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Science and Spirituality are not two

Dr. Vijay Bhatkar is the father of India's first supercomputer, the Param 10,000. One of India's preeminent scientists, Dr. Bhatkar came from humble beginnings. Born in a small village with a population of about 300, in the state of Maharashtra, he studied in a village temple school, and later in the school of a great saint of Maharashtra, finally going on to earn his PhD. in 1972.

He is the Founder and Former Executive Director of the Center for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), member of the Scientific Advisory Committee to the Cabinet of the Indian government and recipient of the prestigious Padma Shri award. Currently the Chairman of Dishnet DSL Ltd., Dr. Bhatkar is also a member of the International Advisory Board - Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham (Amrita University).

For Amma's darshan Dr. Bhatkar visited the ashram on 2 September, 2003. Afterward, still glowing from the personal visit with Amma, he spent a few moments speaking with Amritapuri.org on a wide range of topics.

Om Namah Sivaya, Dr. Bhatkar. Thank you for allowing us this time. May we begin by asking how you first met Amma, and about your experiences with Her?

"Well, it's a very interesting thing. In 1994 I held Director positions in both Pune and Thiruvananthapuram, so I used to travel a lot. I was exhausted and needing to take some rest, so I went to Kozhikode for Ayurvedic treatment.

"As part of the treatment, one of the Ayurvedic doctors said that for some time I shouldn't talk. I said to him that I would then like to read some books. 'Have you heard about Amma?' he asked. I said no, so the next day he brought a book, Amma's biography, and presented it to me.

"When I was alone in the cottage, and I began reading. As I read about Amma's life, something started happening to me, something making me feel that I was very intimately connected to Amma. At that time I had a few experiences. For example, I would suddenly detect a lovely, otherworldly fragrance. It was distinctly different somehow, call it Divine if you will. Of course, being a scientist, I asked 'How? From where?'

"I continued reading, and developed an intense desire to meet Amma. This was a turning point in my life. It turned me from science to spirituality.

"The professor who was working with me at that time started with me from Thiruvananthapuram, as we were supposed to attend a meeting in Kozhikode. I said that this was auspicious, as on the way I could stop and see Amma!

"When we got there and I turned to the professor and said, 'Sir, I'll want four hours'. It was a (Devi Bhava) Sunday, and as we entered the ashram gate, we saw the *huge* crowd. The ashram grounds were teeming with people! I thought to myself that there would be no way I would be able to see Amma now, and I was feeling very sad, thinking that I'd have to go back.

"Just then, a young girl came up and started talking to us. When she learned that it was our

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first time she said, 'Come!' and took us into the temple, right to where Amma was giving darshan, and the next moment we were sitting next to Amma! Amma then hugged us, and spoke a few words in my ear, and told me to sit there near Her. That was my first experience with Amma.

"We sat for a few hours. Then, I told the professor that we'll be late for our Kozhikode meeting, and he agreed that now we should go ahead and leave. So we went. However, I soon turned to the professor and said, 'If you'll forgive me, but I'm not going to come with you. I'm staying here with Amma'. He didn't really like that, but I stayed at the ashram the whole night.

What made you stay behind?

"I strongly felt intimately connected to Amma. I had a craving, an aspiration to meet a Guru or great teacher, and Amma first came to me as the Guru in the form of that book. It is written that when you have this strong desire, then the Guru comes to you. So I just felt like this, that the Teacher has come to me, that the Guru has come to me.

So, how did that affect your life from then on?

"It completely changed my life! I was strongly geared toward science, technology, etc. Although I had a definite interest in Swami Vivekananda's thoughts, I would say that [spirituality] was still not the *basis* for my life. After meeting Amma, She became the foundation, the foundation of my life and work. So, that was a good change, the way I look at it.

"And, very interestingly, I began to develop the strong desire to know the basic nature of Reality! Of course, I would come back to the view from physics, as well as the spiritual point of view of what the Reality is. And it is in this context that suddenly I was introduced to a great philosopher of India, Jnaneshwari. I started looking for all the *shastric* views and the *Vidyasagara*, and all those main *granthas* and spiritual texts to be explained to me, and then met a teacher, who was old but still used to drive a great distance just to teach me in my own home! So there were a series of experiences like this.

"At the time, I was involved in the building of India's first supercomputer. Soon, this three year project turned into a five year project, which ran out of money just three and a half years into it. We weren't going to be able to finish building it, and I didn't know what to do! I knew that the only thing to make this happen would be Amma's grace. So, I grabbed all of my papers from my desk, and went straight to see Amma in Her Delhi ashram. In the darshan line, I said to Amma, 'Please help me Amma!' Amma held my face in Her hands, cradling my cheeks and said, 'Don't worry *mon* (son), it will be done. You will do it'.

"I left Amma's lap without a doubt in my mind. I came back to Pune to talk with my engineers. I called a meeting and told them 'it will be done'. But how? Nobody knew. Suddenly an idea flashed in one of my engineers' minds. We acted on the idea, and soon the money we needed - 20 crores Rs/— came!

"On the day of commitment it was announced in the Parliament, and on that very evening the machine was built and running. It worked beautifully. India had a super computer of her own".

Are there any other such experiences that you'd like to share with us?

"I have several experiences on a personal level. One of these experiences was from when I first got associated with Amma, and associated with the building of Her Pune ashram. Someone told me 'Amma sometimes visits Her devotees' homes. Why don't you invite Amma to your home?' There were such long lines of devotees, and I wondered, 'How can Amma possibly visit homes?' How could Amma come to my home, which is 35km from the Pune ashram. I didn't want to impose on Amma, and so I joined the queue and went for Amma's darshan. This friend who was in line next to me then told Amma that I wanted Her to come to my home! Amma looked at me and asked if it was so, and I had to say yes. Amma smiled and said, 'Yes, yes!' Swamiji turned to me and said, 'Amma has agreed to come. She will visit your house tomorrow, so make preparations.'

"That Sunday, the night before Amma's visit, I had a very vivid dream of Amma coming to my home. When I woke up I told my wife about it before going downstairs for breakfast. Then my

son got up and came and told us that he had also had a dream that Amma had come to our home! Then later after that, one of my daughters came in and told us, 'you know, last night I had a dream that Amma came to our home'. Naturally we were all amazed, and felt like Amma was letting us know that She was indeed coming!

"Also, it's significant that my wife and other daughter are the only ones who didn't have the dream, because they both took the longest to be won over by Amma.

"Amma came that day, going first to the puja room and blessing it by doing arati. Then Amma distributed prasad to everyone, and blessed the project that I was involved with at that time.

What is spirituality in your perspective?

"Some say that spirituality and science are incompatible. But I felt that if Sat (Truth) is one, then any approach to it must arrive at that same Truth. According to Amma, Truth is only one, but there are many paths leading to it. Science and spirituality are two sides of the coin - one air-conditions the body, and the other air-conditions the mind.

What role does intuition play in science, and how to cultivate it?

"Many major scientific discoveries were made through a sudden 'flash' in the mind's eye of the scientist. The work is painstakingly done, of course, but the turning point comes with a sudden revelation, seemingly out of nowhere. We're born with these faculties, but they need to be nurtured. We must listen to our inner voice. Don't neglect the intuitive 'flash' when it comes."

What advice would you give to the world's leaders?

"All of the discord in the world is born from our ignorance of the true nature of Reality.

Modern education is woefully inadequate. Spiritual education is necessary, as it serves to identify our true nature. The spiritual view begins with the idea that the entire world is our family, and proceeds to the experience of 'I am this world'. In this state, all conflict disappears.

"Saints like Amma are needed to teach and transform the people. The world leaders must become deeply spiritual.

"Amma is a unique saint. Even though coming from a poor, small village, She has made a deep impact on the whole world. Teaching Sanatana Dharma, Amma is crossing all cultural boundaries."

If you were to compare Amma to an aspect of Nature, what would that be?

"Nature is full of intelligence and Self-consciousness; Nature is blissful, full of joy, and not just the result of mathematical equations. Nature is Sachidananda, Divine. Amma is THAT."

As a successful scientist, looking back, what helpful factors brought you to this point?

"I was blessed with a good childhood. I had loving parents, and my grandmother in particular was a major influence. My father was very patriotic. He taught that there was one God, our Mother Nation. My parents married amidst the Freedom Movement, and I was born in 1946. Soon thereafter, in 1947, India attained Her independence, and so my mother named me Vijay.

"I wasn't ever necessarily very spiritual, though I had read and been inspired by Swami Vivekananda. I truly appreciated his clear and practical rationale. But, of all that has led up to this point in my life, meeting Amma was the most significant moment."

So, you were blessed with a good family, support and encouragement, etc. Do you have any advice for those less fortunate?

"There is an aspiration within you. Nurture it. Obstacles will come, but many helpful events will come as well. Focus on the beneficial, and work through the difficulties. Discover what your mission is, and commit yourself to it."

So many youths succumb when difficulties arise. You overcame yours. How?

"By falling often, and rising again. Little by little. Sometimes you have to say 'Thank God I failed!' because later you come to see that it would not have worked anyway. Without failure there is no evolution. Everything depends on how you look at the failure. Actually it's a great opportunity! Successful people see all failures as challenges to be overcome. There is no difference between these people and others, except in their outlook. The Guru does this for us - changes our vision."

Where did you get this attitude?

"Amma helped a great deal. When I first came to Amma, I was going through many difficulties. I still got frustrated and tense, but over time, due to Amma's influence, and talking to many people around Amma, I came to better understand the necessity of failure and difficulties."

Do you have any advice for the younger generation?

Today, especially in India, everyone is studying toward careers in the Tech Industry. The nation doesn't value pure science anymore. We must not neglect the pure sciences; they are the very foundation of the Tech Industry.

Do you see Amma's influence in the scientific world?

"She is having a definite impact. Scientists of renown are being drawn to Amma, which is making it more acceptable for those who never openly voiced their attraction to Her in front of their colleagues, for fear of ridicule. Initially, many were afraid of tainting their reputation by associating with Amma. But, with so many esteemed scientists, now it's become the opposite. So many scientists are coming to the *Amritavarsham50* Celebrations! Now it's respectable to be publicly associated with Amma!

"Amma is integrating the best and the brightest. The synthesis She is creating is science (external reality), spirituality (the inner reality, the Self), and culture (the interaction between these two, inner and outer). This is what Amma is doing; directing great minds in this way. Whenever I bring a fellow scientist to meet Amma, they always say it is a great blessing in their life".

What is your desire now?

"What do we mean by Liberation, *moksha*? As a scientist, I want to understand. I want to see the synthesis of spirituality and science. Amma is giving this understanding slowly. Spending time with Amma is my inspiration."

As with Dr. Bhatkar, Amma has become an inspiration to millions. Each views Amma in his or her own particular way, but one thing is consistent: the more time one spends in Amma's Divine Presence, the more attracted one becomes to Her. We all gradually awaken to Amma's irresistible charm. Indeed, Amma has become the sun, around which countless hearts and minds revolve.

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