

“Pavena Parandel” of western sciences and technologies – VIII

In Part VI of this series it was mentioned that “Chinthanaya was a concept created first in order to understand why Sri Lankan, especially Sinhala western scientists have failed to win a Nobel Prize though there are brilliant men and women who have not only been elected as Fellows of that august body National Academy of Science but published several research papers in what are called prestigious international science journals. There may be a few Indians, among them may be two or three Tamils, who have won the Nobel Prize, but even in their cases most of them have had worked for decades, and sometimes brought up entirely in the west. On the other hand a highly out of proportion number of Jews have won the Nobel Prize, especially in Physics. Then of course among women only a very few have managed to win a Nobel Prize. At the outset I must mention that I am considering the Nobel Prize as a yard stick simply because in the western world winning a Nobel Prize is considered as the highest achievement in the western sciences. In Mathematics the equivalent is the Fields Medal and hardly anybody from South Asia has won this Medal, and how come that many renowned Mathematicians have been Eastern European Jews?

I am definitely not aspiring to become a Nobel Laureate having done nothing significant to win even a “Rajya Sammana” locally. However, I had been curious of this phenomenon ever since I went to UK for my post graduate work. Are we to say that the Jews are more intelligent than the rest of us, especially the Sinhala Buddhists or that the women are not intelligent as men in general? More fundamentally what is meant by intelligence? Is it something that could be measured by the so called IQ? Do the Blacks or the non whites in general are born with less IQ than the whites as it is claimed using research done by Eysenk? Only two years ago Watson who himself is a Nobel Laureate and famous for co authoring the work on the double helix came out with a book (I must admit that I have not read the book) that could suggest that the people in Africa are not as smart as the white Caucasians. Then we have the former Harvard President Summers who came out with apparent biological reasons as to why men are better in western sciences than women. Einstein himself is not out of this equation (rather the inequality) having claimed that the creative ability of women is in the womb and not in the brain.

Intelligence (or whatever is meant by that) is likely to create controversy than anything else such as physical power when comparing individuals or nations or races as the case may be. The South Asians for example are prepared to accept that the black Africans or their descendants in the Americas and the West Indies are better athletes than themselves. However, we are not prepared to accept that the whites are better than us in the western Sciences. Would the Sinhala ever contemplate that the Tamils especially those in India have done better in Western Sciences and Mathematics than themselves? It is very unlikely, and the feminist type women would never accept that men have done better when it comes to western Sciences and Mathematics though I suppose that they have no inhibition in accepting that men have more muscular power than the women.

We are likely to propose various “theories” to explain this phenomenon. One popular excuse is that in the so called third world that includes South Asia the facilities are poor

when compared with those in the western countries. However, when it is pointed out that even among those who have lived abroad since they went for their postgraduate studies have not done that well we tend to ignore the argument rather than meeting it. Then the number factor is also brought forward as an excuse. One would say that only a small number of Sinhala or South Asians are involved with scientific research compared to those in the western countries. This is not quite correct as India boasts of having the third largest (western) scientific community in the world. As far as women are concerned the feminists among the females as well as the males come out with the stock argument that women are discriminated in the male dominated societies.

However the state of affairs warrants drawing our attention to the problem rather than taking refuge in popular excuses. There are two basic problems that we have to address ourselves. One is that we are not prepared to accept that Group A is better than Group B in western Sciences and Mathematics not to mention Philosophy and other disciplines as it could mean that there is a biological or a genetic reason for the “superiority”. No group that has come under the influence of the west is prepared to accept that genetically they are inferior to another group in an activity generally associated with what is known as intelligence, though they may accept superiority of other groups in other areas such as sports. This cannot be a universal phenomenon that has existed during the entire history of the mankind a la Darwin or otherwise, and I would associate it with the present west itself, as in the western Christian modernity “intelligence” whatever is meant by the term is considered to be more important than the other qualities possessed by the humans. “Intelligence” and the activities of the intellectuals (and professionals) have been recognized more than the other qualities of human beings though the income of the sports personalities and others may be greater than those of the “intellectuals”. The terms such as knowledge based economy and knowledge based society created in the western countries (we only ape them) recognize and reinforce the value, though not necessarily in terms of monetary value, of the intellectuals and their work. In such a society people would hardly accept, especially as a group, that they are inferior to another group “intellectually”. The false sense of equality that has been given to the western world and passed on to the rest of the world by the French Revolution only rationalizes this reluctance to accept the superiority of other groups genetically (biologically) in intellectual activities.

The answer to this lies in the second problem that I would like to raise in way of an explanation. What do we mean by stating that Group A is superior to Group B in western Sciences and Mathematics and of course the other intellectual disciplines? It is a well known fact that the Sri Lankan students fare very well at examinations conducted by various international bodies that have established their authority in various disciplines, especially in professional activities. It is common to hear that so and so came first in the world in such and such discipline and won a scholarship to a “prestigious” university. The Sri Lankans have become exponents at passing examinations beating most of the others in the world. In general the Asians are good at performing well at examinations, which is an intellectual enterprise that is admired by many in the educated world. Thus if passing examinations is considered to be the recognized intellectual activity then it is difficult to claim that the Asians are inferior to the westerners intellectually. However,

the Asians do not perform that well when it comes to creating knowledge, and it is in this sense that Group A is considered to be superior to Group B. Nobel Prizes are awarded for creating knowledge, or to use the formal language, for contributing to knowledge. Any Ph. D. thesis claims that it embodies work that contribute to knowledge, but it is a well known fact that most of these theses are confined to solving some trivial problem in the periphery of knowledge and not solving a fundamental problem at the centre stage of a particular discipline. In the sense of occupying the centre stage it is clear that the westerners, especially the western Jews are superior to the others.

Thus our problem is now reduced to finding an answer to the question as to why the westerners have been able to create fundamental knowledge very much better than the rest of the world. Is it genetically affected or is the superiority due to something else? When we consider the history of the mankind in the last 5000 years it becomes clear that the westerners had not been able to contribute to fundamental knowledge for about 4500 years, the only exceptions being the Roman and Greek experience in the ancient world. Even there the Romans excelled in Law and road construction and not in many other fields. The Greeks on the other hand were experts and “world authorities” in many a field but theirs could be considered as organisation of knowledge that the others had created before this particular period during which the Greek intellectuals flourished. They had the axiomatic method and abstract thinking and with those two tools they were able to organize knowledge. However, it is clear that except for these brief periods during which the Romans and the Greeks held the centre stage the Europeans had not been able to create much knowledge until the beginning of the fifteenth century. Thus it cannot be said that the westerners are superior to the others intellectually when it comes to creating knowledge due to biological reasons. Now the question arises as to how people create knowledge and the concept of Chinthanaya was created partly to answer this particular question.