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Review

Science and the Indian Tradition: When Einstein Met Tagore, by David L. Gosling. London and New York: Routledge, 2007. 186 pp., £75. ISBN 0-415-40209-3 (hb), 0-203-96188-9 (ebk).

This is a fine study of the relatively unexplored field of the encounter of science and religion in India. David Gosling has established a high reputation for his work in this area, attested by several previous publications, especially his pioneering study on *Religion and Ecology in India and Southeast Asia* (2001). His latest book assesses the effect of western science on Indian society and culture, especially on the thought of some well-known Hindu reformers of the nineteenth and twentieth century, as also the attitudes of Indian scientists towards their religious and cultural heritage. Gosling's close knowledge of the Indian subcontinent and his expertise in both physics and the study of religions make him an exceptionally well-qualified commentator on these issues.

Packed with fascinating details, the book is based on ideas first developed during the 2005 Teape Seminars at the University of Cambridge. This perhaps explains the somewhat vignette-like character of its main chapters. Each can almost stand alone as an independent essay on different, but not always closely interrelated, topics. The four meetings of Einstein and Tagore (1926–1930) give the book its subtitle and provide the striking photo of the two eminent men on its cover. Their conversations are used as an exemplary encounter pointing to possible contacts and exchanges between science and religion, the rational and the mystical, a visible embodiment of the much commented upon meeting between West and East. The title and cover photo are an imaginative invitation to read this book, but the actual meeting and themes of the two thinkers' discussions are only dealt with in full rather late in the story, in ch. 8.

The short Introduction (ch.1) sketches the themes and methodology of the book, drawing on both historical and sociological material. Also in evidence, though not mentioned, is the comparative approach. The author rightly characterizes his chapters as 'a broad narrative of the events and personalities which shaped science and religion in modern India' (p. 10). This applies especially to ch. 2, 'Science in India's Intellectual Renaissance'. Scholars of modern Indian history and neo-Hinduism will find much already familiar here, but the chapter still provides a useful digest and fitting background to the following chs. 3–6. Postcolonial critical perspectives could have helped to provide here a more advanced critical analysis of the coming of western science to India, but this opportunity has been missed.

'Tradition Redefined' (ch. 3) presents a vignette from a modern temple in Delhi where traditional Hindu beliefs are reinterpreted for a contemporary audience, followed by a brief summary of the six major schools of Hindu philosophy, the main scriptures and Vedantic teachings, as well as the beliefs and attitudes of some Indian Christians, mostly Protestants, apart from the Catholic convert Brahmabandhab Upadhyay. 'Worldviews in Encounter' (ch. 4) moves over into Indian science, from its early history and classical formations to science under Islam, followed by the coming

of European science. It culminates in the teachings of Darwin and other scientists, dealing with evolution and the nature of the universe. The following chapter on 'Relativity and Beyond' (ch. 5) focuses squarely on modern physics, with a discussion of the two theories of relativity, quantum theory, the Bose-Einstein statistics, the uncertainty principle and the search for a unified theory. In ch. 6 'Indian Science Comes of Age' the reader obtains a glimpse of the institutionalization of science in India and is introduced to the fascinating personalities of some eminent Indian scientists, most of whom can positively correlate their understanding of both science and religion.

'An Investigation into the Beliefs of Indian Scientists' (ch. 7) offers the most empirical part of the book. It investigates the relationship between religion and science as understood by Indian research scientists at some prestigious scientific research institutions. Some of this material was gathered over the last three years, but a substantial part of the discussion is based on earlier research in the 1970s, so that it is difficult to know which of the attitudes and beliefs expressed are still prevalent today. As already mentioned, ch. 8 'How Clear is Reason's Stream?' examines in detail the religious views of Tagore and Einstein, and the themes covered in their dialogue. In some ways this is the most original and inspiring part of the book, at least to non-scientists.

'Looking to the Future' provides a concluding summary and pleads for further discussions regarding the nature of consciousness and reality. It ends with the plea that in the ongoing dialogue between scientists and adherents of different faiths, so far mainly pursued in the West, 'representatives of the non-Western world must be invited to play a greater role' (p. 160). One can only concur with this important request, but it will take considerable time before this requirement will be met in full, given the sophisticated advances made in the long established conversations (and disputes) between science and religion in the western world.

The book is carefully annotated and provided with a select bibliography (which unfortunately does not include all references given in the Notes). It also contains a helpful glossary and two informative Appendices, one giving the text of the 1930 Berlin discussion between Tagore and Einstein on 'The Nature of Reality' (taken from Tagore's famous Hibbert Lectures *The Religion of Man,* 1931) and extracts from a second conversation, the other reproduces the questionnaire used for investigating the views of science students in India concerning the relationship between science and religion.

The author's innovative research and his concerns for a more inclusive science and religion dialogue are to be welcomed in the continuously expanding world of science and cross-cultural encounter, where more international attention is now increasingly being given to India as a global player in world economics and politics. This book helps to promote more dialogue about India's important scientific and religious endeavours, and encourages others to undertake more work in this area. Students and scholars can draw much inspiration from this storehouse of interdisciplinary data and ideas. It is a most useful volume for all library collections and specialized courses on science and religion.

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