

Integrating Knowledge Systems : Secular and Sacred

SWAMI SUPARNANANDA

We have two worlds before us: (i) *jada jagat* (Macrocosm) and (ii) *jiva jagat* (Microcosm) and as such we are required to acquire knowledge of the two worlds. Unfortunately, we are more concerned with *jada jagat*, the secular learning, and the study of the *jiva jagat* in depth has been relegated to the backyard. To have the connection between the two we turn to Dr Radhakrishnan, who said, 'It takes centuries of tradition to build up a civilization and it takes centuries of civilizations to build up a culture and the force of strength that unites and protects centuries of culture is a religion.' Also, a few centuries are necessary to build up spirituality from the rich experiences of the Godhead, leading to desired transformation in religion. In spirituality, there is unity among religions and also unity between the secular and the sacred. There we have the knowledge of the universe as well as the individual. Usually the division between them is prominent: *Dve vidye veditavye parā cha aparā cha*. Two kinds of knowledge we shall have, one is *aparā* (secular) and the other is *parā* (the sacred). One is Science and the other is Religion. Macrocosm is the objective universe around us. This is the physical world. We study it to become efficient in our activities and earn a lot. This *aparā vidyā* nourishes our physical

bodies. Our life expectancy is enhanced. Also, we have to know the *parā vidyā* which deals with our real nature. This is called *Ātmavidyā* as well—to know ourselves. Search for *parā vidyā* leads us to the doorsteps of spirituality. Our real emancipation waits for the dawning of spiritual knowledge. We spoke above of our journey from tradition to spirituality and the various steps involved in the process. The relation between the two kinds of knowledge is not one of competition as they are complementary. Secular education gives us food for body and sacred knowledge provides spiritual food to our soul.

Searching for Truth in the external universe

Scientists are trying to find out the Truth in the external universe. They have found, like our ancient Rishis, that the external universe is made up of five elements viz: *Ākāsha* → *Vāyu* → *Agni* → *Āpa* → *Prithvi* (*Vyom* → *Marut* → *Tej* → *Ap* → *Kshiti*). One may say in the language of a physicist, macrocosm comprises only five forces instead of these elements but each is related to the five elements listed above. This we receive from our scriptures. In brief, the following is the relation between the five-fold energy and elements.

<i>Ākāsha</i> is exactly the Gravitational Force:	→ First Cause
↓	
<i>Vāyu</i> is the Kinetic Force:	→ First Effect, Second Cause
↓	
<i>Tej</i> (Agni) is the Radiational Force:	→ Second Effect, Third Cause
↓	
<i>Ap</i> is the Electrical Force:	→ Third Effect, Fourth Cause
↓	
<i>Prithvi</i> is the Magnetic Force:	→ Fourth Effect ?

They come in this order and we present them above exactly as discovered long ago by the Rishis of yore.

Now, to find out the Truth, you have to analyse all these elements listed above seriously. By doing so, you will find that one is the cause of the other. In the area of causation, the first element is *Ākāsha*; how did it appear physically? Science is silent. It is dealt with by the Rishis: From *Ākāsha* everything follows. Where did *Ākāsha* come from? No answer is given by the scientists. After *Ākāsha* we get the finite universe. Beyond *Ākāsha*, nothing is found in the external world by the scientists.

Chemists also tried to solve the issue from their standpoint in the area of causation. They found that hydrogen is the first element. But how did it come? No answer. From hydrogen arises helium→carbon→and all other 114 chemical elements followed thereafter. But what is the cause of hydrogen? No answer. Science is, to that extent, handicapped. It cannot proceed along 'causation' any further.

Beyond or above causation, the universe is infinite, i.e., without beginning and below causation it is finite or subject to death and birth. Reality is not known by the scientists. The Absolute which is of the nature of infinity has become finite by coming into Causation. (A₁)

Now with Space. This big universe of ours in its smallest form has been the matter of interest and exploration to the physicists. The

cause of this universe is not known. It means that the origin is not known. It proves only that this creation has no beginning. Its head is not knowable. Now, they want to know of the tail. Where does it go? They take up space since space divides the visible universe. They, through the process of division, once arrived at atom and, curiously enough, they found that atom is a most powerful element. They did not stop there. They are searching for the smallest unit—the seat of power and hence they divided atom successively 200 times and at last got quarks or the God particle, a hypothetical particle. It is so small that they cannot any longer divide it and ascertain its existence. So, the truth they here discover is of two types:

(i) Power is in the small.

(ii) There is no further to go for them in search of Truth within the area of space of this universe.

Since they could not locate the object at all in space, they concluded:

(i) It is space that makes everything divisible and within space, everything is divided and can be broken into pieces but not beyond space.

(ii) Physics, too, beyond quarks cannot proceed further. The truth remains a mystery, not being known by the physical science.

Swamiji intervened here as far back as in 1894. He was then in London. He said, beyond space is *prāna*. The universe located in quarks enters the *prāna* of the observer

himself; from *prāna* to mind, then to intellect and at last it becomes Ātman or Consciousness. Truth is not outside of us, it is all within and it is consciousness. So, the Absolute which is undivided has become divided by coming into Space. (A_2)

Now about Time and its brief history. Time makes everything subject to change. For example, the Mughal Empire started with Babur and came to an end with Bahadur Shah. This is the brief history of the Mughal Empire (zero-time to zero time). So, the brief history of time is a concept relative to a particular event only. Even before that event, time was present. Similarly, time of the universe started with a big bang and it will come to an end with a black hole. So, within time everything is changing, but beyond time there is the unchanged. This, then, is the view of physics. But it is erroneous. Why? It is easy to understand that even before big bang, time was there and even after black hole, time will persist. Absolute has, as if, been changing by coming through Time. (A_3)

We consider A_1 , A_2 and A_3 —all together to get the state of Reality, the Absolute. Swamiji summarises the entire phenomenon thus: The Absolute has become this universe, the relative, by coming into Space, Time and Causation (STC). Swamiji calls it *Māyā*, which is a statement of fact. We cannot reject or accept it at our own sweet will. Hence, the visible universe is relative and false. False? Yes, since it cannot exist by itself just as our shadow cannot without our body. The universe, therefore, is the shadow of the Real seen through STC. Swamiji made this astounding observation. This follows from Vedanta, he only asserted it.

The state of creation and Vedanta

Now this apart, what does Vedanta say about the state of creation? It says God is the first cause of the universe. Note that Brahman

(Macro Reality) or Ātman (Micro Reality) is of the nature of *Sat-Chit* and *Ānanda*. It is not the cause of God of the universe. But who is the cause of God? Vedanta literature unambiguously solved the chicken-and-egg problem. Who is God? How is He present in the scene? God is the first vision of Reality called Brahman when seen through Space-Time-Causation net (*Māyā*). How does the Absolute Brahman become the relative God? Through *Adhyāsa* or the apparitional transformation like snake appearing as a rope. Transformation seems to occur, but not really. Similarly, when seen through *Māyā* (STC), Ātman is Jivātman (in deep sleep). God is the *Jagatkārana* whose nature is Omniscience, Omnipresence and Omnipotence. Pure Brahman and Pure Ātman are one and the same, having no concern for the world and known as *Sat-Chit-Ānanda*. Also, we have seen above how the STC (A_2 - A_3 - A_1) interaction makes the Real relative. We can never see the Real since we have to see It through Space-Time interaction. We see the rising sun from our position on earth 8 minutes late. Why? Because that is the time taken by light to traverse the distance to reach our eyes. It is a mirror image of the sun that we see, not the real sun.

Searching for Truth in the internal universe

The things we see are not real and the things we do not see are more real. How? The answer is in the above discussion. But Swamiji made it more intelligible and clear.

He states, in the waking state we see our body and take body as real. But when our body is absent, and we do not see it, we still work and probably work more. How? In the dream state, our bodies are lying on the bedstead, but in dream our minds are separated from body and move everywhere without confronting any barrier, creating a

new world, as it were, enjoying and suffering. So, in dream we live in mind and intellect. Our problem is that, when we see our body, we do not see our mind. When we see our mind, we do not see our Spirit (in deep sleep). Waking, dream and deep sleep states give us an idea of what we are basically. We gradually move from the lower to the highest state of reality, from body to mind and intellect and from there to Spirit or Consciousness. Our concept of truth changes accordingly.

So, in deep sleep state (*sushupti*) we are lost in Consciousness; we do not see our body, mind, intellect or anything; we are all one and see no physical things and see no differences anywhere. This is the Reality. There are no differences among us. We experience this oneness in ourselves in deep sleep. That is our real nature; that 'Chaitanya' is our real nature, the Truth. Remember, we cannot reject our dream as false since, events in dream are true in dream just as events of the waking state are true in that state only. In dream they are false and vice versa. So, which is truer—dream or waking experiences? None, in fact.

The goal before us

The goal is to know ourselves and Swamiji says we attain that goal when we know we are all One. We must be ready to give up our body, just like Buddha who was ready to give up his body for a goat. Now what does Swamiji say about the goal of human life being God-realization? He is dividing the whole process of our transformation: (i) From amoeba to the first birth of man, the crude man and (ii) from crude man to the Buddha man. That is, we have to pass through all the lower stages of humanity. From Darwin to Buddha is our journey. The embryo goes from the stage of an amoeba to that of a human child in

the mother's womb. That means, we go through the whole gamut within 9 to 10 months. Then comes the last phase. Vedanta tells us that we not only have to live all the past lives of a man in the mother's womb, but also the future life of all humanity till we are Buddhas. Swamiji asserted, there is no difference between the earthworm and the Buddha. The Buddha is the earthworm evolved and earthworm is the Buddha involved. Swamiji replaced the Darwinian theory of *Evolution* with the theory of *Involution* which means the evolution of the involved state of divinity. Divinity and purity are the same.

The final flight

To have the vision of that Truth we have to purify our *karma*, which, in turn, purifies our mind and then, we get a pure *buddhi*. Pure *buddhi* will soon be lost in Pure Consciousness. We then have perfect fulfilment. Outwardly, we adhere to unselfish work and then attain a calm and introspective mind leading to meditation and ultimately to *samādhi*.

For that to happen, the means is to love all, serve all, knowing them to be our own self. When others suffer, we are suffering as well in *their* bodies. This is the real gain we reap in selfless service. So, knowledge is One; secular knowledge converges with the spiritual knowledge. That means *Jiva* becomes *Shiva*. Even a piece of stone is alive. Sir J.C. Bose proved it before all in the Royal Society of London.

Why do we want sacred knowledge? To become pure. Why do we learn secular knowledge? To become healthy and strong and morally efficient. With secular knowledge man becomes educated and with the sacred knowledge he becomes *Jivanmukta*, free while living. ■

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