophers and scholars of modernity had taken a narrow and parochial view of reality. This was aided by emergence of new paradigms in science particularly the quantum physics wherein the notion of determinism got challenged. Further, 'cognitive arrogance' of modernity and enlightenment project was reflected in treating everything as irrational except that knowledge, which could pass through enlightenment's narrowly defined rationality test.

Though material progress was achieved, inherent nature of enlightenment project was domination - domination of other cultures, other countries and other people. Thus, enlightenment project became a partner of colonialism. Indeed it became a tool of colonialism, as others had to be civilized according to 'rational' ways of living. In the post colonial phase of human history, the negative aspects of enlightenment project have become more evident in the form of environmental degradations, male dominant world views of enlightenment project etc. Indeed during recent years 'pathology of modernity' and pathology of enlightenment have become the primary concern for many intellectuals. Many now consider Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* as a 'contemporary testament' as Gandhi had anticipated the limitations of the modernity paradigm. Application of enlightenment approach to social sciences in the form of rational-irrational dichotomy had many interesting implications as many ethnocentric ideas were passed off as rational and scientific and insights from other cultures and societies were dumped as irrational. With 'philosophical parochialism' of modernity becoming evident now there is resurgence in creative search for new ideas in the intellectual heritage of various cultures.

* Paper presented at the National Seminar on "**Ethics, Government & Industries**", organized by North Gujarat University, Patan, January 11-12, 2002.

From the negative experiences of the European enlightenment a new intellectual movement has been emerging. It has found manifestation in various forms e.g. interest in Eastern spirituality and religions. We may call this new awakening as 'Eastern Awakening' because its roots are in Eastern approaches to understanding the life in its totality. This awakening aims at correcting the negative impact of the enlightenment project.

For an understanding of Eastern Awakening it is useful to understand two routes to explorations of reality. The first route is concerned with exploration of 'matter' and the second route is concerned with exploration of that which explores the matter. The intellectual roots of this route could be traced to exploration of 'consciousness' which has been the primary concern of ancient and modern rishis. The first route has led to development of the scientific methodology thereby leading to development of science and technology. The second route is concerned with development of human beings as human beings. Traditionally West has given attention to the first route and East to the second route. A combination of the two could lead to a new paradigm for future development of human society. I had earlier referred to second route as 'Rishi' route as the essence of this route lies in 're'-see way of re-seeing things in a new perspective.

The new paradigm goes beyond the 'light of reason' and is founded on the 'light of wisdom'. The metaphor of the light of wisdom can be summed up by the following wisdom equation:

$$W = R + I$$

Wisdom = Reason + Intuition

This equation has several interesting interpretations. It represents the complementarity principle of physics, Chinese yin-yang model, Indian Ardhnareshwar concept of 'dialectical synthesis', an 'omnjective' view of reality as fusion of objective and subjective etc. At a practical level the wisdom equation also reflects the two sides of brain i.e. the left and right brain indicative of the rational and intuitive faculties.

This equation suggests that there is a need for paradigm shift from 'age of reason' to 'age of wisdom'. This is because during the 'age of reason', there was only a partial understanding of the reality surrounding humans. The dawning of the 'age of wisdom' could correct this partial approach to understanding of reality. It implies a mental shift from enlightenment project's 'kingdom of reason' to a new awakening and establishment of the 'kingdom of wisdom'. This awakening implies cognitive liberation from methodology of reason to 're'-see methodology. In this awakening the scientific temper is tampered with spiritual curiosity and spiritual intensity. This awakening implies that difference between vigyan and gyan should be understood. In pursuing religiosity of science, religiosity of conscience should not be lessened. This is an important lesson from the Eastern awakening. Hence, Western enlightenment and Eastern awakening should go hand in hand for the material and spiritual progress of humanity.

Table 1 summarizes the key aspects of the enlightenment project and the awakening movement.

Table 1: From Enlightenment to Awakening

	Western Enlightenment Project	Eastern Awakening Movement
Focus of exploration	'Matter'	'Consciousness'
Basic approach	Rationality way Scientific temper Light of reason Science (Vigyan)	'Re'-see way Scientific temper with spiritual intensity Light of wisdom Science with Conscience (Vigyan with Gyan)
Model of humans	Homo-faber Self-actualization Yang Model	Homo-sober Self-actualization + Self realization Yin+Yang Model
View of life	Violence oriented	Harmony oriented
Objective	Material progress Civic society Kingdom of reason	Holistic progress Sacro-civic society Kingdom of wisdom
Social impact	Cognitive arrogance Domination Dehumanization	Cognitive liberation Co-existence Re-humanization

Time has come to re-see the past and present with a view to create a new future. This implies achieving a proper balance between tradition and modernity. This balance can be achieved through a synthesis of Western enlightenment and Eastern awakening. This synthesis of the Western enlightenment and Eastern awakening can also be presented in a diagrammatic form for achieving holistic happiness for humanity. Fig.1 presents this idea of synthesis as a circle of synthesis.

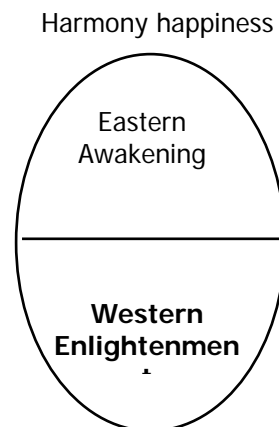


Fig.1: Circle of Synthesis

Interaction between East and West is not new. However, in future, we envisage that this interaction would lead to synthesis between Western Enlightenment and Eastern Awakening. Guy Sorman (2001) in his book, *Genius of India*, has identified at least three intense historical interactions between East and West. He states, "India has never ceased to haunt the imagination of the West. On three occasions, she left an indelible imprint on the Western shores. Christianity borrowed from her the idea of compassion and the belief in immortality of the soul... The Enlightenment philosophers discovered the practice of toleration... Mahatma Gandhi demonstrated, in the twentieth century, the strength of non-violence and in the sixties, the West borrowed the notions of ecology and feminism from India. These influences from the East may come as a surprise to many Westerners".

Now the de-colonization of Eastern mind has already begun. This would lead to its liberation in future. As a result, new awakening has dawned, which is finding its manifestation in varying forms. It is likely that this would once again influence the West and will leave a new indelible imprint on the human thought. To some extent, it is already happening in the West through the "Indian Diaspora Effect" and the knowledge workers.

Implications for Management, Administration and Society

The ideas presented here have several implications for social theories and management theories and practice. In the discussion below some areas of interest are presented as illustrations of the conceptual framework of 'Eastern Awakening'.

(I)

From Conflict Resolution to Conflict Dissolution

Since the model of "man" in enlightenment project is that of homo-faber, the intensification of conflict is inherent in such conceptualization. Hence, the ideas of resolution of conflict gains primacy. In such a model, "man" is busy resolving one conflict or the other. Thus, he is in perpetual state of resolving conflicts. There is no escape from conflicts. Indeed he starts enjoying the game of conflicts and wants to use it to his advantage. Thus, he creates a conflict to demonstrate his homo-faber nature. This is also the essence of the yang nature of "man".

The project of Eastern awakening suggests another model of human being viz., homosober. In this model "man" demonstrates his non-violent sober and yin nature. In this model human beings work for complete elimination or dissolution of conflict. This implies a non-violent approach or the yin-approach to conflict handling. The framework discussed here indicates that there is need for a paradigm shift from the yang style to yin style of handling conflicts.

Mahatma Gandhi echoed this approach to conflict handling through his famous lines, 'Nij par shashan phir anushashan', i.e., Rule the self, before ruling others'. This represents the essence of the yin or the non-violent approach to conflict resolution. This also represents the yin model of "man" in sharp contrast to homo-faber model of the 'Enlightenment project' which is the yang model of "man". Self-discovery implies discovery of the yin nature of "man".

In the last fifty years, resolution of social issues has been rooted in the "conflict model" of society. This is the legacy of Darwin and Marx, who were also product of 'Western Enlightenment', Gandhi with his roots in 'Eastern Awakening' has an alternative model viz. the 'harmonization model' to offer. Accordingly he was for 'conflict dissolution' in many areas of social life. His catchphrase was the concept of 'reconciliation' i.e. reconciling 'man' with nature and 'man' with 'man'. India's intellectual failure has been to abandon such ideas under the dominant influence of 'conflict model'.

(II)
Towards A Model of Holistic Development

The idea of corporate management is also directly and indirectly rooted in the Western Enlightenment. Accordingly its focus has been on the 'enterprise' and 'professional qualities development'. Self-development has not been its prime concern as the focus has been largely on 'corporate development'. While in Western Management, focus is on 'enterprise', in 'Indian Management' focus has been on self and self-development. By combining the two, the 'new age corporates' could contribute to the holistic development of the society. In fact, we can identify five inter-linked levels of development viz. self-development, family development, corporate development, nation's development and global development. Fig.2 presents this holistic model of development linking the micro and the macro units of development. Eastern awakening implies appreciation of a holistic approach through an integrative approach wherein corporate development and other developmental links are strengthened together.

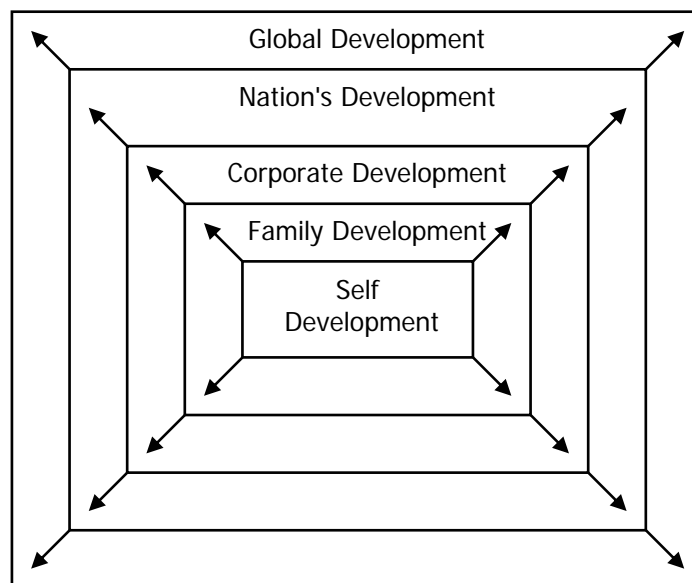


Fig.2: A Holistic Model of Development

(III)
**Corporate Rishi Leadership:
Towards a New Age of Rishi Managers**

It may be indicated that emergence of management as a discipline is closely tied to the enlightenment project and its tools and techniques. As a result management theory and practice has been heavily biased in favour of rationality. Only during recent years the limitations of this approach have become evident. Now the role of intuition has also received acceptance. Hence, wisdom equation $W = R + I$ is now emerging as a new paradigm for managers. Since wisdom equation recognizes the role of I (intuition) and thereby the re-see way, we can refer to new generation of managers as Rishi Managers. Managers who are willing to re-see the things in a new perspective and are willing to create new paradigm shifts. These managers are not R-oriented but W-oriented. Hence, they represent a combination of the Western Enlightenment and Eastern Awakening – a combination of the vjgyan and the gyan. Perhaps the world awaits the arrival of this breed of new generation of "Rishi Leadership" in the form of 'Corporate Rishis' and Rishi Managers to lead the nations and the world towards holistic progress.

(IV) Mind Liberation Project

At the root of Eastern Awakening is the Mind Liberation Project (MLP). While the objective of Western Enlightenment Project was to introduce reason as a primary mode of thinking, the objective of Mind Liberation Project is to question the reason through the instrument of both reason and intuition. Western Enlightenment is rationality dominated, MLP is creativity oriented. Western Enlightenment offers a narrow definition of knowledge, MLP broadens the view about knowledge and allows knowledge generation through creative and intuitive insights. Western Enlightenment attempts at dominating other cultures through science and technology, MLP aims at overcoming such attempts at mental and social dominations.

(V) Towards A Convergence of Religions, Science & Spirituality

Alvin Toffler presented to us a waves model of history, in his well known book *Future Shock*. This model identified the waves in terms of agriculture society, industrial society and information society. There is an alternative way of looking at history. This is from the viewpoint of evolution of human thought. The first wave was the wave of religions. The second wave was that of science which lead to the development of technology and fundamentally altered the way we live. The third wave is now just emerging. It is the wave of spirituality and in future the fourth wave could be towards a convergence of religious, science and spirituality. This waves model distinct from Toffler's model is presented in Fig.3.

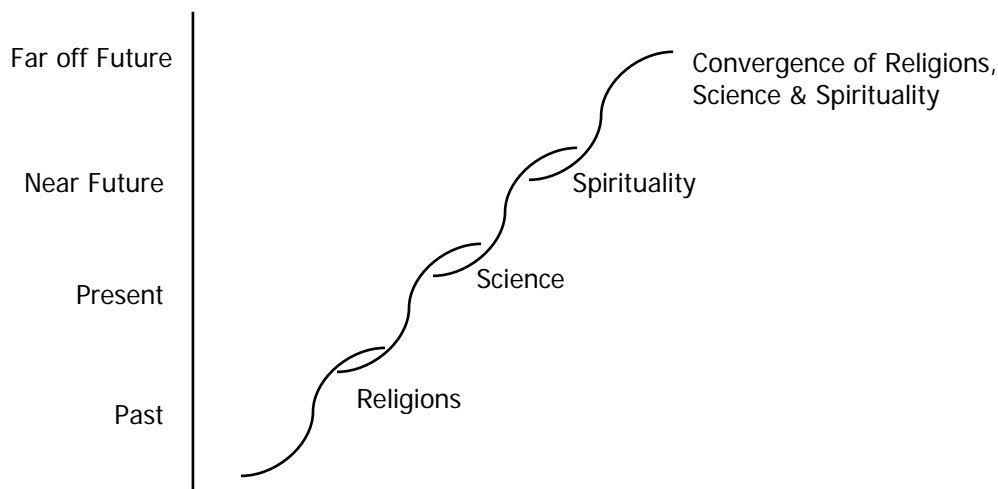


Fig.3: Waves Model for Evolution of Human Thought (Sharma, 2001)

In contrast to the negative metaphor of 'Future Shock', suggested by Toffler, our metaphor for convergence of religions, science and spirituality is the 'Nirvana Point'. We need to create a change in the mindset, from negative metaphor of 'Future shock' to the positive metaphor of 'Nirvana point', as Future shock is a metaphor of despair and Nirvana point is a metaphor of hope. Indeed, we have already left the 'Future shock' behind, because advancement and development of technology has been a 'pleasant surprise' rather than a 'future shock'. History is a manifestation of 'spirit of idea(s)'. In future, we may see the manifestation of the idea of convergence of religions, science and spirituality as a mover and shaper of history.

The aim of the Mind Liberation Project is to seek a convergence of religions, science and spirituality by overcoming the 'tyranny of reason' and the 'cognitive dominance' of the Enlightenment project. Eastern awakening could lead us in overcoming the 'tyranny of reason' and provide a creative touch to the hope of convergence of religions, science and spirituality. This would lead to a symbiosis of Western Enlightenment and Eastern Awakening. This author's metaphor for the same is, Western Windows Eastern Doors, wherein 'Western Windows' are indicative of Western Enlightenment and Eastern Doors are indicative of Eastern Awakening. By opening both the windows and doors, we can move ahead towards a synthesis of religions, science and spirituality. That could be an agenda ahead for 'new age thinkers' who are searching for new and creative ways of creating changes in human life and society to ensure dawn of a new society based on the accumulated knowledge of humanity rooted in 'Western Enlightenment' and 'Eastern Awakening'.

(VI) Towards Establishing Sacro-Civic Society

It has been indicated earlier that the notion of civic society is linked with the Western enlightenment project. However, we need to move beyond the idea of civic society as there is no explicit recognition of the sacred aspects of life in the idea of civic society. Hence, the need for the concept of 'sacro-civic' society, which arises from the symbiosis of Western Enlightenment and Eastern Awakening. In the expression sacro-civic, the word sacro could as well refer to the Eastern Awakening and civic to the Western Enlightenment. This author's book *Management in New Age: Western Windows Eastern Doors*, offers a blueprint for establishing the sacro-civic society and re-engineering the societies to become sacro-civic in nature. Avijit Pathak (1998) echoes the same sentiment through his metaphor of "spiritualizing modernity" and Chakraborty calls for a sacro-secular symbiosis. However, Gandhi's metaphor of Ram-rajya is the most compelling metaphor and has a popular appeal. It must be admitted that the attractiveness of the idea of sacro-civic society is more at the cerebral level.

When viewed in terms of an evolutionary perspective, we get a four step model of societies indicated by Jungle-raj, Civic society, Sacro-civic society and Ram-rajya. Fig.4 presents this model. Thus the transition from the Jungle-raj symbolized by 'survival of the fittest' to Ram-rajya symbolized by 'arrival of the best', is through the intermediate steps of civic society and the sacro-civic society. Only when sacro-civic society is established we can hope to move towards Ram-rajya.

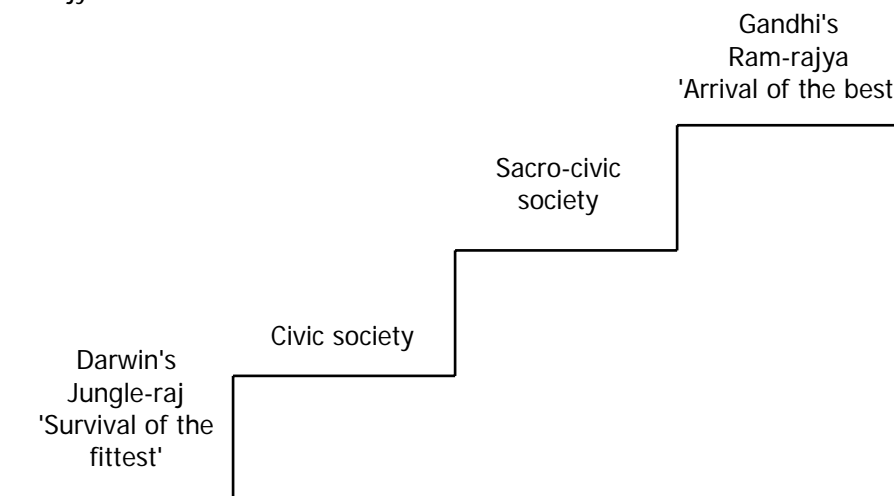


Fig.4: An Evolutionary Model for Future Development of Global Society

To conclude, in this paper, we have argued for a symbiosis of the Western Enlightenment and Eastern Awakening. Through these two streams of ideas and knowledge we can move towards building a better society. Such a combination would also help us in building better enterprises both business as well as non-business. When Mr. Narayana Murthy was recently adjudged as one of the top 25 world business leader, the citation indicated his contribution through an interesting phrase i.e. "spreading values and spreading wealth", not "lost his soul for money". These phrases perhaps provide an 'empirical evidence' that it is possible to build enterprises based on holistic models of development rooted in a synthesis of 'Western Enlightenment' and 'Eastern Awakening'. These phrases also indicate that it is possible to create "Corporate Rishi Leadership" in the world of global competition. It is also interesting that such an empirical evidence has come from Indian context and thus at least one individual / one corporate has shown us the way that it is possible to create a paradigm shift towards a synthesis of Western Enlightenment and Eastern Awakening. We need more such examples to take us forward to the next evolutionary step of development i.e. creating responsible corporates for nation's and global development and creating a sacro-civic society leading to holistic development of individuals, families, corporates, nations and the world.

Notes & References

1. This paper is primarily based on author's earlier writings such as:

Subhash Sharma (1996), *Management in New Age: Western Windows Eastern Doors*, New Delhi: New Age International Publishers.

Subhash Sharma (1999), *Quantum Rope: Science, Mysticism and Management*, New Delhi: New Age International Publishers.

Subhash Sharma (1999), "Corporate Gita: Lessons for Management, Administration and Leadership". *Journal of Human Values*, Vol.5, No.2, July-December, pp.103-123.

Subhash Sharma (2001), "Routes to Reality: Scientific and Rishi Approaches", *Journal of Human Values*, Vol.7 No.1, January-June, pp.75-83.

Subhash Sharma (2001), *Arrows of Time: From The Blackholes To The Nirvana Point*, New Delhi: New Age International Publishers.

2. Critique of 'Western Enlightenment', in one form or other is also available in the following bibliography:

Avijit Pathak (1998), *Indian Modernity: Contradictions, Paradoxes and Possibilities*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House.

Chakraborty S K (1995), *Ethics in Management: Vedantic Perspective*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Guy Sorman (2001), *The Genius of India*, New Delhi: Macmillan India Ltd.

Haque Shamsul Md. (1989), *Philosophical Parochialism in Theories of Development and Underdevelopment*, Los Angeles: University of Southern California.

Ian Palmer & Cynthia Hardy (2000), *Thinking About Management: Implications of Organizational Debates & Practices*, London: Sage Publications.