

The Vedas, Tribal Perspectives, and Big History

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The belief system that people now refer to as ‘Hinduism’ is a complex merging of ideas and experiences that have taken place over the last 4000 years. It came together from the encounters between Central Asian and South Asian traditions with Indo-European heritage during and after the Indus Valley Civilization.¹

Some call Hinduism the world’s oldest religion, but it is much more than a devotional canon. It comprises ways of life, obligations and duties, social links, and a multitude of creative expressions. It also gave birth to new spiritual movements, from Buddhism to Brahmaharma, and is venerated by many peoples outside of the Ganges, from Indonesia to the Americas.²

My reason for writing this article is based on more than just a passing interest. My life and work are closely interrelated. I grew up in the village of Yemalur.³ When I was nine years old, my family moved to Jayanagar in Bangalore, where my father worked for Hindustan Aeronautics. When I was twelve years old, I went with my father to a village and had to helplessly watch him die with his head on my lap without medical aid. That day I decided to become a doctor and save lives. Though I had good marks to enter medical school, I was denied a seat because I was underage – only fifteen. So I worked in a flour mill for a year, where I made 110 rupees a month.



Map 1: Karnataka in India; the B.R. Hills are in the south of Karnataka. Map by Midori Batten 2019.

It was at that time I came in contact with the Ramakrishna Mission in Bangalore, where I met Swami Bhajanananda, a young monk who shaped my life. He told me about Dr. Albert Schweitzer and his commitment to community healthcare in Gabon, as well as the work of other physicians who worked in remote areas. These stories inspired me. Besides encouraging my medical studies, Bhajanananda also introduced me to a cosmic perspective and Vedic spirituality.

He himself had a wonderful expansion of his awareness when he read zoologist Karl von Frisch's book, *Man and the Living World* (1963). The great mysteries of the universe and life fascinated him, and he shared his insights with me. At that time, like other teenagers, I had little understanding that I was part of a wider world. I was a cricket player; so, when the monsoon spoiled my cricket pitch, I was sad. That was my attitude to the wonderful phenomenon of rain. I ignored all the offshoots of water, from sustaining plants to it being the basis of life.

My left brain was more important. By the age of sixteen, I began to feel differently, as a result of my talks with Bhajanananda. My teachers in the Bangalore schools had taught us how the Sun is a burning mass of hydrogen. At first, this explanation destroyed my faith in सूर्य Surya, the Sun God, and all the mystery that went with it. Then I realized that, yes, it is a burning mass of hydrogen, but our intuition is right about how its energy sustains us – the Sun is still worthy of veneration. I came to think that we should celebrate an emotional bond with the Sun, along with the Moon, and the rest of the cosmos.

In 1967, I entered the Bangalore Medical College, whose entrance fees cost three-months of my flour-mill salary! Inspired by the teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, and the discussions with my mentor Bhajanananda, I considered becoming a monk at the Ramakrishna Mission. When I graduated from medical school in 1973, I joined the Mission as a novice and served in its hospitals at Mayavathi in the Himalayas of Uttarakhand, Ponnampet in the Western Ghats of Coorg in Karnataka, and Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Movement in Kolkata in West Bengal. Then I set-out on my own independent work in the hills of south-west Karnataka.

For the last forty years, I have worked in the Soliga tribal territory, in the Biligirirangana Hills, where the Eastern and Western Ghats come together, at the border of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu in South India. I was useful to the Soliga communities in managing medical emergencies like snake bite (krait, viper and cobra), maulings by sloth bears, seasonal pneumonias, and tuberculosis. From these curative services, I then began to engage in preventive healthcare.

We studied the Soliga traditional medicine and health practices, such as how birth was done in a squatting posture. We built our healthcare system by integrating traditional practices with modern medicine. In 1981, we founded the Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra (Vivekananda Tribal Wellness Centre), which works to improve the health, education and living of tribal peoples.



Image 1: Soliga community in the Biligirirangana Hills. Photograph by Barry Rodrigue, 29 April 2018.

In 1986, I began the Karuna Trust as a way to promote responsible rural development through the integration of health, education, and livelihood security. It succeeded far beyond expectations. Our health team brought down the incidence of leprosy from 21.4 per 1000 people to less than 0.3. Hot-water epilepsy came under control. These and other successes led to an expansion of services beyond the BR Hills.

The Karuna Trust now provides primary health care to over a million people through public-private partnerships in the states of Karnataka, Orissa, Arunachal, Meghalaya, and Manipur. The states subcontract us to run remote health centres that provide comprehensive, primary medical care. To accomplish this, we integrate innovative strategies, from telemedicine and health insurance to mental health and dental services, along with the support of resident health aides in villages, auxiliary nurse-midwives, nurses, pharmacists, laboratory technicians, social workers, physicians managing primary health centres, and hospitals. These agencies have become highly successful and are expanding their scope of operations.

There have been ups and downs in our work over the last forty years, largely as a result of the dominant society's negative views and disregard of tribal people. Unfortunately, I had no pills for poverty! So, early on, I got involved in the Soliga projects for community rights, once spending two days in jail for our efforts. This strife was most evident over tribal access to their lands, which had come under administration of the Indian Forest Department. In spite of the national Forest Rights Act (2006), the government was reluctant to implement it.



Image 2: Umtrai Public Health Centre, managed by the Karuna Trust, Meghalaya, 28 June 2018. Photograph by Barry Rodrigue.

We convinced Deputy Commissioner Chakravarthy Mohan of the Indian Administrative Service of the good will and responsible role that the Soliga could play in forest management, so he took leadership in coordinating the Revenue Department and Forest Department to begin the process. In 2015, the surveys were made and the land and community rights were distributed to the Soliga people. Within the government there are good and bad people; we need to have dialogue and make friendship with officers who are sensitive to tribal issues. Getting the Land and community rights has been the landmark achievement of the Soliga tribal people in their 'sustainable development'. Though our intervention in health and education was a great success, the access to natural resources gave them a quantum jump in their development.⁴

In the course of my work, I met anthropologist Barry Rodrigue and encountered the new field called big history and universal studies. A modern view of existence, it merges interdisciplinary science and knowledge, and, in its Asian manifestation, engages with social change.⁵ In this aspect, I find that it parallels my own experience and beliefs, and my understanding of Vedic tradition.

The Vedas, The Upanishads ... and Big History

The Vedic and Upanishadic periods represent some of the earliest belief systems that contributed to the development of Hinduism. The Vedas (knowledge) are the oldest Sanskrit compositions, from at least 3500 years ago, and appear as prayers, rituals, stories, and commentaries. The early Upanishads were philosophical thoughts that formed part of the Vedas, but they were extracted and developed in a separate tradition, forming the basis (with later Upanishads) in the following Vedanta period, beginning about 2500 years ago. The Vedas are the embodiment of a holistic vision of life and reality, developed by *rishis* (enlightened scholars and teachers). Vedic thought forms the foundation of Indian culture and consists of three basic concepts:

Rita: ऋत means harmony. The Vedic *rishis* saw reality as an eternal, self-regulating, universal order or harmony, the essence of all that exists.

Yajna: यज्ञ means sacrifice, but it is not the mere giving up of something, it is *participation* in the living drama of the cosmos.

Dhi: धी means heart or intuition, encompassing both spiritual intuition and will. As Sanskrit scholar Jan Gonda interprets *dhi*, it is intentional thought that becomes a transcendental vision.

During the Vedic period, people felt that they existed as part of the cosmos and in harmony with nature. Their quest was on how an individual could find harmony with the wind, trees, life and everything else. They sought to awaken a higher intuitive faculty, one that could provide such understanding. One way they achieved this was to stimulate the heart centre, which activates a link with the universe and life.⁶ That cosmic quest was the goal of Vedic understanding and is seen in the famous Gayatri Mantra:

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः ।
तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं
भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

The eternal, earth, air, heaven,
That glory, that resplendence of the Sun,
May we contemplate the brilliance of that light,
May the Sun inspire our heart.⁷

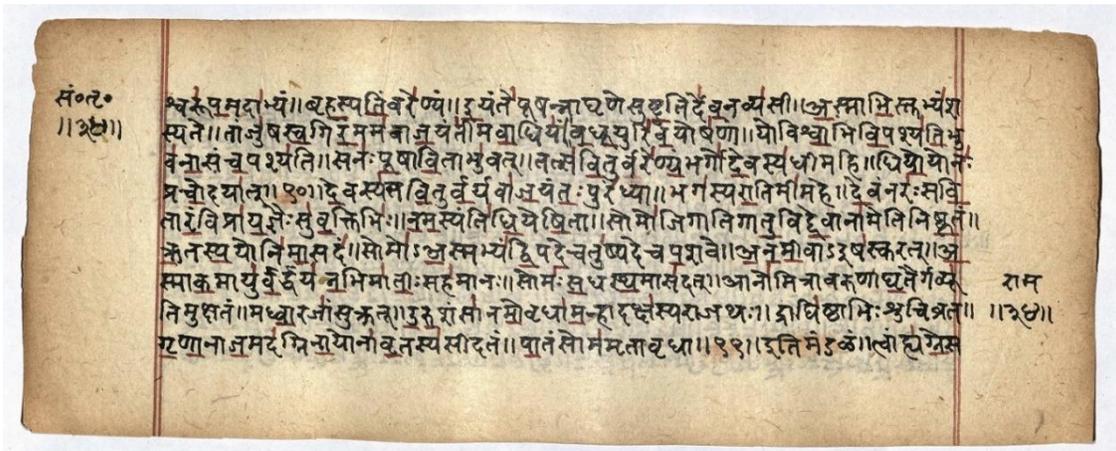


Image 3: Gayatri Mantra, R̥gvedasamhitā (Rigveda), manuscript copy made in Śaka 1742 of the Hindu calendar (1820 CE), Acc. No. 1/A1879-80. Courtesy of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute and Dr. Amruta Natu, Assistant Curator of Manuscripts, Pune, Maharashtra, India.

The Upanishads and Microcosm-Macrocosm

The fundamental insight of the Upanishad sages was how frames of reference for microcosm / macrocosm and individual / universal are built on the same pattern. Its essence is the way that the individual is embedded in cosmic reality. This reality has different levels and, at each level, the nature of an individual corresponds to the larger cosmos. We exist as individuals with family, community, nationality and planetary connections, but we also are part of the entire universe. It is subtle, but the energy of the Big Bang provided an ability to evolve into complex existence.

INTEGRAL CHART: Panchakoshas, Microcosm and Macrocosm are built on the same plan									
Macrocosm (Samashti)		Microcosm (Vyashti)			Macrocosm (Samasti)				
Ishwara (God - formless with attributes)		Anandamaya Atman Bliss & Infinite Consciousness	VISIDDHA	PRAJNA Sushupti	SUPER CONSCIOUS	ANANDAMAYA			
Hiranyagarbha (God with form and attributes)		Vijnanamaya Pratyagatman (Buddhi) Self-awareness and Will	ANAHATA	TALJASA Swapna	CONSCIOUS	VIJNANAMAYA			
VIRAT ↑ ↓	Big Mind Incarnations: Vamana, Parashurama, Rama, Balarama, Krishna, Buddha, Kalki Humanity: Planetary Citizen - Nationalist - state - ethnic/Tribe - Family Anthropology Art Politics Trade Culture		Plane of abstract ideas and reason Manomaya Psychology Plane of images and emotion			MANIPURA	Jagrat	MANOMAYA	
	Universal Life (Plants & Animals) Viruses - Bacteria - Amoeba - Multicellular - Fish - Amphibians - Mammals Incarnations; Matsya (Fish), Kurma (Tortoise), Varaha (Boar), Narasimha (Lion) Sacred Trees		Pranamaya Prana (Life) Physiology			SWADHISTHANA	EGO (VISWA)	UNCONSCIOUS	PRANAMAYA
	Gods: Surya (Sun), Agni (Fire), Vayu (Wind), Varuna (Rain) Big bang - Particles - Atoms - Galaxies - Solar System - Sun - Earth Astronomy Physics Chemistry		Annamaya Physical Body Atoms and Molecules Anatomy			MULADHARA		ANNAMAYA	

Figure 1: Diagram of the microcosm / macrocosm, relating Vedic and Big History connectivity in the universe. Based on an original sketch by Swami Bhajananda about 1970, it was then developed by Dr. Sudarshan over the next fifty years. Publication layout by Midori Batten, 2019.

The Upanishads state that, before creation, the Supreme Spirit was alone. The Spirit desired: ‘Let me be many; let me be born’.⁸ The *Koshas* कोश – layers that encase us – came out of this Spirit in a spiralling evolutionary process.

Annamaya Kosha अन्नमयकोश is our physical layer of existence. Today, we understand how the potential for existence was inherent in the Big Bang, as energy evolved into particles, atoms, stars, molecules, planets and galaxies, including our own Sun and Earth. The iron and copper in our body came from supernovas. The physical layer is made of atoms and molecules (micro) that exists within the entirety of the cosmos (macro) – we each have our own carbon and hydrogen, but it all originated in the cosmos. The divinities / elementals the ancients celebrated were *Surya* सूर्य (Sun), *Agni* अग्नि (Fire), *Vayu* वायु (Wind), and *Varuna* वरुण (Rain).

Pranamaya Kosha प्राणमयकोश is the life principle that emerges by transcending but including the Annamaya. We are carbon-based life forms. Carbon is the fourth most common element in the universe and appears in many ways, from coal to diamonds. It bonds with other elements and has the ability to become life, an amoeba or a human. The cells, tissues and organs of our body (micro) coexist with other life forms (macro). The ancients wondered what made things come together as life. They thought that when a living creature dies, it lost *prana*, the essence that actuated matter into life. Some of the avatars our ancestors saw in this life principal were *Matsya* मत्स्य (Fish), *Kurma* कूर्म (Tortoise), *Varaha* वराह (Boar), and *Narasimha* नरसिंह (Lion).

Manomaya Kosha मनोमयकोश represents emotions and the cognitive mind. The mind provides each of us with consciousness (micro) and cooperates with other minds to develop collective knowledge (macro). Other animals have self-awareness, but it developed further in us. The ancients did not come close to our present scientific understandings, but, as their cognition increased, they began to understand existence better and better. Some of the representations of this consciousness are *Vamana* वामन (creative balance), *Parashurama* परशुराम (defensive balance), *Rama* राम (moral balance), *Balarama* बलराम (domestic balance), and *Krishna* कृष्ण (astute engagement).

Annamaya, *Pranamaya* and *Manomaya* are together called *Vishva* at the individual (micro) level and *Virat* at the macro level.

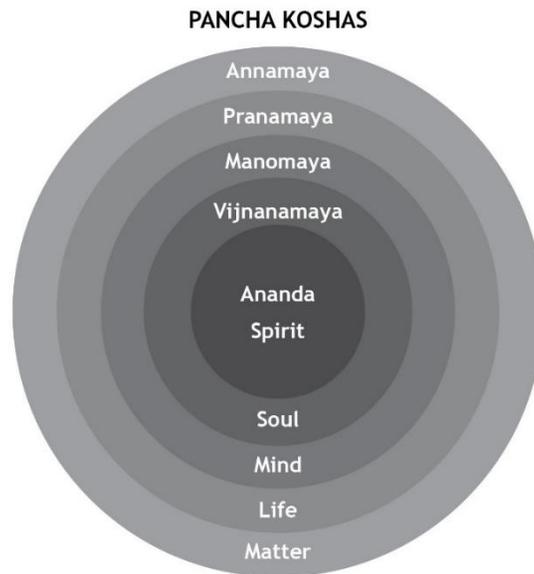


Figure 2: Chart of the microcosm/ macrocosm of the five koshas कोश – the layers of existence. Chart by Midori Batten, 2019.

From this basic description of existence, two other levels of being were later perceived as internal representations of higher, transcendental reality.

Vijñānmāyā Kosha विज्ञानमय कोश, discernment, which leads to the integrated spiritual layer of existence. It is essentially the intuitive faculty of the individual (micro) that connects to the *Purusha* पुरुष or integrated external totality (macro).⁹

Anandamaya Kosha आनंदमय कोश, or inner body of light. This was the highest level of attainment, the unification of an individual (micro) with the cosmos (macro), which resulted in *Nirguna Brahman* निर्गुण ब्रह्मन् (transcendental enlightenment).

These latter two *koshas* were especially developed in the succeeding Vedantic period (after 500 BCE) and became an ultimate goal in Hinduism. Together, this nested philosophical arrangement is referred to as the *Pancha Koshas* पञ्चकोशा (five layers).

Balance and Harmony

What is the basic cause of disharmony in our lives? One answer is how the ego has built intellectual walls that cut us off from experiencing other parts of the universe and life, the *rita*. The core meaning that can be derived from the Vedas is that we are part of both the microcosm and the macrocosm. Establishing harmony with the macrocosm was a goal in the Vedic period. It then evolved into *dharma* धर्म – the ways of living in accord with *rita*.¹⁰

The *Manamaya kosha* (cognition) allows us to develop new ideas and gives us the ability to contemplate our existence. It has led to the theories of the *koshas* and of science. If there is life on other planets, the *koshas* teach us that we are also connected to all life in the galaxy and beyond.

I need good proteins from food, which come from the macrocosm, and then my body gives back organic and inorganic products and physical force (work). I need oxygen, which I take in from the macrocosm, and then I give back carbon dioxide. It is a dynamic equilibrium, the whole of life – *rita*, how a microcosm establishes harmony with the macrocosm. Everybody know what to take. We are all selfish. We know how to take, grab. But we have to give back. At the physical level, if we take in food but do not work to give back some of the energy to our surroundings, then we get obese and our coronary arteries get blocked. We are all unconsciously connected.

That's why, with the Vedas, we see ritual activities like *tapas* तपस (self-discipline) and *yajna* यज्ञ (worship) by which we 'give back' to the cosmos, reinforcing these intuitive connections. The rituals can be individual offerings or community ceremonies, but they express the wisdom of living in harmony with society and community as planetary and universal citizens. It's not easy. We are

brought up selfishly – first me and my little family, a kind of possessive love. We have to get past that narrow view and feel oneness with the entire planet – to protect Earth and all its life.

The entirety of the macrocosm is called *Virat Purusha*, or cosmic consciousness, which was visualized as a celestial human. The Vedic period focused on how to establish harmony with all life – trees and plants – and to the physical universe – the rain and the Sun.

Tribal Culture

The Sun is an important deity for the Soliga. They knew we were unified in a solar system with solar energy that sustained life. They got up in the morning and worshiped the Sun. They knew in their cosmology that the Sun is the source of all life and energy. It's an intuitive feeling that the Sun sustains us with its light and energy. To establish harmony with the Sun was essential.

Of course, the tribal people did not originally understand the scientific details of how this worked, their ideas were external knowledge mixed with metaphorical description. Today, we know how solar energy is captured through photosynthesis and transferred through food to animals, where it is metabolized and sustains our human complexity, as we use them for food and production. What the tribal people knew intuitively, we now explain scientifically.

They connected with the universal. When they cut a tree, they planted a tree: You take one life but you plant another, that was in their cosmic understanding. Respect for life. Take what little you want, give back to nature. Don't accumulate too much at the physical or life levels or even at the level of ideas, unless you give it back to the macrocosm in some way.

I learned from the Soliga, as I had with Swami Bhajanananda. They reinforced his teachings in a different way. When the first rains come to the Biligirirangana Hills, the tribals dance ... so now I feel like dancing too.

There is a big champak tree in the BR Hills that is about 600 years old.¹¹ The tribals worship it, it's an important deity for them – *Dodda Sampige Mara*. They sing and dance the whole day and they hug the champak, it energizes them. The tribals have retained that sense of connection. They are not alienated from nature. In 1981, when I first saw this veneration of the champak, my left brain, my cognitive faculty, said: 'It's superstition ... how can you get energy from trees?!' But with the development of my right brain, I feel energy entering into my body from that tree.

Alienation from nature comes from too much of an obsession with ideas, in which the microcosm becomes more important than the macrocosm, the connected whole of existence. Our modern ideas become more refined and detailed through science and scholarship, but, in the process, something is lost. Tribal people have the gift of unconscious connectivity to universal life. It is sad that

modern humans are so alienated from it, which is visible in the crises we face all around us today. We have to re-establish this link with life.

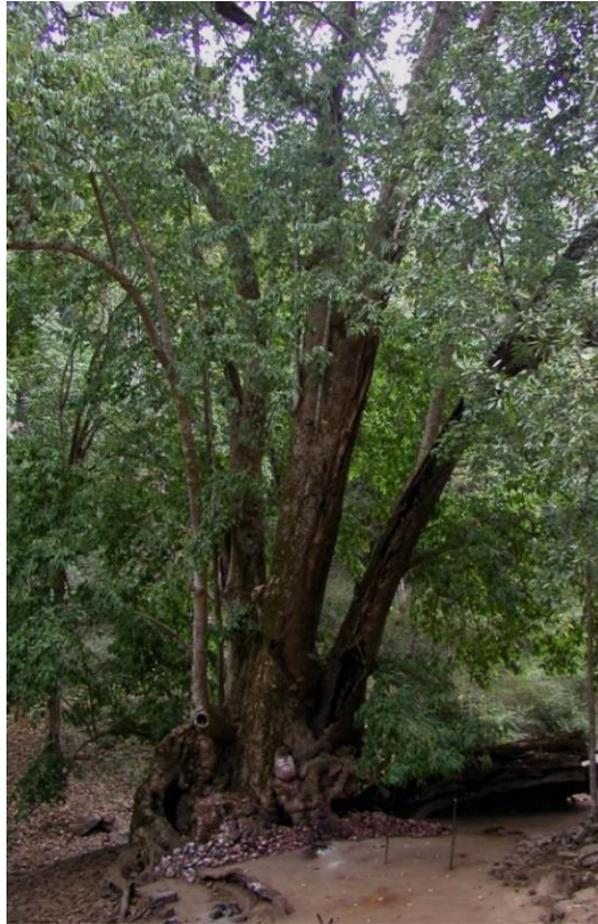


Image 4: *Dodda Sampige Mara*, the sacred Big Champak Tree, the most important deity of the Soliga. Photograph by Dr. Sudarshan, 1995.

Big History

I didn't like history when I was a youngster. History was boring. All my family and all my teachers wanted me to be a doctor or engineer. They said history was only for less intelligent people. That is a problem of Indian education, in which the arts and humanities have been dismissed in favour of an alienated view of 'modernity'. Everything is history. Big History is everything.

Everything fits together – physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, sociology, history, astronomy – it is all interconnected. The coming together in a planetary consciousness gives us a larger picture ... and a larger range of action. I discovered this in my own life as a meditation process. You can see history at work in Fig. 1, which is derived from a sketch that my guru, Swami Bhajanananda, made when he explained the totality of 'history' to me. I have worked on elaborating this diagram for fifty years.

When I encounter a problem, it can seem big and distracting. I react; I have body consciousness – I’m an individual. So I expand my horizon to engage with family and friends, and find that the problem shrinks in size. Problems exist at all levels. When I engage in medical and social work with the Soligas, my own problems and those of my family and friends diminish. This process continues upwards to the state level, when I help plan healthcare for the seven crores of people in Karnataka ... and even higher when I go to the National Rural Health Commission in Delhi to work for the over a billion people of India.

Although I’m a patriot of my country, we can’t get stuck at that level with narrow feelings of nationality. We don’t want to miss the beauty of planetary citizenship. Identifying with all humanity is very joyful. You are a universal citizen. My love for my little family, my mother and my friends does not disappear, because we are together in planetary and universal citizenship. We all have that capacity to scale upwards.¹² And when we pass away, we are giving back to the cosmos. My carbon, hydrogen and oxygen goes back to the universal elements for new adventures. My *prana* goes into the cosmic *prana*. All the ideas I had go into the universal mind, our collective learning.

A problem is that modern people tend to act like machines, like robots, automatons. We follow routines and forget to reflect on ourselves. We focus on the body, life, or thoughts and emotions. One *kosha* becomes the entire focus, as when forget about our body while thinking on all our brilliant accomplishments. We have to be aware of all five processes. The integration of personality is only possible through consciousness / self awareness.

So what is it that gives us continuity? We feel we have an individuality that says: ‘Sudarshan, I remember him at age 3 or 4’ (that’s the earliest I remember), but I feel that I’m the same Sudarshan now at age 70. My cells have changed. Most of my carbon atoms have changed, my hydrogen also. New atoms have come, the old ones have gone. Only some old ones remain in my brain (it takes longer for the exchange of those atoms). The energy is also flowing; ideas have come and gone. What is it that is giving continuity to say that I am that same individual called ‘Sudarshan’?

We similarly have three cognizant states. There is a waking state that is controlled by our thoughts. We also have a dream state and deep sleep. In the dream state, it’s another world. Dying and all sorts of fanciful illusions can happen in our dreams, but fortunately they are not usually transmitted into the corporeal world (the sleep centre in our brain paralyzes our muscles or else it can become sleep-walking). When you come out of that dreamtime, you say: ‘I dreamt’. What is it that says that? It is something called awareness, consciousness.

Individual consciousness is part of universal consciousness. What is it? It’s something like present-moment awareness, when you engage with the here and now. There is a happiness we can find in

the present moment. When you see a beautiful rose, you are so happy. No other thoughts exist. But when you start comparing it with other roses, you lose that present-moment awareness. Buddhist teachings focus on living in the present, mindfulness. Instead, many people brood over the past or compulsively plan for the future. This is not to say that we shouldn't learn from the past, and we need to plan for the future, for our survival. Understanding this evolutionary chain is important. A problem comes though when we compulsively fret on yesteryear or obsess about tomorrow.

Society and Action

I have lived in the Biligirirangana Hills with the Soliga tribal communities for over thirty years. I never felt the need for a television. I am fascinated by cricket, so I have to confess that I sometimes listen to matches on the radio, but I never really missed it – every moment has been joyful here. There have been tensions, there were fights, but that is part of life.

A major point of contention between the tribal communities and the central government has been over the forests, where many of the tribals live. These lands were governed by the Indian Forest Act (1927), which allowed the government to extinguish or limit tribal rights, even in their own homelands. In some cases, it facilitated the exploitation and abuse of tribal people, while the government and corporations prospered from commercial use of their lands. The new Forest Rights Act (2006) sought to mitigate the old law.



Image 5: Megalithic burial site in the B.R. Hills, 5000 year old. Photograph by Dr. Sudarshan, 2005.

We have more than 150 megalithic burial sites in B.R. Hills, which shows that people have been living here since at least 3000 BCE. One of the justifications used by the government for displacing

tribal people has been to preserve highly endangered wildlife. We show the megaliths to tiger conservationists and tell them: ‘If tigers and tribal people have lived here harmoniously for 5000 years, there is no need to displace the people now’.

We have been successful in getting land and community rights to most of the Soligas. Conflict is not an easy thing. A big part of our work with the Soliga community has been to help the tribal community understand the wider issues and the options available. We developed new strategies. It was an effort of local empowerment. This was a process. At first, I spoke on behalf of the Soligas; now they speak for themselves.

We need harmony, but harmony doesn’t just come out of nowhere. It’s a dynamic, a dialectical process, as in Marxist theory. Sometimes you need to confront. There were very good forest officers who came and sat with the tribals, understood them, but there were also bad officers who needed to be confronted, and, in the process, change. I was in jail fighting for land rights and went on a total fast, experiencing what Gandhi called *Satyagraha* सत्याग्रह (holding to the truth), which was a kind of spiritual bliss for two days. The point I was making is that present-moment awareness can come even in jail. So that is something we need to cultivate. The deputy commissioner brought me out, gave me juice, and the government resolved many of the land problems. So, when we get a good forest officer, we shake hands and go with it. It is not eternal conflict. It’s a dialectical process that finally ended in harmony, synthesis, *ritha*.



Image 6: Dr Sudarshan (left) and Soliga in the Biligirirangana Hills, 29 April 2018. Photograph by Bary Rodrigue.

It has been thirty years of struggle to get tribal land and community rights, but we succeeded. Now the Soliga and the Forest Department work together to protect the land and its residents. My social ideal is to be aware and establish harmony. I was influenced by humanitarian psychoanalyst Erich Fromm. He gave us understanding of real love – ‘being’ versus ‘possessing’ or ‘accumulating’. It is this sense of being and the need to give that the Vedas teach us.

It is my feeling that big history provides a modern interpretation of existence, the contemplation of which began millennia ago, as seen in the ‘wisdom traditions’ and Vedas of Asia. Certainly, our ancestors did not presage what we know now, but they wondered about internal and external things in ways that reflected the knowledge of their time. This paper is my attempt to show some of these connections and explain how these ideas developed in my own life experiences. The paper came together in several stages. In 2017, Prof. Barry and I met at a symposium of the Fireflies Intercultural Centre in Bangalore, where we felt that our experiences to understand existence paralleled each other. So we began sharing ideas.¹³

Two years later, Prof. Barry began working on projects with us in the B.R. Hills. He made a presentation on big history to our teachers and students, so we are now planning a big history curriculum from first to twelfth standard at our school, making it an interconnected hub of our curriculum. In addition, the children have a science playground, where they learn about the dynamics of the natural world, so we also will expand this into a Soliga heritage and big history park. The future is bright!

Conclusion

Integration of the individual with cosmic consciousness is a way to live in harmony. By opening the gates of the microcosm into the macrocosm (at the levels of the *koshas*), we feel connected with the entire cosmos. By meditating on big history, we can feel this connection. By awakening the higher faculty in us, we can make this connection (a form of communion) in present-moment awareness. The Vedic idea of *rita* is participation of the individual in the living drama of cosmos.

The essential point in participation is in not holding back. Accepting all the aspects of cosmos: creation, preservation and destruction is essential to live in harmony. *Virat* does not create sorrow or happiness, good or evil. These are creations of the ego.

So it is now come to evolutionary process. It’s all potentially in the stone to become life and every amoeba has a potential to become a human, and every human can become what Sri Aurobindo called ‘Gnostic beings’. Where this higher consciousness (*dhi*) is awakened, there exists a universal consciousness where there is only harmony and no conflict.



Image 7: Soliga young men on the way to a forest festival, Biligirirangana Hills, 30 April 2018. Photograph by Barry Rodrigue.

¹ The word ‘Hindu’ is derived from ‘Indus’ and designated the people living beyond the Indus watershed. For two background texts, see the following. Shereen Ratnagar, *Harappan Archaeology: Early State Perspectives*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2016. James Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology and Myth*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1989, viz. pp. 35–48.

² Shashi Tharoor, *Why I am a Hindu*, New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2018.

³ My mother gave birth to me in a cowshed in my village. Childbirth was considered polluting and hence it was done in such a location. Now, our Karuna Trust provides safe institutional deliveries to more than 20,000 pregnant women every year.

⁴ I share the experience I have accumulated over the years by volunteering as chair of the Karnataka Government Task Force on Health and Family Welfare as well as Vigilance Director for the Karnataka Lokayukta (Ombudsman)’s work against the ‘epidemic of corruption’.

⁵ Nobuo Tsujimura and Hirofumi Katayama, ‘Think Cosmically, Act Globally: Emerging Clues for the Big History Movements’, *International Journal for the Transformation of Consciousness*, vol. 3, no. 1, June 2017, pp. 45–71. An essay that considers healthcare from the perspective of traditional Chinese medicine is by Dr Zhao Mei. Mei Zhao, ‘The Universe Within’, in *From the Big Bang to Galactic Civilizations: A Big History Anthology*, Volume II, *Education and Understanding: Big History around the World*, eds. Barry Rodrigue, Leonid Grinin, Andrey Korotayev, Delhi: Primus Books, 2016, pp. 217–226.

⁶ Dr. Zhao likewise reports a connection between the heart and the universe. Zhao, ‘The Universe Within’, p. 224.

⁷ Translation by Douglas Brooks.

⁸ *Taittiriya Upananisad* 2.6.1.

⁹ There is a fundamental difference as to how ‘spirit’ is understood in the East and West. The concept of consciousness, *chaitanya* चैतन्य in Sanskrit, is basic to Eastern understanding, while the idea of a separate ‘soul’ is a Western concept. From our view in India, soul is *aatman* आत्मन – and so it is consciousness. Consciousness, according to Western notions, is awareness, alertness – a psychological phenomenon. This Western concept associates well with the Eastern concept of mindfulness, *vipasana* विपश्यन.

¹⁰ We are most aware of the microcosm, which is ourselves as individuals, but, at each of level, we can link ourselves to the macrocosm. We need to integrate the *invidia* with cosmic reality. God manifesting through the whole universe/multiverse is *virat*. Worship of *virat* is called *viradupasana*. The term *upasana* means both concentration and worship.

¹¹ The champak is an evergreen tree, a species of magnolia.

¹² In the field of big history, see the following for a discussion of scaling levels of human understanding. David Christian, ‘Scales’, in *Palgrave Advances in World Histories*, ed. Marnie Hughes-Warrington, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 64–89.

¹³ In 2018, Prof. Barry and student Jahnvi Pandya from Mumbai visited our school and clinic in the B.R. Hills, where they did an interview with me on 29 April 2018. Ms. Pandya, now a graduate student in psychology, transcribed the interview, and Prof. Barry configured it into an essay, which he and I refined over the following months. Artist Midori Batten of Bristol (Vermont) assisted us with the illustrations.