

Author:	David L. Gosling
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Review:

This fine book could probably only have been written by David Gosling, who combines an advanced education in physics (including research experience, if of some vintage) with a substantial knowledge of Indian religious traditions resulting from a life-time of research and teaching in religious studies, and considerable experience in India and South-East Asia. The publishers have packed a lot of print on to the 186 pages of what used to be called a "slim volume", so that in reality it is a bigger book than meets the eye. Be prepared for substantial chapters on a number of intertwined topics, but be prepared also to enjoy this most instructive account of a complex encounter between civilisations and thought-worlds. Somehow Gosling also manages to tell us where physics in general has got to, in a manner which seems rather understandable to the non-expert in that field.

It is refreshing that we do not here find a contraposing of supposedly western science and supposedly Indian religious thought. This book is real. Gosling is able to tell us about the development of scientific education and research in India itself and about the formation of attitudes to religion among Indian scientists. These were studied by means of a questionnaire and interviews but also by an analysis of the writings of eminent Indian scientists P.C. Roy and J.C. Bose. In general, it transpires, the impact of scientific training on religion is not dissimilar to that in western countries such as Britain, i.e. that religious views are often weakened by science but sometimes strengthened. Pride of place is given to a presentation and discussion of the meetings between Rabindranath Tagore and Albert Einstein in 1930. Tagore of course explored many themes in his writings, including social themes, but his leading conception of the cosmos as being underpinned by a supreme being who is the "ultimate guarantor of all relationships" appears as a vision of and for humanity within an otherwise inconscient universe. Einstein for his part seems to have had a residual vision of a cosmos which hangs together meaningfully, if only because science always seeks a unified field. On this basis he was able to talk, if tentatively, with Tagore. Two short texts of these encounters are presented in an appendix. It is notable that both thinkers have a *cosmic* view of

religion, rather than say, an existentialist one. This means that, even while Einstein insisted that particular details of scientific theory can in themselves have nothing to do with a religious vision (except in so far as religious persons foolishly think they do), any general conception of science understood in some sense religiously is inevitably going to be about cosmology and the concept of God as a creator or universal power of some kind, and not for example about Brahmanic sacrifice or about the imitation of Christ. The particulars of religion do not therefore figure much in the relations between science and religion, except in so far as evidently untrue beliefs (of which there are many) are likely to be deflated by science in all its forms. Of course "science" has moved on, and so too has religion, not always for the better. Gosling points this out. But he seems to be himself both a religious and a positive thinker, for he calls for the further discourse between science and religion not only to be continued, but to be continued on the basis of well-informed inter-religious relations. For those who share his concerns there is evidently a lot of work ahead, while this book itself will be a most valuable marker in the long-term debate.

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