

LIFE AND VISION OF IMMANUEL KANT

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Kant was born on 22nd April 1724 at Konigsberg, presently called Kaliniingaid. From the very childhood he had to struggle against poverty. He was of frail constitution and weak health, and sort of indrawn character. Due to abject poverty Kant could not receive formal education but for the timely financial help from his home teacher Schultz, a compassionate man he was educated. His teachers were always kind to him in offering financial assistance. The brilliance of the budding genius was well recognised by the teachers. When Kant pursued higher studies he came under the patronising influence of Martin Knutzen. Knutzen belonged to the Leibnizian-Wolffian school. Kant's rationalistic leanings were supplemented by thorough bred education under Knutzen. Kant emerged as a rationalist. Kant expresses his high regard for Wolff when he says "Celebrated Wolff, the greatest of all dogmatic philosophers". By dogmatic philosophers he means, those who follow the "procedure of pure reason, without previous criticism of its own powers". Kant has followed the procedure of pure reason, but with criticism of its powers. Kant in his own method of exposition followed an apparently formalistic logical rigour, which he terms architectonic and thereby lost the lucidity and fluency of his oral lectures. He says, "Human reason is by nature architectonic, that is to say, it regards all our knowledge as belonging to a possible system" – a system so rigorous that any change however slight it might be is bound to affect the total structure. The architectonic is based on the structure of formal logic, – a legacy of rationalistic tradition fostered by Wolff.

Kant was a voracious reader and he had free access to the personal library of his Professor Knutzen, which he utilised for his best advantage.

He published papers on various subjects of his wide interest. He was really a polymath. He received his doctorate degree in the year 1755. But nothing could qualify him for a teaching post in his native university. He continued to suffer financial hardship till 1770 when at least he was given a Professor's post in the University. He was then forty six years of age and one can well imagine how hard his life would have been for such a genius. He remained a bachelor throughout his life.

He lived a simple, austere and plain life. Regularity and punctuality were his main stay. His daily routine from 5 am to 10 pm was scrupulously observed by himself in almost mechanical precision. His sense of punctuality was proverbial. It is said that people used to set their watches right when they found Kant passing by their door on his daily morning walk. He had his personal attendant Lampe by name.

Lampe was faithful and followed his master behind like a shadow. Kant's life was thoroughly academic and equally uneventful. From an external look Kant appears to be as unromantic as anybody could imagine Schiller remarked, "Kant would have been one of the greatest human beings if he had been capable of feeling love".

But despite the stern external, Kant had a genial spirit. He loved friends and often invited them to dinner. He loved conversation and loved to mix with people. His class room lectures were full of humour and witty remarks. He forgot his daily schedule for a few days as he was preoccupied with the study of Rousseau's *Emile*. Rousseau once threw away his watch to be unburdened of the sense of urgency of time. Kant broke away for some days from his daily routine under the spell of Rousseau's writings. Both the events are significant for the history of human thought.

Kant felt that man is always free even when he is chained to society, circumstances, and even to all-pervasive nature. This freedom is man's moral autonomy is the self-legislative act of freedom. Kant's pronouncement was that no individual should be treated as a means to an end. Every individual person is an end in himself. The driving force for Rousseau and Kant was freedom. Both are the precursors of romanticism in the continent.

The other influence on Kant was David Hume. Hume's treatment of causality, Kant says, woke him from his dogmatic slumber. It was a form of awakening for self-knowledge through self-criticism. Kant was not an opponent of Hume as is usually presumed but a co-worker to dig deeper than their predecessors in the line of self-knowledge of reason. Hume's influence deepened Kant's own programme for self-criticism of reason and Kant appears in the role of a critic of Leibniz-Wolffian rationalistic thought, in which reason without any reference to experience ventures unbridled even to the world of unknowable and scientific principles are attempted to be deduced from purely a priori sources.

Kant has formulated four questions to be answered in the First Critique.

1. How is pure mathematics possible?
2. How is pure science of nature possible?
3. How is metaphysics as natural disposition possible?
4. How is metaphysics as science possible?

He reduces all these four questions to a single all important question, "How are a priori synthetic judgements possible?" Kant answers the question in the Critique of Pure Reason. In reply to the third question, says Kant, metaphysics though not possible as a science, is possible as a natural disposition. He observes, "thus in all men, "to whatever clime and time they may belong) "as soon as their reason has become ripe for speculation, there has always existed and will always continue to exist some kind of metaphysics." Kant says, man is a metaphysical animal, as much as he is a rational animal. Kant's second critique i.e. *Critique of Practical Reason* was published in the year 1788. It is a work on problems of moral judgement. It is

a critical probing into the foundations of morality or Ethics. The Third Critique i.e., *Critique of Judgement* was published in the year 1790. It is a work on the problems of aesthetics. The Third Critique proposes reconciliation of the first two, that is, theoretical and practical reason, science and morality, fact and value. Hence the three Critiques are integral to Kant's profound outlook on human situation. Hence none could be exalted at the cost of the other.

The whole of philosophy, observes Kant, could be comprised in four basic question.

1. What can I know?
2. What shall I do?
3. What may I hope?
4. What is man?

These pressing questions engaged the whole lifetime and labour of a genius of Kant's magnitude. What was then the concern of Kant? In one word it can be replied that it was man; it was exploration of man's inevitable situation in knowledge, in action, and in his hope and aspirations.

Among numerous publications of Kant extending over different branches of natural science and philosophy, the important ones are General Natural History and Theory of the Heavens (1755) where he anticipates the nebular theory of the great scientist Laplace, Dreams of a Ghost-seer explained by the Dreams of Metaphysics (1766), Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics which may present itself as science (1783), Towards Perpetual Peace (1795), and Metaphysics of Morals (1797). It goes without saying that the Three Critiques are the most important contributions of Kant to the world of thought. It could be said without reservation that the first, second, and the third critique was devoted respectively to the exploration and exposition of the three supreme Vedantic values *Satyam* (Truth) *Sivam* (Goodness) and *Sundaram* (Beauty).

Kant breathed his last on 12th February 1804 at the ripe age of eighty. He passed away peacefully in his bed in the presence of his private secretary who offered him a parting kiss. He was buried at Konigsberg, the place of his birth and the epitaph on his tombstone in his own statement from the Critique of Practical Reason – “Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe the more often and steadily we reflect upon them *the starry heavens above and the moral law within.*”