

Communication from Indian Perspective – with Special Reference to Vedic Spiritual Tradition

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Abstract

Communication is a basic function of human beings that has been widely discussed from a scholarly angle for the last one century. There are different models and theories proposed to describe its different dimensions. Mostly Western, few of them Eastern/Indian. *Sadharnikarn* model from the *Natyashastra* is also quite discussed about. Some others based on the other systems of philosophy are evolving, mostly derived from epistemological basis. Much more is needed to be done. In Indian tradition, complete picture of communication cannot be thought of without taking into consideration the in-depth and holistic view of human beings, their goal of life and its interrelation with society, world, and the universe at large. In the Indian tradition *Shabda* (speech) originates from *Shabda-Brahma/Nad-brahma*. And it has four types – *para, pashyanty, madhyama & vaikhary*. Life is defined with four value systems – *Dharma, artha, kama & moksha*; *Moksha* being the ultimate one. Thus Self-realization is the prime goal here & knowing oneself the beginning of all wisdom. *Atmabatsarvabhuteshu and Vasudhev kutumbkam* are the defining ideals of Indian Psyche (culture). In this background, communication as a concept in India has far wider, deeper, and somewhat different meaning than what's described in the western tradition, which has a different set of value-belief system, defining philosophy, and cultural context. This paper will discuss the concept of communication in the Indian context with special reference to the Vedic spiritual tradition. It is the researcher's firm conviction that in the Vedic tradition, intrapersonal communication or spiritual communication was the basis of all other forms of communication. Cut off from inner reality merely outward communication (Interpersonal, group or mass communication) cannot achieve the desired goal defined in Indian culture.

Key words : Communication, Western approach, Indian approach, Vedic spiritual tradition, Intrapersonal communication and Spiritual communication

Communication as the basic function of human beings has been widely discussed by scholars during the last century. Basically a Western concept, it has been in use in India since time immemorial as in all parts of the globe. Most of the theories and models describing communication are Western. Very few of them are Indian/Eastern. *Sadharnikarn* is much discussed about; derived from the Sanskrit text *Natyashastra*. Others are still evolving, mostly based on the epistemological basis. There is a lot to be done. This present paper is a humble effort in this direction, discussing communication from the Indian perspective, with special reference to the Vedic spiritual tradition.

Communication– Basic concept & Different meanings

Communication basically means exchange of information, ideas, or feelings from one person to another. The word 'communicate' comes from the Latin word, 'communicare', which means 'to share' or 'to make common'(Manorama, 2007, p.3). In the words of Kumar (2010) "Interaction, interchange, transaction, dialogue, sharing, communion and commonness are ideas that crop up in any attempt to define the term 'communication'" (p.8).

According to Denis (1975a), communication is a process which increases

commonality - but also requires element of commonality for it to occur at all. A common language, for instance, does bring people together but language alone does not suffice for communication to take place. There are other factors too at play such as a shared culture and a common interest which bring about a sense of commonality and more significantly- a sense of community (Kumar, 2010, p.8).

Human communication is a linear term, as the sending of meaningful messages from one person to another. These messages could be oral or written, visual or olfactory (Denis, 1975b). Montagu and Matson (1979) go further saying that, human communication is more than media and message, information and persuasion; it also meets a deeper need and serves a higher purpose. It is, in short, the essential human connection.

Discussing academically, communication is basically a Western concept and most western studies of communication are confined to the study of what may be termed as 'surface structure' features, such as verbal language, body language, non-verbal gestures, facial expressions etc. But it is often the 'deep structure' features that makes a critical difference to our understanding of communication (Saral, cited in Kumar, 2010, p.29). This 'deep structure' is shaped by the cultural and metaphysical assumptions about the definition of truth and reality, the place of an individual in the universe, and one's relationship with other living and non-living elements of the environment, the concept of time and space, and so on (Kumar, 2010, p.29).

Western models and theories of communication are thus reflective of the biases of western thought and culture. The distinctive marks of this philosophy are categorization, classification, linear sequencing and rational logic. Indian philosophy on the other hand is characterized by complexity and pluralism; it is holistic and intuitive, and believes that reality is one. In the Indian rhetoric, opposites are co-

ordinates, contradictions are illusory, and the world is a drama of God playing hide-and-seek with himself, trying to reassemble all the divergent parts back into their original unity (Oliver, cited in Kumar, 2010, p.29).

Indian perspective – *Sadharnikarn* model

Scholarly exploration of communication began in India in the late eighties and nineties of the last century. Communication scholars like Yadav and Tiwari highlighted the concept of *Sadharnikarn*.

The Sanskrit term *Sadharnikarn* comes closest to the sense of 'common' or 'commonness'. Usually associated with communication, *Sadharanikarn* is a social process which can be achieved only among *sahridayas*, people with the capacity to receive messages. This is an innate ability acquired through culture, adaptation or learning (Tiwari, cited in Kumar, 2010, p.8). Focus here is not on the sender but the receiver of the message.

The term *Sadharnikarn* was first used in the tenth century by Bhattanayaka in a commentary on the *Natyashastra* to explain the sutras related to *rasa*. Bhattanayaka stressed that the essence of communication lay in achieving commonness and oneness. (Yadava, cited in Kumar, 2010, p.27). The process is fundamentally 'asymmetrical', and the sharing or oneness it connotes is among *sahridayas* alone, unequal perhaps but one in heart. The goal of *sadharnikarn*, therefore is not persuasion so much as the very enjoyment of the process of sharing.

At the community level, Yadav notes, the saints, Sufis and Brahmins of old propagated religious and cultural values through simplification and illustrations. He sees this practice as continuing today in the conversational and traditional media of rural folk throughout the Indian subcontinent. This dimension of *Sadharnikarn*, seems to have become the common heritage of the Indian people. *Sadharnikarn* model has been further explored and interpreted by

Nepali communication scholar Nirmala Mani Adhikary (Adhikary, 2009).

Dissanayake (1983) draws on the Vedas, the Upanishads and non-philosophical tradition (such as Bhartrhar's *Vakyapadiya*, a fifth century text on grammar or Bharat Muni's *Natyashastra*) to build on Indian model of communication. In Indian tradition he argues, 'communication is an inward search for meaning – a process leading to self-awareness, then to freedom, and finally to truth.' Thus it transcends language and meaning and is interpretation or reception-oriented, not expression oriented like the Western models. The intrapersonal dimension is of greater importance than the interpersonal in the Indian approach, for individualism and manipulation have no place in it. It would not be exaggeration to term intrapersonal approach to be the basic character of Indian communication system rooted in its spiritual tradition.

Indian Spiritual tradition

Spiritual life is the true genius of India. Those who make the greatest appeal to the Indian mind are not the military conquerors, not the rich merchants or the great diplomats, but the holy sages, the *rishis* who embody spirituality at its finest and purest (RKMIC, 1982, p.xxiii). The cultural heritage of India is to be found primarily in her philosophy and religion; and the source of her philosophical ideas and religious beliefs lie in the Vedas and the Upanishads (RKMIC, 1982, p.163).

A search for the beginning of the Indian philosophy would take us down the long corridor of time to the distant days of the *Sanhitas* and *Brahamans*. Its earliest origins are traceable to the hymns of the *Rig-Veda*, the world's oldest scripture, in a form in which philosophy is hardly distinguishable from religion. In the ancient Aryans conception of gods behind nature, his way of worship, his classification of gods, his quest after unity among them and his marked monotheistic tendencies, his search for the

supreme God, his ultimately rising to the transcendental Reality beyond all limitations – in all these and many more of his religious strivings can be perceived as the dawn of the Indian philosophy (RKMIC, 1982, p.333). This dawn was to herald, in the period of the *Aranyakas* or Forest-Books, more and more of the full light of day, through the growth of subjective speculation, which resulted in gradual supersession of Vedic rituals and ceremonials by *Upanisadic* meditation and Self-knowledge.

The Upanishads declare, that science is the greatest which makes man know That which never changes and by knowing which everything is known. It was this science, the science of the soul, that became the national characteristics, the vitality of the race (RKMIC, 1982, p.xi). This science established the principle of the spiritual oneness underlying the great variety found in the world, the world of thought as well as the physical world. This not only resolved all contradictions and differences, it also embraced life in all its aspects, and formed the basis on which social organization was found (RKMIC, 1982, p.x). Thus concept of world culture in the form of *Vasudheiv kutumbakam* has been innate in its life blood.

Describing the Spirit of India, Rabindranath Tagore says, "India truly seeks is not a peace which is in negation, or in some mechanical adjustment, but that which is *shivam*, in goodness; which is in *Advaitam*, in the truth of perfect union; *karmas* in the presence of the Eternal, with the pure knowledge of the spiritual meaning of existence"(RKMIC, 1982, p.xxi). With this background, Indian communication system can be said to be primarily spiritual based on its rich spiritual cultural heritage. Its foundation can well be traced in the Vedic-Upanishadic wisdom and the spiritual outlook of the ancient sages-*Rishis* – the seers of the Truth, *Mantra-drshhta*. Tracing the trend of *adhyatma-vidya* of the Vedic civilization back to 3,000 BC, Sri Aurobindo says, "The sages of the Veda and

Vedanta relied entirely upon intuition and spiritual experience” (Sri Aurobindo, 1972, p.69). Later, “the age of intuitive knowledge, represented by the early Vedantic thinking of the Upanishads, had to give place to the age of rational knowledge; inspired Scripture made room for metaphysical philosophy, even as afterwards metaphysical philosophy had to give place to experimental Science” (Sri Aurobindo, 1972, p.68).

In search of the ultimate Truth of life, existence, this world and the universe, they gave some fundamental revelations of eternal value and universal significance.

Indian perspective : Spiritual Goal of life and the Way

In search of the ultimate principle operating behind the complex web of life, Vedic sages in the state of deep contemplation found it as –*RIT* & *SATYA*. *RIT* – the eternal law operating within the outer nature and *SATYA* –the eternal law operating within the spiritual/inner life calling it as *Dharma* - the way of life (Vidyavachaspati, 2009, p.15).

The complete scheme of life, they confined within four ideal, called as *Purushartha* - *Dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, *moksha*. *Moksha* as the ultimate Goal and *Dharma* as the means and the way. *Artha* and *Kama* as the basis of the worldly life. These *purushartha* are the springs of man’s action. *Dharma* is righteousness; it is the law of inner growth and the basis of man’s actions. It is in harmony with a man’s spiritual evolution (Nikhilananda, 1947, p.22). *Artha* is the possession of material possessions and wealth. *Kama* the fulfillment of sensuous and aesthetic desires. *Artha* and *kama* must be guided by *Dharma* for them to be the means of *Moksha*, the highest Good, else they degenerate into misery and suffering.

Gradual qualification to the ultimate state was formulated through four stages - *Brahmcharya*, *grihastha*, *vanprastha* & *sanyas*, with the gradual evolution of consciousness. So

the Indian view of life as conceived in the Vedas is essentially spiritual. It has a spiritual end designed as *moksha* or Liberation. Material enjoyments, which are necessary and legitimate at certain periods of life, should be so regulated that in the end they may lead men to the attainment of the Highest Good. The various divisions of individual and social life as described in the *Vedas* and the *Puranas* bear out the ideal of man’s spiritual destiny (Nikhilananda, 1947, p.18-19). The way to this evolution was through communication system based on deep insight over the spiritual nature of the universe and human existence.

Human communication and Vedic spiritual insight

At the root of human existence and this universe, Vedic *rishis* found the root sound, the primordial energy and called it - *shabdbrahm/Nadbrahm* (Acharya, 2009, p.20). Different forms of Mantras – sacred sound syllables were its further manifestations. These *mantras* were basis of the Vedic rituals.

Human speech was classified into four categories - *Vaikhary*, *madhyama*, *pashyanty*, *para* (Acharya, 2009, p.12). Communication took place through all these mediums at different levels. *Vaikhary* and *madhyama* were part of daily life and *Para* and *pashyanty* were spiritual modes of communication. Speech refined with spiritual practice was called as VAK, which was powerful enough to achieve any desired objective.

Treating all as Self (*Atmavat sarva bhuteshu*) and this world as a family (*Vasudheivkutumbakam*) were the underlining principles guiding Indian psyche. So was the communication system based on this cultural foundation, all inclusive and all-embracing.

The basics of its spiritual communication tradition can be discussed at three levels. Three stages of spiritual communication in Indian tradition have been –Intrapersonal (Self-reflection, meditation), Interpersonal (*Guru-shishya samvad*),

Mass communication (by a Meditating Yogin or an illumined Master).

Spiritual Intrapersonal communication

Vedic Sages, seers, *munis* in search of the ultimate Truth used this method intensively. They declared Self-knowledge as the basis of all knowledge. Self-realization through Self exploration and Self-discovery was the way common to them. Intrapersonal communication played central role in it.

It was clear conviction of the Vedic sages that, of all knowledge, Self-knowledge is the highest. This is the only royal road to true happiness and peace (Acharya, 2001, p.4). All other forms of knowledge are of secondary importance; for a man's action, feeling, reasoning and thinking are dependent upon his idea of Self (Nikhilananda, 1947, p.22).

This Self is to be realized through (*Shravan*) listening, (*Manan*) contemplation and (*Nididhyasan*) deep meditation (*Brihadaranyak Upanisads*, 4-5). Communication between Lower self and higher self was the way (*Mundaka Upanisads*, 3/1/1, 2). Its objective was to uplift the person where he stood. It was also the way to inner as well as outer peace and harmony.

Try to be in tune with the Divine in you and then you are in tune with the others. First there is inner harmony, then there comes outer harmony (Yatishwarananda, 1989, p.663). This basic understanding was the basis of the spiritual communication. It was intellectual conviction of the sages that, cut off from inner reality, outer communication alone cannot achieve the ultimate goal of life.

Guru-shishya sambad was the most potent communication mode accelerating and supplementing the process of Self-realization.

Guru-Shishya Samvad : the Spiritual Interpersonal communication

It is the most commonly used communication system of ancient India, prevalent till date. All the Vedas, Upanishads and the rest of the literature (*aarsha-vangmay*) is mostly a by-product of this communication tradition. The seeker of the ultimate Truth, the *mumukshu*, the disciple was the fertile ground for the illumined Master, Guru, *Rishi* – the seer of the Truth, the *mantra-drashta* (Vivekananda, 1974, p.496). The highest truths of the spiritual tradition have ceaselessly flown through ages by means of this *Guru-Shishya* communication tradition.

In the words of Dr S. Radhakrishnan – The ideal man of India is not the magnanimous man of Greece or the valiant knight of medieval Europe, but the free man of spirit, who attained insight into the universal source by rigid discipline and practice of disinterested virtues, who has freed himself from the prejudices of his time and place. It is India's pride that she has clung fast to this ideal and produced in every generation and in every part of the country, from the time of the Upanishads and Buddha to Ramakrishna and Gandhi, men who strove successfully to realize this ideal (Dhar, 2014).

In fact, mostly we are oblivious of our true nature. We forget our divine essence. Someone must remind us of our real nature. He who does it is the *guru* or spiritual master (Yatishwarananda, 1989, p.126). In fact there is no greater guru than your own mind. The Supreme spirit, the source of all knowledge, the Teacher of all teachers, is ever present within the heart of everyone. When the mind is purified through moral life, prayer, meditation etc., it comes in touch with the inner light of the supreme Spirit. The purified mind becomes a channel for the flow of divine knowledge (Yatishwarananda, 1989, p.133).

But before this realization dawns, we need illumined masters to remind and guide us. Srimad Bhagvad Geeta, the cream of our Vedas, the essence of our Upanishads can be seen as a classic example of this communication process. Dynamic process of spiritual communication inherent in the Geeta comprises of intrapersonal, interpersonal and divine commune, leading to the purposeful action with self-realization and perfection (Singh, 2014).

The tradition of *Guru-shishya samvad* has flourished in India through the ages to fulfill this need. When this link was broken or weak, the nation has witnessed the most vulnerable moments of national life, the dark phases of our history.

Spiritual Mass communication

The communication of an illumined soul through *para-pashyanty* mode is the other level of communication, mostly misunderstood and also least discussed about. But it is a unique feature of the Indian spiritual tradition. Even today, realized souls in their subtle body are doing penance in remote Himalayas and sending positive, uplifting and spiritual vibes (Acharya, 2001, p.49-50). During the freedom struggle it was this mode of communication, which charged the subtle environment of our freedom struggle. The central role in this process was of Sri Aurobindo and Maharshi Raman (Acharya, 2001, p.147-8). It can be called as the Spiritual mass communication. Even from a remote cave a Yogi is capable of this mode of mass communication. It may be the rare moments of our historic life, but it is the great Truth, we cannot ignore.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the spiritual tradition of Indian communication system has been the rock strong foundation of our national life. The vitality and the strength of social fabric and national character have been directly proportion to its intensity. It

can be seen further percolated to the masses through different folk medias. In every era galaxy of spiritual masters have blazed on the National horizon, enlightening the social life with a new energy, vigor, and inspiration.

At personal level intrapersonal mode of spiritual communication uplifts the person from where he stands and gradually leads him towards the higher goal, the Ideal supreme. *Guru-Shishya samvad* accelerates the journey towards the highest Good of Self Realization or *Moksha/Liberation* and further transmits the highest wisdom to the next generation. At its peak the illumined soul, the Master can transform the lives of the masses through his spiritual vibes and shape the destiny of humanity. This spiritual communication is the need of the hour. Amid the prevalent moral and value degradation of the society, there is need to revive and promote this mode of communication. Further researches and exploration are needed to unravel the thick veil of mystery shrouded over this science of spiritual communication.

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