

Symbiosis Between Science & Spirit

By Karan Singh

Some years ago, I called upon the great scientist Prof S Chandrasekhar in Chicago and asked him how seers of the Vedas and Upanishads had two astounding insights that have emerged in modern science only recently.

The first is the concept of *anantakoti brahmada*, endless universes. The second is the concept of vast aeons of time through which creation passes, much like the ancient belief that a single day of Brahma is 4.32 million human years long, so that his one year corresponds roughly to the age of planet earth. When I suggested that perhaps this knowledge came to seers in enhanced states of consciousness, Prof Chandrasekhar seemed to agree.

In Indic traditions, consciousness is not merely an epi-phenomenon of evolving matter, rather it is the prime principle that calls forth these millions of worlds. The great icon of Shiva Nataraja portrays this kinetic universe in which all things, from galaxies to sub-atomic particles, are in flux. The drum in Shiva's left hand represents creation, while the fire in his right hand represents its destruction in the cycles of time. Shiva's other two hands point to the possibility of individual realisation amidst cosmic chaos. One hand is raised in a gesture of benediction, while the fourth points to his upraised foot as the path of liberation.

The question of consciousness and its evolution is one that has attracted some of the best minds in the world. In India, we have developed over the millennia systems of yoga which are surely the most integral exploration of consciousness ever essayed by humanity. Indian civilisation took a unique turn — our most creative minds turned the searchlight inwards towards the source of consciousness, and built an entire science based upon creative introspection. The yoga-sutras of Patanjali, for instance, are seminal guidelines for exploring the deeper recesses of our being.

Post-Freudian movements in western psychology have

gradually developed these deeper insights, notably with C G Jung and Transpersonal Psychology. The study of consciousness has now become a respectable area for intellectual and experiential exploration. Albert Einstein's famous remark that "science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind", makes an important point. Before him, the Cartesian-Newtonian-Marxist paradigm of thought postulated an unbreachable dichotomy between matter and spirit. After Einstein and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, quantum mechanics and extra-galactic cosmology, the situation has changed considerably. Science is in one of its creative periods where old barriers are breaking down and we can discern outlines of a convergence between science and spirituality.

I use the term 'spirituality' advisedly, because 'religion' carries a lot of baggage, some of it negative. Spirituality transcends barriers of race, religion, creed and nationality. Seers of all great faiths have sought to describe what is essentially an indescribable experience, whether it is the Beatific Vision of the Christians, the Bodhichitta of the Buddhists, the Noor-ellahi 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 are the heritage of the entire human race.

This flows from the persistent tradition of the light that illuminates the universe — that of consciousness itself. It is awareness of this light in all human beings that alone can become the cornerstone of a harmonious global society. What is needed is a symbiosis between the inner and the outer, the quietist and the activist, and in the broader dimension, between science and spirituality.

(Extracted from Dr Karan Singh's inaugural address at the symposium 'Science and Beyond: Cosmology, Consciousness and Technology in the Indic Traditions')

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Sacred Space

Bonded in Love

Natural mildness should be there in the family. Observance of the vows leads to mildness... Right belief should there be amongst family members. Crookedness and deception cause unhappiness in the family. Straightforwardness and honesty in one's body, speech and mental activities lead the family to an auspicious path. Purity, reverence, ceaseless pursuit of knowledge, charity, removal of obstacles that threaten equanimity, service to others — these make the family happy.

Tattvarthasutra 6.18-24



I will make you of one heart, of one mind and free from hate. Love one another as the cow loves the calf she has borne. Let the son be loyal to the father, and of one mind with the mother; Let the wife speak sweet and gentle words to the husband. Let not brother hate brother, sister hate sister, unanimous, united in purpose, speak you words with friendliness.

Atharva Veda



In five ways should a child minister to his parents as the eastern quarter: 'Once supported by them, I will now be their support; I will perform duties incumbent on them; I will keep up the lineage and tradition of my family; I will make myself worthy of my heritage.' In five ways parents thus ministered to, as the eastern quarter, by their child, show their love for him; They restrain him from vice, they exhort him to virtue, they train him to a profession, they contract a suitable marriage for him, and in due time they hand over to him his inheritance.

Digha Nikaya