

Goodall's fascination for wild chimpanzees

By Jayalakshmi K
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She believes it was all a part of a grand design – meeting anthropologist Louis Leakey, taking up a pioneering study of wild chimpanzees in Tanzania, untrained in any way, and going on to become a reputed primatologist who established without doubt that chimps can think and feel. Today the Jane Goodall Institute supports many projects aimed at research, education and conservation of the environment. How did it all start? She speaks to Deccan Herald in an exclusive interview on issues close to her heart.

“I was fascinated by the field and it was with sheer determination that I saved up enough money to go to Africa. The rest is I believe a pattern that was predetermined in the way these things are.”

Her path-breaking study on cognitive behaviour in chimps, as also that they are capable of emotions, was something that was arrived at after a gradual study of their behaviour repeated many times. “There were also times when something attempted once struck an important discovery like the dramatic moments when I saw them making tools, something we had thought that only humans could do. It was also dramatic in that it could get us money for the project!” Was it lonely at any time?



Jane Goodall

“No, I loved being alone in the forest. It is in the city that you feel alone.” Scared sometimes? “Yes.”

Referring to recent studies in related studies where a sign language had been detected in bonobos, Jane makes a correction. Not a language, she says. “The bonobos or the pygmy chimps as they are called are one of the great apes, and like the chimps are not able to speak due to the structure of the vocal chord. But like the chimp a bonobo has a highly sophisticated brain that can do all kinds of intellectual feats which we used to think was unique to humans. They clearly have more of a propensity to try to imitate us in our talk unlike the chimp who won't even try. The bonobo will say for banana as aa,aa,aa.”

Onto is another subject close to her heart. Animal experimentation. “It is unfortunate that we even thought of using animals for experimentation. Most of it is useless, counterproductive and thirdly, a matter of ethics when you realise that animals have feelings and a right to their lives. We need a different mindset. It is unfair, a kind of torture.”

Co-existence of people and nature has been another thrust of her programmes in Africa. She points to the Gombe programme which has been extremely successful with people living around national parks joining in conservation efforts. “The programme concentrates on women, giving them primary healthcare, education, based on the knowledge worldwide that education of women sees substantial drop in family size which is important. People around Gombe park are helping us to conserve chimps”, she adds.

Did being a woman create hurdles? “People thought it did! It was like this — fancy sending a woman into the woods but that was probably because I did not even have a degree, and they would have said that even if I had been a man. When I went to Cambridge university with my first results, nobody believed them because I was a young untrained girl and that I was starting my own branch of science, in a way I didn't have male competition. So I think being a woman actually helped me!”

What does it take to be Jane Goodall? “I had a wonderful mother, wonderful family, great friends. It takes patience, determination and never giving up.”

Science and nothing beyond?

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A single source for all life and non-life on earth and elsewhere in the universe? What this was is still unknown but amazingly and almost independently, both scientists and philosophers seemed to be converging at this point at the SSQ symposium at NIAS. Call it quantum vacuum or the energy field, or the Creator! A rose by any name?

As the dialogue between science and spirituality continued, the battle lines became clear. Psychologist and former head of department of clinical psychology at Nimhans, S K Ramchandra Rao declared that there was science and nothing beyond. N Balakrishnan, IISc promised the world of spiritual machines with unimaginable computing, memory and storage capabilities, which by the year 2020 would equal the processing prowess of 1,000 humans. A wor-

ld where silicon would definitely replace carbon, and give way to superhumans with 100 times the efficiency currently possible. Spirituality? No. Technology.

Not that there were no counter arguments. Jeane Staune, University of Paris, sought to show citing near death cases that there was a consciousness which was not situated in the sensory organs of the body but left it open whether it was a by-product of the brain, even while tackling another topic vital to the science-spirituality dialogue – whether the universe was designed. Former Andhra University VC and psychologist K Ramakrishna Rao placed the onus on the connotation of the word spirituality and sought to highlight on awareness as a state of being rather than the notion of awareness as a state of knowing. Taking examples of Buddha and others who in this transformed state could influence objects

without using visible energy, Rao stressed on the need to experience this state by suspending senses. He stated that there were different ways of knowing truth other than the scientific way through third person observation. How can you study an inner phenomena from outside?

ETHICS OF CLONING: Ethics of science came in for much discussion at the SSQ meet beginning with Anindya Sinha's Brave New world of cloning, when he sought to say that cloning was just another step in the technology for assisted reproduction. If there were problems that would face the cloned human, don't all of us have problems too? Humans would be cloned, science has never been halted in its stride by issues of morality or ethics. Should a retarded child be denied treatment for ethical issues over the status of the embryo? The nature of man is nothing but the product of human will, noted Sinha.