

***Panel invite: Transitioning from the literal to the symbolic: existential quest for meaning, purpose and healing at the intersection of the east and west using Jungian and Vedantic perspectives***

*Abstract*

Our present day world is full of strife with man made struggles predominating human consciousness; creating yet another inflexion point in the history of human evolution. It is my contention that the present day socio-political realities are the nadir of the transformation of consciousness brought about in the western world in the era of the industrial revolution. On the one hand, human agency came to the forefront that paved the way for material benefits, lifestyle improvements and emergence of democratic traditions in the west, simultaneously on the other hand, the quest for exploration brought about not only the ravages of colonisation (which among many other things concretised an economic divide, a virtual hegemony of the western mechanistic thought, the destruction and obliteration of indigenous traditions and value systems) but also relativisation and consequent impoverishment of a soul-centred life.

Subsequent to this Cartesian split and pre-dominance of the current western model of development, progress has been increasingly and solely associated with economic prosperity and lifestyle. Over a period of time, such a viewpoint, to the exclusion of soul, has led to a life full of inner crisis devoid of inner meaning and purpose. As man is inherently homo religiosus, in an absence of living traditions and predominance of rational thought, the desire for purpose and meaning has led to a swing towards what I call “literalisation” (the reading of the past in literal terms and finding solace in the concrete – be it history, tradition, books or religion). This has added to human woes through ethnic and religious strife over and above the economic divide.

Accordingly, the pressing question for humanity is, “Are there alternate pathways possible that balance the outer demands of worldly life and yet honour the inner demands of the soul?” This paper explores the gifts of west through depth analytical and process oriented psychologies and east through Yoga-Vedanta traditions as a pathway to inner congruence and outer societal harmony. The author believes that the intersection of the east and the west is a meaningful focal point for emergence of new human consciousness. Grounded in an experiential personal exploratory journey and focused on the essence, these pathways hold the potential to heal the split wrought about across cultures, nations and civilisations.

The Yoga-Vedanta traditions (emerging from Indian soil) with their philosophical underpinnings in the Sāmkhya and Upanishadic framework provide a comprehensive cognitive, emotive, conative pathway for working on oneself. Likewise, the Jungian Depth Analytical & Process oriented approaches (rooted in the west) offer to us a soul centred modern psychological pathway for examining the unexamined and emergent. On surface, these eastern and western approaches do not seem to share much in common, especially in their methods, however, a deeper examination unveils an underlying essence level similarity

and the approaches in fact complement each other. Pursued in tandem, both these approaches could be a potential antidote to the modern mechanistic utilitarian existence and can provide a balm for the world caught in the grip of momentary pleasure fulfilled existence.

In the talk, after a brief exposition of the Jungian, the process oriented approaches and the Yoga-Vedanta traditions, their underlying similarity, I would attempt to discuss how these approaches could potentially serve as a pathway to both a wholesome inner life and outer congruence thereby contributing to individual and societal well being.