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## Science and Religion in the Context of Modern Society

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### Abstract

The 1921 Physics Nobel Prize Winner, Albert Einstein in his 1941 “Science and Religion” expressed that “Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind”. His deep conviction and concern for “religion and God” also have been expressed in his obituary issue of **New York Times** of April 15, 1955 thus: “My **religion** consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable **superior spirit Who** reveals **Himself** in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds. That deeply emotional conviction of the presence of **Superior Reasoning Power**, which is revealed in the **Incomprehensible Universe**, forms my idea of God.”

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There existed an uncompromising conflict between **knowledge and belief** throughout the closing stages of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This conflict led to the prevalence of a strong opinion in favour of replacing belief by knowledge. Belief is therefore considered as superstition as it was not a **Knowledge-based** entity. Swami Vivekananda’s monism principle advocates a strong determination to achieve a truthful life. His religious theory acts as a force for national integration and stability. Religion represents a way of life with beliefs and practices adapted to the nature of world reality. It is attributed to human action systems of human environment in the

matter of people's feelings, hope and fear. The curse of human scientific and technological progress led to disproportionate inequality and misuse of achievements for destructive purposes. The answer to these is to enforce psychological unity by religion to face the onslaughts all kinds of challenges. Religion should not only become an institution but it should be dynamic, adaptive and non-fundamental, flexible and capable of absolving all kinds of ugly situations. Unity, understanding, coherence and tolerance are the hallmarks of any religion.

The spirit of science is not opposed to that of religion. The origin of spiritualism lies in **Brahma Sutras** and takes it to matter. Concentration on inner things leads to **Reality** and **Godliness**. Consciousness and experience, a rebornness, an inner evolution and a change mark spiritually-charged humans as models and gurus. Jesus Christ's concept of rebirth occurs by inner contemplation and it is awakening from sleep through light shed by inner wisdom. Outer experiences have to be squeezed to reach inner ones. Thus all religions should look upon life as an opportunity for self realization to reach the immortal level. Even Marxism supports this approach of making us free and fearless citizens. All religions in the East and West have common origin and preach the same thing of friendliness among all religions to shape the spiritual life of humankind. According to Rabindranath Tagore, science cares for progressive ascertainment of truth as also religion studies the progressive realization of its ideals.

In the opinion of Max Planck, science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature. The structure of Reality can be achieved only by experience, when soul contacts the **Transcendent Reality**. Plato too advanced that the soul is the seat of divine origin. The works of Damascus, Augustine and HG Wells too accounted for similar views. Thus science and spiritual life/Religion should strive to bring humanity in the world to come together by building brotherhood and harmonious living together.

### **The Concept:**

According to Swami Vivekananda, religion is the most vital and moral force, which imparts strength to individual members of the society as well as nations. He thinks that unless we have faith in ourselves there is no salvation. Unless and until one is strong, one cannot reach truth which alone gives life. This is the underlying principle of Vivekananda's monism, which

applies to all people irrespective of the religion they practice. He believed in the need of religion for India and even formulated a religious theory of **nationalism**. Religion acts as a force for national integration and stability, and even acts as the force when the country's political authority gets weakened. All the reforms and the very fabric of national life should be based on the foundations of religion according to him.

Religion is nothing but the relationship between the ultimate nature of reality and the human ways of life. It is religion, which tunes human actions to the view prevailing in the cosmos and bring forth the images of the cosmic order to the level of human existence. Thus a people's lifestyle is not only made reasonable in terms of religious beliefs and practices but also religion is shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the nature of the world reality. Therefore the emergence of religion is attributed to human action systems either in the context of environment for its maintenance or in the matter of motivation related to people's feelings of anxiety, hope and fear.

### **Why Do We Need Religion:**

The grand progress humanity made in science and technology has brought the world community closer and unified. In the process, the benefits derived from the progress led to disproportionate inequality between countries as well as human societies and individuals. The rise of such ugly heads caused the exploitation of havenots by the haves rather than assuring strength, freedom and improved life ways. Another dimension of this development of control over the forces of nature has become a cause of anxiety since the misuse of the achievements for the destructive purposes has become a constant fear to millions of people. So Coming together of people of different countries of the world as a result of scientific progress is seriously challenged today whether it is in the material, economic or political aspects.

It is high time that the world Community is given for psychological unity. It is here that there is need for a system of thought, which has significance and value for human existence. This intrinsic element of human nature is nothing but religion. **A religion is ever creative and never-ending and should be capable of withstanding the onslaughts of all kinds of challenges in space and time.** Religion should not become an institution of mere faith of certain

human aspects of life but it should be dynamic, adaptive and non-fundamental, flexible and capable of absolving any kind of ugly situations that the humanity fails.

As this is not only the age of science but also an age of humanism, it is necessary for religions to rise to the needs and obligations as also problems of humanity of modern times and as such, it should not perpetuate a sense of division, disunity and disintegration. On the other hand, it should always aim at bringing about unity, understanding and coherence as well as tolerance for one another and should never become prey to the elements of extremism.

It is not true to think that the spirit of science is opposed to that of religion. Looking at the universe objectively is of prime importance to religion. The observable facts of study would contribute to natural theology and not revelations or traditions. The ultimate attempt to try to know the ultimate being based on the survey of facts of nature is a kind of scientific method.

### **What do Puranas-Vedas-Smrithis Say?**

The **Bramha Sutra** from the Third Chapter of **Taittareya Upanishad, Atato Brahma Gignasa**, which means the desire to know **Brahman** by another **Sutra Janmadyasya Yadhaha**, which means that the origin of the world proceeds from the **Brahman**. This shows the highest place for spiritualism, next to which come other forms of life:rational, sentient, organic and inorganic in descending order. This holds that the world is real and is God's body, which is eternal.

The scientific achievements are the outcome of the spirit of human mind. Therefore scientists are in a way pursuing truth, which is the service of God. The orderly progress seen in the evolution of the cosmos is a testimony to its reality. Therefore the ultimate beginning is matter, not shown by the spirit of science. Albert Einstein in his "World as I see it" accounts for the **superiority of natural laws over all human thinking and actions**. Radhakrishnan says that the spirit of science leads to the refinement of religion and that it should not be confused with magic or witchcraft or quackery or super--stratified model dogmas, etc which cause hindrance to the growth of spiritual life. Unlike in science which deals with the study of empirical data and its

interpretation, all religions are rooted in experience, the ambit of which is beyond normal phenomena.

The Upanishads have shown that man by the use of his outward senses has not only lost his way but also his contacts with himself. His mind must concentrate on the inner things to find the Reality. It is the fight against the inward nature to triumph over it. All religions preach that ignorance should be replaced by wisdom. So religion is thus a spiritual adventure and process rather than theology. To say that we have discovered truth is a big folly. The fulfilment of man's life with his experience raised to its highest level is religion. A religious-minded man should therefore show change in his consciousness and experience, a rebornness, an inner evolution and a change in understanding. Even evolution has shown that man is evolving continuously by the interaction between biological and cultural factors. Therefore it is not to be considered as automatic evolution. Man has to make conscious efforts to grow into a regenerate being to the extent that the currents of universal life flow through him. It is only such persons who realize the reality are really reborn and become models and gurus to others. Even Christianity has shown this when Jesus advocates the concept of rebirth or second birth to make us new men by the inner contemplation. It is a kind of awakening from sleep through the light shed by the inner wisdom. This is what Jesus taught humanity, the highest state of human beings, the Kingdom of Heaven.

### **What is the Keynote of Religion?**

The visible and invisible worlds have sandwiched man and therefore it is not enough to achieve the highest form with normal consciousness. It is only when one squeezes the outer experiences, he reaches his inner experience. This is possible only when we give up sense impressions, emotions, desires, etc. It is only self-thinking and self-willing, which can overcome imagination and senses. It is wrong to think that the truth is authored by someone, because of the fact that it lies in man's experience as is advocated by Buddha. The keynote of all religions is that we have to look upon life as an opportunity for self realisation and reach the immortal level. That reality, wisdom and love of the universe constitute God and that all humans are His children. In fact all human souls are the seeds of God's consciousness, realisation of which is to be sought after. Once man becomes aware of truth, he will realize the importance of universal

brotherhood and love for all creation and free himself from hatred. Such experience as this makes us free and fearless citizens of the society and enable us to work against cruelty and lead the voiceless. This approach underlies Marxism too. All these aspects show that religion act as a binding force for bringing about solidarity of human society.

There is no question of one religion superceding the other because all religions in East and West almost preach the same thing. What is needed in any religion is our sincere efforts and earnestness to reach the Supreme. Even Gandhiji held that a man or a woman can be called a cultured being only when he or she reads the scriptures of the world. He even considers the study of world religions as a sacred duty. In a nutshell, all religions are friendly partners meant for shaping the spiritual life of mankind. Their interaction will help the human soul in a bigger way and contribute to peace and harmony in the world.

Religion unlike philosophy is dogmatic and quite real for the believer and it has to be understood in the sense of the founder-believer. But in the course of its understanding, absorption and realisation, religion may have been infested by several aberrations and mistakes as in the case of science, the history of development of which is abounded by a maze of mistakes at different times though in reality no one is interested to publicize mistakes. It is apt to quote the words of Rabindranath Tagore in this connection: "The progressive ascertainment of truth is the important thing to remember in the history of science, not its innumerable mistakes. And so also in religion, one should study the progressive realisation of its ideals, not the failure and abandonment of search for truth." Therefore it is possible by **sadhana** to realise truth by rectification of errors.

### **How does Science Contribute to Religion?**

Science and technology has reached its present stage of space age from the prehistoric stone age. This revolutionary stage brought about notable improvement in the standards of living and made our life comfortable. At the same time, the constant worry of humanity is the misery that science caused to it and created conflict within the system instead of liberation from its own nature. The new situation calls for education of the human spirit. Whether it is in the West or in the East, science and religion had a common origin. Science otherwise called natural philosophy,

when historically viewed, becomes the main part of spiritual history of mankind. This age of specialisation led to fragmentation of knowledge forgetting the larger context. While it is good to realize the development of science, at the same time it is our responsibility to understand its limitations and shortcomings. There is no point in sticking to traditional ways of life in the face of scientific achievements. But while accounting for its achievements, it is necessary to seek religious truths with our minds. We need both science and religion and work for their reconciliation.

The scientist thinks that only such evidence which is verifiable and empirical is true and he ignores the basic nature of the universe and of life and death. That is how the human species is considered as a product of heredity and environment by which the human self becomes robbed of its reality. Though science studies cosmos, its inner relation is not sufficiently made and is comparable to the middle level and does not account for the beginning or end as stated in Bhagavad Gita. For instance, the study of atoms and electrons is made to understand their working but it is not known how they were created. Thus a scientist as he himself as a part of the nature or universe does not know its meaning as a whole. In the words of Max Planck is his work "where is science going" , stated that science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature. And that is because in the last analysis, we ourselves are part of our nature and therefore part of mystery we are trying to solve. The most penetrating eye cannot see itself anymore than working instrument can work upon itself. The scientific theories are based on observed facts and used to interpret the given data of experience. Thus the deeper level things though referred to in the scientific theories, they can never be afforded for direct observation. This is where we depend for the understanding of the process on the **Brahma Sutra** which shows the supreme spirit or God as reason for the structure of **Reality**. This can be achieved only by experience which is not limited to the facts of space and time. Experience establishes contact of the soul with the **Transcendent Reality**, on which both **Eastern and Western thoughts** are based. That the Soul is the seat of the divine origin was advanced by Plato. Similar Thinking is reflected in the works of Damascus and Augustine. In his **First and Last Things**, H.G. Wells also accounted for the **Supreme Reality** in his religious life. Change of consciousness of being and a rebirth of the spirit mark the spiritual life. Experience can not make the human mind to comprehend the

**Ultimate Reality.** Will and freedom constitute the backbone of human reality. Unlike Scientific or objective and creative nature of science, the human mind and nature as also individual are the source of liberty. It is the opinion of the greatest thinkers all the world over to have science and spiritual life for human harmony, development and progress. While science erases ignorance, religion removes selfishness and fear. Both will help in bringing the humanity in the world to come together for brotherhood and harmonious building and living together.

### **Conclusion and Observations:**

- Religion is the most vital and moral force, which inculcates faith in ourselves.
- National integration and stability as also national life can be achieved by Religion.
- Scientific and technological progress has lead to disproportionate inequality between countries as well as societies and individuals.
- As this is the age of humanism, science and religion must work hand in hand to rise to the needs and obligations as also problems of the humanity to bring about unity, understanding and coherence as also tolerance for one another.
- The hard truth laid down in the **Brahma Sutras** is that origin of the world proceeds from the **Brahman**, followed by the birth of other life forms – rational, sentient, organic and inorganic--in a descending order. This is the eternal truth which asserts that the God holds the **real world** in **His lap**.
- The traits of consciousness and experience, rebornness, an inward evolution and change in understanding make religious-minded persons as models and gurus to others. Self realization to reach an immortal level is the key note of all religions.
- All religions are friendly partners meant for shaping the spiritual life of humankind.
- Rabindranath Tagore asserts that science or religion must study the progressive realization of its ideals and not failures and abandonment of search for truth.
- In the West or the East, science and religion had a common origin. Science as a natural philosophy becomes the spiritual history of humankind.



- The supreme **Transcendent Reality** in the West or East contributes to human spiritual life, harmony, development and progress. Both science and religion erase ignorance, selfishness, and fear, and help bringing humanity to come together for brotherhood harmonious living together.

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