

Vedanta and Modern Science

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Abstract

Vedanta- Universal religion is becoming scientific in its approach. Of all the scripture of the world, it is one scripture the teaching of which is in entire harmony with the results that have been attained by the modern scientific investigations of external nature. In recent times, many scholars studied Vedanta from scientific purpose and drew some parallels. Today, many great scientists and thinkers- Albert Einstein, Swami Vivekananda etc have recognized and asserted this truth. Satyamev Jayate, the motto of Indian republic is taken from the ancient Indian scriptures, Mundaka Upanishad. As the primary source of Vedanta is Upanishads, it is the proof of relation between Vedanta and Science. Their aim is at studying what is experienced by man and the universe of man's experiences. Ranganathanada, a representative of scientific era, tries to find out the similarities between the teachings of Advaita Vedanta and the postulates of the different branches of modern science like physics, psychology and neurology. Vivekananda recognized the tie between Vedanta and science many years ago. He realized that truth and thought that the relation between Vedanta and science should be made known to the world, especially to India.

Keywords: Vedanta, Mundaka, Advaita, Upanishad, Science.

Introduction

Vedanta, the base of Indian philosophy means the end or the conclusion of the Vedas. Traditionally, Vedanta has two definitions- first is in the reference to the end part of the Vedas and second is about the particular school or philosophy of Hinduism. Thus the last portions of the Vedas- the Upanishads and the principles or philosophy propounded in them are called Vedanta. In recent times, many scholars studied Vedanta from scientific purpose and drew some parallels. Ranganathanada, a representative of scientific era, tries to find out the similarities between the teachings of Advaita Vedanta and the postulates of the different branches of modern science like physics, psychology and neurology. He says that the goal of both Vedanta and science is seeking truth. He visited many countries and propagated the fact that the ancient sages of India had attempted to provide satisfactory explanations regarding cosmic evolution and organic evolution, thousands of years ago before the origin of modern science. Today, many great scientists and thinkers- Albert Einstein, Swami Vivekananda etc have recognized and asserted this truth. Satyamev Jayate, the motto of Indian republic is taken from the ancient Indian scriptures, Mundaka Upanishad. As the primary source of Vedanta is Upanishads, it is the proof of relation between Vedanta and Science. Their aim is at studying what is experienced by man and the universe of man's experiences. These disciplines generally have contradictory theories on the topics of the origin of universe, its existence etc as well as the mind, its function and so on. These topics are correlated to the theories of Vedanta and study reveals that the concepts of science are contained within the domain of Vedanta.

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with the results that have been attained by the modern scientific investigations of external nature. As in science, Vedanta looks into the nature of reality. In a modern sense, Vedanta can be defined as the study of the gross and subtle aspects of the universe in which we live to understand our purpose in it and our relationship with it. The theory of the universe as propounded in Vedanta has striking similarities with scientific theories. It is true that Vedic literature lacks technical details in several aspects, yet these theories project a generalized perspective of the perpetual process of creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universe in a cyclic order. Today such cyclic cosmological theories have become a subject of great interest to cosmologist and astrophysicists. Moreover, predictions made by Swami Vivekananda on the basis of Vedanta and his own experiences are being confirmed. The conversion of mass to energy and energy to mass, which happens to be significant contribution of Albert Einstein, had been proposed by Swami ji a few years before by scientist¹. Moreover, the inseparability of space and time in Einstein's special theory of relativity had also been predicted by the great Swami Ji before the scientific theory was published. Swami ji said: 'The one peculiar attribute we find in time, space and causation is that they cannot exist separate from other things'².

Swami ji was the first Vedantist who tried to bring together Vedanta cosmogony and scientific cosmology. His concepts of Akasha, universal matter and Prana, universal force impressed the renowned scientists and thinkers of his times. Nikolo Tesla, the scientists, who invented alternating currents, was, in 1895, "working a good deal now upon the cosmology and eschatology of the Vedanta. I clearly see their perfect union with modern science, and elucidation of the one will be followed by that of the others."³ Tesla was fascinated by how the teachings of an ancient religion seemed to fit so well with the discoveries of modern science and even met with Swami Vivekananda in order to discuss his findings, "that force and matter are reducible to potential energy." When comparing the Samkhya theory from the Vedas, which implies that matter is made up of energy, to science, Prana translates to energy and Akasha translates to matter, terms which Tesla used frequently after he studied Vedic science. Swami Vivekananda also was hoping that Tesla would be able to prove the Samkhya theory, as this would bring the Vedas and Hinduism into the world of spotlight.

Swami Vivekananda believed that science and Vedic spirituality were not mutually exclusive and should fit together, especially since Vedas contains numerous scientific theories and also that religion simply answered different questions related about the universe. Just as the Vedas affirm, the universe has days and nights that last for billions of years and appear and disappear cyclically with long intervals in between. We also know that Time is relative to the world in which it functions. The Vedas confirm it. We also know from science that the universe has numerous aspects and dimensions, which are mathematically or rationally indescribable and incomprehensible to the human mind. Just as the Vedas affirms that there are gods

¹ see Swami Tathagatananda, 'Swami Vivekananda's search for a mathematical Demonstration of the unity of existence', Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture (January, 2010) II.

² The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, 9 Vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989; 2.135.

³ Complete works, Vol.V, Fifth edition, 1347,p.77.

and demons in the world above and below, science suggest that the universe is filled with numerous worlds of light and darkness and positive and negative energies. If there is matter in some parts of the universe, there is anti-matter in some parts. We also know now that existence is not possible and creation would not have happened without such dualities.

Just as the Vedas state that the body and soul are different, science confirms that the body is seat of consciousness, which can hypothetically be separated from the body and eternally stored in a suitable environment. As in Vedanta, science also recognizes that Nature is a dependent reality of the universe and subject to numerous modifications, movements and transformations. From the Vedas we learn that creation began billions of years ago. It is now corroborated by modern science. Both Science and Vedanta should go hand in hand to understand the universe. Albert Einstein in his book 'Science and Religion' – 'Science can denature plutonium but it cannot denature evil in the heart of man.'⁴ Raganathananda says that scientists are aware that there is certain underlying principle behind the whole world and earth and some of the scientists call it 'Prime Matter'. Many of the Indian sages also have reached such conclusion and named the underlined principle of the Universe as 'Brahman'. Vedanta or the Upanishads considers Brahman which is derived from the root 'Brh' means to expand as the primary energy behind the universe. The Brahman has the vibration or Spanda before the world was projected. Vedanta and modern science are also so close in spirit and temper that even in the field of cosmology the connection is clear. The postulate behind both Science and Vedanta is a self evolving cause. Vedanta calls this cause Brahman. Science also states about this cause but has not named it. The truth found out in the Upanishads is impersonal, so also in science. This is because they are universal and give an insight into the nature of the world.

The aim of Vedanta is the ultimate truth. The truth in Vedanta can be understood only by freeing the bondage of mind. When mind is freed, it indulges in the search of the self and thereby reaches the stage where the self and the 'Atma' become one. The process of uniting the self and the Atma is done by both external and internal nature of man. Science, which is also in the pursuit of truth, in the earlier age, was aimed at studying external things rather than the internal things of man because science is the seeking of truth by fore-going personal passions. Even in the field of science, the study of truth is divided into many departments or branches. The ultimate aim of all these departments is to find the inside into knowledge and to control external knowledge. We can say that in science a question can be answered with the help of many departments but all of them brush the external nature only. By including or attaching Vedanta to it, the problem can be solved from the inner nature too. The tendency in modern education to treat humanities and the sciences as mutually exclusive disciplines is giving place to the Vedanta awareness that they are complementary to each other. If science and Vedanta were studied together more frequently, it is possible that an increasing number of scientific and theological ideas could be created. The scientific method limits itself to the empirical realm and believes that there is nothing beyond the empirical truth. But the reality is that beyond the science, this trans-empirical domain is captured by the Vedanta philosophy.

⁴ Albert Einstein, Science and Religion, London, Oxford Press, 1954, p.91.

Science is a vast subject and Vedanta too. Vivekananda recognized the tie between Vedanta and science many years ago. He realized that truth and thought that the relation between Vedanta and science should be made known to the world, especially to India. According to him, the system of education should be founded on the basis of Vedanta and science. Ranganathananda explains Vivekananda's suggestion in these words- "In all educational training, we need to grasp the fundamentals of science and Vedanta. This will make the student modern and progressive in the true sense of term, and through it, he will enter a stream of thought which is destined to fertilize every section of Indian life in the course of time. The people in the Indian villages, whom educated youths, will be called upon to serve in some field or other, need to teach the essentials and the utility of both science and Vedanta. If, in the course of their education, these youths are able to get clear understanding of this vital subject, it will make them more efficient in life and work and will enrich their personalities. Thus, they will be a source of strength to all whom they may come into contact with in the course of their life and career." India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, too accepted this idea and said that first of all our country needs a system of education based on both science and spirituality. Nehru's successors also appreciated this and have tried to follow his views even to this day. Man must have knowledge about his existence as well as the environment in which he lives. In short external and internal knowledge is a must for a human being. So, science and Vedanta must go hand in hand. If science and the Vedas were studied together more frequently, it is possible that an increasing number of scientific and theological ideas could be created. In the modern time too, Vedanta stands as a relevant philosophy by directing humanity to their welfare.

Conclusion:

This was the beginning of a new age: both Vedanta and Science are blissful pursuits towards the goal, which is absolute Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. The goal of a Vedantist and scientists, which is acquired when one disciplines his mind acquiring the mental abilities such as concentration, objectivity, detachment and penetration. It is then that we are able to perceive the natural truths. Further the subject matter of both science and Vedanta is the experience of man and his fellowmen. Hence both Vedanta and Science could give the world a true and rational knowledge about the realities on the earth and in the world. So the seeking of Vedantist and Scientist is complementary.

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3. See 'Metalogic' in Encyclopaedia Britannica (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2009).
4. Russell's Paradox: a logical paradox stated in terms of set theory, concerning the set of all sets that do not contain themselves as members, namely that the condition for it to contain itself is that it should not contain itself—see New Oxford Dictionary of English (Oxford: Oxford University, 2000).
5. See Swami Atmapriyananda, 'Understanding Bhāvamukha: Sri Ramakrishna's Unique State of Consciousness', Prabuddha Bharata, 116/1 (January 2012).
6. Ranganathananda, The Universal Message of the Bhagavat Gita, Vol-I. p.122.