*Being Different* by Rajiv Malhotra
A Synopsys
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January 19, 2012

# Content of the Presentation

The Approach

Being Different? What is Different

1. Embodied Knowing vs. History Centrism

2. Integral Unity vs. Synthetic Unity

3. Anxiety over Chaos vs. Comfort with Complexity

4. Cultural Digestion vs. Sanskrit non-transferables

Western Universalism

# Approach

**Caveats:**

1. This is my view of the book, not the book summary
2. Based on my reading of the book, no prior subject expertise
3. I have no knowledge of Sanskrit; a major handicap

**Objective of the Book (based on what is stated in the book)**

1. Set terms for a deeper and more informed engagement between dharmic and western world
2. To  highlight the unique and core ideals of dharma using the west as a foil
3. Refute Western claims of universalism

**Author's Methodology: Purva Paksha**

**Please feel Free to Contribute As We Go**

# *Purva Paksha*

**Effective prerequisites for Purva Paksha**
1. Level playing field, terms of debate mutually agreed
2. Intention to pursue truth, not conversion
3. Pursue truth irrespective of ego impact, no compromises to get win-win;
4. Basic self-control /mastery a prerequisite for the practioner
5. Be well informed in both the schools

**Best example**: Mahatma Gandhi and his fight against Colonial rule

|  | **Use Western Categories** | **Use Dharmic Categories** |
|---|---|---|
| **Gaze at Indian Civilization** | Colonial Indology and humanities in today's South Asian Studies | Pre-colonial Indian intellectuals |
| **Gaze at Western Civilization** | Postcolonial Indian scholar who attack the West using western categories | Very rare but the Authors goal |

# My Framework for Understanding *Being Different*

|  | Materialism | Spiritualism |
|---|---|---|
| **Mysticism** | Abrahamic Religions • Judaism, Christianity, Islam | Tantric practices, |
| **Rationalism** | Science | Yoga /Vipasana |

**Diagonal Challenge**
- Yoga /Vipasana vs. Abrahamic Religions seen as
  **Embodied Knowing vs. History Centrism**

**Vertical Challenge**
- Integrating Rationalism and Mystism seen as
  **Synthetic Unity** reflected in Evolution-Creation debate in the west, and
  **Integral Unity** reflected in the idea of Evolution-Involution, leading to acceptance

**Horizontal Challenge**
- **Anxiety over Chaos** – Science supreme, but inability to explain spirituality
  **Comfort with  complexity** –Sensing adequate, explanations not adequate
- **Cultural digestion vs. Sanskrit non-translatable**
  a challenge of translating multi-dimensional concepts in binary language

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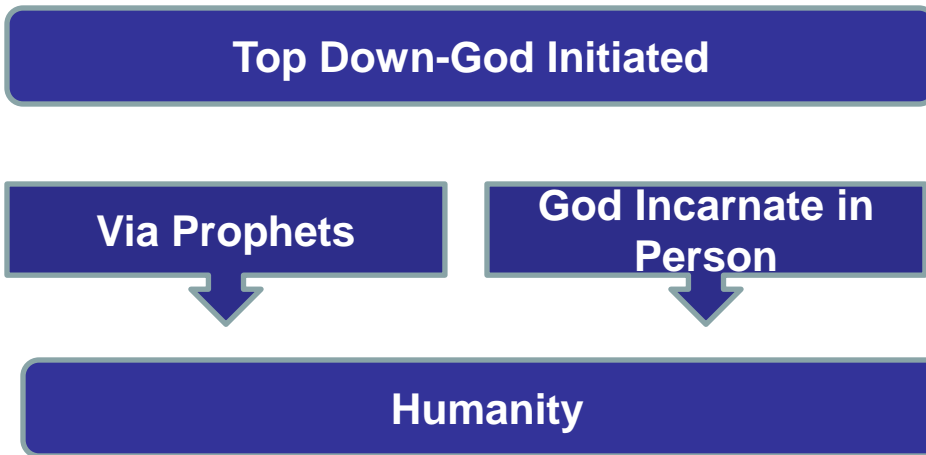# Being Different: Visible In Tolerance vs. Respect

**Western**

- **Charcoal Burner**
  - Tribal focus
  - Only path
  - Salvation
  - Evangelizing or Soul harvesting
- **Distrust for other religion, current position tolerate other religions**

**Eastern**

- **Garland Weaver**
  - Individual focus
  - Multiple paths
  - Sat-chit-anand
  - Individual moksha
- **Mutual Respect for other paths/ religions**

- Late 1990s Claremont Graduate University: Tolerance vs. Respect
- United Nations Millennium Religion Summit 2000
  - Replace tolerance with mutual respect
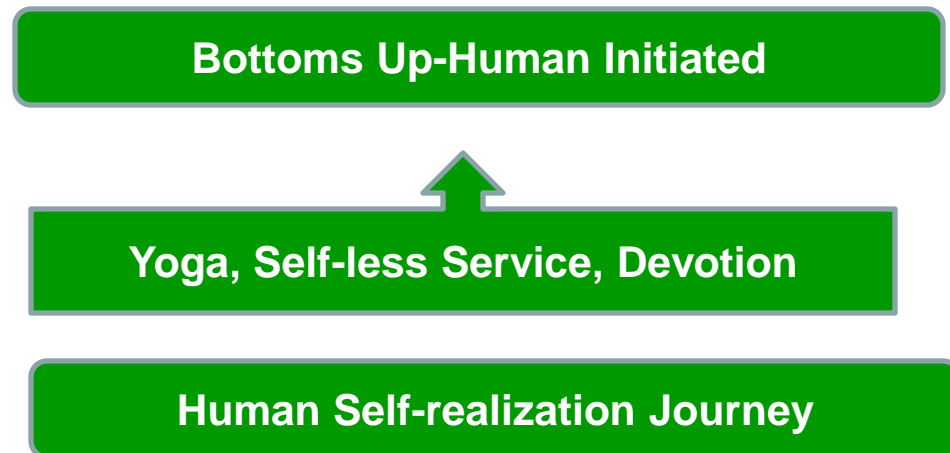  - Retraced by the Catholic church a month later

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# Embodied Knowing vs. History Centrism: <u>The idea</u>

**Top Down-God Initiated**

**Via Prophets**

**God Incarnate in Person**

**Humanity**

Common Ideas:
1. Sole Scripture
2. Original Sin
3. Cannot attain salvation w/o god
4. Externally dammed unless saved
5. Divine grace
Push marketing

1. System integrator vs. Pre-configured systems
2. Itihasa vs. History
3. Role of myths and multiple narratives
Pull marketing

**Bottoms Up-Human Initiated**

**Yoga, Self-less Service, Devotion**

**Human Self-realization Journey**

# Embodied Knowing vs. History Centrism: <u>Issue of Contention</u>

**Three Concepts of Secularism**

1.  **Western Secularism: The origin**

    –   Separation of Church and Government or spiritual and material

    –   Separating reason from belief; a palliative remedy, defers the problems

    –   Concept does not extend to political spheres: American Presidents 'God Bless America' and current Mormon debate

2.  **Indian Pseudo-secularism: borrowed from America**

    –   Constitutional amendment highlighted this concept

    –   Dharma-nirapeksha or indifferent to dharma vs. pantha-nirpeksha or indifferent to organized religion

3.  **All Religions are the same, hence leave it to the individual**

    –   Opts for a passive role for religion, but problematic due to

    –   Claims of only 'truth' by Abrahamic religion

# Embodied Knowing vs. History Centrism: <u>Implications</u>

**Conversion and Excommunication**

**Basis for Conversion**

- World divided into Believers and Heathers

- Believers are the chosen people

- Nature available only to the believers for their enjoyment

- Mandate for the believers to convert heathers: Soul harvesting

**Basis for Ex-communication**

- Only approach to salvation is through the chosen path

- No direct communication with the Almighty

- Claimants for direct contact termed heretic, e.g. Joan of Arc

**Central authority resulting in Bull: Fatwas of the Church:** Birth control, evolution, gay rights

# Integral Unity vs. Synthetic Unity: The Idea

- Integral Unity of the Dharmic world: Involution and Evolution cycle
  - Concept of infinity: Purna
- Synthetic Unity: Creation and Evolution irreconcilable

|  | Dharma | Judeo-Christian |
|---|---|---|
| **The Ultimate reality** | Belief independent<br>Impersonal, multiple forms<br>God not separate from world | Belief based<br>Male, Father<br>God and world distinct |
| **The Human** | Individual: sat-chit-anand<br>Reincarnation<br>Self-made destiny-karma<br>Moksha: individual effort | Individual: sinner<br>One life<br>Circumstances unexplained<br>Salvation: Grace of god |
| **The World** | Infinite cycle of creation<br>No collective end; moksha personal | Finite time and space, linear<br>Judgment day for humanity |

# Integral Unity vs. Synthetic Unity: Issue of Contention

- **Synthetic Unity: Binary world of True and False**
  - Emphasis on reasoning to bifurcate promotes ego or isolation
  - Higher isolation/ inflated ego leads to higher needs
  - Inflated ego promotes selfishness and violence
    - Result, pursuit of infinite growth in a finite world
    - Focus on <u>freedom to</u>
- **A range of states: (7 in number) Negation, Approximation, Absence, Difference (with some similarities), Reduction / Diminution, Badness / unworthy, Opposite/ contradictory**
  - Concept of prana –unifying mind and body focused on feeling
  - Process to integrate self with the ultimate reality, by eliminating ego
    - Focus on <u>freedom from</u>

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# Integral Unity vs. Synthetic Unity: Implications

| Description | Dharmic | Judeo-Christianity |
|---|---|---|
| **World view** | Cosmic centered system | Human centered system |
| **Time horizon** | Infinite | Finite |
| **Relationship with nature** | Interdependence | Subordinate to man |
| **Approach to problem** | Discover solutions | Invent solutions |
| **Concept of Progress** | Sustainable co-existence | Material progress |
| | | |

- **Binary mode of view vs. multiple hues of dharma is seen as dharma being 'unethical'**

- **Means vs. end debate and Krishna in Mahabharata**

- **A view that ethics as a guide applies only in self-centered actions**

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# Anxiety Over Chaos vs. Comfort with Complexity: <u>The idea</u>

**Defined, permanent bifurcation vs. Subjective, temporary, classification**

**Biblical view: Good and Evil inherited, Noah and three sons: Ham, Shem, Japheth**

- **Dark-skinned Ham & ancestors punished for violating honor**

**Dharmic View: Good and evil, vision based**

- **Kashyapa =Vision, Diti= limited/ divided, limited, Aditi= limitless**

**Source of Difference: Desert origin vs. Forest born**

| View | Time | Karma/ Phala | History dependent | Psychological implications |
|------|------|--------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Christianity | Finite | Eternal | Yes | Tension/ Guilt |
| Hinduism/ Buddhism | Infinite | Temporary | No | Ease |

# Anxiety Over Chaos vs. Comfort with Complexity: <u>Issue of Contention</u>

**Uni-dimensional Ethics:**

- **Commandments or the one Right path for all**

- **Push for Uniformity**

**Contextualized Dharma:**

- **Universal dharma an oxymoron**

- **Dharma is life-stage specific, occupation specific and era-specific, Dharma is open ended and evolves**

- **Practice can be both right and wrong; they are context specific**

- **Push for unity**

# Anxiety Over Chaos vs. Comfort with Complexity: <u>Implication</u>

- **Satyam-Shivam-Sundaram implications**

**Western view:**

- **True, good and beautiful is integrated**

- **White skinned, symmetric gods and heroes, dark skinned, malformed villains**

- **Was used to justify slavery**

**Dharma View:**

- **Beautiful need not be good, good need not be beautiful, both good and beautiful need not be permanent, i.e. true**

- **Dark skin seen as beautiful and good, : Rama, Krishna, Vishnu**

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# Cultural Digestion vs. Sanskrit Non-translatebles: <u>The Idea</u>

- **Four levels of Vak (the root/ source of creation): un-manifest, subtle potential, mental image and outer expression**

- **Words have multiple meaning and is context specific**
  - Brihadaranyaka Upanishad: The 3 meanings of Da

- **Translating Sanskrit into other western languages misses the essence**
  - It is like assigning constant value to an algebraic variable

- **Brahman and Ishwara ≠God, Impersonal vs. Personal, universe vs. creator**

- **Shiva ≠Destroyer, Shiva is transformer, there is no end**

- **Atma ≠Soul; True self vs. waiting to be save by God**

# Cultural Digestion vs. Sanskrit Non-translatebles: <u>Implication</u>

## Religion viewed Differently

| Aspects | Christian view | Dharmic View |
|---|---|---|
| **Divine** | Distinct from individual | Within; but not essential as in Buddhism, Jainism, Carvaka |
| **Source of Knowledge** | Single source | Multiple sources; library vs. books |
| **Governance** | Institution of Church | Not essential |
| **Route to salvation** | A standard set: repentance and acceptance | Multiple routes: Jnana, Bhakti, Karma, |
| **Membership** | Formally granted | No formal membership, a way of life |

# Western Universalization

**Idea**

- **Globalization means westernization**
- **Progress is salvation or scientific secular progress**
- **Concept of Universal History, linear in nature**

**Issues of Contention**

- **Binary categories like sacred/ secular, monotheism/polytheism, creation/evolution, political right/left cannot explain Dharma with multiple hues**

**Implications**

- **Other cultures selectively used to forward Westernization: Germany and Sanskrit**
- **Uni-dimensional concept of success**
  - Cultural genocide in the name of developmen
    - Eliminating local production and seasonal eating