W hat is science? What is society? Is science meant only for scientists? Or does it have to be a way of life for everyone? Why does the Constitution of India consider it a Fundamental Duty ‘to develop scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform’?

Science is beyond merely solving numerical problems of Physics and Mathematics. It is the ‘eternal’ process of learning in the society for benefit of the society. Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary (7th Edition) defines science as ‘a system of organizing the knowledge about a particular subject, especially one concerned with aspects of human behavior and society’.

Renowned evolutionary biologist and historian of science, Stephen Jay Gould, in his treatise The Mismeasure of Man (1981) observes, ‘Science, since people must do it, is a socially embedded activity. It progresses by hunch, vision and intuition. Facts are not pure and unsullied bits of information; culture also influences what we see and how we see it’.

Today the situation is very dismal. Politicians and students of politics hardly know any science. In contemporary India, lack of scientific temperament among politicians and the youth has led to severe political instabilities in various spheres of life.

Thus science is nothing but a quest to ‘think out of the box’. Every discipline of study and practice involves science. To do things with inquisitiveness is the basic tenet of science. But we have made it out into a separate discipline.

For instance, students of Humanities, while studying History, are not required to learn Einstein’s Theory of Relativity but they should think like Einstein. They are not taught that since Early Man was very inquisitive he could invent the wheel, hunting tools, fire, etc. Such inventions by early man are proof of his acumen for scientific inquiry. In fact, science is sine-qua-non for the progress and welfare of the society. For instance, taking just a simple example, if a pulley would not have been invented, it would have been very hard to pull water out of the well!

Science is even related very closely to the economy. Higher Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country emanates from the science it follows. Higher GDP hinges on higher production of goods and services that ultimately depends upon capacity building in the society, development of scientific skills among the youth, farmers, labourers etc., innovations in agriculture like High Yielding Varieties of seeds, drought resistant and flood resistant crops, organic farming, novel and efficient methods of irrigation, scientific storage of grains, better automotive transport, and so on.

Science is inextricably linked to politics as well. Plato, is the earliest political scientist known to the world. In his theory of Ideal State, Plato said that an ideal state should be governed by the Philosopher King who is the most intelligent and possesses the highest element of reason – he is scientific in his approach.

Plato is credited with the opening of the first Western university – The Academy. The Academy was an institution dedicated solely to the study of society and politics. But Plato clearly mentioned on the gate: ‘Those who don’t know Mathematics needn’t enter The Academy’. The reason was simple – to infuse rationality in thought and spirit of science and inquisitiveness among the students.

Like his master Plato, Aristotle in his Theory of Education laid great emphasis on Mathematics, Higher Mathematics, Medicine and Dietics for children who were taught to become the king of the state.

But today the situation is very dismal. Politicians and students of politics hardly know any science. In contemporary India, lack of scientific temperament among politicians and the youth has led to severe political instabilities in various spheres of life. We still fight on the basis of castes and religion. Because of immigration, while societies in the West have now become more diverse than ours, our society is becoming more and more divided.

In 1947, India’s literacy rate was 15%. By 2010, it rose to 74%; we became literate but not scientific! Science requires us to be rational and reasonable. True nation building is possible only if our citizens and those in the seat of power develop a scientific temperament rather than adhering to old beliefs.

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