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Age Group: College

Topic: The Science is a Verifiable Truth and so is the Sanatana Dharma

Religion and science tend to have a rocky relationship. From Galileo's execution in the sixteenth century to the fiery courtroom battles between creationists and evolutionists, people have always approached old-style religion with suspicion. However, there exists an ancient culture where scientists were not burned at the stake but rather celebrated and revered, a culture that welcomed questioning and encouraged experimentation. Hindu Dharma, also known as Sanatana Dharma or the eternal way of life, views science and spirituality not as conflicting but rather as supplementary.

Like science, Sanatana Dharma is driven by the fervent desire to know the truth of this world. While material sciences, such as biology and chemistry, seek to understand the physical world, Sanatana Dharma is the science of spirituality and seeks to understand the mind and self. It addresses fundamental scientific questions, such as: who am I, what is God, and what is my relationship with God. The beauty of science is that it is based on natural laws that can be tried and tested and do not discriminate. For instance, the law of gravity applies to everything in the same way. Santana Dharma is also about discovering these laws of nature that apply to everyone uniformly and universally. For example, the law of karma states that we always bear the consequences of our thoughts and actions; thus, we create our own destiny. This law applies equally to everyone and everything in the universe. As Krishna has shown in the Mahabharat by accepting the curse of Gandhari, even God cannot escape the results of his actions.

Hindu Dharma did not originate with a single prophet or at any particular point in time, but is rather based on the collective personal experiences of ancient scientists known as rishis. Their work method was scientific, empirical, and rooted in experimentation. Like any good scientific experiment, their experiments are replicable and can be verified by anyone, anywhere, and at any time – this is exactly what the word “sanatana” means: it was applicable in past, it was applicable today and it will be applicable in future. Over the years, many great souls have validated the truth of these spiritual teachings for themselves. In fact, the way to achieve spiritual

perfection is not by simply reading and hearing about spirituality, but through personal experience out of ones own actions. Blind faith has no place in Sanatana Dharma.

Such a scientific tradition was able to flourish because ancient India was an environment receptive to the collection of knowledge. The Rig Veda declares, “Let noble thoughts come to us from all directions.” The Hindu tradition embraces and encourages questioning and reasoning. For example, the Upanishads are structured as question-answer conversations between the disciple and teacher. In the 1800s, a young boy named Narendra constantly asked people whether they had seen God, only to receive negative answers. Only after Ramakrishna Paramahansa told him with confidence that he had seen God did Narendra accept Ramakrishna as his guru and grow to become the great Swami Vivekananda. It is because Hindu Dharma encourages questioning and dissent that it grew to become such a rich, all-encompassing culture.

Just as science has evolved and expanded over time, people have added to the knowledge base of Sanatana Dharma over time and continue to do so in the current time. Sanatana dharma is not static and continues to evolve. In a way Hindu dharma can be thought of as relentless pursuit of truth. There are mainly two categories of Hindu scriptures. The first are the Shrutis, which includes the Vedas and Upanishads, scriptures that are sanatana and abide forever. They are built on fundamental principles and natural laws about the nature of the self (Atman), the nature of God, and the Atman’s relationship with God. The Smritis deal with the practical application of these principles and include the Puranas and Agamas. The second category can change with time, place, and situation. Great saints and reformers, such as Shankaracharya, Madhavacharya, Buddha, and Mahavir, have appeared from time to time and added to the richness of the Hindu culture by reinterpreting and devising methods of social interactions according to the needs of society at that time. The fact that Hindu Dharma has this ability to change and evolve makes it scientific in nature.

The English writer Aldous Huxley once said, “All science is the reduction of multiplicities to unities.” Hindu thought encompasses this very idea. The theme of the Upanishads is to find the ultimate unity of things. The Mundaka Upanishad says, “Kismatinnu Bhagavo Vigyaate Sarvamidam Vigyaatam Bhavati - What is that by knowing which we know everything else?” The ancient rishis used the scientific method to seek principles that would unify and explain the whole of the human experience. The forest was their university, and their own mind was their laboratory. They used a discipline called yoga to concentrate their attention

inwards. They discovered that this unifying principle is consciousness, and its study is called brahmavidya, translated as both the supreme science and the science of the Supreme. They discovered that the innermost essence of our Self is the Atman, and that the Atman is no different from the ultimate reality, Brahman, the divine consciousness that permeates this entire universe.

The reason Hindu Dharma is Sanatana, or eternal, is because it is scientific in nature. Therefore, it is only natural that Vedic India was home to a flourishing scientific tradition. The ancient Hindus developed modern numerals, the decimal place system, zero, algebra, and trigonometry. Surgeons like Sushruta performed and perfected operations as complex as caesarian sections and cataract surgeries. Tremendous advances were made in the fields of metallurgy, astronomy, chemistry, and Ayurveda, a holistic healthcare system. The root of these great discoveries was the scientific spirit of Sanatana Dharma, a way of life that leads us to the discovery of ourselves and the whole universe.

Anant Garg – 7/28/2011 - 4:20 PM