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Department of English

Dr. K.N. Modi University, Newai, Rajasthan, India.



Returning to the Ethico-Spiritual Roots: A Study from Head to Heart in Sundar Sarukkai's *What is Science?*

Munesh Yadav

Assistant Professor

Government College for Women Narnaul, Haryana.

E-mail:- mymunesh@gmail.com

Abstract: In today's world we are misusing scientific and technological knowledge indiscreetly and greedily for material benefits. With the help of this highly developed science and technology, we exploit natural resources for material benefits which cause imbalances that make it difficult to maintain natural harmony. No doubt we have developed a rational and intelligent being within us but the problem is how to convert this intelligent being into spiritual being. The excessive exploitation of nature and unethical shape of development indicating environmental hazard immediately demand ethical and spiritual restraints. If we have a quest of creating peace and harmony on this globe, we will have to seek accord between spirituality and science. The new age mentality of the West and the westernized Orientals in the present day world also have a desire to move towards the harmonized and unified vision of science and spirituality for the sustainability of the mother earth. The relationship between spirituality and science is of paramount importance in this world in which the most inspired age of science is attempting to get power and dominance over nature. The world may take us to dross if our spiritual eye remains closed. Consequently a holistic view of knowledge must be created which is essential for sustainable development and happy survival of mankind in the lap of the Mother Earth. The proper understanding and blending of science and spirituality can provide solution to this problem as Sundar Sarukkai's in depth insight in his seminal work *What is Science* has reflected upon it.

Key Words: Culture, Epistemology, Ethics, Science, Spirituality, Technology.

Sundar Sarukkai, a physicist and philosopher, is well versed in Indian and Western philosophical traditions. With deep ecological insight he regards science as a charitable



activity, therefore, scientists should act as guardian against misappropriation of science. Inextricably intertwined relationship between science and spirituality is centuries old. Before the beginning of the modern science, scientists had to look to religion for validation but now the situation is reverse as religion has to seek legitimacy from science to exhibit its soundness. Both science and literature reveal truth through their different ways of storytelling as Sarukkai in *What is Science* states that “Stories are a particular way of describing truth-scientific stories describe certain kind of truth in a particular manner and literature often describes other kinds of truth in a different manner” (21-22).

The spiritual understanding demands a serious kind of concentration in the form of meditation both in the field of social and applied sciences as Albert Einstein remarks that “Cosmic religious feeling is the strongest and noblest motive for scientific researches” and further highlighting the contribution of science to spiritualization, he asserts that “Science not only purifies the religious impulse of the dross of its anthropomorphism but also contributes to a religious spiritualization of our understanding” (Einstein 39-49).

Science is not only confined to creating and using knowledge, but on account of its multi-facetedness, it has inherently social and political character as its technology passes into the hands of politicians/ government from where it seeks financial assistance. Moreover, with the sophisticated and highly developed instruments and technology, perception of the unobservables like DNA, stem cells, genes, electrons etc. are being examined through indirect perception-instrumentation. Thus science shows important distinction between appearance and reality as Sarukkai remarks “There is always something underlying everything that we see and our perception is only the surface impression of the world”(112). Over centuries, science is attempting “to appropriate the notions of reality, truth and knowledge within its domain and activities.” Literature is also striving for reality “with fiction, myth and imagination”(117). Novitz (1987) also argues that literature is an important source of knowledge about the real world. Moreover, literature provides knowledge which is ‘richer and more varied’ than the empirical science.



Sarukkai says that “Science understands the world in order to intervene in it, to ‘reform’ the world to suit our needs and desires” (177). Thus science moves from the ‘pure’ to ‘applied’ domain through technology which may be used for either good or evil purpose. From biological point of view, our impulses as biological imperatives related to biological traits and processes make morality natural through culture, hence ethics becomes a product of long ‘evolutionary process’. This moral knowledge justified in the scientific sense will lead to wiser decisions. This will lead to an intrinsic connection between non- violence and ethics which we find in the Buddhist, the Jainas as well as in Gandhiji’s idea of non-violence. But the ideas prevailing at the time regarding science and ethics are completely localized to a specific Western mindset which is contrary to ideal scientific methods. Therefore, in science the stress should be on virtue- epistemology and curiosity should not be coupled with pride and lust because knowledge acquired through vice and vanity becomes contaminated. Thus curiosity should be taken as positive virtue for positive end. Linguistically curiosity sprouts from ‘care’ and ‘cure’, hence it should be caring and curing towards non-humans and other cultures. Therefore, the richest life is one that combines the religious and secular notions of curiosity leading to positive virtue. So in Science there should be a self- regulative and self-restraint process with ethics of general pragmatic and empirical view as we find in Indian classical traditions as Bhattacharya (1958) shows how in Indian philosophy ‘ethics and metaphysics are inextricably connected’. It shows, as Sarukkai thinks, that “ethics is fundamentally ingrained into any activity since the normative is essential to every kind of physical, intellectual or spiritual act” (201).

The dominant intellectual culture of the modern world is scientific in spirit. There is also a trend to move towards religion in societies having scientific and technological character simultaneously expressing a deepening sense of unease among people about the benefits of modern science divorced from spirituality. In this way the scientific world is taking us to some hazards, therefore, some other ways of living are being sought for. Since religion has not been vanished from the consciousness of the people in any culture, therefore,



by removing the divorce between religion and science from the soul of the individual, the scientific and spiritual vision of divine culture is essentially required.

Science and technology should also be used to promote Pan-humanism which is inextricably linked to spiritualism, therefore, a close relation between science and spirituality is essentially required as Einstein in “Science, Philosophy and Religion: A Symposium” (1941) emphatically stated that “I am not conceived of a genuine scientist without that profound faith. The situation may be expressed by an image: science without religion is lame and religion without science is blind.” (Einstein, 46) Thus a proper understanding and harmonious relationship between the two will reflect an ideal culture in the modern techno-science world.

Modern science, being discursive of other different kinds of knowledge system, is dominantly Eurocentric in character. It arrogantly dismisses Indian logic as well as the notion of spirituality; therefore it is paternalistic and patriarchal embodying a male view of the world and knowledge. It is not inclusive as it does not consider philosophy seriously particularly issues related to truth and reality. Unbridled freedom cannot be regarded as innocent nor can freedom be unbridled as it is associated with responsibilities. Science being felicitator of society also has social responsibility of idealizing the world through all kinds of change.

Of course, modern societies feel deeply indebted to modern science for its growth and sustenance as these societies are predominantly scientific and technological in character. The political strength and economic systems are basically dependent on scientific and technological development. But human beings caught within the eddies of contemporary science in the name of specialization are moving away from the holistic notion of the knowledge and the world as a whole as they are distancing themselves from spirituality.

Technological culture is about speed, efficiency and control as we see in computer and mobile phones technology. Change is at great speed and no doubt, evolution of society fundamentally lies in change which rests on the growth of science and technology. There is something leading to natural progressions of humanity but something is also unnatural coming out of modern science and technology including many kinds of forces ranging from



market economy to waging war. But it does not mean that we should wish science and technology let away which will be against the pragmatic path of progressive thinking. Therefore, the solution is to humanize science and technology by combining it to literature, arts and music so that the mysterious experience of the spiritual world may be validated in the light of science as the eminent scientist, Albert Einstein in *Ideas and Opinions* asserts; “The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. Whoever does not know it and can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is as good as dead, and his eyes are dimmed” (11).

Thus the integrated vision of spirituality and science projects holistic view of knowledge for the betterment and welfare of the world as a whole and this article is also an attempt to contribute in this sublime goal.

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