



Science and Religion

The two are poles apart, argues **D.D. Bandiste**

INTEND TO present a novel contrast between science and religion, a contrast which, though evident, has not yet to my knowledge been pointed out by anyone. This contrast ensues from the different amount of empirical data science and religion contain. If the essential data of sciences are mostly empirical and objective in nature, the essential data of religion are mostly neither empirical nor objective. Many implications follow from this fact, but before discussing them it would be better to state briefly the nature of science and religion.

NATURE OF SCIENCE

Although there are both conceptual and behavioural sciences, for the present discussion I am taking only the natural sciences as my model. Hence I would say that science is an empirical attempt to understand some natural phenomenon in a systematic and comprehensive way.

Except for the horizon-areas, everything in science is empirical and objective in nature. There is nothing subjective or esoteric in the scientific attitude. This is why investigators of the same phenomenon, whether they belong to different times or different places, all arrive at roughly the same conclusions. Thus scientific knowledge is common for the whole world. Scientists try their best to eliminate the subjective element from the whole investigation.

NATURE OF RELIGION

The promise of absolute and ultimate liberation of the believer from every misery, limitation, bondage and worry is the essence of religion. This liberation is to be realised in some transcendental existence after death. As constituent factors of this liberation and as matters inseparably related to it, religions invariably accept the existence of God, soul, heaven, hell, divinity of the prophet, infallibility of scriptures, value

of faith and the efficacy of the prescribed path in equipping the believer for the coveted liberation. The important characteristic of all these essential constituents of religion are that they are all empirically unverifiable. Every religion contains elements which by their nature are unverifiable, whereas science mostly contains elements that are empirically verifiable. Thus in science faith is not at all necessary while in religion faith



alone is necessary. Whereas in religion only believers gain and doubters perish, in science only the doubters flourish and the believers perish.

It is a known psychological finding that in any knowledge situation the less the objective constraints the greater becomes the domination of subjective elements within it. This subjective element is of a wish-fulfilling and ego-satisfying nature. Since religion is a social phenomenon coming down from thousands of years, the subjective element dominant in it assumes not an individual but a communal form and is based upon the respective scriptures. And then what is the result?

What any particular religion says is completely satisfactory to its followers while it is not at all satisfactory to the followers of other religions. In our present multi-religious world the 'we' element dominates the believers' thinking. The orthodox belief invariably takes the form of 'ours' and 'theirs'. A sort of 'onlyism' comes to dominate it, implying that only we are good and are the

chosen ones of god. Every ardent believer moves in the cosmopolitan world as a proud representative of the only religion that is absolutely satisfactory. Since his scriptures are perfect in every way he does not have to learn anything from anyone; he has only to teach the others.

Now just the opposite is the approach of scientists. They are humble and eager to learn. As days pass our scientific knowledge improves and hence the golden days of science are in the future while those of religion are in the past. And, importantly, the question of satisfaction does not arise in sciences. What a scientist says is assessed on a true-false scale not a satisfactory-unsatisfactory scale. But, again, being satisfactory or not is decided in the religious sphere not in an impartial

way but on the basis of who is saying it. If we are, then ipso facto it is satisfactory and if they are, then ipso facto it is evil. All this ensues from the fact that sciences are intellectual pursuits while religions are emotionally satisfying pursuits. It appears as if science and religion inhabit two different worlds. The emotionally satisfying fantasy fortresses of religion are completely secure from what goes on in the empirical world. This is why scientific discoveries as such have no demolishing effect upon the various religious beliefs.

So much so that if in sciences proofs create beliefs, in religion beliefs create proofs. The Jains will offer tens of grounds for dining only during the day while a Muslim will offer an equal number of proofs for eating only during the night in the month of Ramzan. And none will yield even an inch of ground to the other. This does not happen in sciences. Scientists give up their beliefs if they are found to be false. Truth and beliefs also have a contrasting position in science and religion. If scientists