

## CONCEPT OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

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Received: 25-11-2012

Revised: 15-12-2012

Accepted: 25-12-2012

### ABSTRACT

Religion is nothing but an attempt to expand the limits of consciousness. Achievement of saintliness is the core of spirituality. The ultimate reality or Brhman is infinite and each and every individual is a part of the infinite only limited to the contriving circumference of selfishness. Religions and mythologies are the secondary aspects, if they put an impediment in the way of expansion of consciousness, they are worth relinquishing.

**KEY WORDS:** Religion, Consciousness, Sprituality

There are two basic assumptions about the nature of the Universe—materialism and spiritualism. Materialistic assumption accepts that the matter is the ultimate reality and the spirit or consciousness is nothing but a chance production of different conglomerates of matter. It is one of the fortuitous products of the compounds of carbon. Materialism as an assumption is as old as philosophy itself. Their foremost modern proponents are Marxist philosophers who laid much emphasis on the materialistic origin of consciousness. Afanasyev—a Marxist philosopher defines matter as given below:

“Substance is a form of matter—everything that has a rest mass is a substance..... Substance exists in a variety of states. In our everyday life we usually deal with solid, liquid or gaseous substances. And yet the most widespread state of substance is the world of plasma, a gaseous condition created by electrically charged particles—electrons and ions..... Plasma is also regarded as yet another form of matter. The field is another form of matter. The gravitational field and the electromagnetic fields were known already on the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The boundaries between substance and field are distinct only in the macroscopic visible world. In the sphere of micro processes, however, these boundaries are relative....Substances and fields are intricately connected. They

interact and under certain circumstances are capable of being transformed one into another. The word by its nature is material; all that exists represents forms and kinds of matter!"

This may be regarded as a gist of materialistic philosophy. Even those philosophers who believe in the uniqueness of human consciousness give ontological priority to matter. The great existentialist thinker Jean Paul Sartre who regards freedom and consciousness as synonyms, accepts consciousness as denial of being—desire of being etc. In Sartrean parlance for-itself is dependent on in-itself. The being-in-itself is dumb packed togetherness without any consciousness whatsoever. It can not question itself. The for-itself on the contrary is questioning capacity it can ask questions because it carries nothingness in its very being. Consciousness is other than being in-itself. Hence consciousness itself can never cause or justify being- in-itself. The latter is before the for-itself, and consequently has no cause and no reason.

The consequence of materialistic philosophy is that the world is fortuitous having no plan or design and human life is a chance appearance and whole of our endeavors is to give meaning to life is futile. God is a figment of our imagination and if there is any pattern in the march of history as envisaged by Marxist thinkers, it is totally deterministic. For Sartre man is a useless passion.

In our age there is pre-eminence of science. But we can not say that the materialistic interpretation of the world is corroborated by the findings of the sciences. The scientific methodology is hypothetical deductive and claims no certainty. If some facts are found which can not be explained by the latest scientific theories, scientists never cling to them and make amendment. There are scientists of repute who do not regard materialistic hypothesis totally satisfactory to explain the life and the world. Before giving a description of spiritualism as an alternative assumption for our life we would like to quote from the editorial writing of The Times of India dated February 6, 2005 (New Delhi edition). The caption of editorial was 'Intelligent origin'. We quote a few lines 'However mainstream scientists and philosophers who accept Darwinian evolution and reject any God like intervention have routinely mixed the idea, upholding that science is inherently committed to naturalistic premises. At the same time though, more and more people are beginning to believe in intelligent design. This can be gauged from the fact that only recently one of the world's best known philosophers and a passionate proponent of atheism for even a half a century Professor Antony Flew changed his mind as the age of 81. The reason according to him was because the researcher's investigation of DNA has shown the almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements which are needed to produce life, that intelligence must have been involved, or as Professor Flew put it "It has become inordinately difficult even to begin to think about constructing a naturalistic theory of the evolution of that first reproducing organism".'

The second alternative assumption about the advent and nature of all the beings is that of spiritualism. Spiritualism as a philosophy avers that either consciousness is the only reality or it is parallel to matter. The former is called non-dualistic monism and latter is dualism. The first corollary of this assumption is that consciousness is eternal and it survives the destruction of material body i.e. death. The second corollary is that the Universe is not a chance conglomeration of fundamental particles, but it has a design – a pattern – a pre-established harmony. How can we substantiate this assumption? Reason can never give us a definite answer. By nature being discursive it can provide us an adhoc and probable answer both in the case of materialism and spiritualism. But there are some phenomena which can at best be explained by the spiritual assumption. Moreover, reason is not the only way of knowing, the other one is experience our aesthetic and moral experience are not less important for our life. The whole of value experience is beyond the purview of discursive reasoning. Before analyzing the oneness of mystical and moral experiences of the seers and saints. We would like to point out some facts which corroborate the spiritualistic assumption of non-dualistic monism. Modern science has not yet solved the problem of ultimate reality but it is tending towards non-dualistic monism. According to modern physics, the world of object is reducible to certain elements which themselves are comprised of the uniform units called atoms. These atoms themselves are the different combinations of yet elementary particles called electron, protons etc. these elementary particles are the bottled energy of different potentials. Whole of the world is made of these elemental particles and their different combinations. Those who believe in primacy of matter aver that at some stage life or consciousness is born out of the inanimate matter. But here a pertinent question may be asked as to how it so happens that the fundamental particles coexist in certain way to make whole of the inorganic and organic world. The combinations of elemental particles which make the world can not be called gratuitous and absurd because it is this combination which gives meaning and purpose to the wayward particles. For example proteins are the essential constituents of all living cells, and they consist of the five elements, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen and sulphur with possibly 40,000 atoms in the ponderous molecule. There are 92 chemical elements in nature all distributed at random, the chance that these five elements may come together to form the molecule, the quantity of matter that must be continually shaken up and the length of time necessary to finish the task, can all be calculated. A Swiss mathematician Charles Eugene Guye has made the computation and finds that the odd against such an occurrence are  $10^{160}$  – a number far too large to be expressed in words. The amount of matter to be shaken together to produce a single molecule of protein would be millions of times greater than that in the whole universe. For it to occur on earth alone would require many almost endless billions ( $10^{248}$ ) of years. Proteins are made from long chains called amino acids. The way those are put together matter enormously. If in the wrong way they will not sustain life and may

be poisons. Professor J.B. Seathes has calculated that the links in the chain of quite a simple protein could be put together in millions of ways ( $10^{46}$ ). It is impossible for all these chances to have coincided to build one molecule of protein<sup>2</sup>.

Now we may ask the question as to whether there is a unifying ubiquitous reality which is the basis of all the particles and swing to which they all caalesee to make different things. Any such coexistence of the forms of different nature presupposes a basic identity of their nature. Is there a basic identity in the different fundamental particles? The scientists have given no positive answer but some experiments are gesturing towards such unity. In the 17<sup>th</sup> International Conference on high energy Physics held at Imperial College in London on July 1974, Physicists from the Brookhaven National Laboratory in Upton, New York, the Fermi National Acceleration Laboratory at Bolivia, Illinois and the Rockefeller University in New York city announced new discoveries revealing the underlying simplicity of nature deep within the atom. The experiments concerned measurements of protons and neutrons, basic components of the atomic nucleus, after they were bombarded with six different particles accelerated to very high energy 'from 5 to 200 billion electron volts. With all six particles the measurements of the proton and neutron begin to look alike, and differences seen previously at lower energies begin to disappear, suggesting that the physicists are seeing a new simplicity of nature making sense out of the subatomic .....'<sup>3</sup>.

The scientists have not yet framed hypothesis about the nature of unity which they find at micro level of reality. But if we have the vision we can realize this unity at all levels. Mystic and seers have already realized it. They call the ultimate principle of unity as God or Brhman. They feel the oneness of beings at the highest level of experiences. Lord Krishna affirms in the Gita (IV, 10), 'Freed from passion, fear and anger, filled with me, taking refuge in me, purified of wisdom, many have attained the oneness with me'. The same truth is asserted in Madubya Upnishad Kariba 11.35

वीरतरागमय क्रोधेर्मुनिभिर्वेदपागेः

निर्विकल्पा द्वयदृष्टः प्रपञ्चोशमोअद्वयः(35)

This transcendental non-dual state, in which relative existence is overcome, has been attained by sages free from attachment 'fear and anger' and who has gone beyond the mandate of Vedas.

Actually we are one with the ultimate reality. It is only the limitation of our vision caused by ignorance which makes us dwell on the surface of consciousness where only we can see the diversity of things. Apart from testimony of seers and mystics modern researches in the field of extrasensory perceptions too indicate towards an unifying and all absorbing reality which can be nothing but all encompassing consciousness. Telepathy and clairvoyance are established facts now. Telepathic process in humans is accepted by the scientists on the basis of experiments. Scientists of Russia were able to have telepathic contacts from the distance of 1860 miles. Telepathic contacts are not

possible only among human beings but trees and plants are also capable of receiving telepathic messages. Cleve Backster, an American scientist has proved it beyond doubt. With the help of polygraph or lie detector he measured the electrical impulses of indoor plants during moments of threat to their well being. He decided to torture the plant by burning its leaf. 'At the moment of this decision at 13 minutes and 55 seconds of chart time, there was a dramatic change in the psychogalvanic reflex (PGR) tracing pattern in the form of an abrupt and prolonged upward sweep of the recording pen. I have not moved or touched the plant, so the timing of the PGR been actively suggested to me that tracing might have been triggered by the mere thought of the harm I intended to inflict on the plant'. He tested this capacity of the plants by several other experiments and came to the conclusion that the telepathic messages are received even in plants. Ample evidences of the phenomenon of telepathy among human beings have been investigated by Professor J.B. Rhine and his associates of the Duke University USA. The phenomenon of clairvoyance is also an accepted and recorded fact. The case of a Dutch man Peter Hurkos is well known. He fell from a ladder and fractured his skull and consequently lost the power of concentration.

But he acquired a new power of clairvoyance. He solved a murder case by holding dead man's coat. He described the murder in detail. This power of clairvoyance was established when Jean Dixon described the murder of John F. Kennedy half an hour before the actual happening. Mahamahopadhyay Gopinath Kaviraj has given instances of the phenomena of telepathy and clairvoyance in his books demonstrated by his revered Guru Swami Vishudhanand Jee. By these instances at least unity of consciousness is proved. Individual consciousness is surrounded and situated in world of matter and if without any physical contact and without the aid of any physical medium consciousness can communicate with each other. Certainly there is some unifying reality which combines both mind and matter. The world can be compared with the ocean on whose surface there are many ripples and bubbles but at the deep level there is only calm water. This fact which has been accepted by seers and mystics all over the world is accepted by the modern scientists too. In his book "The Tao of Physics" Dr. F. Copra, Professor of Physics at the University of Berkley, USA observed the most important characteristics of the Eastern world view – one could also say the essence of it - is the awareness of the unity and mutual interaction of all things and events, of ..... The Eastern traditions constantly refer to this ultimate indivisible reality which manifests itself on all things, and of all things are parts. It is called Brhman in Hinduism, Dharmkaya in Buddhism, Tao in Taoism. Because it transcends all concepts and categories Buddhist call it Tathata or suchness. The basic oneness of the universe is not only the central characteristic of mystical experience, but it is one of the most important revelations of modern physics. It becomes apparent at the atomic level and manifests itself more and more as one penetrates deeper into

matter, down into the realm of subatomic particles. As we study the various models of subatomic physics we shall see that they express again and again in different ways, the same insight – that the constituents of matter and basic phenomena involving them are all interconnected, interrelated and interdependent, that they can not be understood as isolated entities, but only as integrated parts of the whole. Thus the mystic and physicist arrive at the same conclusion – one starting from the inner realm, other from the outer world.

Now we can emphatically say that the underlying reality of whole of the universe is same and this is nothing but consciousness. And with the coagulation of consciousness time and space arise. The ultimate reality is beyond time and space. The matrix of time and space requires division – dualism. Why the ultimate reality diversifies itself. The diversity is only seeming and at the deeper level oneness remains. The enigma of diversification is Maya. If we are given the anthropomorphism, we can prescribe a personality to the ultimate reality and call it God and diversification may be called as 'Leela'. But if we avoid anthropomorphic interpretation we have to accept Advaitic interpretation. The reality remains as such and seeming diversity is only due to our limitation of perception. But why are we limited in our vision? The limiting adjunct is 'Maya'. We can have the realization and attain the oneness with Brahman. This can be achieved through Sadhna. This attainment is Moksha and the pathway to this achievement may be called religion. All the mystics and seers have realized this oneness. This is the highest form of religious expression. But here one doubt arises, if the religious expressions of the different seers of different place and time are one the description of this state should be the same. But it is not so. The diversity of interpretation of ultimate realization is a fact. How can we explain it? It can be explained by the ineffable nature of religious experience. In the realization of oneness of reality the triad known, knower and knowledge melts away. Totally it can not be called an experience. But a 'Sadhak' can not remain at that exalted state forever. He has to come down on mundane level. And when a 'Sadhak' tries to describe this state, he fails to do so and if he tries he uses the symbols and metaphors presented in the language and the milieu he has inherited. But the influence of this state of mind has the same effect on each and every 'Sadhak'. Saint's character is same in all the cultures. The saints are detached to worldly achievements. But their detachment is not of negative type. The saint alienates himself from everything which is constrictive, narrow and selfish and which leads to conflict and greed. But his attitude towards virtue, contentment and beauty is one of sweet friendliness and silent approval. The saints are particularly indifferent to their personal troubles and sufferings but are very much sensitive to sufferings of others. We can find ample testimony of this in the life and work of Buddha, Mahavir, Christ, Vivekanand, Gandhi and others. The great poet Tulsi Das speaking of Saints says that just as flowers placed in hollow of the joined hands make fragrant both the hands. Similarly the saints do good both to friends and enemies (B.K. R, Dohe 3).

बदंरु संत समाज चित, हित अनहित नंहि कोई  
अंजलि गत सुभ सुमन जिमि, सम सुगंध कर दोई

Achievement of saintliness is the cone of spirituality. Religion is nothing but an attempt to expand the limits of consciousness. The ultimate reality or Brhman is infinite and each and every individual is a part of the infinite only limited to the contriving circumference of selfishness. Enlarging the limiting circumference and ultimately removing it is the aim of all great religions. Religions and mythologies are the secondary aspects, if they put an impediment in the way of expansion of consciousness, they are worth relinquishing. We would like to conclude by quoting Swami Vivekanand:

‘Each soul is potentially divine; the goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work or worship or psychic control or philosophy, by one or more, or all of these, and be free. This is whole of religion. Dietaries or dogmas or rituals or books or temples or forms are but secondary details.’

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