

Indian scientists secular, but firm believers in god: survey

Indian scientists are very much secular but that doesn't go against their belief in god. A survey has found that many of them seek divine blessings before embarking on major scientific missions.

The study, 'Worldviews and Opinions of Scientists in India', carried out by the Trinity College of the US with help from Centre for Inquiry (CFI) India, a non-profit organisation, has found that 49 percent of scientists believe prayer is 'efficacious as therapy'.

Though most of the 1,100 Indian scientists surveyed described themselves as 'secular', they refused to be called irreligious. The survey came out last week.

'In 2005, space scientists went to Tirupati to seek the blessings of Lord Venkateswara before launching the rocket and satellite,' the study reveals.

It also found that only eight percent of the scientists said they would refuse to work on stem cell research because of moral or religious beliefs.

Nearly 83 percent of respondents described secularism as the 'separation of religion from state and government' and 93 percent termed it as 'tolerance for religions and philosophies.' Only 20 percent considered that secularism means atheism.

'Indians are by nature god believing people. They don't put spirituality versus science. Our ethos is broad - while we are rooted to our belief we are also open to new ideas, knowledge and innovations,' renowned scientist Y.S. Rajan told IANS.

'There is broadly no conflict as we are for religious plurality. Let me be clear, there is no basic dichotomy between science and god,' he added.

The study found that a majority of scientists believe in the existence of god or 'some higher power'. Some even said that they don't know whether there is god or not.

'The majority of scientists think they are spiritual,' the study found.

Placid Rodriguez, former director of Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research, said religion or belief in god is a part of the Indian value system. 'It's a part of our family value and social need.'

'I as a Christian have broken coconuts at the beginning of some programme (though it's a Hindu practice). God or religion is an inbuilt belief,' Rodriguez, who is currently a Raja Raman Fellow and distinguished professor at IIT Madras, told IANS over phone from Chennai.

The study found nearly 75 percent of these top scientists - whom the survey termed as 'elite' - said they believe in the Hindu cycle of life. At least 29 percent believe in karma, 26 percent in life after birth and 20 percent in reincarnation. Similarly, 38 percent said god performs miracles.

'I don't think, we can call the karma and rebirth theory unscientific. The belief helps us do good work and leads us towards ultimate equality. It's a beautiful imagination to improve yourself,' Rajan explained.

The study sampled participants from 130 universities and research institutes in India between July 2007 and January 2008.

Barry A. Kosmin, the lead researcher of the study, said: India was chosen because of its increasing scientific and economic importance on the global scene.'

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