

Who Is An Intellectual?

Often in intense and acrimonious, earnest and righteous discussions among Kashmiri Pandits, and others, sometimes at a moment one of the participants cites an authority in the defense of his argument, who he says is an intellectual. Suddenly, a silence falls among the discussor group, both among those who know who an intellectual is and therefore they feel bent by his weight and those who form most of the people present who are not certain who an intellectual is and therefore are rendered silent because of their ignorance. Some do not know at all about this special genre of human beings. An intellectual carries a heavy weight and this quality, generally, in discussions remains unchallenged. But who is an intellectual?

The word intellect means the power of knowing, as distinguished from the power to feel and to will. It means a capacity for knowledge and also a capacity for rational or intelligent thought, especially when highly developed. An intellectual is a person given to study, reflection, and speculation. Also, a person engaged in activity requiring the creative use of intellect. So, intellectual persons engage in high level reasoning in the pursuit of acquiring definitive knowledge of something or in pursuit of solving a problem. There are other type of problem solvers. Religious people, psychics, poets, fortune tellers, and others also claim to solve problems and make prophecies, which at times come true. But an intellectual has to follow prior knowledge on the subject he is dealing with, established reasoning, based on established principles and rules, and scientifically verified data. In the words of Einstein there should be an inner harmony and external verification in postulating a new theory. So, an intellectual's work is harder than, say, a poet's to make a projection of a phenomena. In the intellectual world a lot of things are still unknown but a religious person, through divine connection, is able to know things without much thinking.

In modern times, as mankind has advanced greatly in science and technology, man's intellect has come to be greatly revered. Religion, though not extinguished, has been diminished. Understanding based on verifiable facts and established

scientific principles is given the highest place in man's consciousness and in the pursuit of understanding the material universe and the world. It is on the strength of this consciousness that the edifice of science has been built. Science is almost modern man's religion. The reason that it is not a complete religion is because science can not help man in his many aspirations and psychological architecture and states. Though some people think that science will become a complete religion one day but I think it will never become so. So, man's intellect has gained a high stature. Therefore, an intellectual is highly regarded because it means learning on the scientific basis, which is based on a foundation of knowledge resting on concrete facts and principles and cognizant on any new evidence. The claims of science have to be provable, if they do not meet this test they are expunged from the body of science. There are no favorite theories in science, each one stands on its legs of verifiable facts and well established principles.

Many learned people believe that Einstein's General Theory Of Relativity is the greatest feat of intellectuality. It took about ten years to develop it. Einstein's Special Theory Of Relativity was completed in 1905 and it is considered as the first floor of a two story house, while General Relativity is the second. Special Relativity dealt with the relativities of motion and time. Any uniform motion when looked from other uniform motions is different and therefore synchronicity is not an automatic phenomenon. Time is always measured in relationship with something. So, both motion and time are relative, not absolute. Newton thought otherwise. One of the deductions from Special Relativity is the most famous scientific equation, $E = MC^2$. It implies that an enormous amount of energy is stored in a small amount of mass. But this energy can be very difficult to release because of the enormous engineering difficulties needed to do so. This equation was the precursor to the start of the atomic age. Two small atomic bombs thrown on the Japanese cities of Nagasaki and Hiroshima destroyed huge number of human lives and material structures.

General Theory Of Relativity (1915) developed the theory of the gravitation (the first developed after Newton). In Einstein's understanding gravity is a curvature of space-time in which the objects of universe lie. To see a pronounced effect of the space-time curvature considers an object like our earth near a star like our

sun. The rotation of the earth round the sun is an example of the former following the space-time curve near the latter, which before General Relativity Theory was simply an attraction between the two objects. It is based on this understanding Einstein predicted that even a ray of light will bend near the sun by a certain amount he calculated. Now, in the earlier understanding light was the straightest thing in the universe there was, because it was massless and therefore unbendable in presence of a mass. In 1919, during a solar eclipse, two teams of scientists verified Einstein's claim. One was sent to the island of Principe, South Africa, and another to Brazil. Both teams obtained data that was reasonably close to Einstein's prediction. These teams were organized by the British astronomer, Arthur Eddington. Britain and Germany at that time were in war with each other and therefore this scientific effort was greatly hailed as step toward peace and friendship between the two.

The above description of Einstein's work was only given to indicate some extraordinary works of one of the supreme intellects of the mankind. Let it not be misunderstood that every intellectual has to be at the level of Einstein. Any person who frequently indulges in intellectual activity at a developed level is an intellectual. Let us say there is a professor of physics, with a Ph.D. in it, who teaches in a college. This does not automatically make him to be an intellectual because mere teaching, even at graduate level, is not intellectual enough. On the other hand if he indulges in research, at a good level, he is an intellectual. A man may be intelligent but he may not be an intellectual. Here is an example to illustrate the difference. An intelligent man may know all the facts of the formation of stars but he if he does not know the theories behind the facts and can not answer new questions, even if on speculative basis, about the formation of stars he is not an intellectual. Let us take another example: we have a mechanic who can fix problems occurring in a household refrigerator but he does not know the scientific principles of refrigeration and temperature control. He is an intelligent person but not an intellectual. Also, in this case, an engineer who knows the scientific principles of refrigeration and temperature control does not qualify to be an intellectual. He has to be indulging in the research on the new problems in these fields to qualify to be so. Ability to solve difficult and new problems in a field or fields of knowledge is a significant element in the definition of an intellectual. Because a man may solve conceptually old problems by the

sheer power of his memory but an intellectual is a thinking person in his significant and well established field of inquiry who can either solve or speculate on the new problems. There are intellectuals also who come from the fields of philosophy, arts, writing, sociology, and others. Actually, one can be an intellectual without belonging to any established field, just be a thinker in human and other non-established problems. The point is that man has to be learned, thinking, and right in most of his thoughts. General people of ten get disappointed when they see that the intellectuals have not solved many great problems in the world: religious intolerance, inhuman conditions in many parts of the world, distrust among many people, etc. Intellectuals have said all the right things about these global problems but they are so large that they need a change of heart and mind in the involved people, helped further by political and cultural leaders. The mankind is still immature, even with the last five thousand years of the emergence of the modern civilized man. A hundred years from now the world may be a safer and more tranquil place than it is now. But alas the present generations will not be there then.