

## SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY

## Need for a symbiosis

By KARAN SINGH

I would like to start by quoting the famous creation hymn from the world's most ancient living scripture, the Rg Veda (X.129/1-7 - Griffith translation):

*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?*

*Death was not then, nor was there ought immortal:*

*No sign was there, the day's and night's divider.*

*That One thing, breathless, breathed by its own nature:*

*Apart from it was nothing whatsoever.*

*Darkness there was: at first concealed in darkness*

*This All was indiscriminate chaos.*

*All that existed then was void and formless:*

*By the great power of Warmth was born that Unit.*

*Thereafter rose Desire in the beginning,*

*Desire the primal seed and germ of Spirit.*

*Sages who searched with their hearts' thought discovered*

*The existent's kinship with the non-existent.*

*Transversely was their severing line extended:*

*What was above it then, and what below it?*

*There were begetters, there were mighty forces.*

*Free action here and energy up yonder.*

*Who verily knows and who can here declare it.*

*Whence it was born and whence comes this creation?*

*The gods are later than the world's production.*

*Who knows then whence it first came into being?*

*He, the first origin of this creation,*

*Whether he formed it all or did not form it,*

*Whose eye controls this world in highest heaven,*

*He verily knows it, or perhaps he knows not.*

**Insights on cosmology**

It is indeed astounding that modern developments in science, particularly cosmology, seem to echo some of the insights of our great seers and sages which have come down to us for thousands of years through the long and tortuous corridors of time. It is almost as if, like the background emanations from the Big Bang, the faint echoes of our ancient spiritual luminaries can still be heard in the background of all our post-

modern discourses on the human condition.

Some years ago, when I was Ambassador to the United States, I called upon the great scientist Prof S Chandrasekhar in Chicago, and asked him as to how it was that the seers of the Vedas and Upanishads had two astounding insights which have emerged in modern science only very recently. The first is the concept of *Anantakoti Brahmanda* - billions of galaxies or universes. The second is the concept of vast aeons of times through which creation passes, the single day of Brahma being of 4.32 million years with a night of equal duration, so that a year of Brahma closely approximates the age of planet earth. He really had no explanation and when I suggested that perhaps this knowledge came to our seers in enhanced states of consciousness, he said that was quite possible.

**Consciousness**

From cosmology, let us then move on to consciousness. In the Indic traditions consciousness is not merely an epi-phenomenon of evolving matter, rather it is the prime principle which calls forth these millions of worlds. The great icon of Shiva Nataraja, Lord of the Cosmic Dance, beautifully portrays this kinetic universe in which all things, from the majestic movement of the great galaxies down to the persistent agitation of sub-atomic particles, are in a state of flux. The drum in Shiva's left hand represents creation — the original Big Bang if you like, or perhaps a continual series of Big Bangs, while the fire in his right hand represents their ultimate destruction in the great cycles of time. However, if there were only the Big Bangs and the Big Crunches, there would be little space for you and me. Shiva's other two hands, therefore, point to the possibility of individual realisation amidst the cosmic chaos in which we find ourselves. One hand is raised in a gesture of benediction, telling humanity not to fear, while the fourth points to his upraised foot as the path of liberation.

The whole question of consciousness and its evolution is one that has attracted some of the best minds in the world, including the great evolutionary philosopher Sri Aurobindo. In India we have developed over the millennia systems of yoga which are surely the most profound and integral exploration of consciousness ever essayed by the human race. While we also developed path-breaking outer technology in such fields as metallurgy, medicine and mathematics, Indian civilisation took a turn

probably unique in the history of thought. Our most creative minds turned the searchlight inwards towards the source of Consciousness itself, and built up an entire science based upon this creative introspection. In his classic work on the *Yogasutras*, the sage Patanjali has given us a seminal textbook for exploring the deeper recesses of our being.

Post-Freudian movements in psychology in the West have also gradually developed these deeper insights, notably with C G Jung and the post-Jungians, and moving on to transpersonal psychology. The study of consciousness has now become a fully respectable and challenging area for intellectual and experiential exploration. I have personally had the privilege of discussing the nature of consciousness with some of the most creative minds of the 20th century - Stanislav Grof with his extended cartography of the mind, Rupert Sheldrake with his theory of morphogenic resonance, Ilya Prigogine with his Chaos theory, Jonas Salk, the great biochemist whose book *Survival of the Wisest* is a classic, Carl Sagan, who brought the mysteries of the cosmos into the minds and hearts of millions, Arthur Clarke, the astonishingly creative space author and many others. Indeed the study of consciousness is now one of the most fertile fields for research and experimentation.

Years ago, when I was Minister for Health and Family Planning, I had started here in Bangalore in the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences (NIMHANS) a programme entitled 'Project Consciousness' in which I had assembled some of the most creative scientific minds in India as well as involving Pandit Gopi Krishna whose books on *Kundalini* awakening are known throughout the world.

**Matter and spirit**

Unfortunately, as so often happens, the project was wound up almost immediately after I left the ministry, evidently considered a mild eccentricity not worth pursuing. It has always struck me as tragic that we in India, with our unique spiritual and intellectual background in this field, should still be lagging behind. Had the project continued over the last quarter of a century we could well have produced the first Nobel laureates in the field of Consciousness research.

Albert Einstein's famous remark that "science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind", makes a very important point. Before him, the Cartesian-Newtonian-Marxist

paradigm of thought postulated an unbreachable dichotomy between matter and spirit. This concept dominated Western civilisation for several centuries and did produce spectacular results. However, with the Einsteinian revolution and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, quantum mechanics and extra-galactic cosmology, the situation has now changed considerably. Science itself is in one of its great creative periods where old barriers are breaking down and some of us — perhaps a trifle optimistically — are beginning to discern the outlines of a convergence between science and spirituality.

**Global renaissance**

I use the term 'spirituality' advisedly, because 'religion' carries a lot of baggage, much of it positive but some of it negative also, despite the work being done by interfaith organisations around the world including the Temple of Understanding of which I happen to be Chairman, whereas spirituality transcends the theological divisions, and cuts across barriers of race and creed, religion and nationality. The seers of all the great faiths of the world have, in their utterances, sought to describe what is essentially an indescribable experience, whether it is the Beatific Vision of the Christians, the *Bodhichita* of the Buddhists, the *Noor-e-Ilahi* of the Muslims, the *Ek Onkar* of the Sikh gurus or the Self-Realisation of the Hindus. Clearly there are states of higher consciousness which transcend all barriers and which are the heritage of the entire human race. This flows from the persistent tradition of the light that illuminates the universe - the light of Consciousness itself, and it is ultimately an awareness of this light in all human beings that alone can become the cornerstone of a sane and harmonious global society.

What is needed today, as the watchword of the emerging global society, is a new global renaissance, an integration between apparently conflicting concepts. We need to develop a benign symbiosis between the various elements of our personality - the inner and the outer, the quietist and the activist, the feminine and the masculine - and in the broader dimension between science and spirituality. It is my sincere hope this symposium will help to trigger the process of creative symbiosis whereby alone can the human race survive its own technological ingenuity.

*(Text of the inaugural address delivered by the author on Wednesday at the international symposium on "Science and Beyond - Cosmology, Consciousness and Technology in the Indic Traditions", held in Bangalore)*