

Observations & Views:

Science & Religion

Dr. Harish Chandra, in the Spirit Magazine, posted in February 2008 on the website www.centerforinnersciences.org, has presented an interesting comparison of science and religion. According to him, science is based on reason. So it is logical and rational, and void of dogmas. Religion on the other hand is based on reason and faith and so it may not be logical and rational, and may include dogmatic ideas. In his article, Dr. Harish Chandra makes the following eye-opening remarks: "Scientists discover the truths hidden in the creation. The founder of a religion may or may not be truthful, and is certainly not all-knowing otherwise his religion would have been near-universal. A scientist will not cheat. Even if there is a miracle-like thing, he will explain the truths behind it. The founder of a religion may play a trick for self-aggrandizement, giving it an impression of a miracle. (On that token, a magician is a more honest person who says it up front that he is playing a trick.) Scientists have a simple motive – to seek truths for eventual betterment of the society. The founder of a religion (or his later followers) may have some selfish ulterior motives in misleading the God-fearing innocent people. Religions have caused maximum number of wars. Even today's 'hot spots' are due to religions."

The Jain religion emphasizes rationalism (SAMYAKTVA), teaches that all the things and events in the universe function according to the laws of nature and disapproves miracles. Still it is a sorry state of affairs that some Jain scholars and monks continue to promote irrational and deluding practices.

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Rationalism Versus Fundamentalism

Mahatma Gandhi stated, "I do not want to stay in a house with all its windows and doors shut. I want a house with all its windows and doors open where the cultural breezes of all lands and nations blow through my house. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any." This is rational perception.

Fundamentalists, on the other hand, adopt a one-sided view. They insist that their respective scriptures contain the absolute truth and that no other religious concepts need be studied. For example, on the PBS Program, 'Bill Moyers On Faith & Reason' of July 7, 2006, Jeanette Winterson stated: My mother was terrified of any secular influences entering our lives. My father is illiterate and every day my mother used to

read to us from the King James Bible and only six books were allowed in the house. The Bible was one, and the other five were books about the Bible. ... (My mother) had simply barricaded books out of her life, and they had to be barricaded out of our lives. And when challenged with her defense, she always used to say, "Well, the trouble with a book is that you never know what's in it until it's too late."

Such views and practices lead to conflicts and violence.

It is ironic that in some ways we Jains behave in a similar manner. We Jains go to the temple, participate in various religious activities, listen to discourses and relate certain precepts of our religion to our children. Jain scholars and monks give us the impression that all that has been presented in our scriptures is absolutely true. We convey the same impression to our children. Obviously, this amounts to 'Frogs Of The Well (KOOPAMANDOOK)' story. We are behaving like the frogs who live in a well and think that whatever they see and experience in the well is the limit of existence/knowledge. They think that nothing outside the well in the whole wide world is relevant or important. By not exposing ourselves to other religions and philosophies, we behave like 'frogs in the well'.

Do we Jains have to embrace such ideas and apprehensions? Do we have to imply that all that is presented in the Jain scriptures is absolutely true? Should we keep ourselves shut inside our own 'world' and not study other religions and philosophies? The Jain concept of multiplicity of viewpoints teaches us to look outside the 'well' and accept what appeals to be rational according to our study, observation and experience. This is the virtue of rational perception.

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Labyrinth Of Irrationalism

Based on the website: www.southasianconnection.com

On June 14, 1986, Sungeeta Jain's family was in a serious car accident while returning from Vancouver, B.C. Their car skidded on gravel and flipped into a ditch. Sungeeta, who was about ten years old, found herself in a hospital, surrounded by doctors and nurses, with all sorts of tubes into her body. When she finally woke up, she found that she could no longer use her legs. She was sentenced to life as a paraplegic. Sungeeta was extremely depressed. She questioned, "Why me? God, why did this happen to me?"

Sungeeta's family was more or less religious. They were followers of a Jain monk who had led them to believe that 'miracles can happen through faith and prayer'. Sungeeta's family invited the monk to their home. Considerable sums of money were donated and prayers were said.

Sungeeta's mother prayed from morning until night, religiously folding her hands and bowing her head before the long line of gods in the makeshift temple in their home but to no avail. Some priests told her parents that if they "donated" a certain sum of money, they would perform some rituals and Sungeeta would be cured. The family spent thousands of dollars, but there was no improvement in her condition. They tried acupuncture, reflexology, and Indian medicine but to no avail. Obviously, chasing after the 'mirage' of false hopes given by the religious system made them lose faith in their own roots. It was the consequence of irrationalism, which is usually preached by the monks, and priests and so-called scholars. Remember, Jainism teaches that everything happens according to the laws of nature. There are no miracles or magical occurrences. Nevertheless, the Jain monk misled Sungeeta's family to indulge in meaningless ritualism with the ulterior motive of securing money for his organization. Remember, all religious groups collect money in the name of charity to promote their religion.

Sungeeta's family had to remodel the house to make it wheelchair accessible. While the Jains were remodeling their home, an Ethiopian man came to take measurements for remodeling. On seeing Sungeeta he told the family that he was a Christian minister in Ethiopia and *that he wanted to pray for her healing and did not want any thing in return*. He began coming to their house and telling them about Jesus and praying with them. Sungeeta's condition did not improve at all. However, as the man read to her from the Bible and began to tell her about Jesus, young Sungeeta, an impressionable kid, started believing in Jesus.

The next step of the Ethiopian minister was to somehow induce the Jains to go to the church. So he had a Pakistani Christian family invite them to church. They would call every few days. The Jains did not want to go to the church but the Pakistanis kept on calling. Finally, one evening the Jain family went to the church.

After the service, the Jain family was invited to go to the front of the church for prayer. The ladies gathered around Sungeeta and started to pray with her, telling her to say, "I need you Jesus. I love you Jesus." But, as Sungeeta was trying to pray, all of a sudden, she couldn't speak. Someone annunciated that Sungeeta was being filled with the Holy Spirit. Sungeeta's mother did not know who that was. A little while later someone declared that was not the Holy Spirit, but a bad spirit and that they would have to fast and pray about it, and cast it out. Hymns like the following were sung:

"God has blotted them out. God has blotted them out. My enemies mocked and scoffed at me. He blotted them out when he set me free. God has blotted them out. God has blotted them out."

Such rituals and antics continued to be perpetrated but there was no improvement in Sungeeta's condition. Notwithstanding, Sungeeta and her family converted to Christianity.

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Subtle Messages Versus The Soul Of Indian Culture

A schoolboy asked his grandfather, who had spent his formative years in India, "What do you think you had as a child, that children today are missing?"

The grandfather replied, "Simplicity – simple living, a calm peaceful atmosphere, without any exposure to violent and vulgar shows, movies and videos."

This is a reflection on how life has changed in modern times, here as well as in India. In the article, 'Learning to kill for fun', published in the magazine section of Hindu on December 23, 2007, Mini Krishnan writes, "Children are natural imitators and the law of Nature is that the young grow up watching and subconsciously mimicking and following their elders. ...

"When by implication and through the toy-market we announce to children that it is perfectly all right and even admirable to demonize imaginary people and develop a killer-instinct about them, we are saying that for no clear reason 'they' that is 'some persons' need to be destroyed."

Researchers may argue that all this is imagination - just for fun. However, the consequences of these violent and vulgar games and videos are less than desirable.

Mini Krishnan continues, "The training received by the virtual game kicks in and the phantom mentor in the game who instructed you to pick up a gun pushes its virtual 'get set go!' call through the centre of your consciousness."

A number of games and shows promote the culture of consumerism. They imply that the more you possess, more successful and happy you will be. Commenting on this aspect of our lives, the author remarks, "It seems we have sent out many signals about how to be 'happy', being 'successful' financially and materially. We have succeeded splendidly in that department of the time-table of life but have been rather negligent of the spiritual and imaginative training of our children."

It is ironic that we Indians who migrated to this country have focused on the material aspects of our culture rather than on the soul of Indian philosophy.

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Two Sides Of A Coin

Our practice of nonviolence entails that we should nurture the physical and mental development of our children. Here is an item that is relevant in this respect.

An article, 'Virtual Fitness', published in the Hindustan Times of December 23, 2007, reports, "Pop science writer Steven Johnson's claim that video games sharpen brains by offering a cognitive workout that hones concentration, forward planning, lateral thinking, and sustained problem-solving skills, has made a bestseller of *Everything Bad Is Good for You*."

This is true to some extent in certain instances. However, the opposite effect of video games is also observed as is evident from the following quotes from the same article:

"Too many children end up exercising only their thumbs and fingers these days. Weight issues are usually the first health problem parents of inactive children have to contend with,' says nutritionist Rekha Sharma. ... She gets several young patients who are ready to do anything to lose weight, except give up their television and gaming time.

"As the chief dietitian at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Sharma had done a series of studies on obesity in children over the past decade. 'Most children and adolescents spend an average of three to four hours a day playing video games or watching television at home. Schools just have two games period a week, so most children get almost no physical activity at all,' she says.

"Playing video games for several hours every day has been shown to decrease school performance, increase aggression, raise obesity, induce epileptic seizures, and causes postural, muscular and skeletal disorders such as tendonitis, nerve compression, and carpal tunnel syndrome. Though these effects are not likely to occur in most children who usually don't spend more than a couple of hours playing games each day, parents need to be concerned about two things: the amount of time spent playing, and the content of the games played."