



Conference Report

On



13th All India Students' Conference on Science & Spiritual Quest 28-29 December 2024, SPA Vijayawada

The two-day All India Students Conference on Science & Spiritual Quest (AISSQ), held on 28-29th December 2024, was a significant event organized jointly by the Bhaktivedanta Institute and School of Planning and Architecture (SPA), Vijayawada. The event is also part of Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Bhaktivedanta Institute, Kolkata. Hosted at Auditorium in SPA Vijayawada, the conference drew over 400 delegates and guests from premier institutions like IITs, IISERs, AIIMS, and other leading universities and colleges across India. The whole venue was decorated with banners and hoardings on Science and Spirituality, featuring the views of the founding fathers of Sciences and other renowned scientists as well as Scientist & Saint Dr. T. D. Singh, the conference visionary and Founder Director of Bhaktivedanta Institute, setting the stage for the conference. Some instances of such quotes are “... for me it may always remain as a mystery, that how many different molecules could come together to form a primordial cell. I think that life could be beyond the assembly of biomolecules.”- Werner Arber, a well-known microbiologist and Nobel Laureate in Medicine or Physiology and “Science and technology alone cannot solve the problems of the new millennium. We need additional guidelines for our actions, for the selection of our research projects and research goals. These guidelines have to do with ethics, with philosophy, and with faith.”- Professor Richard R. Ernst, Nobel Laureate in Chemistry. Individual book exhibitions by Bhaktivedanta Institute were presented at the conference venue.



Fig1: Conference Venue: Main Gate (left) and Auditorium, School of Planning and Architecture (SPA),

Vijayawada

The conference commenced with a prayer performed by students to the Almighty for blessings.

Distinguished Chief Guest Prof. Madhabananda Kar, Director, AIIMS Mangalagiri, along with other Guests of Honor Prof. Dr. Ramesh Srikonda, Director, School of Planning and Architecture (SPA), Vijayawada; Dr. C. Sudha, Founder of Sree Padmavathi Venkateswara Foundation, Vijayawada; and dignitaries Prof. P.K. Singh, IIT BHU; Mr. Prabhakar Ballapalle, Senior Technologist, Western Digital, Bangalore; Sri Vasudeva Rao, President, Bhaktivedanta Institute and Dr. Debasish Khan, IIT BHU, Conference Convenor; Prof. Ramgopal Uppalauri, IIT Guwahati, Chairman Local Organising Committee & G. Yaduvamsi Krishna, Secretary were invited onto the stage to address the gathering with their insightful words of wisdom. Sri Vasudeva Rao welcomed the gathering by presenting the importance of such conferences and about Dr. T.D. Singh, the Founder Director of the Bhaktivedanta Institute, who envisioned the AISSQ conference series to help the students to have a balanced pursuit of scientific temper and spiritual wisdom. Sri Vasudeva Rao emphasized that we should not forget the scientific contributions from ancient Indian traditions, especially the Science of Mind and without hesitation incorporate the ancient Indian models of Mind into our scientific research. Prof. Madhabananda Kar and the Guests of Honor expressed their appreciation to the organizers and shared insightful remarks about the importance of the conference. The dignitaries also released the conference handbook.



Fig2: Inauguration of the Conference: Release of Conference handbook

Around twenty one thought-provoking lectures were deliberated on the following themes- Science and Spirituality: An overview; Holistic Education and Human Excellence; Mathematics, AI and Consciousness; Spirituality and Health; Indian Knowledge System: Mysteries of Ancient Indian Architectures and Vedanta & Science by the eminent speakers of the conference. The speakers were **Prof. Reinhard Genzel**, *Nobel Laureate in Physics, Max Planck Institute for Extraterrestrial Physics, Germany; Bose Institute, Kolkata*; **Prof. Hans Liljenstrom**, *Director of Agora for Biosystems and Professor in Biometry, SLU, Sweden*; **Prof. R. Ramakrishna & Prof. Shiva Prabodh**, *NRI Medical College, Andhra Pradesh*; **Dr. G. Srinivasa Rao**, *Sri Krishna Hospital, Andhra Pradesh*; **Prof. Dr. Ramesh Srikonda, Dr. Nagaraju Kaja & Dr. M. Banu Chitra**, *School of Planning and Architecture (SPA), Vijayawada*; **Prof. Dr. Usha Rani & Prof. Dr. Gomatam Mohana Chayulu**, *VFSTR Deemed to be University, Vadlamudi, Andhra Pradesh*, **Dr. Sasi Kumar Kotagiri**, *MD Anderson Cancer Center, USA*; **Prof. Ramjee Repaka**, *IIT Dharwad*; **Prof. Ramgopal Uppaluri**, *IIT Guwahati* and **Dr. Jayanarayan Tudu**, *IIT Tirupati* and many more.

Day 1 hosted three technical sessions: The first technical session was entitled “Science and Spirituality: An overview”. The speakers were Sri K. Vasudeva Rao (President Bhaktivedanta Institute, IIT Kanpur alumnus) & Sri Varun Agarwal (Director Bhaktivedanta Institute, IIT Kanpur alumnus). Sri K. Vasudeva Rao talked about the two aspects of reality i.e the objective world and subjective world. Science has made tremendous progress by limiting itself exclusively to the objective aspect but avoiding the subjective part of reality - our inner nature, feelings, ethics, morality and responsibility. He remarked that the founding fathers of Science have hinted that we need a new science which could be realised by bringing new fields of study within Science as well as amending the way we do science today. The session continued with a talk by Sri Varun Agarwal. He presented how the scientific discoveries unravelled many foundational questions which challenged the very limits of modern science and pushed the renowned thinkers from Science to Philosophy, Psychology and Spirituality. He also gave a glimpse of 50 years of service of the Bhaktivedanta Institute, making immense selfless contributions to humanity especially among the intellectual class.

The second technical session was entitled “Holistic Education and Human Excellence” chaired by Prof. Ramgopal Uppaluri. The speaker was Prof. Dr. Usha Rani & Prof. Dr. Gomatam Mohana Chayulu, *VFSTR Deemed to be University, Andhra Pradesh*; Mr. Segar Millindar, *NVIERA Bangalore*; Prof. Ramjee Repaka, *IIT Dharwad*; and Dr. Jayanarayana Tudu, *IIT Tirupati*. Prof. Usha said that Human Excellence is the right prescription for the Indian youth today. Knowledge about Indian culture, ethics, values and spiritual principles is needed by employing a scientific and rational approach. Prof. Chayulu talked about approaches that incorporate meditation, mindfulness and scientific inquiry, promoting critical thinking, compassion and flexibility. Mr. Milindar emphasized that the modern education system faces significant challenges due to its neglect of spiritual education and not addressing deeper existential questions.

Prof. Repaka talked about the profound impact of sublime and saintly qualities like compassion, humility, tolerance, simplicity, generosity, empathy, patience etc. on personal and collective transformation. Dr. Tudu remarked that it is important to set the reference line from the foundational ethical principles based on the spiritual values revealed in Bhagavad Gita in order to guide ourselves as individuals and society.

The third technical session was entitled “Mathematics, AI and Consciousness”. The speaker was Sri Sushant Sharma, Bhaktivedanta Institute, Kolkata (Alumnus IIT Guwahati) & Prof. Hans Liljenstrom, SLU, Sweden. Sri Sushant Sharma talked about the formulation of hypotheses in the scientific method and subsequent validation and rejection based on experimental observations. He raised profound and overlooked questions like where does the hypothesis originate and what serves as the source of inspiration for scientific inquiry. He suggested juxtaposing mechanical approaches with the Vedic perspective to resolve the gap. Prof. Hans Liljenstrom talked about traditional Science rooted in reductionism and determinism often negating free will, agency and purpose. He advocated for a broader understanding of Science that integrates subjective experience and embraces the complexity of Life fostering hope, connection and purpose in a challenging world.



Fig 3: Panel cum Interactive Session (Day 1)

The fourth technical session was a panel discussion entitled “Curiosity: Questions by Students”. The panelists were Prof. P.K. Singh, IIT (BHU), Varanasi; Prof. Ramgopal Uppaluri, IIT Guwahati; Prof. Ramjee Repaka, IIT Dharwad; HH Nilambar Krishna Swami, Bhaktivedanta Institute, Kharagpur; and Moderator was Mr. Segar Millindar. There were many thought provoking questions by the students. The day concluded with a keynote lecture by Nobel Laureate Prof. Reinhard Genzel, who talked about the General theory of Relativity and its implications in deriving the theoretical concept of Black Holes. He also discussed his forty year journey in studying the

mass distribution in the Centre of the Milky way Galaxy, which eventually found to be Black Holes. The cultural segment featured various spectacular dance forms like Kathakali, Bharatnatyam & Folk, giving a delightful end to the first day.



Fig 4: Cultural performances

On Day 2, four technical sessions were conducted. The first session was entitled “Spirituality and Health”. The speakers were Prof. R. Ramakrishna & Prof. V. Siva Prabodh, NRI Medical College, Chinnakakani, AP; Prof. T.V. Pavan Kumar, NRI Academy of Sciences, Magalgiri; & Dr. Gonuguntla Srinivasa Rao, Sri Krishna Hospital, Narasaraopet, AP. During this session Prof. R. Ramakrishna in his talk remarked that health encompasses physical, mental, social and emotional well being. He shared the positive effect of spiritual practices on health like reducing stress, anxiety, depression, inflammation, aging etc. and told that incorporating spirituality into daily life can cultivate a deeper sense of purpose, connection and well being. Prof. Prabodh talked about the role of Spirituality in epigenetics, an emerging field of research. He said that the spiritual practices have been associated with changes in gene expression and especially genes involved in the immune system, stress regulation and inflammation, often fostering resilience against epigenetic effects of trauma and thus promoting holistic approach to health.

The second session of Day 2 was entitled “Indian knowledge System: Mysteries of Ancient Indian Architectures”. The speakers were Prof. Dr. Ramesh Srikonda, Director, School of Planning and Architecture, Vijayawada; Dr. Nagaraju Kaja and Dr. M. Banu Chitra, School of Planning and Architecture, Vijayawada.

Prof. Dr. Ramesh Srikonda, talked about Spiritual architecture intricately blending sacred geometry, symbolism, and sensory experience to create spaces that reflect cultural, religious, and cosmic harmony. He also highlighted ancient

traditions—from Hindu and Buddhist temples to treatises like *Vāstu Śāstra* and *Śilpaśāstra* which emphasize the alignment of built space with universal order, fostering both ritualistic function and inner transformation. He gave examples of places like Kāśī Viśvanātha Dhāma whose architecture inspires towards transcendence, guiding the practitioners toward self-realization and pure consciousness through immersive spiritual experience. Then, Dr. Nagaraju Kaja explained that spirituality originates from the concept of an inner self and involves a personal search for meaning and aliveness. He emphasized that spirituality has been deeply connected with architecture, where design elements like light, form, and space are used to evoke a sense of transcendence and divine presence. According to him, different architectural styles express spiritual beliefs through symbolic features such as domes representing the heavens or spires reaching toward the divine. Dr. Kaja highlighted that this study focused on how architectural elements carry symbolic meaning and contribute to spiritual experiences across cultures, especially in India’s diverse religious traditions. Finally, Dr. M. Banu Chitra explained that sacred groves reflect a deep spiritual and ecological bond between humans and nature. She noted that these groves, revered across cultures, serve as sanctuaries for deities and protect biodiversity. According to her, they are vital to traditional practices and community identity but face threats from urbanization and climate change. Dr. Chitra stressed the need for conservation through community efforts and the integration of spiritual values with modern environmental ethics.



Fig 5: Poster session during the conference

Subsequently there was a poster competition session. There was an overwhelming response of around 16 abstract submissions for the posters out of which 15 posters were selected for the competition. The students and professionals coming from all across India and abroad, showcased a range of innovative and thought-provoking posters. These posters addressed various aspects of consciousness, including EEG methods, meditation and music effects, quantum mechanical phenomena in neural systems, Indian Vedantic philosophy, etc., fostering dynamic interactions among attendees. The first three poster presenters were awarded cash prizes and books worth INR 22,000.

The third session was entitled “Vedanta and Science”. During this session, Sri Prabhakar Ballapalle, from Western Digital, Bangalore, emphasized that the human quest for truth through curiosity forms the basis of both scientific inquiry and spiritual wisdom. He explained that while science explores reality through hypothesis, experimentation, and observation as evident in the discoveries of Newton, Einstein, and Galileo—spirituality complements this by guiding ethical action and inner growth. He warned that scientific power without spiritual values could be dangerous, highlighting the need for virtues like compassion and forgiveness. He concluded that blending scientific temper with the spiritual insights of Vedanta offers a holistic path to peace, purpose, and balanced human development. Then, Dr. Roshan Tiwari, Research Scientist at the Bhaktivedanta Institute, Kolkata, explained that conscious experiences are deeply subjective and cannot be fully captured through classical information. He suggested these experiences align with quantum information, which is unobservable and cannot be shared due to the no-cloning and Holevo’s theorems. Drawing on the no-hiding theorem, he proposed that such experiences are never truly lost. Finally, Dr. Sasi Kumar Kotagiri, from MD Anderson Cancer Center, Texas, highlighted that the origin of life remains an unsolved mystery despite theories like the RNA world and laboratory experiments showing chemical precursors. He noted that many questions still remain, as current theories fall short of fully explaining life’s emergence. In bridging these gaps, Dr. Kotagiri pointed to Vedantic wisdom, which asserts that life comes from life—not matter—and that consciousness is a fundamental, spiritual quality of the soul.

The conference concluded with short but attractive oral presentations from Young Minds. These talks represented a vibrant confluence of scientific inquiry, cultural heritage, and philosophical depth, showcasing the curiosity and creativity of the next generation of thinkers. Mr. Rajesh Pandit, IISER Kolkata Alumnus explored how ancient Indian mathematics, through concepts like zero and infinity, had profoundly influenced modern scientific thought. Ms. Yerrolla Monalisa from IIT Bhubaneswar and Ar. V Sanmukha Teja from SPA Vijayawada presented on ancient Indian architecture, highlighting its fusion of heritage, science, and innovation. Mr. Yogesh Tambe, also from IIT Bhubaneswar, attempted a mathematical formulation of the Vedantic principle that "life comes from life" based on Prof. Jagdish Srivastava’s work. Finally, Mr. Vamsi from the Bhaktivedanta Institute, Vijayawada, offered an integrative perspective on

consciousness and ultimate reality by bridging science with Vedantic insights. This session, coordinated by Prof. Ramjee Repaka (IIT Dharwad) and Dr. Dheeraj Dube (IIT Mandi), concluded with an engaging Q&A, reflecting the dynamic exchange of ideas.

The valedictory session marked the end of the conference, with the organizers extending their gratitude to all speakers, guests and all the volunteers.



Fig 6: Audience Group Photo



Fig 7: Cultural Troupe Group photo