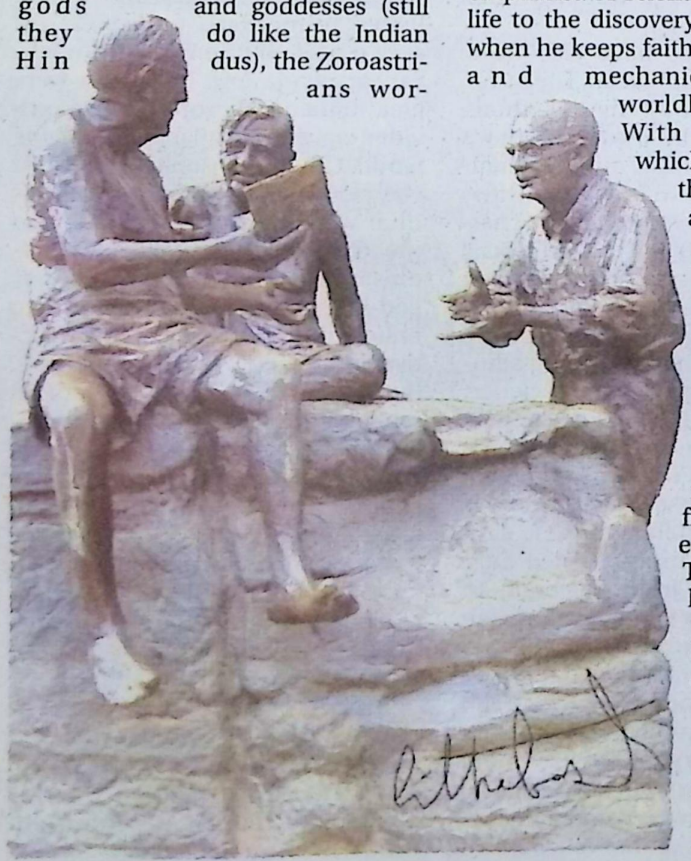
Some might argue that the Indians attained excellence in mathematics and cosmology, but those were driven by sheer mysticism. Mathematics was akin to symbolism and cosmology to astrology. The discovery of 'shunya' (zero) by the Indians, whose transportation to the West in later period gave an impetus to science, was the result of spiritual explanation of the world. They believed that the world came out of nothingness and again will turn into nothingness, which is comparable to 'zero'. Similarly, their counting and marking stars in the sky was grossly dedicated to establishing link between the course of the heavenly bodies and the fate of living men.

Philosophy in other parts of Asia -- China, Iran and Egypt, for example -- was also more or less spiritual. Taoism in China, Zoroastrianism in Persia and Pharaohism in Egypt all suggest distinctive cultural practices which are based on spiritual thoughts. Taoists believed in many gods and goddesses (still they do like the Indian Hindus), the Zoroastrians worshipped fire and the Pharaohs used to mummify their bodies and preserve them in pyramids with the purpose of reincarnation. Materialist philosophy could spark nowhere in the East in a fashion we notice in the West -- in old Greece and everywhere in modern Europe.



It was Democritus who first claimed that the world is composed of tiny particles which we now call atoms. He is given the credit of being the first proponent of atomic theory. Aristotle first proposed a mechanical theory of the cosmos. Later his theory was corrected by Galileo, Newton, Einstein and other scientists. The philosophy of science took birth in Greece, was revived through renaissance and boosted up by industrial revolution. Science and technology in its current shape have literally been produced by the West, which got a suitable philosophy for it. Any scientist is essentially a philosopher, typically materialist, mechanist and empiricist. A scientist dedicates his life to the discovery of natural laws when he keeps faith in the existence and mechanical working of worldly phenomena. With a philosophy which declares everything as 'illusion', a scientist cannot be successful in his scientific inquiry.

Philosophy brings the existential question into relevance. The sense of meaninglessness frowns at life with empty grimace. Though it was latent in all philosophical quests, it was explicitly expressed in the theorisations of a handful of nineteenth and twentieth century philosophers including Kierkegard, Heidegger, and Sartre. Existentialism greatly influenced contemporary literature, which sustained other influences like structuralism, modernism and post-modernism. The theoretical underpinnings have given literature power to portray life more reliably and vividly, keeping the issue of existence at the pivotal point.

In Bangladesh philosophy has always remained neglected as an academic discipline as well as a subject of scholastic exercise in practical life. Hence we have no philosophical tradition, which only exposes our intellectual poverty. We have no Thales, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, nor have we Descartes, Hegel, Spinoza, Leibniz, Hume, Kant, Nietzsche, Derrida and Lacan. We get great literary figures like Ishwarchandra, Saratchandra, Bibhutibhushan, Bankim, Rabindranath, Nazrul and Jibananda, but they did not contribute to the subject called philosophy. They had their strong personal philosophy, no doubt, but none of them have written any book on philosophy like Husserl's "Phenomenology", Locke's "Essay Concerning Human Understanding", Berkeley's "Principles of Human Knowledge", Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations" or Russell's "History of Western Philosophy". We get here Araj Ali Matubbar, one or two, but their philosophy is of primitive kind and deemed unsuitable for academic discussion.

Philosophy is essentially integrated with life. It is all of life and all for life. It promises to settles any intellectual problem concerning life. It creates scope for deeper realisation of the meaning of life (or meaninglessness of life). Without philosophy, human life is just that of other animals driven by mere instinct. Philosophy elevates life to the greatness of beauty and truth. The more philosophy is exercised in individual and national life, the more the surety of enlightenment.

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All photos have been collected from the Internet