

REVISITING CRITICAL THINKING

ARTS GAZE
BY LUBNA MARIUM



At the beginning of yet another new year and then, yet again, coining of new resolutions, it will certainly be worth our while to resolve to critically evaluate where the world is heading. Yes, as ostentatious as it may sound, more alarming than the fact that much is amiss, is the apparent death of ideas to amend the situation. The commonly accepted reason for this is that we live in a post-ideological era.

The grand narratives of class and economics struggles, having been discredited, have now been effectively replaced by single-issue debates and campaigns on race, identity, gender, environment, religion et al. Though this marks the end of ideology as a totalitarian concept, political reality suggests 'a plethora of new – and old – ideological phenomena waiting for rethinking the empirical and theoretical frameworks of analysis'. This brings us back to the notion of critical thinking, within issue-based campaigns.

The Greek philosopher Socrates once remarked, "An unexamined life is not worth living". But, unfortunately, we are born into a structured world that discourages examination of the realities we live in, making us hostage to other people's interpretations of right and wrong. Breaking free and thinking 'out of the box' is the beginning of critical thinking. This necessitates a willingness to allow space for difference. A wonderful illustration of this is the classic dialogue of the Buddhist tradition 'Milinda-pañha' or 'Questions of King Milinda to the sage Nagasena' from

the 2nd century BC, famous for its discussion of the no-self view central to Buddhism.

Milinda: Reverend Sir, will you discuss with me again?

Nāgasena: If your Majesty will discuss (vāda) as a scholar, well, but if you will discuss as a king, no.

Milinda: How is it that scholars discuss?

Nāgasena: When scholars talk a matter over one with another, then there is a winding up, an unraveling, one or other is convicted of error, and he then acknowledges his mistake; distinctions are drawn, and contra-distinctions; and yet thereby they are not angered. Thus do scholars, O King, discuss.

Milinda: And how do kings discuss?

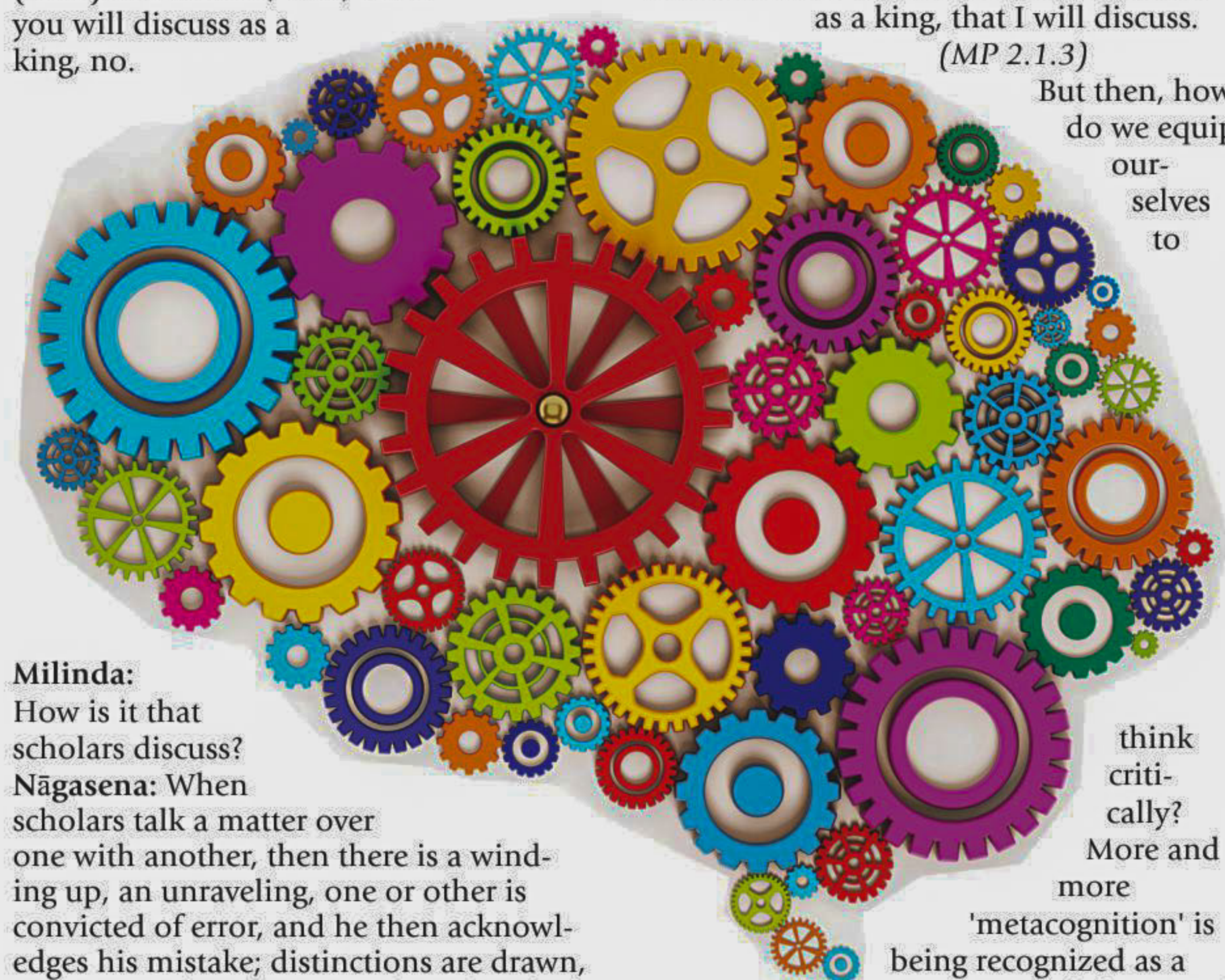
Nāgasena: When a king, your Majesty,

discusses a matter, and he advances a point, if anyone differs from him on that point, he is apt to fine him, saying "Inflict such and such a punishment upon that fellow!" Thus, your Majesty, do kings discuss.

Milinda: Very well. It is as a scholar, not as a king, that I will discuss.

(MP 2.1.3)

But then, how do we equip ourselves to



think critically?

More and more

'metacognition' is being recognized as a necessary skill for critical thinking – meaning the

need to 'think about thinking', 'know about knowing', and becoming 'aware of your awareness'. In other words, go

beyond cognition, or 'cognize the world differently'. One way to do this is to look at the world through the arts.

Cognition clearly involves perception of one's environment through the senses. Art, on one hand, is a unique human activity associated fundamentally with symbolic and abstract cognition. On the other hand, present day neuroscience points to art as a multi-process cognition that is dependent on diverse brain regions. Clearly, therefore, art helps in developing conceptual understanding, essential to critical thinking, by encouraging creative imagination. Indian aesthetics, too, recognizes the fact that "Natyam, or theatre, while evoking the inner-organizing principle (*anuvyavasāyatmakam*) of apperception, can make audiences differently cognize (*vikalpa – samvedanam*) their world" (*Abhinavagupta, 9th Century AD*).

Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and leading advocate of 'critical pedagogy', maintained that, with 'proper tools', individuals can 'become conscious of their own social reality and deal critically with it'. German poet and playwright, Bertold Brecht, goes on to state that theatre can be that 'tool' which 'arouses man's capacity for action and forces him to take decisions', because 'the observer is alterable and able to alter'.

Therefore, this new year, let us resolve to cognize the world differently, to allow us to think critically in the hope of finding new solutions. Be it through the arts, or otherwise. Shubho Noboborsho.

A FORGOTTEN HERO

The other day, I was listening to a song from the movie "Bondini" which I heard in childhood. The lyrics, in Bengali, were, "Isharay shis diye amake dekona (Do not invite me by making gestures and whistling sounds. Do not look at me with eyes full of longing)." The movie sensation of 70s, Babita, was lip-syncing, but who was the brown-eyed, tall and handsome hero? I have never seen him before. An unfamiliar face in Bengali movies, and I was sure that he was neither from West Bengal nor from Mumbai. I posted the YouTube clip on Facebook to know who the hero was. I was right; he was not a Bengali actor. His name was Waheed Kader, an Afghan actor who played as an American immigrant in "Bondini". Waheed used to speak flawless Bengali and became a model and star in Bangladesh. Waheed's heroine Bobita stated that Mr. Kader was one of the best lead actors paired in a movie with her. Later, Waheed moved to the United States, and died in 2004. Very short life



indeed.

One of my Facebook friends, Ajmotullah, did a splendid job. He discovered Waheed Kader's son, Matthew Kline Kader, and his Twitter account. I contacted Matthew and wanted to know about his father. Another movie story started to unfold. It was soul-stirring and tragic as well.

Waheed Kader was born in Kabul, Afghanistan. His father was an ambassador in different countries of Asia and Europe so as a child and young man,

Mr. Kader traveled a lot with his father and family. Waheed was fluent in Bengali, Hindi, German, French, Persian and English. When his father came to Bangladesh as an ambassador, he was a handsome young man. Waheed began modeling in Bangladesh. His smart look attracted a casting director of Bengali movies and he requested Waheed for an audition for an upcoming role in "Bondini". The casting director described Waheed's appearance as a western American. After his audition the

casting director was amazed at Waheed's performance and immediately offered him the role. "Bondini" was released in 1976. It was a grand success.

In 1980, Waheed immigrated to the US. He had moved to a new country by himself, a country which he was not yet familiar with. He proceeded to get a job in the security business field. Within a month of starting his new life and career, he received a phone call from the director of "Bondini". He was told that an audition was waiting for him for one of the biggest drama series on the network in the United States, named "General Hospital". Waheed auditioned for the part and was offered a role on the show but at that time Waheed had just gotten married and his wife was pregnant. So, he decided to not accept the role and continued the security business.

(To Be Continued)

By Pinaki Bhattacharya