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The Poetics of Possibility and Critical Spirituality

By Marcus Bussey*

A new planetary civilisation (and I believe that we are part of this new world already), where consciousness, community and connection become the hallmarks of human endeavor is within reach. Like all such chimeras its immanence obscures its possibilities. As with all civilisational projects the vision is core and it is expressed aesthetically in a poetics of possibility, in what Ananta Giri calls “the art of integration”, which evokes the sense of endless yearning to become part of something bigger than oneself. The human urge for wholeness is a powerful ordering force which expresses itself equally at the level of the psyche’s quest for integration in which the mind yearns, as Aurobindo describes, for *Sachidananda* as well as at the level of the collective where social ordering moves from complexity to complexity as clan becomes village, becomes city, becomes state and finally empire. These ever expanding circles of social order reflect the inner drive for integration. Of course this has in its patriarchal form frequently been violent and hegemonic in nature. Yet it need not be so as integration need not demand a unitary singularity but can find expression in partial, local even fractal possibilities. Such a soft wholeness joyfully embraces difference and multiplicity as expressions of the possibilities of wholeness where the uni-versal allows in the multi-versality of the kaleidoscopic dance of consciousness in both form and function.

When thinking about a poetics of possibility we can see that multidimensional thinking is a central element of this human becoming whole. This multidimensionality must take into account the physical world, the social and institutional world, the cultural world and the subjective inner world of each individual. Thus a poetics of possibility invokes a *politics of possibility* in which relationship is measured and promoted through a distributive justice that leaves no being outside of the community. Seen in this light trees and animals, in fact the entire biosphere of the planet, is part of this greater belonging. We are all working towards this work as ‘earth worms’ churning and enriching our collective civilisational soil. Advocacy for inclusion in our co-creative cosmos seeks to maximize the possibilities of each being while retaining a balance between inner and outer, one being and another, one voice and another. This balancing is dynamic and an expression of *prama* (Sanskrit for balance) in action.

The main focus of all thinking that starts with spiritual and meditative activity in this world, is distributive justice. Thus spirituality demands a critical inquiry into the workings of this world. This calls forth a spiritual critique into realms often quarantined from the spiritual such as economics and politics. From a spiritual perspective the separation between sacred and secular collapses under the weight of injustice and human and planetary suffering. This critical spirituality is a corner stone for any engagement with sustainable futures as it forces all to look beyond dominant categories as we co-nurture a future worth having.

The question of climate justice is an example of our current economic system’s failure to generate optimal futures for all. Critical spirituality offers a set of resources for rethinking and working on such failures. Immanent to the present are a set of resources grounded in civilisational categories denied or diminished by dominant modernist culture. Hegemony or no, the civilisational currents beneath the veneer of modernity are in constant dialogue. Myriad civilisational conversations are in progress and all those seeking sustainable futures are part of this ferment. The anticipatory is built into these conversations which all have a futures dimension. There is something qualitatively new emerging that is growing out of the creative milieu in which traditions are meeting and cross fertilizing generating hybrid forms. Such processes point towards what Derrida (2005) called the ‘enlightenment to come’ where reason and the rules and categories that define current ‘logics’ are over turned. This is a time when it is important to believe in impossible things.

Critical spirituality begins by inviting us to explore the world through the quality of relationship. It offers an assessment of our relationality by firstly expanding the sense of our human identity. In an anthropocentric universe ‘man’ stood at the top of a vertical arrangement of relationships in which relating was transactional and utilitarian. New (neo) humanity is on the horizon as we explore horizontal relationality in which it is dialogic process rather than domination that defines our interconnection. Such a critical spirituality invites us to enter into what Ananta Giri calls processes of ‘meditative co-realisation’. This offers us a critical poetics based on a neohumanist vision of possibility beyond limits, yet embedded

in local realities in which the work of co-realisation is always at the heart of human activity. In this the body receives and experiences, the mind analyses and synthesises, the spirit reflects and critiques. This requires that we ourselves become laboratories of reflection in which body, heart, mind and spirit bear witness to Being.

There is no road map to help us in this process. We are on a journey of co-realisation together. And this journey involves the entire planetary community not just the human cohort. Yet the wisdom traditions offer a rich basis for considering the way forward as we strive for sustainable futures. It is in the encounters between these traditions and their secular variants, such as Western philosophy and science, that the ingredients of a poetics of possibility lie. What is important is that the ethical compass be set based on relationality, conviviality and benevolence. In a world torn by dichotomies we now strive to find a bridge between dual principles in order to heal the world from the heart. A critical spirituality offers one such bridge as it integrates the physical world with a spiritual appreciation for relatedness. It is this appreciation that a poetics of possibility offers as it is open ended, multidimensional and committed to maximizing the possibilities inherent to context.

To activate context we need to engage a politics of possibility as a critical tool that explores the nature of relationship, identifying both possibilities and obstacles for co-realisation. This is where critical spirituality expands our sense of agency as it liberates our limited identities from the ego-consciousness that excludes us from the potentiality of co-realisation. Spiritual critique will call us individually and as a culture to account relationally for our values, beliefs, and aspirations as well as for actions and the technologies that enable our civilisational project. Thus climate justice becomes linked to a relational logic which critiques not just the expression of the injustice but also the root. The result is an urge, born of a sense of co-vulnerability, to serve others.

Thus a poetics of possibility draws on a critically spiritual sensibility. Such an awareness acts as an ethical imperative to serve as we find in the Other our own pain and vulnerability. This imperative is fostering conversations across borders to establish the basis for new categories for acting, thinking and being. Critical spiritual consciousness is part of this process as it invites us to explore our own emergent neohumanity as an opening up to possibility that nurtures our co-realisation.

This critical work moves across scales integrating local with global action through a layered consciousness which perceives/intuits connection and relational dynamics. This in turn recognises the eternal dance of consciousness in which we are forever becoming whole without ever realizing the goal (moksha and mukti will forever tantalise us). The yearning that propels consciousness forward also animates our sense of relational being. This forms the basis – the logic and energy – for a neohumanist engagement with the world and its struggles. This is ever so human, yet always striving for the beyond. This implies rich anticipatory futures thinking and the critical spiritual orientation that gives it ‘teeth’ in a world so easily psychologised and relativised. Finally, beyond all action lies the sublime state of eternal Cosmic Consciousness that is the source of our yearning. This state invokes a rich immanent-emptiness always ready, pregnant and overflowing yet empty!

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