

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S SYNTHESIS OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION—3

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

THE VEDĀNTIC VIEW OF EVOLUTION

The Vedānta views the entire evolutionary process as progressive evolution of structure and form, and as greater and greater manifestation of the infinite Self within. It is evolution of matter and manifestation of spirit. Twentieth century biology recognizes, in the first appearance of living organisms, the emergence, in rudimentary form, of the spiritual value of awareness.

This spiritual value of awareness grows, as it were, in richness and variety as we move up the evolutionary ladder. The evolution of the nervous system discloses progressive development of awareness in depth and range, and consequent increase in the grip of the organism on its environment.

This awareness achieves a new and significant dimension with the appearance of man on the evolutionary scene. The field of awareness of all other organisms is, largely, the external environment and also, to a small extent, the interior of their bodies—the *without* of nature. Man alone has awareness of the self, along with awareness of the not-self, of both the *within* and *without* of nature.

That is the uniqueness of man, according to both twentieth century biology and ancient Vedānta. Self-awareness, which nature achieved through the evolution of the human organism, is a new dimension of awareness containing tremendous implications for man's destiny as much as for his philosophy of nature.

The Vedāntic view of evolution and of

man's uniqueness finds a classic statement in the *Bhāgavata* (XI. ix. 28):

*Sṛṣṭvā purāṇi vividhānyajayātmaśaktyā
Vṛkṣān sarīśrpapaśūn lchagadamśa-
matsyān;*

*Taistaiḥ atuṣṭahṛdayaḥ puruṣam vidhāya
Brahmāvalokadhīṣṇaṇaṁ mudam apa-
devaḥ—*

'The divine One, having projected (evolved) with His own inherent power various forms such as trees, reptiles, cattle, birds, insects, and fish, was not satisfied at heart with forms such as these; He then projected the human form endowed with the capacity to realize Brahman (the universal divine Self of all), and became extremely pleased.'

INDIA'S URGE: REALIZATION AND NOT MERE SPECULATION

Evolution has revealed that the mystery of existence stirs in man as the mystery of the self. The mystery of the universe will ever remain a mystery until this mystery of the self is cleared. Till then all our conclusions about the truth of the universe proceeding from science or philosophy, theology or logic, will be speculative ventures yielding mere postulates and conjectures. The Indian mind was not content to remain at the stage of speculation or conjecture in so important a field as the knowledge of the ultimate truth. Her thinkers boldly penetrated into the world within, taking the facts of awareness and the ego as the clue, as *footprints*, in the words of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (I. iv. 7); and when they penetrated to the

depth, they discovered the infinite and the eternal behind the finite and the time-bound. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (III. iv. 1) registers this approach, and the object of its search, in another significant passage :

*Yat sāṅśāt aparokṣāt Brahma ya Ātmā
sarvāntarah—*

'The Brahman that is immediate and direct—the Self that is within all.'

'That thou art' (*Tat tvam asi*), proclaims the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (VI. viii. 7). Again and again, the Upaniṣads reiterate this great Truth. If man as scientist has such a profound dimension that he can comprehend the vast universe in a formula given by his thought, what must be the dimension of man as the Ātman, the unchangeable, infinite Self? The mystery of the universe was finally resolved through the discovery of the solution to the mystery within man himself. The sages of the Upaniṣads discovered the centre of the universe in the heart of man. Through that discovery, man was revealed in his infinite dimension; and the universe was also revealed in all its spiritual glory. Realization of this truth is the only way to life-fulfilment, say the Upaniṣads. Says the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (II. 15):

*Yadātmatattvena tu Brahmatattvam
Dīpōpamēna yuktah prapāsyet;
Ajām dhruvam sarvatattvaih viśuddham
Jñātvā devaṁ mucyate sarvapāpaih—*

'When the self-controlled spiritual aspirant realizes in this very body the truth of Brahman (absolute Existence) through the truth of the Ātman (Self), self-luminous as light, then, knowing the Divinity which is unborn, eternal, and untouched by the modifications of nature, he is freed from all sins.'

This was a profound, joyous discovery, as can be seen even from the language in

which it is couched in the Upaniṣads. In reaching the ultimate Truth of the Ātman, they had reached also the ultimate of knowledge and awareness, peace and joy. Hence they communicated their discovery as the discovery of the inexhaustible mine of *satyam* (truth), *jñānam* (awareness), and *anantam* (infinite), or of *sat* (existence), *cit* (knowledge) and *ānanda* (bliss). In the struggle to realize this truth and the life-fulfilment it involves, they saw the true meaning of the entire course of cosmic evolution, especially of human evolution.

The organism seeks fulfilment; that is the end and aim of all its activities and processes, says modern biology. In the Upaniṣads, we have the beautiful concepts of *mukti*, freedom, and *pūrṇatā*, fullness. We are bound now; we want to become integral, we must experience fullness. Jesus Christ calls it 'perfection': 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' (Matthew v. 48) To experience the delight of freedom, to enlarge the bounds of man's awareness, to get *bodhi*, complete enlightenment, as the Buddha expressed it, is the great aim of human evolution. Education, science, culture, socio-political processes, and religion are meant to increase and enlarge the bounds of this awareness and the range and depth of this fulfilment, by increasing man's knowledge of and control over not only the outside world but also the deep recesses within himself. Knowledge is power in the positive sciences; it is still more so in the science of religion, the science of the inner nature of man, where the power that is gained is not only greater in terms of quantity but also higher in terms of quality.

While living as a prisoner in St. Helena, Napoleon made this significant confession:

'There are in the world two powers—the sword and the spirit. The spirit has

always vanquished the sword.

'Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I founded great empires. But upon what did the creation of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded his empire upon love, and to this very day, millions would die for him.'

VIVEKANANDA AND A SCIENCE OF HUMAN POSSIBILITIES

India developed religion as a science, as what Julian Huxley calls 'a science of human possibilities'. In this connexion, I can do no better than quote a significant passage from Swami Vivekananda; though rather long, it is worth quoting in full in view of its relevance.

In his speech on 'The Powers of the Mind' delivered in Los Angeles, California, on January 8, 1900, Swami Vivekananda said:

'Now, I shall tell you a theory, which I will not argue now, but simply place before you the conclusion. Each man in his childhood runs through the stages through which his race has come up; only the race took thousands of years to do it, while the child takes a few years. The child is first the old savage man, and he crushes a butterfly under his feet. The child is at first like the primitive ancestors of his race. As he grows, he passes through different stages until he reaches the development of his race. Only he does it swiftly and quickly. Now, take the whole of humanity as a race; or take the whole of the animal creation, man and the lower animals, as one whole. There is an end towards which the whole is moving. Let us call it perfection.

'Some men and women are born who anticipate the whole progress of mankind. Instead of waiting and being reborn over and over again for ages until the whole human race has attained to that perfection, they, as it were, rush through them in

a few short years of their life. And we know that we can hasten these processes, if we be true to ourselves. If a number of men, without any culture, be left to live upon an island, and are given barely enough food, clothing, and shelter, they will gradually go on and on, evolving higher and higher stages of civilization. We know, also, that this growth can be hastened by additional means.

'We help the growth of trees, do we not? Left to nature they would have grown, only they would have taken a longer time; we help them to grow in a shorter time than they would otherwise have taken. We are doing all the time the same thing, hastening the growth of things by artificial means. Why cannot we hasten the growth of man? We can do that as a race. Why are teachers sent to other countries? Because, by these means, we can hasten the growth of races. Now, can we not hasten growth of individuals? We can. Can we put a limit to the hastening? We cannot say how much a man can grow in one life. You have no reason to say that this much a man can do and no more. Circumstances can hasten him wonderfully. Can there be any limit then, till you come to perfection? So, what comes of it? That a perfect man, that is to say, the type that is to come of this race, perhaps millions of years hence, that man can come today. And this is what the *yogins* say, that all great incarnations and prophets are such men; that they reached perfection in this one life. We have had such men at all periods of the world's history and at all times. Quite recently, there was such a man (Sri Ramakrishna) who lived the life of the whole human race and reached the end even in this life.

'Even this hastening of the growth must be under laws. Suppose we can investigate these laws and understand their secrets and apply them to our own needs; it follows

that we grow. We hasten our growth, we hasten our development, and we become perfect, even in this life. This is the higher part of our life, and the science of the study of mind and its powers has this perfection as its real end. Helping others with money and other material things and teaching them how to go on smoothly in their daily life are mere details.

'The utility of this science is to bring out the perfect man, and not let him wait and wait for ages, just a plaything in the hands of the physical world, like a log of drift-wood carried from wave to wave and tossing about in the ocean. This science wants you to be strong, to take the work in your own hand, instead of leaving it in the hands of nature, and get beyond this little life. That is the great idea.' (*The Complete Works*, Vol. II, pp. 18-19, 9th edition)

THE VEDĀNTIC MESSAGE OF STRENGTH AND FEARLESSNESS

Spiritual knowledge confers on man infinite strength and fearlessness. That is the best proof of its truth and utility. Referring to this, Swami Vivekananda said in his lecture on 'Vedānta and Its Application to Indian Life' delivered in Madras in 1897 :

'And in my mind rises from the past the vision of the great emperor of the West, Alexander the Great, and I see, as it were in a picture, the great monarch standing on the banks of the Indus, talking to one of our *sannyāsins* (monks) in the forest; the old man he was talking to, perhaps naked, stark naked, sitting upon a block of stone, and the Emperor, astonished at his wisdom, tempting him with gold and honour to come over to Greece. And this man smiles at his gold, and smiles at his temptations, and refuses; and then the Emperor standing on his authority as an Emperor, says, "I will kill you, if you do

not come", and the man bursts into a laugh and says, "You never told such a falsehood in your life as you tell just now. Who can kill me? *Me* you kill, Emperor of the material world! Never! For I am Spirit unborn and undecaying; never was I born and never do I die; I am the Infinite, the Omnipresent, the Omniscient; and you kill me, child that you are!" That is strength, that is strength.' (*ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 237-8, 8th edition)

Swami Vivekananda also gives as illustration of spiritual strength the example of an Indian monk who was stabbed by an English soldier during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. The Indian soldiers captured this English soldier and brought him before the dying monk to be identified and, if identified, offered to kill him in revenge. But the monk, who had realized his Self and his oneness with all beings, seeing his assailant before him, broke his silence of fifteen years to say to his murderer with his dying breath and in a tone suffused with love: 'And Thou also art He.'

The strength and fearlessness of Socrates in the face of death, and his gentleness, had its source in his spiritual knowledge. When Crito asked him: 'In what way shall we bury you, Socrates?', Socrates answered: 'In any way you like, but first you must catch *me*, the real me. Be of good cheer, my dear Crito, and say that you are burying my body only, and do with *that* whatever is usual and what you think best.' (*Dialogues of Plato*, Vol. I. p. 474, Jowett's edition, 1953)

If man is to live a true life, if he is to achieve real life-fulfilment, he has to manifest the infinite Self within him by controlling and transcending his lower self, his finite sense-bound nature. There is a technique for achieving this, and the religions of the world tell us about it with varying degrees of clarity. *But in India alone did this subject receive a treatment*

at once scientific and thorough in its spirit and methods, and impersonal and universal in its results and applications.

SCIENCE AND VEDĀNTA COMPLEMENTARY

Religion so expounded has a message for all humanity. Science through its technology may build for man a first class house, and equip it with radio, television, and other gadgets; the social security measures of a welfare state may provide him with everything necessary for a happy, fulfilled life in this world, and even, through the state church, in the world beyond; the man himself may give his house such arresting names as 'Śānti Kunj' (Peace Retreat), or 'Happy Villa'. Yet none of these can ensure that he will live in that house in peace or happiness. For that depends, to a large extent, on another source of strength and nourishment, another type of knowledge and discipline—the knowledge and discipline proceeding from religion. If man can have the help of the positive sciences to create a healthy external environment, and the help of the science of spirituality to create a healthy internal environment, he can hope to achieve total life-fulfilment; not otherwise. This is the view of the Upaniṣads.

But today this is not the picture that modern civilization presents. Man in this technological civilization is feeling inwardly impoverished and empty in an environment of wealth, power, and pleasure; he is full of tension and sorrow, doubt and uncertainty, all the time. Juvenile delinquency, drunkenness, suicide, and a variety of other maladies are ever on the increase. Why? Because man is not inwardly satisfied; he is smitten with ennui and boredom arising from the limitations of his sense-bound *Weltanschauung*. Indian thinkers foresaw this predicament of modern man ages ago. Says the *Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (VI. 20):

*Yadā caṁmavad ālōśam veṣṭayīṣyanti
mānavāḥ;*

*Tadā Devam aviṣṇāya dukkhasyānto
bhaviṣyati—*

'Men may (through their technical skill) roll up the sky like a piece of leather; still there will be no end of sorrow for them without realizing the luminous One within.'

Schopenhauer said a hundred years ago:

'All men who are secure from want and care, now that at last they have thrown off all other burdens, become a burden to themselves.' (*The World as Will and Idea*, Vol. I, p. 404)

Today, man is his own major burden and problem. He can tackle and solve this problem not by going in for more positivistic science, more technology, more life's amenities, more socio-political manipulation of human conditions, but by the cultivation of the science of religion, by the understanding and practice of this science. Said Swami Vivekananda: 'You must bear in mind that religion does not consist in talk, or doctrines, or books, but in realization; it is not learning but *being*.' (*The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 35, 8th edition)

It is in this sense that India understood religion: and it is this idea of religion that Swami Vivekananda expounded in the West and the East through his powerful voice. The end and aim of religion, as our ancient teachers put it, is the experience, *anubhava*, of God, through the steady growth in man's spiritual awareness. *That is the touchstone of religion.* There is such a thing as the spiritual growth of the individual, step by step. We experience this growth, just as we see a building rising up step by step, brick by brick. When we live the life of religion, strength comes to us, consciousness becomes enlarged, sympathies grow and widen, and we feel that we are

growing into better men. It is only the strength that proceeds from such inward growth and development that will enable man to digest and assimilate the energies released by the progress of science. Such a one alone has the strength and wisdom to convert the chaos of life into a pattern of happiness and general welfare. If religion is taken away from society, what remains is simple barbarism. Ancient civilizations were destroyed by barbarians bred outside those civilizations. But modern civilization, if it is to go the same way, will be destroyed by barbarians bred within the civilization itself. What can save us from this predicament is a little 'Christian love' in our hearts for our neighbours, in the words of Bertrand Russell (*Impact of Science on Society*, p. 114), or a little more altruism, in the words of Pitirim A. Sorokin of Harvard University (*Reconstruction of Humanity*, especially part V). This love comes from the *practice* of religion, as defined by Swami Vivekananda and other great teachers of the world. Says Vivekananda: 'Religion is the manifestation of the divinity already in man.' (*The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 358, 8th edition) Again: 'Him I call a *mahātman* (great soul) whose heart bleeds for the poor, otherwise he is a *durātman* (wicked soul).' (*ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 58, 7th edition)

That is the function of religion; the finite man reaches out to the infinite man. No other discipline can give this education to man.

'Now comes the question, can religion really accomplish anything?', asked Swami Vivekananda, and proceeded to answer:

'It can. It brings to man eternal life. It has made man what he is and will make of this human animal a god. That is what religion can do. Take religion from human society and what will remain? Nothing but a forest of brutes. Sense-happiness is

not the goal of humanity. Wisdom (*jñāna*) is the goal of all life. We find that man enjoys his intellect more than an animal enjoys its senses; and we see that man enjoys his spiritual nature even more than his rational nature. So the highest wisdom must be this spiritual knowledge. With this knowledge will come bliss.' (*ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 4, 8th edition)

CONCLUSION

Understood in this light, there is no conflict between science and religion. Both have the identical aim of helping man to grow in spirituality, of ushering in a better social order which alone can provide him with the stimulus to total life-fulfilment. Each by itself is insufficient and helpless. They have been tried separately with unsatisfactory results. The old civilizations took guidance solely from religion; their achievements were partial and limited. Modern civilization relies solely on science; its achievements also have turned out to be partial and limited. The combination today of the spiritual energies of these two complementary disciplines in the life of man will produce fully integrated human beings and thus help to evolve a complete human civilization for which the world is ripe and waiting. This is the most outstanding contribution of Swami Vivekananda to human thought today. This synthetic vision of his finds lucid expression in a brief but comprehensive testament of his Vedāntic faith:

'Each soul is potentially divine.

'The goal is to manifest this divine 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 the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples,

or forms, are but secondary details.' (ibid., Vol. I, p. 124, 11th edition)

The Vedānta expounded by Vivekananda as the synthesis of science and religion is also the synthesis of head and heart, of the classical and the romantic in the human heritage. The erstwhile tendency in modern education to treat the humanities and the sciences as mutually exclusive disciplines is giving place to the Vedāntic awareness that they are complementary to each other. Himself 'the personification of the harmony of all human energy', in the words of Romain Rolland which I have quoted at the beginning of this paper, Vivekananda has bequeathed to man, in a moving passage, his vision of the unity and synthesis of all human energy and aspiration. Making a prophetic reference to the future religion of humanity in the course of his

lecture on 'The Absolute and Manifestation' delivered in London in 1896, he said :

'In Buddha, we had the great universal heart, and infinite patience, making religion practical, and bringing it to everyone's door. In Śaṅkarācārya, we saw tremendous intellectual power, throwing the scorching light of reason upon everything. We want to-day that bright sun of intellectuality joined with the heart of Buddha, the wonderful, infinite heart of love and mercy. This union will give us the highest philosophy. Science and religion will meet and shake hands. Poetry and philosophy will become friends. This will be the religion of the future, and if we can work it out, we may be sure that it will be for all times and peoples.' (*The Complete Works*, Vol. II, p. 140, 10th edition)

VINOBA BHAVE: THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF HIS SOCIAL REFORMS—3

DR. JACQUES-ALBERT CUTTAT

(Continued from the previous issue)

Here lies the first major difficulty in the way of Vinobaism. If imperturbable patience, serenity in suffering, stoic acceptance of persecution, a natural disposition towards acts of unselfishness and universal goodwill, are Indian virtues which derive from non-violence, then it also has its counterpart in 'non-action', an ideal which is common to Buddhism as well as to Hinduism. This is admittedly a contemplative virtue, but it tends to promote in everyday life an attitude and a mentality that are asocial, even perhaps antisocial, that is to say, diametrically opposed

to the reform of Vinoba. Moreover, Vinoba incessantly exhorts his 'social workers' not to confuse non-violence with its many deceptive facets which might appear to resemble it; namely, indolence when it is necessary to act; submission when it is necessary to react; absence of initiative when it is necessary to invent; depreciation of time—this tendency so typically Indian of remaining the spectator—at the very moment when the temporal imposes urgent duties; insensitivity in the face of the needs of our fellow men; in short, passivity. There is no better way of sum-