India first to look within: Karan

Bangalore: *Then was not non-existent nor existent. There was no realm of air, no sky beyond it. What covered it, and where? And what gave shelter? Was water there, unfathomed depth of water?*

The creation hymn from the Rig Veda, quoted by Congress leader Dr Karan Singh in his inaugural address at 'Science and Beyond', a four-day international symposium on cosmology, consciousness and technology in Indic traditions, echoes modern developments in science and insights of great seers. Singh called for a new global renaissance for integration between apparently conflicting concepts in the global society.

Scientists and spiritualists from all over the world have gathered at the National Institute of Advanced Studies to link the two quests.

Karan Singh stressed on how India, while developing path-breaking technologies in metallurgy, medicine and mathematics, was among the first to turn the searchlight inwards towards the source of consciousness and built a science based on this creative introspection. "The study of consciousness is now one of the most fertile fields for research and experimentation."

He recalled the time when he was health minister and started a project at the Nimhans, called 'project consciousness'. It was abandoned as soon as he left the ministry. "Had the project continued over the last quarter of the century, we could have produced the first Nobel laureates in consciousness research."

While Chief Minister S.M. Krishna said that it's only a country like India with its rich history that can provoke a global renaissance, he also raised the question that when nearly 35 per cent of the population is illiterate, how can you make them think of the 'beyond'? "Technology will cease to have meaning unless it makes a distinct difference to what their life was before," he stressed. And if Bangalore has earned a reputation for being an IT city, he would like it to become the capital art, culture and philosophy and letters.

K. Sunil Prasad

Chief Minister S.M. Krishna greets Infosys Chairman N.R. Narayana Murthy at 'Science and Beyond' in Bangalore on Wednesday. Congress leader Dr Karan Singh looks on.

'Consciousness is non-computabie'

Bangalore: What is consciousness? What is intelligence? And what is the physical world in its entireness? If we had complete answers to all these, man would have been able to grasp the absolute truth of the universe through a mathematical route.

Involved in subjects such as time, space, matter, mind and the physical basis of consciousness, Sir Roger Penrose, Emeritus Rouse Ball Professor of Mathematics, enlightened the audience: "As a mathematician who tries to understand consciousness, I have developed the the platonic world, mental and physical world. The three are three mysteries, only a bit of each in a way dependent on the other."

He threw up questions on consciousness: "Can we have a robot capable of complete understanding? When we do not fully comprehend the meaning of 'understanding', how can we design something that does?"

What is beyond?

Interdisciplinary studies are like drugs. Some avoid it and those who try, get addicted. A strange simile offered by Philip Clayton of Sonoma State University, while trying to link science and spiritual quest at 'Science and Beyond'.

A large group of technologists, scientists, Nobel laureates started off the meet with trying to decide what is 'beyond': is it possible to link them, does science exclude beyond, does science point to beyond?

Technology: Delivering his keynote address on 'Technology, society and values' Infosys Chairman N.R. Narayana Murthy said: "Technology itself does not have a moral dimension. But the way in which it is pursued and its application has morality involved."

Technology can either be used to jeopardise the future or harness it to bring peace and prosperity. Quoting the recent news of human cloning, he said its research could result in treatments and cures for dreaded illness and disabilities, and on the other hand, it has raised issues on identity and individuality. The need of the hour is to develop a culture based on values.