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Mind, Language & Culture

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Mind, Language & Culture

Khalil-ur-Rehman*

Abstract

By and large, any worldview is an abstract and a philosophic frame of mind towards life, and rest of the world as a whole as opposed to a corresponding worldview. The relationship between mind, language and culture in the greater context of worldview is vital and critical. The three are interlinked in an evolution reflecting harmony or disharmony. For in the function of the mind, the shaft of light is language. Language inhabits the Kosmos, the world of its own. It is also the main instrument in the development of mind and culture. Language is not only a means of communication but the structure of the language and phrase has logic of its own. It produces a type of thought based either on cognition or dissonance resulting in reflection or problem respectively. Language creates its own reality and feels its way towards that reality. Learning a language alters the mind. By knowing a language one enters into its world. This world has its own symbols and a cultural background leading to a type of mind and way of thinking. For the way we live and think is culture. One does not speak a language; it is like living in that language and breathing in its ambience. The ability to speak an additional language transcends the specificity of mother tongue. It is akin to stepping into geometry after learning arithmetic.

Keywords: Mind, Language, Culture, Thought, Intuition, Induction

Introduction

Harmony in the convergence of thought and language is cognition i.e., knowledge and wisdom. Disharmony in this convergence is cognitive dissonance i.e., insanity in the psychological sense. Human being in this finite world is repeatedly compelled to cope with the same object, the repeatedly evoked cognition and feelings including dissonance. As a result, response disposition becomes organized into a unified and enduring system, for human being is an organizing and conserving animal. Since phenomenal facts are experienced, this, in turn, reinforces the role of language itself. The quality and nature of mind depends on the type of intake. Its capacity is

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linked with the command over language. And mind is also an automatic restate. The attributes of mind are in relation to the structure of language and the related culture. Mind is lived experience and is like concealed wiring developed as a result of social input and the culture associated with it. Mind can also become prisoner of the half-lit intellect.

Moreover, being limited in knowledge about the chemistry of a mind and its equation is always the problem. Understanding logical things for wrong reasons is part of the complication. The knowing of the make-up of mind solves the puzzle of illogical things. It explains the inevitability, because, the lacerations of mind are emotional experiences, the passionate phenomenal facts. Be those of joy or sorrow. Mind can be mythical for the connection between language and myth is as old as humanity. Besides, in the articulation of mind and culture, whenever the control over language is limited, the halo remains unexpressed in its essence. Therefore, life is never understood. It remains a mind teaser. It is a spiritual journey. The problem is that life is the dancer and you are the dance. That is the reality and not the other way round, though, the seamless moves of a dancer surmount the challenges representing consonance as opposed to noumenon. Who is beating in harmony with the rhythm? One can create a spirit of one's own. Silence is speech and speaks louder than words. It is the Highest Interpretation. Although the question is irrelevant for a question is always a contradiction. Still, what is the spiritual secret?

A particle is sometimes a particle and sometimes a wave. To a lay person, three days a week it is a particle and the other four days it is a wave. It reinforces the thesis that it is both. An observer looks at it and it changes. On an occasion this, on an occasion that. Whether it changes for the observer or by itself, it is only when the observer appears on the scene does it become a wave or a particle. Now this trial or test and the hardships, yet human beings succeed. A human being is a mixture of the opposites. For a brilliant mind combines in himself many traits including good and evil. Being is the midpoint. To be more precise, being (self) is a logical priority. Human being is an equilibrium i.e., neither day nor night but a meeting of the two. Reality is the junction point, not double. It is individual. The moment an individual becomes a double, one is caught either in a sin or jealousy, perhaps much more. One sins when one is torn. A human being at every step is faced with a dilemma. The variation is in the boundaries of good and evil. What matters is to transcend the evil. Since both are in operation, one should bring illumination in the opposites. For a human being is never untainted.

At times one is caught in a difficulty. The pain is always in the being and not outside. An adherence leads to a unified spirit. For an ambiguity is always in the subjective person. How far a human being has

gone is formlessness. When you deserve it you are a wave when you do not you are a particle. The quantum physics has proved that a human being is and is not. When it is, it is solid and the part that is spiritual is also in him. The wave is the mystical twilight and the particle is the form. One should concentrate on the dilemma of mind living in the two worlds of the wave and particle.

All the struggles and contradictions of life are pain and agony. To be born and live is an agony. How do you stimulate interest in interpretation and life as a whole? The greatest of all the pleasures in life is sublime. It is to understand. Anecdotes could be many, but the social and spiritual aspects are important to inflame curiosity in an interpretation and life as a whole. A case in point could be an interpretation of poetry or a painting e.g., the secret of femininity is in the smile of the Mona Lisa. Another interpretive expression could be that love is pre-determined sympathy whereas romance is too close to reality and one should avoid getting too close to reality. The dissolute living should always have limits.

Look at the things through consciousness for it stimulates new thoughts. A Divine touch is in everyone. How Divineness translates itself from an infinite to finite is the key to an understanding and transcendence. Is there a connection between Divineness and thought? Is thought Divine or a capacity? If it is capacity what should be the end? What remains critical is the illumination of the mind. For certain things are always bigger than life and are beyond the material world e.g., honor, dignity, integrity, harmony, curiosity, resilience, sacrifice, happiness, freedom, wisdom, compassion, turning around, transcendence, meaning, purpose, courtesy, modesty, balance, creativity, originality, awareness, and the centre of gravity of being. And only a truly free person understands the true meanings of honor and dignity. The magnetism of personality is in the halo around a person whereas the environment and within it the atmosphere affects the stimulus enhancing understanding. The learning curve never ends. Moreover, a breach that occurs in mind always has the potential to become synthesis of Beautiful Minds.

Mind-Body Dualism

Mind-body dualism is woven into the entire texture of Western Philosophy and could be easily traced back to Plato and Socrates. However, one could find it more pronounced in Cartesian philosophy. Descartes underscored that mind and body are two distinct entities where body/matter is inconceivable without extension; and mind (is inconceivable) without thoughts and ideas. The post-Cartesian philosophy, however, seems to be seized by the idea of straightening out this dualism and converts it into

some sort of monism or the other. For instance, Hobbes provides the lead by insisting that mind is nothing but an ephi-phenomenon, an incidental expression of the brain or bodily organism. Mind may be called brain-in-action. We can see that Hobbes tends to define mind into bodily terms and is more inclined towards materialism.

Leibniz, on the other hand, takes just the opposite view and tries to dismiss body as a material entity. He holds that all reality consists of “monads” which are essentially spiritual in their nature and substance. Different levels of existence are, in fact, reflective of different grades of these monads, being more or less active or dormant. Body or matter, so to say, is not material. It is spiritual in nature. Liebizean theory, it may be observed reminds us of Greek atomists, Democritus and Leucippus, with one difference that atoms are material whereas monads are spiritual in nature.

Spinoza offers us quite an interesting solution to this dualism. He seems to have anticipated Bertrand Russell’s theory of “Neutral Monism”. It can be safely paraphrased that in Spinoza’s view man is still a moving prisoner of Plato’s Cave. As he consists only of two elements (or windows), that is, bodily and spiritual, he is condemned to see reality only in two ways. If he is inclined towards materialism, he will consider the entire universe as material in its ultimate nature and substance. If, on the other hand, he is inclined towards spiritualism, he will regard the entire universe as spiritual in nature. Only these two paradigms are available to human mind and cannot see reality in another way.

Empiricists view this dualism in a more fascinating manner. For instance, Locke contends that when we converse with the external world, an object or a thing-in-itself, we run into two types of attributes, that is, Primary attributes, such as, figure, design, length, breadth, extension etc. These attributes, he observes, are trace-able to the object itself. By virtue of these attributes, the object (or the external world) maintains its distinct, separate and continued existence. Secondary Qualities, on the other hand, such as color, taste, smell, softness, hardness etc can be traced back to the perceiving mind and are variable in nature. So an object (or external world) so to say is half dependent on the perceiving mind.

Berkeley pushes empiricism farther than Locke and makes matter entirely dependent upon mind-mind may be human mind or Infinite Mind. In order to develop his thesis, Berkeley contends, that Locke’s distinction of Primary and Secondary qualities is totally artificial and untenable, reason being, that extension, figure and design, like color, taste and smell, too are perceived by the observing mind. Both are qualities and attributes and both are perceived by the perceiving mind. Matter, if, it means something that exists independent of perceiving mind is a contradiction in terms. He insists

esse ist percipie: Existence is being perceived. If matter is not perceived, it does not exist. The whole universe, he holds, is an idea sustained and preserved by an Infinite Mind. To sum up we may say that for Berkeley there is no matter. Only mind and its ideas exist. Since ideas are not floating in the air, instead, they are inhere in a mind. So we can conclude that only mind and its ideas exist. There is no matter what-so-ever. Matter is not material; it is mental or spiritual in its ultimate nature.

Hume concedes that Berkeley is perfectly right as far as he goes. But unfortunately he does not go far enough. Hume contends that Berkeley's arguments, which he launched for the dismissal of matter, can be easily extended to the dismissal of human mind as well. Just as matter consists of attributes - and all that we know about matter are these attributes or ideas - same is true of mind. When we look within and try to catch our inner self (or mind) we run into successive states of consciousness. We cannot catch our-self. So one can say that if there is no thing-in-itself, one can equally say that there is no mind-in-itself. In fact, both mind and matter - in their real essence/substance - are shut-out from human comprehension. All that we run into are different thoughts and ideas. It may be emphasized that Hume's skepticism is directed against empiricism as well as rationalism, as two distinct gateways to knowledge and wisdom. However, he finds relief in intuitionism or "animal faith" and naturalism mixed with imagination.

Hume insists that when all is said and done, we can still hold on to our intuitive conviction that mind and matter do exist. We may not be able to retain them on rational and empirical grounds; but we can hold them on, on intuitive grounds. Now intuition is an integral part of induction. And induction cannot be justified by deduction. In fact, it needs no justification. It stands on its own and is a unique way to knowledge and wisdom. All moral and natural laws are the product of Induction which, in turn, is based on Intuition. So induction and intuition play the most vital role in our life. Einstein rightly observes that "*the intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant and that we have created a society that honors the servant but has forgotten the gift*".

Kant, Fichte, and Hegel have also addressed themselves to the problem of self or mind. Their contention is that Self is presumed or posited as a logical necessity in all our experiences. Without assuming the prior existence of the Self - same - Self through and through we cannot have any experience whatsoever. Kant, in particular, offers three fundamental postulates that is, Self; freedom of Self; and God. Bertrand Russell has made a very interesting observation regarding the philosophies of Kant and Hegel. He thinks that their philosophies are similar to pre-Humean rationalism and could be dismissed on Humean grounds. We may refer to

self and self-identity as it is viewed in the philosophies of Hume, Kant and Hegel. Hume makes a sharp distinction between philosophical and mathematical identity on the one hand, and natural identity on the other. The philosophical or mathematical identity does not allow us to draw even a hundredth part of dollar/rupee and still call it the same dollar or a rupee. However, when we deal with natural objects, the situation is totally different. For instance, we do see that trees, animals, rivers, even humans do undergo a change. But as the change is gradual and imperceptible we do take these objects as still the same. Hume thinks that philosophers are guilty of substituting natural identity with philosophical identity and the transition is allowed to pass un-noticed.

Pakistan, Urdu & the North Indian Muslim Culture

The cultural setting in which Pakistan finds its roots consists of the Central Asian culture, which is nomadic in character and is reflected in waves of invasions on India. Afghanistan's tribal culture is always visible in the struggles against occupations and civil wars. Hindu culture is rooted in the soil and reflected in the will of Nehru i.e., dust to the dust and ashes to the ashes. From crude to the assimilation of everything is the contemporary Indian culture. The present day Pakistan in its origin is a peasant-cum-tribal society. Any peasant is caring, affectionate and extrovert but not subtle and lacks sharpness whereas a tribesman looks inward for strength and feels ensconced among his people. It is like returning to the heart and soul.

Finally, the North Indian Muslim culture is trans-national, trans-geographic and trans-cultural. It is pan-Islamic in its worldview. Pan-Islamism is floating and non-geographic. It is tied with ideas and emotions. Its roots lie in the historical experience of a Muslim minority that had ruled India for more than seven centuries, and later became a powerless minority in the Hindu majority India. The problem of Muslim minority and that of its decline started with the Battle of Panipat. The centre of gravity, its focus and essence are all extra-territorial. Notice how the centre of gravity of the symbolism in poetry and art including architecture was placed or "displaced" outwards: the almond blossoms of Kandahar, the fairies of the Caucasus, the waterfalls and scenic beauties of the Farghana valley and the romantic scenes of Tashkent, Bokhara, Samarkand, and Khurasan. The list is endless and includes the "cool breeze of Yemen". It is nostalgia, a thirst, an existential angst, and a turning outward in romantic and spiritual manner. It is a curious and difficult to explain passion as also the stir of the imagination that is ethereal. These longings and yearnings are for those lofty ideals.

This cultural background is historical through and through – it is itself unfolding in history.¹ For the primal holon itself is shaped, *even as it*

*is forming, by a cultural background.*² The Muslims of the Indian subcontinent have always considered themselves as a part of the universal brotherhood of Islam and many of them, especially in the Northwest, in fact, carry in their veins the blood of Muslims from neighboring lands who came to India in successive waves as conquerors,³ and nurtured not only Urdu language but the subsequent art, literature, music and High Culture as well. Today, all this or that forms part of the historical and social roots of Pakistani Mind.

The North Indian Muslims were as an island within the sea of Hindu majority. This is reflected in poetry, drama, and prose and indeed in the Urdu language as a whole. The birth and nurturing of Urdu have been historical and cultural developments. The emergence of Urdu was closely linked with the advent of Muslims, their political and religious institutions, their literature and other aspects of their culture.⁴ Every isolated human group thinks of itself mythically, in the first place, as the only humanity worthy of the name,⁵ individuals also since any person is a microcosm of a society. To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.⁶ The North Indian Muslim culture is introvert, subtle and sharp as well.

The central elements of any culture or civilization are language and religion.⁷ Language is second only to religion as a factor distinguishing people of one culture from those of another.⁸ Urdu derives its material and motive force from Arabic, Persian, and is steeped in Islamic lore and religious tradition,⁹ including Turkish. All the similes, metaphors, references, frameworks, coordinates, symbols and signs have nothing to do with India. These were borrowed from Shiraz, Isfahan, Kohikaf, Yemen, Damascus and Baghdad and are all extra-territorial. Urdu was born out of the need of Muslim invaders of India from the tenth century onwards to create a language in which they could communicate with their Indian subjects.¹⁰ Except for the “verbs” nothing belonged to Hindustan; nothing belongs to Pakistan and India. The substantives and nouns are all non-local. This gives it more flexibility and manipulative power. And by now Deoband and Kandahar connection is one and half-century-old.

Furthermore, Urdu has at least been saved in Pakistan from the slow extinction it has been subjected to in India.¹¹ And in case of Kashmir, the more vocal elements of the insurgency in the Valley have emphasized their relationship to Urdu, Persian, and Arabic as the languages of the Muslim Ummat, rather than to their regional languages.¹² After all, Urdu encompasses a culture of resistance to man’s enslavement by man, intense love and passion, eclectic mysticism, full blooded hedonism, unrelenting anti-imperialism and a defiant conversation with God.¹³ The al-Qaeda for the first time in July 2008 released a video in Urdu language urging Jihad. And in addition to international relations, history, strategy, psychology and

medicine, the leader of al-Qaeda Ayman al-Zawahiri displayed his linguistic charms by referring to Urdu as a ‘charming language’.¹⁴ And Urdu poetry is part of everyday life and thought,¹⁵ in Pakistan.

Since years 70 percent Pakistanis want Iran to have nuclear weapons, 64 percent Pakistanis view America (because of its crusading zeal) unfavorably and 66 percent oppose American war on terror.¹⁶ The anti-Americanism in Pakistan since then has increased manifold and “the support base for pro-American foreign policy in Pakistan which earlier was just 2 percent,¹⁷ has further dropped over the years, especially after the American air-strikes on Salala Post. Besides, the University of Texas officials have recruited students to study Hindi and Urdu as part of a new Defense Department programme to teach languages vital to global security.¹⁸

Language exists not only for the coordination of social activity but (functioning) as the medium in which identity is constituted, in which we understand and define ourselves.¹⁹ Language is nothing but culture and when you use language accurately and when you are able to appreciate a language correctly, you become at ease with that language.²⁰ Those who receive the linguistic cues learn to tell the difference between friend and foe much faster even though the nonsense words provide unnecessary information.²¹ Linguistic information boosts people’s ability to sort objects and language also affects visual processing.²² And the epitome of Greek wisdom, Heraclitus, once said, “do not listen to me but to the word”.²³

Language evolved to fill the role of grooming as human tribes grew too large for everyone to be able to groom everyone else.²⁴ Language is more than blood and languages truly decide the glory, survival or defeat of nations on the battlefields of time.²⁵ Innovations in language often intimate that something important is unfolding in the given historical setting.²⁶ And English has already joined Arabic, Persian and Urdu, the classical languages of Islamic High Culture, as a medium for expressing ideas in modern Islam.²⁷ Also Urdu is a unique language, having an extraordinary ability that lends itself to aliens, for an Urdu word, to go Shakespearean, “doth become the mouth as well”.²⁸ And success in learning a foreign language is contingent on a certain degree of maturity in the native language.²⁹

What is more the sole of Vygotskyian schema is *word meaning* and the greatest discovery of Vygotsky was “the consciousness of what happens”. The “word” *pan-Islamism* has become the microcosm of Pakistani consciousness. And consciousness is reflected in a word as the sun in a drop of water.³⁰ The reality asserts as time goes by and the die is cast. The history of cultural, social and economic development of a society determines the origin and development of culture.³¹ And one of

the fundamental insights of linguistics is that *the present is the key to the past*.³² Moreover, others may have an idea but this does not mean that one should give up one's own. However, an identity and national interest are two different things and mixing one with the other or taking one for the other is cognitive dissonance. One should always cling to national interest like grim death, especially in the chaotic world of 21st century. Harmony of mind and correct decision making are linked.

Conclusion

The English language and its Sister European languages are rooted in Latin and Greek and represent the scientific worldview. This inductive worldview is rooted in the transformation of languages and consciousness that took place centuries ago when inductive method and process of reasoning replaced deduction. Resultantly, the mind developed through these languages is inductive e.g., imagine a vast table of science with all the tangibles and intangibles of the Western creativity spread over on top of it: scram jets, tanks, aircrafts, submarines, ships, computers, medical advances, engineering products, space technology, automobiles, information technology, communication, infrastructure, dresses, architecture, art, sculpture, archaeology, museums, miniature, music, philosophy, culture, civilization, scientific method, laws of science, law, constitutions, form of government, good governance, financial and economic institutions, languages, nation-state system and much more. The West stands by its table and asks to pick and choose and discard anything if you can. However, one should never compromise on the supremacy of thought over language.

The 21st century is the "New Age of Discovery" as well as a New Age of global transformation. In the realm of science, the trajectory of Copernican Revolution has reached quantum physics, super-string theory, parallel universes and *m* theory. Global geo-politics and integrated global political economy along with quantum physics is the beginning of a new consciousness as it was at the dawn of Copernican Revolution. The advances in the field of quantum physics will have a great impact on the American led west and its worldview. The perception of reality is linked with an answer that is not known and involves the nature of particle, i.e., why particle is like this as opposed to what is particle?

The post-Copernican developments transformed Western consciousness whereas the post-modern issue is the harmonizing of arts, morals and science. Modernity along with romanticism, idealism and post-modernism failed to harmonize the three. It led to scientific imperialism. The developing world in general and the Islamic World in particular did not comprehend modern scientific consciousness, thus the present day West

arose. This led to imperialism and the contemporary declining American neo-imperialism. The world takes a round to come around and the world has changed. The madness and violence are that of the transition stage. To think of getting away with the help of a smoke screen is naïve.

Pakistan too failed to comprehend the institutions and value system of the West, as also the impact of science on Western society, its worldview and process of reasoning and universe of analysis. Inculcation of the spirit of quest and discovery in the national character is desirable. Likewise during the decade after 9/11, the stresses developed by the federation of Pakistan are new, serious and sensitive. Evasions and avoidance of truth will not work. These have never worked in the past nor will they work in the future. The spirit of the Promised Land that pervaded Pakistan on its creation stands dissipated today. Pakistan's multiple weaknesses are increasing with the passage of time as critical moments of history unfold. In the process, Pakistan has suffered a lot and continues to do so. This has translated itself into major political, geo-strategic and foreign policy crises. The American strategic withdrawal is looked-for, but what about judgement, decision making and soundness of mind? It is an unhappy situation.

Historically, start at any point in circle and what you find is that the whole thing was and continues to be circular. And this time too the improvisation with shoe strings has not worked. The jubilation was out of place. The construct had multiple contradictions. It was basically unsound. It remained ambiguous. What was delayed was crisis that in the due course arrived. It is complicated, complex and more than Kafkaesque. Moreover, Pakistan is unique in the sense that threats to its security are from systemic, sub-systemic and anti-systemic forces. Pakistani nation has developed an ability through which it reconciles with so many departures from the truth. When a society is suggestible, then it is credulous. A Hamlet is being played in which the Prince of Denmark has the patience of a coward. All this increases margin of maneuver of *others*.

Other than the tangibles, the intangible, that is, the morale of the nation is shattered. The cement of the federation has turned into sand and a sense of alienation is dominating the country. Where is the glue that holds the federation together? All the sinews of power are not able to hold or bring things together. The federating units should not expect the voltage descending from the top. For an anomie is taking over. The circle is closing in on itself. The real power is not with the parliament. It lies else where. And the establishment as a whole has also unraveled whereas bureaucracy is part of the debris and judiciary is trying to make a new beginning. The interpretation is pessimistic. Still, our hope is too stubborn to go away.

We have not penance ourselves by purging our souls. You pardon yourself and a new life is born. First you must forgive yourself, before you can forgive others. Since we did not, we continue to corrode. Pakistan is in pieces. The heat is beginning to catch up. The simple crisis has become a recurring crisis. Lack of will power makes it worse. Every time the hope of an improvement is banked upon, the rub comes in again and the nation remains in the thick of whatever is happening. It remains at a loss to understand where someone is coming from. It is difficult to ascertain as to who is in charge. The apple is rotten at the core.

The uncertain domestic and external game can only go on for a limited time. The multiplicity of problems is reducing the writ of the state and its reckless governance. It is being continuously reduced. It is a dappled affair. Can we manage the dispersal of state authority? For the dappled picture is reflective of declining state authority. Different measures will buy you time, but what will you do with that time? The political structures can always shift in such a way that a new situation emerges. Whenever the infighting spreads and the conglomeration of different factors come into play and dissipation reaches a point then the ugly situation forces the decision. It simply cannot go on and last for ever. If the nation does not come out clean from this mixture then the integrity and writ of the state will be in name only. It is drifting in that direction. Who do you control when there is chaos? In the present situation, one will have to invert the pyramid of power to run the show. One can only be as well as one can be under the circumstances for a crisis is an agony and a disturbance in emotions. And to a hallucinatory character any crisis is a passing incident.

It is foolish to bank upon others' prudence. The problem is that one does not choose his enemies. The Pakistani mind is prone to simplicity. It is at ease with black and white and not comfortable with grey areas. And despite the fact that the compression of time is critical, temporizing in Pakistan has become an art. If choices are multiple one can play more than one tune, but that is not the case. Nailing the flag to the mast or thought of riding a roughshod will not work. To cut it to bear bone and to return to Pakistan's problem finally, the decisions have tried, are trying and will continue to try Pakistan's soul. The *New Frontier Policy* is still awaited. And the escape will be a narrow one, but Pakistan Allah willing will survive. For the ancient resilience of the Pakistani people is Pakistan's greatest asset.

Lastly, the Youth of Pakistan in the face of wholesale abdication of leadership should marshal their spirits against local, regional and global odds. Remember that everything makes a statement. And one

makes a statement through acts and gestures, through a tremendous capacity on a narrow front. Also keep in mind that they and their patron get agitated whenever there is a finger to write on the wall. You should be passionate, competitive, inductive and intuitive (capacity to look into future) young men and women. Nothing should shake you off. Nothing should be enough. You should never give up, because, *I am* is the undying part of *consciousness*. *I am* the *universe*. *I am* the *world*. *I am* the *field of force*. *I am* the *screen*. *I am* the *mirror*. *It always appears to me in me*. Never forget that mind is the kind of a thing with which one can do wonders. Mind is lived experience, images, symbols, feelings and thoughts.³³ And last but not the least, a trained mind is an end in itself, for an accurate explanation is an accuracy of the mind. And beauty is nothing but a Beautiful Mind.

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