

Science and Non-violence

Science is the pursuit of truth in the gross, physical world. Non/violence is the pursuit of moral values in the subtle, inner world. The subject that we will jointly explore today is that of pursuing both simultaneously, for the good of mankind.

If the philosophy of science were rooted, from its very inception, in moral values, the world would have been different place. Unfortunately for us, the first faltering steps towards modern science were taken in the west. And the basic flaw in scientific reasoning started with Descartes' oft/quoted dictum: 'cogito ergo sum'- I think, therefore, I am. Thought became the proof of existence. Thus psychology was stood on its head and we have never recovered from this original sin.

Had we proceeded on the Vedantic premise that the substratum of the cosmos is an indefinable subtle entity, which is conglomeration of existence, consciousness and bliss, from which thoughts, emotions, energy-states, actions and objects arise, this cardinal error would have been avoided. Then existence would be self-evident and it would not require the faculty of thought in order to prove itself. In the individual human being, thinking would not become the central faculty unique to man that it has become. Human beings would not be the only creatures who can think and thus distinct and separate from the rest of the creation. Man would not stand in opposition to nature and all that it contains. Science would not then try to exploit nature for the benefit of man alone and it would not become the instrument of violence that it has become.

The other reason was the inadequacy of the Christian theology to withstand the onslaught of modern science and its discoveries. Christianity had in the dark ages congealed into a dogma, the strict interpretation of which had become a monopoly of the church and the church had been transformed into a weapon by which a complacent clergy exploited the helpless laity. When Galileo proved that the sun was motionless and the earth revolved around it, the church saw it a challenge to its ancient authority. No one examined the Galilean thesis as an accretion to the knowledge base of mankind; it was viewed in terms of power equations that would get disturbed. Thus started an era of confrontation between science and religion. Many scientific discoveries were seen as heresies and were condemned as such. As science demonstrated its practical utility and religion got enmeshed in airy disputations, an unfortunate consequence ensued. The bulk of humanity genuinely started believing that science represented the truth, while religion was just superstition. It was not, therefore, surprising that people first lost interest in religion, and then became agnostics and finally atheists and unbelievers.

As science gained in power, it spouted its own philosophy. Many of the old scriptures and theological books contained references to physical events in the outer world, and gave explanations based on contemporary scientific knowledge. Where the old science floundered due to ignorance, charming myths were invented by poetic fancies and passed off as possible explanation of natural phenomena. Gradually, science was able to explain these phenomena in purely rational terms and to harness natural forces for the

benefit of humankind. Such explanations were vastly superior to the old mythologies and appealed to the human mind. This gave further credence to the notion that science represented truth while religion was the repository of superstition.

As scientists became powerful in society, they gained in courage. The game of science versus religion was converted into a game of man versus God. Every scientific discovery was seen as an advance of human power and a defeat for divine power. Man progressed in his command over the elements and forces of nature and harnessed them for his own benefit. He discovered the hidden laws and mysteries of nature, and became more and more powerful. At last, a day came when Nietzsche could boldly proclaim the God was dead.

There was one other development in scientific philosophy. Up to a point, the hold of moral values on the human mind was such as to provoke controversies whether certain kinds of scientific discoveries was good for humanity or otherwise. But when God lost to man, it also became the received wisdom in scientific circles that science was value-neutral. It was no longer permissible to reject a scientific discovery on the ground that it would enhance immoral behaviour or result in destruction. The pursuit of truth was considered desirable for its own sake, irrespective of the consequences that it might entail.

In the physical sciences, the effect of his doctrine was that there was no brake on research. The foot was always on the accelerator. In inventing weapons of destruction, for example, it was no longer relevant to ask whether a weapon equipped to cause mass destruction was needed. Because it was technically feasible, it was made. When technology to upgrade its destructive power became available, the upgradation was done. As human ingenuity increased, the weapons became more and more horrendous, till today we have reached a stage when the entire population on planet earth can be exterminated in a few minutes, several times over. And not satisfied with this capacity, research still continues for the discovery of even more diabolic devices, only because science is value-neutral. If a thing can be done, it has to be done. The question 'should it be done' is irrelevant because the realm of values has been dubbed as meaningless.

The above syndrome does not afflict the armament industry alone. Let us take the airline industry. There was a time when only birds flew and human beings looked with awe and admiration at their flight capabilities. Today, we have gigantic aircrafts which negotiate enormous distances in a few hours. However, there is no one to cry halt to the advancing juggernaut of technology. We can make even bigger planes, so we are making them. We can make faster planes, so we are making them. No one is prepared to stand back and assess whether we need bigger and faster planes or whether the billions we invest in such research cannot be spent more profitably elsewhere.

The impact of the physical sciences was equally felt in the social sciences. Consider the science of economics. Over most periods of history, human beings have been poor. Poverty was always, in the past, considered as something basic, something natural, ordained by God, determined by fate or past karmas, in any case not a state that

could be wished away. Then came science and mass production, and the affluent society was born. It became clear that man could become as rich as he wished to or exerted, and there was no limitation on his potential. It was no longer fashionable to be poor or frugal. Economics was decided to get out of the clutches of values, so that man could do what he liked.

Along the way, someone invented the economic man, a mythical being, who always maximized profits, it became necessary to over-produce, more than the market could absorb. The search for markets spawned wars, colonialism, imperialism and W.T.O. Because he maximized satisfaction, it became necessary to produce thousands of types of products to satisfy his desires. A fundamental thesis of economics is that human desires are infinite. This has been stated almost as if it is as inviolable as the law of gravitation. The result is that greed has been enshrined as a deity and far from there being a concept of ceiling on desires, all kinds of devices are used to multiply desires even more. The entire advertising industry is based on the premise that if desire does not exist, it has got to be created. Thus the new God of society is Greed.

Or let us take the simple example of TV Channels. Man needs to be entertained. No one knows how much entertainment an average human being needs. There was a time when men entertained themselves by their own devices. They did things, narrated stories, sang songs, danced, wove fabrics, painted walls, played with children. This was creative, participative entertainment. Gradually, science invented passive methods of entertainment, be it pop music, cinema, television, video or what have you. Today, we are all reduced to being couch potatoes, eyes glued to a television or computer screen, each individual intent on his own brand of passive entertainment. Creative arts flourish only in communities and places untouched by modern science and its technology.

One could multiply such examples. Science has converted us into a civilisation that has become a prisoner of what technology can achieve. Technology has acquired its own pace, which has no relationship with what is good for humanity. Philosophy has disappeared, because it has no takers. No intellectual is prepared to risk his reputation in trying to build a system of thought that looks at life as a whole, in all its subtlety and complexity. Without the compass of a philosophy of life, man flounders about, directionless.

Suppose you accost a modern man anywhere in the world today and ask him the basic philosophical questions-Who are you? Where from have you come? Where are you going? What is the purpose of your life? – he will look askance at you, wondering whether you have escaped from some lunatic asylum. He has never pondered over these questions. The pace of his life has been so frenetic that there is no time to think. And if you force him to answer, he will say – I have come from my mother's womb and one day I shall die. I will try to postpone that day as long as I can. The purpose of life is to be as successful as you can be, as rich, as famous, as sensually sated, as possible.

The interesting part is that people are worried about what is happening to humankind. No one is happy. No one is contented. No one prepared to cooperate. People compete all the time. Everyone looks after himself. Marriage is no longer a permanent state. Families break up. Children do not live with their parents. No person preserves his

virginity till he is married. There is no concept of fidelity in marriage. Parents do not look after children. Children do not look after parents There is violence on the streets. Crime is increasing. Old people are alone. There is fear in the heart. No one trust anyone else my more. Everyone looks after himself.

People are mystified about all this. They do not understand why this is happening. There is very simple explanation of all these phenomena. What has happened is that science has abolished religion. In the process, it has abolished spirituality. It has abolished philosophy. It has abolished the whole realm of values. That is why science has created violence- between man and woman, man and man, parent and child, between societies, between countries, between civilizations, between man and animals, man and nature, man and the planet Earth.

Science committed the same blunder as had been committed by the religious yore. At one time, religion tried to encompass the whole of life, with disastrous consequences. Today, science has tried to take over the whole of life, with even more disastrous consequences. We have to change direction. We have to make science non- violent. And the only way it can be done is to restore spirituality to life.

I am not suggesting even for a moment that we should go back to traditional religions. This is a route many societies have chosen. Their disenchantment with all that modern science has given, has led them to their roots and this has fed religions fundamentalism. The search for values is genuine but the route taken is wrong.

Modern man cannot go back to traditional religion. Even if he tries to force himself, the effort is doomed to failure. This is because traditional religions are full of so many elements that are anathema to the modern mind. They were developed at a stage of human history and, therefore, they represent the sum total of human knowledge as it stood at that point of time. Unfortunately, time in traditional faiths has stood still and we have, in the realm of religions, adopted an unscientific attitude that the tenets and concepts are inviolable, unalterable. The various clergies have held on to the written words of the original masters and laid down the law that not even a full stop or comma can be changed in the sacred texts.

But time does not, In fact, stand still. The human mind has not stood still. The discoveries of science cannot be wished away. A religion that does not accept the modern astronomical concepts, the modern biological concepts, the modern medical concepts, the modern archaeological concepts, the modern concepts of freedom, equality, democracy, human rights, gender equality, etc., cannot be really successful in convincing the modern mind. Therefore, we cannot go back. We cannot shout, ‘ Back to the Vedas !’ or ‘ Back to the Koran !’ or ‘ Back to the Bible !’. What is needed is a new search, for a modern religion, a modern philosophy, a modern code of values, a universal science of spirituality.

It is not that this is not happening. It is happening. It is happening. It is happening quietly, surreptitiously, almost shamefacedly. Everyday we find books on this theme. People are trying to explore the old concepts and to reinterpret these for the modern interpreters, thinker, reformer – but the effort is halting, it is not consistent, it is not deliberate, it is not open, it is not being launched as worldwide project.

I feel that the time has come when we should openly proclaim the need to develop a new science of spirituality – a science that is a science in every sense of the word. It should not be based on authority, but on research and experimentation. It should not blindly accept what someone has declared but should consider every concept to be just a hypothesis that can be tested by each person for himself. It should be a science to which everyone can contribute and it should be universal in its appeal.

How can it be that all human beings believe today in common sciences of physics, chemistry, biology, economics, astronomy, sociology and the like, but there are different versions of the science of spirituality, competing for dominance. Because it is so, we find this desire of each religion to convert the rest of humanity to its point of view. So religion instead of being the uniting factor that it is supposed to be has become the single greatest cause of discord in the world.

There are some who will say that this is pipe dream and can never be achieved. Are there any concepts in the spiritual realm that are universally acceptable? I believe that there are. Not only that. I believe that all religions, in their fundamentals, are attempting to state the same truths. It cannot be otherwise. Just as the truths of physics and astronomy are the same, the truths of spirituality are also the same. They cannot be different. If they appear to be different, it is because they have been stated at different points of time, by different people, in different languages, using different metaphors. The original words were not recorded verbatim, and so some interpolations and misinterpretations have crept in. The disciples and devotees have added their own commentaries and this has seemingly increased the divide.

I believe we can consider the following truths to be universally acceptable to all human beings :

-Man not merely physical body. He is something more. There is something mysterious in him that is difficult to define. It is subtle, ineffable, indescribable.

-Similarly, nature is also not merely material. It is not only gross matter. It is energy. It is emotion. It is thought. It is consciousness. It is existence. It is bliss.

-The universe follows certain laws of regularities. There are certain patterns in everything. There seems to be a cosmic design which is slowly unraveling itself. Evolution is not blind. There is a method to the seeming madness of nature.

-Consciousness is the basic stuff of the universe. Everything else- thoughts, emotions, energies, objects, elements, - seems to be a gross manifestation of the basic stuff of consciousness. The universe is the gross manifestation of pure consciousness in varied names and forms.

-There is a cyclic process in nature. First, consciousness gets involved in matter over millenia. Then matter evolves into consciousness over other millenia. The process of evolution is not erratic or accidental. It is part of an overall design. We have discovered a small portion of this design in the biological theory of evolution. But evolution has not stopped at man. It has to go on further.

-It is a reasonable guess, looking at the past history of the evolutionary process , that man has to move up the evolutionary ladder, by further action purification of his consciousness. As human beings are at different stages of evolution, they have to move forward from whatever stage they are at.

-Broadly speaking, human beings can be at five different levels of evolution. At the lowest end, they can be at the gross level of awareness, mainly engrossed in the game of increasing their worldly possessions or wealth. At a slightly higher level, they can be at the vital level of awareness and here their preoccupation is with controlling others through the exercise of power. Next would come the emotional level of awareness where they engage in creative actions, and pursue the goal of beauty. At the intellectual level of awareness they would be engaged in thinking, in order to seek truth. And at the spiritual level they would experiment with remaining in a state of being in order to remain bliss.

-We could say that human beings can be at certain dominant states of awareness. In rising order of evolutionary excellence, these would be the unconscious, sub-conscious, uni-conscious, conscious and super-conscious states of awareness.

-The science of spirituality would then explore these various states of awareness and try to define the methods by which a human being can transcend lower states of awareness and reach higher states of awareness. The goal of human life could, thus, be defined to be attainment of dynamic equilibrium at every moment of one's existence within overall upward process of evolution towards super-consciousness.

-These methods of evolutionary progress would also operate at different levels of awareness. For example, at the gross level, one could control one's actions; at the vital level, one could control the body and the vital systems; at the emotional level, one could train the emotions; at the intellectual level one could channelise the thinking process; at the spiritual level. One could learn to be and to exist in oneself by oneself without recourse to external clutches.

Actually, if we analyse the traditional religions deeply, we will find that they all follow the above broad principles. But this science of spirituality is overlain by so many layers of history, mythology, cosmology, biography, miracles, rituals, contemporary beliefs and even rank superstition that these principles can remain hidden for several more centuries, unless we make assiduous attempt to find them out and arrange them in a holistic thought-system.

Such an attempt can be made by constituting multi disciplinary teams consisting of representatives of various sciences and disciplines, with the philosophers and religious thinkers taking the lead, Philosophy will again have to go back to its ancient origins and try and perform the onerous role of looking at the findings of all sciences and trying to fit them into an overall, holistic, universal thought-system. And having built such a universal philosophy we should teach it to our children in our homes and our classrooms, on the television screens and through the internet.

What is the kind of human being that we will create thereby? The spiritual human being will have the following world-view:

-He will not look upon himself as the body alone. He will know that this personality has several layers- the gross, the vital, the emotional, the intellectual and the spiritual. He will perform actions that will feed his centers.

-He will not be a directionless person. He will know that his life has an inbuilt sacred purpose. He has to evolve into higher and higher states of awareness and finally to graduate to the super-conscious level. He has, therefore, to be mindful about his actions, his breath, his speech, his feelings, his thoughts at every moment of his life.

-Being a person with a higher mission, he will never feel that he is alone in the universe or an outsider. He will see that every person in the world is linked to everyone else, other human beings, animals, birds, insects, trees, plants, clouds, water, fire, earth, sky. Everything is part of an integral whole, the real nature of which is pure consciousness.

-With this attitude, he will care for others. He will love others. When he does something for others, he will see that hurting another hurts himself. Thus, he will be non-violent and compassionate.

-Parents will love children. They will not neglect them or pamper them. They will realize that children come through them, but belong not to them. Children will love and honour their parents. They will try to repay their debt to their parents by caring for them in their old age.

-Marriage will become a sacred bond between two individuals. Each partner will love the other and care for the other. Sex will be there. But it will be only one part of the relationship. The partners will merge at the vital, emotional, intellectual and spiritual levels. They will help each other in their evolutionary upsurge. The bringing up of a family will be a joyous, fulfilling activity. Both parents and children will be happy in being together, growing up together, praying together and moving upwards together.

-Human beings will understand that negative emotions have to be trained. Greed cannot be limitless. There have to be self-imposed ceilings on desires. We need not acquire wealth and property beyond a point. Leisure is as important as work. Family is as important as the workplace. Rest is important as effort. Enjoying what one has to is as important as striving for more. Possessing goods is an achievement only at the gross level. If one is engrossed in greed, one is bound to eternally vegetate at the gross level of awareness.

What will happen to science in a society of spiritual people? Will it lose its importance? Will it be relegated to second place?

My guess is that science will remain as important as it is today. The only change is that scientific efforts will acquire a direction. Instead of science going in this direction and that on the basis of erratic technological breakthroughs, we will have a new science. This new science will have the following characteristics;

-It will be non-violent. It will not conduct research on inventing new weapons of destruction. It will refuse to be a slave to the war-mongers, politicians and generals. And will instead place its intellect at the service of humanity.

-It will no longer serve a society of greed and consumerism. It will not waste its talent on inventing useless consumer articles which are of no use and are meant only to fleece the people and engender wealth for a few individuals.

-It will no longer serve the wealthy and powerful people of the world. It will use its energies to mitigate the hardships of the ordinary people- give them food, energy, water, shelter, clothing, education, health, entertainment, etc. with least amount of drudgery and misery. It will try to devise machines to relieve the farmer and the factory worker, the

housewife and the sanitation worker of their labour and drudgery, their monotony and pain.

-It will study the relationship between matter and energy, between energy and emotion, between emotion and thought, between thought and consciousness and it will discover their inter-relationships. There are many equations like $e=mc^2$ waiting to be discovered and once these are known, science will be a part of larger philosophy. Scientific truths will no longer be opposed to the spiritual truths. Science will realize that it can only deal with the means. But means have to subservient to ends. And ends can only be discovered by philosophy and spirituality.

Friends, I have spoken at some length. The substance of my argument is simple. I would like to sum up the various points I have made as follows:

-Today science is rudderless, driven by technology, not clear about human goals. It, therefore, conduces to greed and violence.

-This is because humanity has lost religion. Science is partly responsible for the decline of the religion.

-Religion has to be reinvented as spirituality to suit the contemporary mind. It has to be scientific, modern, rational, universal and common to the whole of mankind.

-Once we have the science of spirituality, the physical and social sciences can fulfill their real role of facilitating the process of evolutionary change in the desired direction.

-A world in which the goal of human life is clearly spelt out as evolution to a higher stage of consciousness will see a science that will be non-violent, compassionate, cooperative, holistic, service-oriented and noble.

Let us all try to mobilize the vast intellectual resources of mankind towards a future of love, peace and non-violence.

Om! Amen! Aammen

Jai Hind

Maharaj Krishen Kaw

Ahmedabad, India

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Gujarat Vidyapeeth have instituted Shri Kamalnayan Bajaj annual Memorial lectures since1978. This year Mr. Maharaj Krishen Kaw has chosen to speak on the above subject.

Mr. M. K. Kaw has had an outstanding record both as an administrator and a prolific writer, and has made a deep study of various schools of Philosophy. In his lecture he has synthesised the concept of Science and nonviolence.

The above article, translated by Mr.Kanti Shah in Gujarati, is available in the 'Bhumiputra' - published from Baroda.

Your views/comments may please be forwarded to Yagna Prakashan, Baroda