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# Science-Religion Dialouge and Personal Fulfilment

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**Abstract:** *This paper tries to understand the need for befriending of so called the opposites, science and religion. In the beginning an effort is made to show how man had put together scientific spirit and spirituality to live a comfortable and happy life. Next, we see how development in science and technology prompted change s in our well-established values. That gave rise to certain values which estranged the relationship between the two. But it is the west which most feels the estrangement between the two. The East has been generally, inclusive and holistic in its approach, at least, Indian tradition is concerned. The purpose of befriending is explained, from human progress point of view and leading to happiness, which is our ultimate goal.*

**Keywords:** science, religion, man, befriending, spirituality, culture, happiness, value.

“Science investigates, religion interprets. Science gives man knowledge, which is power; religion gives man wisdom, which is control. Science deals mainly with facts; religion deals mainly with values. The two are not rivals.”  
-Martin Luther King Jr.

Man, indeed is different from all other creatures, that is, his fellow - species on earth, as we observe ourselves

from different aspects... As Sri Aurobindo writes in the *Life Divine*,

“The animal is satisfied with a modicum of necessity; the gods are content with their splendours’. But man cannot rest permanently until he reaches some highest good. He is the greatest of living beings because he is the most discontented, because he feels most the pressure of limitations”<sup>1</sup>. It is also true that, the other species on earth live in the present moment, whereas man alone lives in three modes of time simultaneously, irrespective of the fact that he is conscious of it or not. Why is man what he is? Why is he created with this urge to know? Mankind is further marked by differences within itself, depending on factors such as culture, religion, nationality, wealth, education, temperament, refinement and much more. To link the past with the present and the present with the future is propelled by the basic quest to know and realize oneself. There was a time when this basic quest in man, which may be termed his inner quest, because response to this only could come through an exploration of his consciousness, went hand in hand with his external explorations of his environment, Nature, in search of better living conditions. In the Indian tradition we find the example of rishis or sages, who were an explorer of inner mysteries of life and an architect of life in its social context, capable of leading a seeker along the spiritual path and guiding a king through his pragmatic political crisis. Also he could author an esoteric hymn and be a poet of splendours of life. For these sages life was a field of experience embracing both the physical world and the spirit.

As we look at the West, we observe that, in the beginning the story was not very different from the East. However,

with the advent of philosophy, the knowledge at a certain phase of human development resulted in the formation of two different paths: the path of the spirit and the path of the mundane world. The first meant a total preoccupation with the spirit ignoring the worldly affairs and the second meant a total absorption with the matter, the worldly affairs at the cost of the spirit. It was post-renaissance period during which science developed to such an extent that, it claimed to explain the origin of the universe and man without any recourse to god. Religion, of course, has existed for much longer. However, there is the thesis, according to which science and technology, on the one hand, and religion, on the other, are inversely related. Recent resurgences of religion and religious belief in many parts of the world, however, cast considerable doubt on this thesis.

## **1. Understanding Progress**

Advancements in science and technology prompted or brought about tremendous changes in values. The relation between these two great cultural forces has been multi faceted. As mentioned earlier that humanity has many angles and therefore it is mandatory to know all possible aspects of it. There is possibility of science befriending religion, because the two are not exclusive. When both of them are taken as independent of each other, equally powerful, and when they are looked at from extremes, they have always harmed humanity and played havoc with society. Be it consumerism as a by- product of materialism or technology that is misused for selfish gains. Sri Aurobindo foresaw the negative impact of materialism, science and technology on our value system, and rather at the global level, as early as 1916 which he terms as ‘mindless consumerism’ which is the dominant characteristic of our Age. He observes that,

human aspiration for happiness, which is a part and parcel of spirituality, was turned into “success” as a value. In the following quote he brings out the ‘economic’ and ‘physical’ barbarism endorsed by modern science:

“[Modern science] has encouraged more or less indirectly by its attitude to life and its discoveries another kind of barbarism, – for it can be called by no other name – that of the industrial, the commercial, the economic age which is now progressing to its culmination and its close. This economic barbarism is essentially that of the vital man who mistakes the vital being for the self and accepts its satisfaction as the first aim of life .... Just as the physical barbarian makes the excellence of the body and the development of the physical force, health and prowess his standard and aim, so the vitalistic or economic barbarian makes the satisfaction of wants and desires and the accumulation of possessions his standard and aim. His ideal man is not the cultured or noble or thoughtful or moral or religious, but the successful man. To arrive, to succeed, to produce, to accumulate, to possess is his existence. ... life devoid of beauty and nobility, religion vulgarized or coldly formalized, politics and government turned into a trade and profession, enjoyment itself made a business, this is commercialism”<sup>2</sup>.

The ripple effect of this barbarism which he predicted on education, religion, politics, is something which we are witnessing today. Aurobindo comments with reference to the concept of civilization and religion from the viewpoint of a common man, “His idea of civilization is comfort, his idea of morals social respectability, his idea of politics the encouragement of industry, the opening of markets, exploitation and trade following the flag, his idea of religion at best a pietistic formalism or the satisfaction of certain vitalistic emotions.”<sup>3</sup>. The advancement in science made

people value education for its utility, to make a man fit for success in competitive world and socialized industrial existence; value science for the useful inventions and knowledge so that he can live a comfortable life. In other words, the great capitalists and the organizers of industry are the supermen of this commercial age.

Like Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore also was not willing to accept the western concept of progress. He remarks: "With what is called material progress, property has become intensely individualistic, the method of gaining it has become a matter of science and not of social ethics. It breaks social bonds; it drains the life sap of the community. Its unscrupulous plays havoc all over the world, generating forces that can coax or coerce peoples to deeds of injustice and wholesome horror"<sup>4</sup>. It is not that Tagore did not have respect for science, rather he advocated limited use of science confined to man's welfare and not for plundering nature. According to him, science is truth and it gives us freedom in the realm of matter. Although he welcomed western science, yet he wanted science projects to be guided by moral ideas. For Tagore, a world of science minus moral norms is a world of violence and aggression, 'fit for the world of tigers'<sup>5</sup>.

The fast development and ascent to modern civilization during last two centuries was possible because of the exponential growth of knowledge. As far as technology is concerned, there are fascinating prospects for the future. However, the development of a highly technological society does not free us from ethical and moral demands. Science cannot divorce itself from issues which take humanity beyond science itself. The mere technological advancements of which we boast and are proud of, should also take pain to

have some insights about functioning of life in general and of nature in particular. Relativity may sometimes be used as the right way to understand reality. Relativity theory seems to be a theory of nature which has explained not only contemporary empirical data but is also suggestive of what ought to be in future. Some of the issues which affect humanity at present and to which science has not provided any satisfactory solution because alone it cannot, include the political, economic, religious and psychological problems of our age. Science cannot overcome racial divisions and religious extremism, it cannot create a world which is at peace. Issues like this are very much connected with culture itself. The loss of decency of humanity is at the heart of the crisis that calls for a discussion of value. What is it that is to be accepted as a value is inseparable from culture, that is created by man.

Culture is a very complex phenomenon. We find that, in the beginning, at the visible level what matters us are the artefacts, constructed social environment, overt behaviour. At the next level, culture is manifested as values, where actions and events are assigned meaning according to what ought to be. Next, these values which are consistently useful are transformed into assumptions, rather unspoken and they constitute deepest level of culture. Our intrinsic nature influences culture. The abovementioned issues are not necessarily the problems that modern science can address, since they are the problems of the heart, of the mind, of attitude and a way of life; as such they fall outside the scope of science as per the view of the scientists.

Religion too, has failed to understand man in totality. In the garb of religious rituals, the poor, the powerless are harassed. When religion that is practiced and preached is

not realistic, it becomes an escape from reality. Humanity suffers from evil and it becomes 'ugly'. The culture and values are 'corrupted' by social evils. Hence, science along with other complementary factors can play a very constructive role in correcting religion, transforming it and making it anew. Rather, culture and religion are entangled with values, which deal with all possible aspects of human life. There may be hierarchy of values in particular cultures of the world, as we find one in our own culture. The western world valued the material approach more than the spiritual or looking within, while Indians and the other eastern cultures valued the spiritual aspect more than the material. This is one of the most prominent factor for the technological advance in the Western world. However, it is undeniable that the impact such technology has made on our culture and values, has been negative, showing a kind of dissonance with already established values. The traditional values, which supported Indian civilization for thousands of years, need to be strengthened and perpetuated, as they can build a bridge between the past and the future of our country and between India and rest of the world.

## **2. Need for Befriending Science and Spirituality**

There is increasing proximity of both, science and religion, towards explaining and understanding certain basic or foundational issues like the nature of reality, origin of the Universe, human behaviour, evolution, moral behaviour and so on. This proximity either may lead to contempt or friendship. The path of contempt or conflict leads to self-limitation, whereas the path of friendship may open up new ways with positive attitude to understand these issues with a new paradigm.

The pressure felt due to the present challenges faced by the society, whether urban, rural, semi-urban or cosmopolitan on the one hand and the aspirations and the prospects of our future society on the other, calls for a friendship or a supportive attitude between science and spirituality. For instance, the challenge that we face of population explosion, creating healthy societies free from pain and suffering, threats from natural calamities where thousands of people lose their lives, and most important of all is living by the principles of ethics and morality, demand urgent solutions, which the lopsided development of science or spirituality cannot provide. Humanity is forced to look forward for such solutions in the coming together of these two great powers.

According to these great minds like M. Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, R. Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, the most important thing is religiosity than religion. Religiosity being universal, will free man from institutions, churches, temples, sections and personal Gods. The static religion with, at least some of its age-old rituals and values are a hurdle in path of new paradigm. We do recognize beyond doubt the findings of science as attractive and useful, but the world does not belong to impersonal science, as it tries to capture the world as it is without the intervention of imagination. We are wrong in adopting scientific findings when we give science an Omniscient and Omnipotent status. As R. Tagore points out that, the world belongs to 'personality', and human personality is such that it creates new relationships with the world. He accepts dynamism in every sphere of the universe, which constantly rearranges the meaning of things and which is displayed in his creations. The 'truth' lies not in the mass of materials, but in their universal relatedness, which only the human mind is able to understand. He observes further



that it is possible for human personality to comprehend and transcend the details of the facts, knowledge, feeling, wish and will, as well as the individual's memory, hope, love, activities and all his belongings. This transcendence takes place through a unity, and this sublimation is a product of love. The realization of the existence of the 'other' makes the "I" realize his extension. Tagore says, I become more in my union with others..."<sup>6</sup>.

Philosophers, cognitive scientist and social scientists agree that friendship is an essential ingredient of human happiness. Aristotle classified friendship into three distinct categories: of pleasure, of utility and of virtue. The first one brings direct pleasure while the second, is one where a tangible benefit either economic or political, is possible. According to Aristotle, the highest kind of friendship is that of virtue, which brings happiness. He believed that friends hold a mirror up to each other and through that mirror they can see each other in ways that would not otherwise be accessible to them. It is this reciprocal mirroring that helps them improve themselves. In the similar fashion, in the new paradigm also of religion and science befriending each other, we expect that it will work together for global happiness. The solution to the global issues facing mankind requires an ethical transformation, which lies in the area of human relationships. In the light of interconnectedness and interdependence, that is observed in nature, and proved by quantum science, we should aim at the oneness of religion. The oneness of religion asserts that, individuals must seek education and knowledge that is greater than themselves. We find that the posture of social and behavioural sciences to study the interactions between individuals is a right one. Our greatest joys as well as problems involve human

relationships, and successful human relationships involve love and happiness.

Science and spirituality, both the parties involved in this relationship will contribute to the relationship in order to enrich it, since they share a complementary relationship. Care should be taken to see that this relationship does not fall into customary practice or dead habit. It should be dynamic and flexible enough to assimilate the innovative ideas with a positive attitude. This should bring about not only the material and social construction, but also new values catering to our inner life.

The need for befriending of science and spirituality is felt more by the Western world, which believes in sophisticated technology more than the Eastern culture. Sri Aurobindo in his book on 'Foundations of Indian Culture' writes about how a culture or civilization can be evaluated: "A true happiness in this world is the right terrestrial aim of man, and true happiness lies in the finding and the maintenance of a natural harmony of spirit, mind and body. A culture is to be valued to the extent to which it has discovered the right key of this harmony and organized its expressive motives and movements" <sup>7</sup>.

The eastern religion -- what may be considered the deeper and more significant elements -- are not only compatible with science but enrich its findings. The best evidence of this is science's response to the religions of the East over the course of the last 200 years. As the French Nobel laureate Romain Rolland said early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, "Religious faith in the case of the Hindus has never been allowed to run counter to scientific laws." The same can be said for Buddhism, which derives from the same Vedic roots.

Also, most of the Hindu gurus, Yoga masters, Buddhist monks and other Asian teachers who came to the West framed their traditions in a science-friendly way. Emphasizing the experiential dimension of spirituality, with its demonstrable influence on individual lives, they presented their teachings as a science of consciousness with a theoretical component and a set of practical applications for applying and testing those theories. Most of the teachers were educated in both their own traditions and the Western canon; they respected science, had actively studied it, and dialogued with Western scientists, many of whom were inspired to study Eastern concepts for both personal and professional reasons.

The cooperation between science and spirituality is most noted today in the field of medicine. There is a growing body of research which suggests that, spirituality does play a role in health matters. The researchers observe that, the religious faith not only promotes overall good health, but also helps in recovery of serious illness. Certainly, science and religion have contributed towards our understanding of this universe in multiple ways, and whatever they have accomplished is truly impressive. In order that there should be an overall integral development of humanity, perhaps the time has come for science and religion to acknowledge each other's power and influence, join forces and work together in mutual respect to help solve the world's problems. This process should bring about the change in the attitude towards values, as there should be consistency and harmony in the values themselves that we take as foundational in this journey. The goal of all this is the pursuit of happiness of mankind, which is included in spirituality itself.

## Conclusion

Science and religion are not negations of each other, rather they are two great forces which have shaped humanity and its culture for thousands of years. It depends upon how our scientists and theologians interpret the working of these forces for common man, that will bring about change in our attitude towards values. The ultimate goal of humanity is happiness and well-being of all, which includes both, our material progress as well as moral development, which is a part and parcel of our quest for spirituality itself.

## Notes

1. Sethna K.D. and Nirod Baran (ed), Quoted in “Riddle that is Man” , ‘Sri Aurobindo and the New Age-Essays in memory of Kishore Gandhi’, pub by Sri Aurobindo International Centre of education, Pondicherry, 1997, pp 31.
2. Sethna K.D. and Nirod Baran (ed), ‘Sri Aurobindo and the New Age—Essays in memory of Kishore Gandhi’, pub. By Sri Aurobindo International Centre of education, Pondicherry, 1997, pp 53-54.
3. Ibid, pp. 54.
4. Sanyal Indrani and Shashinungla (ed), ‘Ethics and Culture – Some Indian Reflections’, pub by Jadavpur University, Kolkata and Descent Books, New Delhi, 1975, pp 58.
5. Ibid, pp. 58.
6. Ibid, pp. 91.
7. Sri Aurobindo, ‘Renaissance in India and Other Essays on Indian Culture’, pub by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1997, pp. 56

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