

Book Review : The Circle of Memory - An Autobiography By Dr. Subhash Kak

How should one review this book whose author calls it an autobiography but which actually is a chronicle of his ideas on his innate spirituality seeking support of science?

Spiritualists are people who believe that human mind was created by God. They see two kinds of entities in the universe: human mind and physical matter. In fact, getting indirect help from Quantum Mechanics, even the physical matter is a creation of the former.

Marshaling a lot of help from modern physics and the ancient Indian sacred texts, Vedas, Dr.Subhash Kak puts a pitched defense of spirituality. But spirituality and science cannot share the same room. The author believes man and universe are one and the same thing. But his defense of that thesis is weak.

Dr. Kak's big moment with his spirituality came when in 1992 he discovered that in Rgvedic times some rituals and temple architectures used forms and designs based on the facts of astronomical knowledge. It meant for the author the union of man on earth with the Gods in the universe. From that moment onward he has been very relentlessly searching for similar connections in human history.

Human consciousness is a local enterprise inside human brain, though it suggests a cosmic self. That is all the spirituality man is born with. Beyond that it is up to the man possessing that to expand it into something material. There have been people who have developed their intrinsic spirituality into "cosmic" spirituality. But they are small in number.

What the author strongly misses is that consciousness is strongly dependent on ideas. If you compare the ideas of primitive man and modern man you find a huge gap. In almost every area the ideas have changed: child rearing, society, relaxation, sex, etc. Ideas are based on experience and their interpretation by the logical mind. The ideas about these subjects a hundred years ago were different than what they are now. Ideas about self have also changed. Modern man believes that a lot of his life is dependent on how he thinks about it, rather than on the concept of destiny that a man of earlier times thought.

To search for the roots of human consciousness in religious ideas and in ideas emanating from Quantum Mechanics is not a helpful thing to do, as human consciousness has been around some 70,000 years when homo sapiens experienced a significant growth in their cognition and it has developed on. When one is old enough to be meaningfully self-aware, one sees some vague connection to some unknown entity. This is consciousness in its basic manifestation. Many children do not even notice it. To this primitive self-consciousness, as the child grows, he may or may not relate his new significant experiences, depending on his emotional needs and the environment he lives in. Most of the human beings grow up to be religious, at varying levels. But they do not necessarily have a cosmic consciousness the author is after. In fact, a very small number of people achieve that. So, it is the ideas of freedom, love of humanity, and creativeness, etc. that enrich human mind, which has been known from the ancient times. Inner security and happiness can be achieved by mastering the ideas associated with living. Search for the knowledge of consciousness beyond what we already know about it is unnecessary.

Dr. Kak is more well known for his exposition of Hinduism in the most favorable light than for his achievements in his profession of computer science, which I am sure are excellent. At the time of Vedas the scientific knowledge was on idea basis only. That is, there was no testing and there was no such thing as scientific methodology. In today's science a theory has to be rigorously tested, it can not contradict established theories, it has to make predictions that have to come out

true, and finally it has to stand the test of time. He extols ancient Indian science and mathematics to such an extent that Indians in India feel guilty of neglecting to have done so themselves. It may be that it was for this reason that the Indian government made him a member of a high-level science panel. The author believes in the Vedic concept of *akasa*, an ether like entity, from which other elements are believed to have been created.

I am amazed why the author chose to be a scientist instead of being a Hinduism scholar. A couple of years ago I asked him why would a profound and intense spiritualist like him live in the bastion of world materialism, U.S.A. He said to the effect that the circumstances of his life had to be blamed for that.

The autobiography lacks the revelation of the process through which the author became a spiritualist. He never talks about his inspirations, dejections, loves, and failures. In that sense the book is incomplete. We very much learn the heavy armor of intellectuality he lives under. But the danger to an intellectual lies in the cocoon he may build around himself, thereby denying himself the natural flow of life. He says in the book that there has been no watershed experience in his life that turned his life around. Also, he says "...but for those who have traveled beyond unquestioned belief, the past is less than living history." Unfortunately, that is how an intellectual may destroy the rich fabric of the experiences of his life.

The book delineates the prodigious intellectual labors the author has expended in support of his spirituality. The book could have had a smoother chronological flow than it has. Contextually dissimilar sections of the book have been grafted together at times which impede its overall flow of the narrative.

The book is a summing up of a life of purposefulness and achievements of a man of high scholarship and high intensity. This autobiography, though incomplete, is an excellent outline of it.

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