SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY

3. VIEWS OF REALITY, AIMS AND METHODS

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email: srimaa@vsnl.com,
sadlecjjn@rediffmail.com
Editor : Anjana Dharnidharka

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I. The Subjective and the Objective View of Reality and Knowledge

"When our minds are involved in matter, they think matter the only reality; when we draw back into immaterial consciousness, then we see matter a mask and feel existence in consciousness alone as having the touch of reality. Which then of these two is the truth? Nay, God knoweth; but he who has had both experiences, can easily tell which condition is the more fertile in knowledge, the mightier and more blissful.

I believe immaterial consciousness to be truer than material consciousness? Because I know in the first what in the second is hidden from me and also can command what the mind knows in matter.

Hell and Heaven exist only in the soul's consciousness. Ay, but so does the earth and its lands and seas and fields and deserts and mountains and rivers. All world is nothing but arrangement of the Soul's seeing."[1]

In the subjective view of Reality the worlds are only frames of our experience, the senses only instruments of experience. "Consciousness is the great underlying fact, the universal witness for whom the world is a field, the senses instruments. To that witness the worlds and their objects appeal for their reality and for the one world or the many, for the physical equally with the supraphysical we have no other evidence that they exist. It has been argued that this is no relation peculiar to the constitution of humanity and its outlook upon an objective world, but the very nature of existence itself; all phenomenal existence consists of an observing consciousness and an active objectivity, and the Action cannot proceed without the Witness because the universe exists only in or for the consciousness that observes

and has no independent reality. It has been argued in reply that the material universe enjoys an eternal self-existence; it was here before life and mind made their appearance: it will survive after they have disappeared and no longer trouble with their transient strivings and limited thoughts the eternal and inconscient rhythm of the suns."[2] The difference, so metaphysical in appearance, is yet of the utmost practical import, for it determines the whole outlook of man upon life and raises the question of the reality of cosmic existence and the value of human life. But this question cannot be solved by logic based on the data of our ordinary physical existence with its limited consciousness and experience. Only by an extension of the field of our consciousness and an increase in our instruments of knowledge can this quarrel be resolved.

"The extension of our consciousness, to be satisfying, must necessarily be an inner enlargement from the individual into the cosmic existence. For the Witness, if he exists, is not the individual embodied mind born in the world, but that cosmic Consciousness embracing the universe and appearing as an immanent Intelligence in all its works to which either world subsists eternally and really as Its own active existence or else from which it is born and into which it disappears by an act of knowledge or by an act of conscious power. Not organised mind, but that which, calm and eternal, broods equally in the living earth and the living human body and to which mind and senses are dispensable instruments, is the Witness of cosmic existence and its Lord."[3] To the man who has had contact with it or lives in it, the cosmic consciousness is real with a greater than the physical reality; real in itself, real in its effects and works. "And as it is thus real to the world which is its own total expression, so is the world real to it; but not as an independent

existence. For in that higher and less hampered experience we perceive that consciousness and being are not different from each other, but all being is a supreme consciousness, all consciousness is self-existence, eternal in itself, real in its works and neither a dream nor an evolution. The world is real precisely because it exists only in consciousness; for it is a Conscious Energy one with Being that creates it. It is the existence of material form in its own right apart from the self-illumined energy which assumes the form, that would be a contradiction of the truth of things, a phantasmagoria, a nightmare, an impossible falsehood."[4]

"There is a precisely opposite view of reality and knowledge which affirms an objective Reality as the only entire truth and an objective knowledge as the sole entirely reliable knowledge. This view starts from the idea of physical existence as the one fundamental existence and the relegation of consciousness, mind, soul or spirit to the position of a temporary outcome of the physical Energy in its cosmic action,—if indeed soul or spirit has any existence. All that is not physical and objective has a lesser reality dependent on the physical and objective; it has to justify itself to the physical mind by objective evidence or a recognisable and verifiable relation to the truth of physical and external things before it can be given a passport of reality. But it is evident that this solution cannot be accepted in its rigour, as it has no integrality in it but looks at only one side of existence, even only one province or district of existence, and leaves all the rest unexplained, without inherent reality, without significance. If pushed to its extreme, it would give to a stone or a plum-pudding a greater reality and to thought, love, courage, genius, greatness, the human soul and mind facing an obscure and dangerous world and getting

mastery over it an inferior dependent reality or even an unsubstantial and evanescent reality. For in this view these things so great to our subjective vision are valid only as the reactions of an objective material being to an objective material existence; they are valid only in so far as they deal with objective realities and make themselves effective upon them: the soul, if it exists, is only a circumstance of an objectively real world-Nature. But it could be held, on the contrary, that the objective assumes value only as it has a relation to the soul; it is a field, an occasion, a means for the soul's progression in Time: the objective is created as a ground of manifestation for the subjective. The objective world is only an outward form of becoming of the Spirit; it is here a first form, a basis, but it is not the essential thing, the main truth of being. The subjective and objective are two necessary sides of the manifested Reality and of equal value, and in the range of the objective itself the supraphysical object of consciousness has as much right to acceptance as the physical objectivity; it cannot be a priori set aside as a subjective delusion or hallucination.

In fact, subjectivity and objectivity are not independent realities, they depend upon each other; they are the Being, through consciousness, looking at itself as subject on the object and the same Being offering itself to its own consciousness as object to the subject. The more partial view concedes no substantive reality to anything which exists only in the consciousness, or, to put it more accurately, to anything to which the inner consciousness or sense bears testimony but which the outer physical senses do not provide with a ground or do not substantiate. But the outer senses can bear a reliable evidence only when they refer their version of the object to the consciousness and that consciousness gives a significance

to their report, adds to its externality its own internal intuitive interpretation and justifies it by a reasoned adherence; for the evidence of the senses is always by itself imperfect, not altogether reliable and certainly not final, because it is incomplete and constantly subject to error. Indeed, we have no means of knowing the objective universe except by our subjective consciousness of which the physical senses themselves are instruments; as the world appears not only to that but in that, so it is to us. If we deny reality to the evidence of this universal witness for subjective or for supraphysical objectivities, there is no sufficient reason to concede reality to its evidence for physical objectivities; if the inner or the supraphysical objects of consciousness are unreal, the objective physical universe has also every chance of being unreal. In each case understanding, discrimination, verification are necessary; but the subjective and the supraphysical must have another method of verification than that which we apply successfully to the physical and external objective. Subjective experience cannot be referred to the evidence of the external senses; it has its own standards of seeing and its inner method of verification: so also supraphysical realities by their very nature cannot be referred to the judgment of the physical or sense mind except when they project themselves into the physical, and even then that judgment is often incompetent or subject to caution; they can only be verified by other senses and by a method of scrutiny and affirmation which is applicable to their own reality, their own nature.

There are different orders of reality; the objective and physical is only one order. It is convincing to the physical or externalising mind because it is directly obvious to the senses, while of the subjective and the supraphysical that mind has no

means of knowledge except from fragmentary signs and data and inferences which are at every step liable to error. Our subjective movements and inner experiences are a domain of happenings as real as any outward physical happenings; but if the individual mind can know something of its own phenomena by direct experience, it is ignorant of what happens in the consciousness of others except by analogy with its own or such signs, data, inferences as its outward observation can give it. I am therefore inwardly real to myself, but the invisible life of others has only an indirect reality to me except in so far as it impinges on my own mind, life and senses. This is the limitation of the physical mind of man, and it creates in him a habit of believing entirely only in the physical and of doubting or challenging all that does not come into accord with his own experience or his own scope of understanding or square with his own standard or sum of established knowledge.

This ego-centric attitude has in recent times been elevated into a valid standard of knowledge; it has been implicitly or explicitly held as an axiom that all truth must be referred to the judgment of the personal mind, reason and experience of every man or else it must be verified or at any rate verifiable by a common or universal experience in order to be valid. But obviously this is a false standard of reality and of knowledge, since this means the sovereignty of the normal or average mind and its limited capacity and experience, the exclusion of what is supernormal or beyond the average intelligence. In its extreme, this claim of the individual to be the judge of everything is an egoistic illusion, a superstition of the physical mind, in the mass a gross and vulgar error. The truth behind it is that each man has to think for himself, know for himself according to his capacity, but his judgment can be valid only

on condition that he is ready to learn and open always to a larger knowledge. It is reasoned that to depart from the physical standard and the principle of personal or universal verification will lead to gross delusions and the admission of unverified truth and subjective phantasy into the realm of knowledge. But error and delusion and the introduction of personality and one's own subjectivity into the pursuit of knowledge are always present, and the physical or objective standards and methods do not exclude them. The probability of error is no reason for refusing to attempt discovery, and subjective discovery must be pursued by a subjective method of enquiry, observation and verification; research into the supraphysical must evolve, accept and test an appropriate means and methods other than those by which one examines the constituents of physical objects and the processes of Energy in material Nature.

To refuse to enquire upon any general ground preconceived and a priori is an obscurantism as prejudicial to the extension of knowledge as the religious obscurantism which opposed in Europe the extension of scientific discovery. The greatest inner discoveries, the experience of self-being, the cosmic consciousness, the inner calm of the liberated spirit, the direct effect of mind upon mind, the knowledge of things by consciousness in direct contact with other consciousness or with its objects, most spiritual experiences of any value, cannot be brought before the tribunal of the common mentality which has no experience of these things and takes its own absence or incapacity of experience as a proof of their invalidity or their non-existence. Physical truth of formulas, generalisations, discoveries founded upon physical observation can be so referred, but even there a training of capacity is needed before one can truly understand and judge; it is not every untrained

mind that can follow the mathematics of relativity or other difficult scientific truths or judge of the validity either of their result or their process. All reality, all experience must indeed, to be held as true, be capable of verification by a same or similar experience; so, in fact, all men can have a spiritual experience and can follow it out and verify it in themselves, but only when they have acquired the capacity or can follow the inner methods by which that experience and verification are made possible. It is necessary to dwell for a moment on these obvious and elementary truths because the opposite ideas have been sovereign in a recent period of human mentality, — they are now only receding,—and have stood in the way of the development of a vast domain of possible knowledge. It is of supreme importance for the human spirit to be free to sound the depths of inner or subliminal reality, of spiritual and of what is still superconscient reality, and not to immure itself in the physical mind and its narrow domain of objective external solidities; for in that way alone can there come liberation from the Ignorance in which our mentality dwells and a release into a complete consciousness, a true and integral self-realisation and self-knowledge."[5]

II. The Aims and the Methods

In the integral spiritual view of existence, "The world is a movement of God in His own being; we are the centres and knots of divine consciousness which sum up and support the processes of His movement. The world is His play with His own self-conscious delight, He who alone exists, infinite, free and perfect; we are the self-multiplications of that conscious delight, thrown out into being to be His playmates. The world is a formula, a rhythm, a symbol-system expressing God to Himself in His own consciousness,—it has no material existence but exists only in His consciousness and self-expression; we, like God, are in our inward being That which is expressed, but in our outward being terms of that formula, notes of that rhythm, symbols of that system. Let us lead forward God's movement, play out His play, work out His formula, execute His harmony, express Him through ourselves in His system. This is our joy and our self-fulfillment; to this end we who transcend and exceed the universe, have entered into universe-existence.

Perfection has to be worked out, harmony has to be accomplished. Imperfection, limitation, death, grief, ignorance, matter, are only the first terms of the formula—unintelligible till we have worked out the wider terms and reinterpreted the formulary; they are the initial discords of the musician's tuning. Out of imperfection we have to construct perfection, out of limitation to discover infinity, out of death to find immortality, out of grief to recover divine bliss, out of ignorance to rescue divine self-knowledge, out of matter to reveal Spirit. To work out this end for ourselves

and for humanity is the object of our Yogic practice."[6]

Not only Yoga but Science too seeks knowledge, perfection and fulfillment in its own way of perceiving and pursuing them which is exactly the opposite of the Yogic or the spiritual way of doing things. The spiritual works from within outwards and makes the outer the result of the inner. The materialistic science makes the inner the result of the outer, fundamentally a phenomenon of Matter and it works upon that view of things. With this limitation in its approach to knowledge, it cannot arrive at true knowledge or perfection and can never lead to fulfillment. This is not to deny that the preoccupation with life and matter at the beginning is both right and necessary for man because the first step he has to take in his journey is to know and possess the physical existence as well as he can by applying his thought and intelligence to such experience of it as his sense-mind can give him. But this is only a preliminary step and, if we stop here, we would have made no real progress. "The utmost widening of a physical objective knowledge, even if it embrace the most distant solar systems and the deepest layers of the earth and sea and the most subtle powers of material substance and energy, is not the essential gain for us, not the one thing which it is most needful for us to acquire. That is why the gospel of materialism, in spite of the dazzling triumphs of physical Science, proves itself always in the end a vain and helpless creed, and that too is why physical Science itself with all its achievements, though it may accomplish comfort, can never achieve happiness and fullness of being for the human race. Our true happiness lies in the true growth of our whole being, in a victory throughout the total range of our existence, in mastery of the inner as well as and more than the outer, the

hidden as well as the overt nature; our true completeness comes not by describing wider circles on the plane where we began, but by transcendence."[7]

Science has sought to 'perfect' humanity by outward means and one of its main effort has been to construct a powerful social machine which will train and oblige men to be what they ought to be. Looking at the results obtained by the modern socio-economic systems (socialistic or capitalistic) inspired by this approach of science; it is clear that these systems have, as expected, utterly failed to bring about any real change in the condition of humanity. But, in spite of this failure, this approach of materialistic science still continues to dominate and guide the thinking of humanity at large. If one looks a little deeply for the reason behind such a state of things, one finds it in the almost universal and complete subjection of humanity to a surface separative consciousness which is the basis of the universal blinding force designated as Ignorance in Indian philosophy.

The task of religion and spirituality is to mediate between God and man, between the Infinite and this finite, between a luminous Truth-Consciousness and the Ignorance. Considering the results obtained so far, it has certainly been the most arduous and difficult of all the tasks – even for a system of religious and spiritual seeking as wide, deep and supple as the one prevailing in India (called Sanatana Dharma) – because nothing is more difficult than to bring home the greatness and uplifting power of the spiritual consciousness to the natural man forming the vast majority of the human race; for his mind and senses are turned tenaciously outward towards the external calls of life and its objects and never inwards to the Truth which lies behind them. Our life moves

between the two worlds, the depth upon depth of our inner being – the domain of occultism and spirituality – and the surface field of our outer nature – the domain of rational science. In between lie the things of the mind such as aesthetic and ethical culture which the West persistently mistakes for spirituality. The spiritual knowledge perceives that there is a greater thing in us; our inmost self, our real being is the divinity within, the Spirit, and these outer things of the mind are only its instruments. Therefore, the first object of all spiritual seeking is to discover our deepest being and hidden spiritual nature. The spirit and the way of approach necessary for such a discovery is bound to be entirely different from that of the material science.

1. The Method of Science

"The dharma of science, thought and philosophy is to seek for truth by the intellect dispassionately, without prepossession and prejudgment, with no other first propositions than the law of thought and observation itself imposes."[8]

Science is concerned with a systematic study of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment based on human reason. It searches for measurable elements among natural phenomenon and then searches for relations between these measures of physical quantities. And since science is based on reason which starts from ignorance and moves in a great environing circle of ignorance, it must proceed by hypothesis, assumption and theory subject to verification of some kind convincing to our reason and experience.

The method of science consists of three steps: (1) Objective observation, (2) Deduction and theory and (3)

Verification and modification (of the theory). Objective observation is important for arriving at a good theory – a theory which will describe a large range of phenomena on the basis of a few simple postulates and will make definite predictions that can be tested. If the predictions agree with objective observations, the theory survives the test, but no matter how many observations are consistent with the theory, it can never be proved to be correct. On the other hand, if a single observation disagrees with it, one has to discard or modify the theory. But this is so only in the case of physical sciences. In the case of medical or psychological sciences, for example, a single negative example need not throw out or disprove the whole theory.

Thus the method of physical science consists in scrutanising, experimenting, testing and holding nothing for established which cannot be spontaneously and universally verified. It is not merely by reason but by repetition of experience coupled with an element of intuition that a scientist distinguishes between a right and a wrong theory. A great problem with the method of science is that there may be any number of conflicting theories – some apparent and the others not apparent to the observer – which may be consistent with the data and in such a case it is not possible to objectively choose between these. In any case, a subjective element – the personal preference of the observer – inevitably enters.

Traditionally, physical science has tried to assume objectivity by limiting observation to measurable elements among the natural phenomena. But the Quantum Theory has changed the classical view of science considerably by revealing the crucial role of the observer's consciousness in the process of observation and thus invalidating the (always superficial)

idea of an objective description of nature. In quantum physics when one wishes to observe the smallest particles of matter, the process of observation affects the particles observed, thus leading to the loss of objectivity in observation. It is beginning to be realized by an increasing number of scientists that all knowledge and experience are subjective at bottom. Objective (so called) external physical things are seen very much in the same way by human beings because of the construction of the mind and senses; with another construction of mind and sense quite another account would be given of the physical world. Science itself has come to clearly understand, accept and realize that the observed patterns of matter are nothing but the reflections of the patterns of human mind. Since, as discussed earlier, the subjective and the objective are only two sides of the same thing, it will not do to insist on ascribing reality exclusively to either of these. The latest trend in science is to accept subjectivity as an unavoidable fact of life. Since objectivity is the heart of scientific method distinguishing it from the spiritual, rather than compromising on objectivity, this has led science to push objectivity one level higher and from there to observe one's subjective interaction with the universe. Thus one is called upon to simultaneously maintain both the subjective and objective poises. Even in the exploration of the supraphysical, the scientific spirit requires one to maintain this dual pose in order to ascertain the validity of subjective experience.

The scientific method depends critically on the accuracy of observation which, given the inevitable element of subjectivity, is difficult enough to ensure beyond a point; but even more serious is the difficulty of getting all the facts complete without which the deduction cannot be expected

to be correct. Science is limited to the experience and scrutiny of the physical nature alone. It cannot take into account the supraphysical forces which are the real determinants of events here. So it is impossible for science to take account of all the factors. Actually, given the nature of the human mind, it cannot be expected to take into account even all the physical factors. A scientist looks at events in terms of cause and effect and what it considers the cause of a particular effect may only be the immediate but not its deeper cause. For an effect to be produced many forces have to come into play; even the opposing forces are necessary to balance and bring about the effect. The human mind sees only some of these factors, and that too only partially, and misses the rest. The nature of the human mind is such that it cannot look at things as a whole, it sees only by parts. It is like switching on a light and thinking that the switching must be the cause of light. But the one who has the knowledge of electric systems knows a little more and is aware of the fact that many things have to work out before the light can be produced by switching.

2. The Method of Spirituality

"In moments when the inner lamps are lit
And the life's cherished guests are left outside,
Our spirit sits alone and speaks to its gulfs.
A wider consciousness opens then its doors;
Invading from spiritual silences
A ray of the timeless Glory stoops awhile
To commune with our seized illumined clay
And leaves its huge white stamp upon our lives.
In the oblivious field of mortal mind,
Revealed to the closed prophet eyes of trance

Or in some deep internal solitude
Witnessed by a strange immaterial sense,
The signals of eternity appear.
The truth mind could not know unveils its face,
We hear what mortal ears have never heard,
We feel what earthly sense has never felt,
We love what common hearts repel and dread..."[9]

"An inspired Knowledge sat enthroned within
Whose seconds illumined more than reason's years..."[10]

"The method of Yoga in knowledge must always be a turning of the eye inward and, so far as it looks upon outer things, a penetrating of the surface appearances to get at the one eternal reality within them. The lower knowledge is preoccupied with the appearances and workings; it is the first necessity of the higher to get away from them to the Reality of which they are the appearances and the Being and Power of conscious existence of which they are the workings. It does this by three movements each necessary to each other, by each of which the others become complete,—purification, concentration, identification.

The object of purification is to make the whole mental being a clear mirror in which the divine reality can be reflected, a clear vessel and an unobstructing channel into which the divine presence and through which the divine influence can be poured, a subtilised stuff which the divine nature can take possession of, new-shape and use to divine issues. For the mental being at present reflects only the confusions created by the mental and physical view of the world, is a channel only for the disorders of the ignorant lower nature and full of obstructions and impurities which prevent the higher from

acting; therefore the whole shape of our being is deformed and imperfect, indocile to the highest influences and turned in its action to ignorant and inferior utilities. It reflects even the world falsely; it is incapable of reflecting the Divine.

Concentration is necessary, first, to turn the whole will and mind from the discursive divagation natural to them, following a dispersed movement of the thoughts, running after many-branching desires, led away in the track of the senses and the outward mental response to phenomena: we have to fix the will and the thought on the eternal and real behind all, and this demands an immense effort, a one-pointed concentration. Secondly, it is necessary in order to break down the veil which is erected by our ordinary mentality between ourselves and the truth; for outer knowledge can be picked up by the way, by ordinary attention and reception, but the inner, hidden and higher truth can only be seized by an absolute concentration of the mind on its object, an absolute concentration of the will to attain it and, once attained, to hold it habitually and securely unite oneself with it. For identification is the condition of complete knowledge and possession; it is the intense result of a habitual purified reflecting of the reality and an entire concentration on it; and it is necessary in order to break down entirely that division and separation of ourselves from the divine being and the eternal reality which is the normal condition of our unregenerated ignorant mentality.

None of these things can be done by the methods of the lower knowledge. It is true that here also they have a preparing action, but up to a certain point and to a certain degree of intensity only, and it is where their action ceases that the action of Yoga takes up our growth into the Divine

and finds the means to complete it. All pursuit of knowledge, if not vitiated by a too earthward tendency, tends to refine, to subtilise, to purify the being. In proportion as we become more mental, we attain to a subtler action of our whole nature which becomes more apt to reflect and receive higher thoughts, a purer will, a less physical truth, more inward influences. The power of ethical knowledge and the ethical habit of thought and will to purify is obvious. Philosophy not only purifies the reason and predisposes it to the contact of the universal and the infinite, but tends to stabilise the nature and create the tranquility of the sage; and tranquility is a sign of increasing self-mastery and purity. The preoccupation with universal beauty even in its aesthetic forms has an intense power for refining and subtilising the nature, and at its highest it is a great force for purification. Even the scientific habit of mind and the disinterested preoccupation with cosmic law and truth not only refine the reasoning and observing faculty, but have, when not counteracted by other tendencies, a steadying, elevating and purifying influence on the mind and moral nature which has not been sufficiently noticed.

The concentration of the mind and the training of the will towards the reception of the truth and living in the truth is also an evident result, a perpetual necessity of these pursuits; and at the end or in their highest intensities they may and do lead first to an intellectual, then to a reflective perception of the divine Reality which may culminate in a sort of preliminary identification with it. But all this cannot go beyond a certain point. The systematic purification of the whole being for an integral reflection and taking in of the divine reality can only be done by the special methods of Yoga. Its absolute concentration has to take the place of the dispersed

concentrations of the lower knowledge; the vague and ineffective identification which is all the lower knowledge can bring, has to be replaced by the complete, intimate, imperative and living union which Yoga brings.

Nevertheless, Yoga does not either in its path or in its attainment exclude and throw away the forms of the lower knowledge, except when it takes the shape of an extreme asceticism or a mysticism altogether intolerant of this other divine mystery of the world-existence. It separates itself from them by the intensity, largeness and height of its objective and the specialisation of its methods to suit its aim; but it not only starts from them, but for a certain part of the way carries them with it and uses them as auxiliaries. Thus it is evident how largely ethical thought and practice,—not so much external as internal conduct,—enter into the preparatory method of Yoga, into its aim at purity. Again the whole method of Yoga is psychological; it might almost be termed the consummate practice of a perfect psychological knowledge. The data of philosophy are the supports from which it begins in the realisation of God through the principles of his being; only it carries the intelligent understanding which is all philosophy gives, into an intensity which carries it beyond thought into vision and beyond understanding into realisation and possession; what philosophy leaves abstract and remote, it brings into a living nearness and spiritual concreteness."[11]

a. The Proper Way of Testing Supraphysical Experience

"...the experiences of yoga belong to an inner domain and go according to a law of their own, have their own method of perception, criteria and all the rest of it which are neither those of the domain of the physical senses nor of the domain

of rational or scientific enquiry. Just as scientific enquiry passes beyond that of the physical senses and enters the domain of the infinite and infinitesimal about which the senses can say nothing and test nothing—for one cannot see and touch an electron or know by the evidence of the sense-mind whether it exists or not or decide by that evidence whether the earth really turns round the sun and not rather the sun round the earth as our senses and all our physical experience daily tell us—so the spiritual search passes beyond the domain of scientific or rational enquiry and it is impossible by the aid of the ordinary positive reason to test the data of spiritual experience and decide whether those things exist or not or what is their law and nature. As in Science, so here you have to accumulate experience on experience, following faithfully the methods laid down by the Guru or by the systems of the past, you have to develop an intuitive discrimination which compares the experiences, see what they mean, how far and in what field each is valid, what is the place of each in the whole, how it can be reconciled or related with others that at first might seem to contradict it, etc., etc., until you can move with a secure knowledge in the vast field of spiritual phenomena. That is the only way to test spiritual experience. I have myself tried the other method and I have found it absolutely incapable and inapplicable. On the other hand, if you are not prepared to go through all that yourself,—as few can do except those of extraordinary spiritual stature—you have to accept the leading of a Master, as in Science you accept a teacher instead of going through the whole field of Science and its experimentation all by yourself—at least until you have accumulated sufficient experience and knowledge. If that is accepting things a priori, well, you have to accept a priori.

For I am unable to see by what valid tests you propose to make the ordinary reason the judge of what is beyond it."[12]

"I know nothing about X, but what were his tests and how did he apply them? What are his methods? his criteria? It seems to me that no ordinary mind will accept the apparition of Buddha out of a wall or the half hour's talk with Hayagriva as valid facts by any kind of testing. It would either have to accept them a priori or on the sole evidence of V, which comes to the same thing, or to reject them a priori as hallucinations or mere mental images accompanied in one case by an auditive hallucination. I fail to see how it could "test" them. Or how was I to test by the ordinary mind my experience of Nirvana? To what conclusion could I come about it by the aid of the ordinary positive reason? How could I test its validity? I am at a loss to imagine. I did the only thing I could—to accept it as a strong and valid truth of experience, let it have its full play and produce its full experimental consequences until I had sufficient Yogic knowledge to put it in its place. Finally, how without inner knowledge or experience can you or anyone else test the inner knowledge and experience of others?

I have often said that discrimination is not only perfectly admissible but indispensable in spiritual experience. But it must be a discrimination founded on knowledge, not a reasoning founded on ignorance. Otherwise you tie up your mind and hamper experience by preconceived ideas which are as much a priori as any acceptance of a spiritual truth or experience can be."[13]

b. To What Extent Yoga is Scientific?

"His points of doubt about the value—other than subjective and purely individual—of Yoga experience are that

it does not aim at scientific truth and cannot be said to achieve ultimate truth because the experiences are coloured by the individuality of the seer. One might ask whether Science itself has arrived at any ultimate truth; on the contrary, ultimate truth even on the physical plane seems to recede as Science advances. Science started on the assumption that the ultimate truth must be physical and objective—and the objective Ultimate (or even less than that) would explain all subjective phenomena. Yoga proceeds on the opposite view that the ultimate Truth is spiritual and subjective and it is in that ultimate Light that we must view objective phenomena. It is the two opposite poles and the gulf is as wide as it can be.

Yoga, however, is scientific to this extent that it proceeds by subjective experiment and bases all its findings on experience; mental intuitions are admitted only as a first step and are not considered as realisation—they must be confirmed by being translated into and justified by experience. As to the value of the experience itself, it is doubted by the physical mind because it is subjective, not objective. But has the distinction much value? Is not all knowledge and experience subjective at bottom? Objective external physical things are seen very much in the same way by human beings because of the construction of the mind and senses; with another construction of mind and sense quite another account of the physical world would be given—Science itself has made that very clear. But your friend's point is that the Yoga experience is individual, coloured by the individuality of the seer. It may be true to a certain extent of the precise form or transcription given to the experience in certain domains; but even here the difference is superficial. It is a fact that Yogic experience runs everywhere on the same lines. Certainly, there are, not one

line, but many; for, admittedly, we are dealing with a many-sided Infinite to which there are and must be many ways of approach; but yet the broad lines are the same everywhere and the intuitions, experiences, phenomena are the same in ages and countries far apart from each other and systems practised quite independently from each other. The experiences of the mediaeval European bhakta or mystic are precisely the same in substance, however differing in names, forms, religious colouring, etc., as those of the mediaeval Indian bhakta or mystic—yet these people were not corresponding with one another or aware of each other's experiences and results as are modern scientists from New York to Yokohama. That would seem to show that there is something there identical, universal and presumably true—however the colour of the translation may differ because of the difference of mental language."[14]

c. Mental Expression of Spiritual Experience – Confusion Resulting From the Nature of the Human Mind

"I am hearing (through Nirod) certain things that Sri Aurobindo said, and he says that even he contradicted himself a great number of times. ..

...and that, of course, the two or three different approaches are all true. So we can afford to be as...as wide as he is!

Truly speaking, his comprehension of things was very supple – very supple. Listening to certain things he said, I felt I had understood very little of what he meant. Now that I am more and more in contact with the supramental Consciousness, I see how supple – supple and complex – it is, and how it is

our narrow human consciousness that sees things... *(Mother draws little boxes in the air)* fixed, cut and dried.

So....we are under the mind's sway, and the mind is rigid like this *(same little boxes in the air)*. But I see that as soon as you go beyond the mind, it's...it's like waves on the sea. In a word, we have everything to learn. We try to understand in the mental way, so we understand nothing. We simply demarcate things *(same gesture of drawing boxes)*, and that's what we call understanding.

When we have thoroughly put everything in boxes *(same gesture)*, then we say we have understood!"[15]

"…all experiences are true and each has its place. Just because one is true, another is not false. The Truth is infinite. There are so many different ways to come to the Truth.

The wider you become, the higher you go, the more you find that there is still more and more. For instance, the Maharshi had his experience of "I"-ness, but when I had the Nirvana experience I couldn't think of any "I". However I might try, I could not find it.

The word simply got erased. One can't speak of that experience of mine as "I". It was either "He" or "That". I would call it Laya. Realisation of Self is all right – Laya is a part of a realisation much more comprehensive.

When I don't accept the Self as final, it is not that I have not realised its Truth or that I don't know the One in All and All in the One. But I have other realisations which are equally strong and which cannot be shut out. The Maharshi is right and everybody else is also right.

When the mind tries to understand these things, it takes up fragments and treats them as the whole and makes unreal

distinctions. People speak of Nirguna (Qualitiless) as fundamental and Saguna (Qualified) as a derivation, a secondary reality. But what did the Upanishad mean by Nirguno Guni and Ananta Saguna? They can't be thought of as different. When you speak of impersonality as the fundamental truth and of personality as something imposed upon it and therefore unreal, you cut across with your mind something which is beyond both. It is not that personality is the chief thing and the impersonal is only one side or one condition of personality. No! Both personality and impersonality are aspects of one thing which is indivisible.

Shankara is right and so also are Madhwa and Nimbarka. Only, when they state their truths in mental terms there is a tremendous confusion. Shankara says, "Duality does not exist and all is one." Madhwa says, "There is duality." Nimbarka says, "There is Bheda-bheda, there is duality and division as well as no division. "The Upanishad speaks of Him by knowing whom all is known. What does that mean? This knowledge, this Vijnana, does not mean merely the fundamental realisation of the One. It means the knowledge of the principle of the Divine Being, what Krishna speaks of as Janati tattwata. One cannot know the complete Divine except in what I have called the Supermind. That's why Krishna said of himself that one who knows him in the true principles of his being is rare. The Upanishads also speak of the Brahman as Chatushpada, having four feet or aspects. They don't just state that all is Brahman and end there. The realisation of the Self is not all. There are many things beyond that. The Divine Guide within urged me to proceed, adding experience after experience, reaching higher and higher, stopping at none as the final, till I arrived at the Supermind. There I found the

Truth indivisible and there everything takes its proper place. There Nirguna and Saguna, impersonality and personality, don't exist. They are all aspects of one Truth which cannot be divided.

At the Overmind stage, knowledge begins to rush in upon you from all sides and you see objects from all points of view and each thing from every viewpoint. All sides of knowledge tend to get related and there the cosmic consciousness is not merely static but also dynamic. It is the expression of something still higher, the Supermind above.

When you become cosmic, even though you speak of yourself as "I", it is not "I". The ordinary "I"-ness disappears, and the mental, vital and physical look like representatives of that new consciousness. Ramakrishna speaks of this state as "the form of ego left for action". When you reach the Supermind, you become not only cosmic but also what is beyond the universe – the transcendental – and there you have indivisibility and unity, and this transcendental coexists with the universal and the individual.

The same principle works out in science. The scientists at one time reduced all the multiplicity of elements to the ether and described the ether in the most contradictory terms. Now they have found the electron as the basis of Matter. By the difference in position and number of electrons you get the whole multiplicity of objects. Here too you find the one that is the many, and that the one and the many are not two different things. Both are true and through both you have to go to the Truth.

When you come to politics, the truth again is various. Democracy, plutocracy, monarchy, etc. – all have their truth."[16]

III. Scientific Versus Spiritual Method — A Contrast

"Science talks and behaves as if it had conquered all knowledge: Wisdom, as she walks, hears her solitary tread echoing on the margin of immeasurable Oceans."[17]

1. The Perception of the Physical Phenomena and Dealings with Them

Scientific method gives us knowledge only of the physical part of the universe and even here it gives knowledge only of a part – the quantitative part. But, there is not merely the quantitative law or knowledge, there is also a qualitative law – the province of subjective methods – which is much more important than the quantitative law. The subjective disciplines – spirituality, occultism, etc. – deal with subtle planes behind the physical, the knowledge of the forces of these planes and the way of mastering them.

The main concern of the scientist is with physical phenomena. He observes them, studies the conditions and makes experiments and then deduces the laws. In Yoga or spirituality, instead, one has to find out the right Dharma, the right way of functioning, of movement of forces. "Not merely the law which is mechanical, but the Dharma of the movement of forces. An ordinary law merely means an equilibrium established by Nature; it means a balance of forces. It is merely a groove in which Nature is accustomed to work in order to produce certain results. But, if you change the consciousness, then the groove also is bound to change. For instance, I observe the forces on the vital plane, I see what they are, and

what they intend. If they are hostile they attack me. Then I have to find out how they shall not attack me.

I put forth some force and see how they react; I have also to see how they would react if I put forth the force in a different way.

Even in knowing physical phenomena, the Yogi's way of knowing is different from that of the scientist. For instance, when I light a match I do not know the chemical composition of the match, and how it burns when struck. But I feel and know beforehand whether it will light or not, or whether it will do the work intended of it, and that is enough for me. I know it because I am in contact with the force that is in it, the Sat and the Chit in movement there.

The Yogi's way of dealing with these physical forces is also different from that of the scientist. Take, for instance, the fire that broke out in Tokyo. What the scientist would do is to multiply means and organise devices to prevent and put out the fire. What the Yogi would do in the same case is that he would feel the Spirit of fire approaching and, putting forth his force, he would be able to prevent the fire from breaking out in his vicinity.

These dealings are with quite different orders of facts."[18]

When it comes to the perception of motives behind physical acts, especially when related to persons living in deeper consciousness, there is a world of difference between the perception of a Yogi and a person living in ordinary physical consciousness. A glaring example of this we find in a letter of Yogi Sri Krishanprem written in 1931 to Sri D. K. Roy. Here is the relevant excerpt from this letter. "A learned article I read the other day in the *Orient* described Sri Chaitanya

Mahaprabhu as 'plunging into the ocean maddened to ecstasy by its beauty.' *Hai! Hai!* (alas!) and I suppose it was the beauty of the muddy puddle of rain-water on the site where now stands Radhakunda that led Sri Chaitanya Deva to do the same there? The majesty of the ocean may be a great thing, but it was not that which had intoxicated Sri Gauranga, but the infinitely more maddening sense-destroying beauty of Sri Krishna whom he saw standing in front of him.

Gone were the ocean-waves, and in their place he saw only the blue rippling waters of the Jumna surrounding the blue smiling figure of his Lord and it was that sight that annihilated his senses and made him plunge madly in, careless of all but of reaching his Beloved. But I suppose that is all effete superstition?"[19]

Actually, the method of materialistic science is just the opposite of the spiritual way of doing things. The spiritual works from within outwards, the way of science is to work from outwards and make the inner a result of the outer. This basic difference in the outlook and approach can be seen manifesting in varying shades and colours in the attitudes and doings of scientists and Yogis. Here we shall have a look at some of the most important ones of these.

2. The Device and the Reality Behind

The important question here is whether it is the reality behind that adopts the device to suit its purpose or it is the device that determines the result?

"All things on the physical plane are merely devices – they are a system of notation, – just like the wireless or telegraphic notation. It is a convenient device for sending

messages, but often we get too busy with the device and mistake it for the thing that is behind the device.

And this applies to all scientific discoveries. For instance, when you say 'hydrogen and oxygen in certain proportions form water', the statement does not explain anything. It only states a fact. You do not know what water is. It only means there is something behind which manifests itself as water under those conditions.

It is the same with the theory of 'electrons'. So far as the physical facts are concerned the theory may be perfectly true. But why should the blessed electrons, which are fundamentally the same substance, form totally different elements and compounds by the change of arrangement of the same number?

***Disciple*:** Not only that, but the addition or subtraction of one electron changes radically the properties – that is, the nature – of the substance. And even with the same number of electrons a change in the arrangement alters radically the substance. So much so that one substance is a poison and the other is not.

***Sri Aurobindo*:** So I say there is something behind the device which already pre-exists on some plane and it is that which adopts the device in order to manifest itself. But the device is not the reality. The power from behind can change the device. Of course, the power working from behind comes down on the physical plane through the device, and so people generally think that it is the device which is responsible for the manifestation.

As an instance of the change of device I told you about Agamya Guru Paramahamsa. He could stop his heart-beats

and go on talking and working like other men. Now, ordinarily, when the heart stops the man dies, or gets into a catalyptic Samadhi. But in his case it was not so."[20]

"Indifferent to doubt and to belief,
Avid of the naked real's single shock
He shore the cord of mind that ties the earth-heart
And cast away the yoke of Matter's law.
The body's rules bound not the spirit's powers:
When life had stopped its beats, death broke not in;
He dared to live when breath and thought were still.
Thus could he step into that magic place
Which few can even glimpse with hurried glance
Lifted for a moment from mind's laboured works
And the poverty of Nature's earthly sight."[21]

"All the exercises, like breathing-practices, are only devices which something that is behind them is using for manifesting itself.

On the physical plane also, it is nothing else but certain devices – a system of notation – that we employ. But we give too much importance to the form of the device, because we think the physical to be the most real. If we only knew that the entire physical world is made up of force and that it is nothing else but the working of a certain consciousness and power using certain devices then we would not be deceived."[22]

3. The Process by which Things Happen and the Reason for which they Happen

"The significance of the lotus is not to be found by analyzing the secrets of the mud from which it grows here; its secret is to be found in the

heavenly archetype of the lotus that blooms for ever in the Light above."[23]

Another way of looking at the issue discussed above is to take not of the almost universal tendency among the scientists to believe that when the process by which a thing happens has been explained, the reason for which it happens has also been explained. Here we reproduce relevant excerpts from two letters of Yogi Sri Krishnaprem and Sri Aurobindo to Sri D.K. Roy for a detailed and indepth discussion of this issue.

"You ask me to explain why I think that modern analytic psychology and subjectivist physics are going to be a more effective veil to Reality than the old Materialism. Well, I can't give proof – but can only make a few suggestions. Religious apologists made a great mistake in abandoning their defences and retreating to a supposedly impregnable 'Hindenburg Line' of subjective experiences. They relegated the truth of religion to the reign of the inner self, then largely unexplored, just as the Theosophists located their Mahatmas in unexplored Tibet. And they bolstered up their position with all sorts of pragmatic arguments such as that prayer was a reality because of the peace it brought etc. Now this was cowardly and therefore foolish.... *Nayamatma balahinena labhyah*.... Baffled for the moment, the attackers... then set to work to study the nature of the fortress in which the apologists had so unwisely shut themselves up. They have now developed and are still developing a technique which enables them to account so plausibly for subjective psychic or mystic experiences that most superficial thinkers are convinced.

First, the work of anthropologists of the Frazer school collected a mass of information about savage magico-religious rites (which they understood only in an exterior

manner – compare, for instance, Sea-brook's inside account of African Negro magic with the account given by any orthodox anthropologist) and then it was easy to show that the same primitive (and therefore presumably ridiculous) ideas persisted in modern religions.

And then the subjective experiences. Experiments with drugs showed that to some extent similar states (to the mystic's experiences) can be produced in the laboratory. Other experiences are dealt with in the manner satirized in one of G. K. Chesterton's fantasies: A man shipwrecked from his yacht found himself in the compound of a lunatic asylum and was promptly assumed to be a patient. Every explanation he tried to give of his arrival was assumed to be delusion about shipwreck. Thus, if the mystic escapes the Scylla of Freudian repressed sensuality, he is caught in the Charybdis of Jung's 'racial unconscious' in which, for some reason, all the religious symbols of the past are supposed to be preserved like flies in amber and to issue unexpectedly, causing the appearance of mystic experience.

But I must come to the point. There is a saying in *Vishva-Sara Tantra*; "What is there is here, what is not here is nowhere": *yadihasti tadamutra yannehasti na tat kvachit* – If God exists in the subjective world then he exists equally in the objective world. But the objective side has generally been abandoned by the defenders. If the working of the mind in mystic experiences is explained as has been the working of Nature, then the ordinary educated man will feel that the last stronghold is gone and that all farther belief is impossible. *And it will be so explained away*. This is quite certain. Why? Because the mind, as you know, is just as much mechanical

(and as little if you like) as the outer world. It is merely more subtle: *sukshmah*: both are mere modifications of *prakriti* and explicable in similar ways. The real subject (and object, too) is the *jivatma* (soul) and that is for ever beyond the ken of mechanistic science because it is in a *different dimension*. (I use dimension only metaphorically). Now the modifications of *prakriti* form a closed circle as it were, *Guna guneshu vartante*, as the Gita says. Science moves in the sphere of phenomena, that is, of the *gunas*, and there will always be an apparent causal sequence among all phenomena in the plane of phenomena and there is small reason to suppose that the end will ever come and, even if it did, it would be back at the beginning again – the snake with its tail in the mouth. In time, science will no doubt come to admit certain apparently marvellous phenomena now denied, but they will be found also to be explicable along similar lines to all other natural phenomena. *All phenomena can be explained in two ways: one in their own plane, and the other at right angles to it as it were, that is, in a different dimension.* In their own plane all phenomena follow mechanical laws. This is the mechanism by which they take place (for, after all, everything, however 'marvellous' has to take place in some definite way) and this mechanism is in the realm of science. The other explains the reason *for which* they happen and this is the sphere of the mystic or Yogi. This possibility of two-fold explanation applies, I believe, to all phenomena whether 'physical' or 'mental' or 'psychic'. (I use 'psychic' here in its ordinary meaning — somewhat different from that which it bears in Sri Aurobindo's system, I believe). But when an explanation has been given along the lines of the first method there is an almost universal tendency to think that the

phenomena in question have been completely explained – not to say explained away. Hence my forecast of a thickening of the veil, for it is the second method alone which brings the seeker through other planes into the region of real causation and of the Ultimate Reality. And this method requires an act of faith at the outset and an attitude of mind throughout that is quite different from that of most scientists.

I have said nothing so far about the modern tendencies in physics. The subjectivism of Jeans, Eddington and others is no doubt nearer the truth than the nineteenth century conceptions. But the crucial point is not whether the universe is composed of miniature billiard-balls vibrating in an elastic jelly or of geodesics in an expanding soap-bubble of space-time, but whether its basis is to be found in *Sachchidananda* or merely in a tenuously incomprehensible but ultimately *dead* square-root of minus one; and on this point physics, however subjective, can give no answer.

One last word and I have done. I think you will find in what I have said above concerning the two-fold explanation of phenomena the meaning of certain apparent paradoxes in the Gita. For instance, you will find there two sorts of statements about the way in which things happen:

> *Na kartritvam no karmani lokasya srijati Prabhuh*
> *Na karmaphala-samyogam svabhavas-tu pravartate.*

That is:

The Lord produces neither agency nor actions nor yet the union of action and fruit. All is a manifestation of Nature.

And then, on the other hand:

> *Isvarah sarvabhutanam hriddeshe'rjuna tishthati*
> *Bhramayan sarvabhutani yantrarudhani mayaya.*

That is:

O Arjuna! the Lord, seated in the hearts of all, whirls around by His maya all beings as if they were mounted on a machine.

The first couplet refers to the first type of explanation in which Sri Krishna plays no part, being outside the series; the last to the second type in which He plays the only part. *Tameva sharanam gaccha*, O Dilip! (Take refuge in Him alone)."[24]

On this letter Sri Aurobindo commented: "It was a great refreshment to read the letters of Krishnaprem; one feels here a stream from the direct sources of Truth that one does not meet so often as one could desire. Here is a mind that can not only think but see – and not merely see the surfaces of things with which most intellectual thought goes on wrestling without end or definite issue and as if there were nothing else, but look into the core. The Tantriks have a phrase *Pashyanti Vak* to describe one level of the *vak-shakti*, the seeing Word. Krishnaprem has, it seems to me, much of the *Pashyanti Buddhi*, the seeing Intelligence.... A distinction, the distinction very keenly made here, between the plane of phenomenal process, of externalized *Prakriti*, and the plane of Divine Reality ranks among the first words of the inner wisdom. The turn Krishnaprem gives to it is not merely an ingenious explanation, it expresses very soundly one of the clear certainties you meet when you step across the border and look at the outer world from the standing-ground of the inner spiritual experience. The more you go inward or upward, the more the view of things changes and the outer knowledge science organises takes its real and very limited place. Science, like most mental and external knowledge, gives you only truth of process. I would

add that it cannot give you even the whole truth of process; for you seize some of the ponderables, but miss the all-important imponderables; you get, hardly even the how, but the conditions under which things happen in Nature. After all the triumphs and marvels of Science, the explaining principle, the rationale, the significance of the whole is left as dark, as mysterious and even more mysterious than ever. The scheme it has built up of the evolution not only of this rich and vast variegated material world, but of life and consciousness and mind and their workings out of a brute mass of electrons, identical and varied only in arrangement and number, is an irrational magic more baffling than any the most mystic imagination could conceive. Science in the end lands us in a paradox effectuated, an organised and rigidly determined accident, an impossibility that has somehow happened, – it has shown us a new, a material Maya, *aghatana-ghatana-patiyasi*, very clever at bringing about the impossible, a miracle that cannot logically be and yet somehow is there – actual, irresistibly organised, but still irrational and inexplicable. And this is evidently because science has missed something essential: it has seen and scrutinised what has happened and, in a way, how it has happened, but it has shut its eyes to something that made this impossible possible, something it is there to express. There is no fundamental significance in things if you miss the Divine Reality; for you remain embedded in a huge surface crust of manageable and utilisable appearance. It is the magic of the Magician you are trying to analyse, but only when you enter into the consciousness of the Magician himself can you begin to experience the true origination, significance and circles of the *Lila*. I say 'begin' because, as you suggest, the Divine Reality is not so simple

that at the first touch you can know all of it or put it into a single formula; it is Infinite and opens before you an infinite knowledge to which all science put together is a bagatelle. But still you do touch the essential, the eternal behind things and in the light of That all begins to be profoundly luminous, intimately intelligible.

I have once before told you what I think of the ineffective peckings of certain well-intentioned scientific mind on the surface or apparent surface of the spiritual Reality behind things and I need not elaborate it here. Krishnaprem's prognostic of a greater danger in the new attack by the adversary against the validity of spiritual and supraphysical experience, their new strategy of destruction by admitting and explaining it in their new sense, is interesting enough and there is strong ground for the apprehension he expresses. But I doubt whether if, once these things are admitted to scrutiny, the mind of humanity will long remain satisfied with explanations so ineptly superficial and external explanations that explain nothing. If the defenders of religion take up an unsound position, easily capturable, when they affirm only the subjective validity of spiritual experience, the opponents also seem to me to be giving away, without knowing it, the gates of the materialistic stronghold by their consent at all to admit and examine spiritual and supraphysical experience. Their entrenchment in the physical field, their refusal to admit or even examine supraphysical things was their tower of strong safety; once it is abandoned, the human mind pressing towards something less negative, more helpfully positive, will pass to it over the dead bodies of their theories and the broken debris of their annulling explanations and ingenious psychological labels. Another danger may then arise not of a

final denial of Truth, but the repetition in old or new forms of a past mistake: on one side some revival of blind fanatical obscurantist sectarian religionism, on the other a stumbling into the pits and quagmires of the vitalistic occult and the pseudo-spiritual mistakes that made the whole real strength of the materialistic attack on the past and its credos. But these are phantasms that meet us always on the border line or in the intervening country between the material darkness and the perfect splendour. In spite of all, the victory of the supreme Light even in the darkened earth-consciousness stands as the one ultimate certitude."[25]

4. The Neurological Explanations for Mystic Experiences – The Latest Findings

In the sixties of the last century, the young people in the West started experimenting on a large scale with LSD and some other psychedelic drugs with the object of getting 'high' by experiencing the inner realms of religion and mystic experiences which were open only to mystics and Yogis in the past. In those days of drug culture there were suggestions in the air, and even a belief held by a large number of people that what usually took a whole life time of practice of austere Yogic discipline to the Oriental Yogis and mystics has now been made available to people at large effortlessly by Western science. All one had to do to undergo mystic experience was to swallow a pill of the LSD or some other psychedelic drug. The Mother was shown pictures of the people who had taken LSD. Later on, when she had an occasion to speak about it, she said, "I saw pictures. ...People are hurled utterly defenseless into the lowest vital, and, according to their nature, either it's horrifying or they find it marvelous. For instance, the fabric

covering a cushion or a seat is suddenly filled with marvelous beauty. So it lasts for two hours, three hours like that. Naturally, they are quite mad while it lasts. And the trouble is that people call it 'spiritual experiences,' and there's nobody to tell them that it has nothing to do with spiritual experiences....I saw pictures in Life (there were photos): you feel you've stepped into an insane asylum.... Of course, it's the images recorded in the subconscient (images of thoughts, images of sensations, images of feelings recorded in the subconscient), which become objective: they rise to the surface and become objective. So it gives the exact picture of what's inside you!"[26]

The question here again boils down to the distinction between the process by which things happen and the reason for which they happen. Are the psychedelic drugs, or for that matter the Yogic practices, the true causes of spiritual realization and experience or it is so only in appearance and they are only the Nimitta or occasion for these and the true cause is much deeper? As we have seen earlier, the scientists and Yogis hold opposite views on such matters. For a Yogi, whatever the apparent cause or process, it is always the Divine Shakti which is the real determinant of all the happenings in this or any other universe. A Yogi sees the Divine Himself as the Sadhaka, the Sadhana and the goal of Sadhana. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, "For a time comes in spiritual development when we become aware that all our effort and action are only our mental and vital reactions to the silent and secret insistence of a greater Presence in and around us. It is borne in upon us that all our Yoga, our aspiration and our endeavour are imperfect or narrow forms, because disfigured or at least limited by the mind's associations, demands, prejudgments, predilections, mistranslations or half

translations of a vaster truth. Our ideas and experiences and efforts are mental images only of greatest things which would be done more perfectly, directly, freely, largely, more in harmony with the universal and eternal will by that Power itself in us if we could only put ourselves passively as instruments in the hands of a supreme and absolute strength and wisdom. That Power is not separate from us; it is our own self one with the self of all others and at the same time a transcendent Being and an immanent Person. Our existence, our action taken up into this greatest Existence would be no longer, as it seems to us now, individually our own in a mental separation. It would be the vast movement of an Infinity and an intimate ineffable Presence; it would be the constant spontaneity of formation and expression in us of this deep universal self and this transcendent Spirit."[27]

Within a few decades, after it reached its peak in the mid sixties, the use of psychedelics to induce supraphysical experience lost its popularity and appeal to serious seekers. Now, the scientists have recently come up with an apparently more convincing neurological explanation for mystic phenomena and for what they have termed 'The great human hunger for God'. The newly emerging branch of science dealing with these matters is termed neurotheology. According to Newberg, a neurotheologist famous for his work in this field, the mystic experiences described by mystics are not just figuratively real but are as real as the ordinary experience of material reality. In fact, the former are to be ascribed a greater reality if we subscribe to the view that what is experienced more intensely and intimately is more real. To show that all our perceptions of reality spring from a peculiar construction or wiring of the brain, the neurotheologists have

used an imaging technology called SPECT scanning to map the brains of Tibetan Buddhists meditating and Christian nuns engaged in deep, contemplative prayer. "The scans photographed blood flow – indicating levels of neural activity – in each subject's brain at the moment that person had reached an intense spiritual peak.

When the scientists studied the scans, their attention was drawn to a chunk of the brain's left parietal lobe they called the orientation association area. This region is responsible for drawing the line between the physical self and the rest of existence, a task that requires a constant stream of neural information flowing in from the senses. What the scans revealed, however, was that at peak moments of prayer and meditation, the flow was dramatically reduced. As the orientation area was deprived of information needed to draw the line between the self and the world – the scientists believed – the subject would experience a sense of a limitless awareness melting into infinite space.

It seemed they had captured snap-shots of the brain nearing a state of mystical transcendence – described by all major religions as one of the most profound spiritual experiences. Catholic saints referred to it as 'mystical union' with God. A Buddhist would call it 'interconnectedness.'

These are rare experiences, requiring an almost total blackout of the orientation area. But Newberg and d'Aquili believed lower degrees of blockage could produce a range of milder, more ordinary spiritual experiences, as when believers 'lose themselves' in prayer or feel a sense of unity during a religious service. Their research suggests that all these feelings are rooted not in emotion or wishful thinking, but in

the genetically arranged wiring of the brain.

'That's why religion thrives in an age of reason,' Newberg says. You can't simply *think* God out of existence, he says, because religious feelings rise more from *experience* than from thought. They are born in a moment of spiritual connection, as real to the brain as any perception of 'ordinary' physical reality.

'Does this mean that God is just a perception generated by the brain, or has the brain been wired to experience the reality of God?' I ask.

'The best and most rational answer I can give to both questions,' Newberg answers, 'is yes.'"[28]

Needless to say that all this puts the whole thing upside down as is natural for the scientific mind which takes hold of things from the material end and makes the brain the basis and cause of all the psychological states. For a mystic, the true – but only intermediate – controlling power is the Mind, and the brain, the physical organ, is only an instrument for the consciousness to control the body. The Yogic way of looking at this will be to posit an independent existence of God or Spiritual Reality that chooses to use certain patterns of brain for manifesting itself to the experiencer. Neither is its existence conditioned by the construction of human brain, nor is it bound to use a fixed material process for its manifestation. It has been known to use different processes under different circumstances. In spite of repeated physical demonstrations, the scientists have been, for the most part, unwilling to admit such phenomena. For example, "Dr. Jules Romains, himself a scientist as well as a great writer, makes experiments to prove that man can see and read with the eyes

blindfolded, the scientists refuse even to admit or record the results. Khuda Baksh comes along and proves it patently, indubitably, under all legitimate tests, the scientists are quite unwilling to cede and record the fact even though his results are undeniable. He walks on fire unhurt and disproves all hitherto suggested explanations,—they simply cast about for another and still more silly explanation!"[29]

"Mind is a mediator divinity:
Its powers can undo all Nature's work:
Mind can suspend or change earth's concrete law.
Affranchised from earth-habit's drowsy seal
The leaden grip of Matter it can break;
Indifferent to the angry stare of Death,
It can immortalise a moment's work:
A simple fiat of its thinking force,
The casual pressure of its slight assent
Can liberate the Energy dumb and pent
Within its chambers of mysterious trance:
It makes the body's sleep a puissant arm,
Holds still the breath, the beatings of the heart,
While the unseen is found, the impossible done,
Communicates without means the unspoken thought;
It moves events by its bare silent will,
Acts at a distance without hands or feet.
This giant Ignorance, this dwarfish Life
It can illumine with a prophet sight,
Invoke the bacchic rapture, the Fury's goad,
In our body arouse the demon or the god,
Call in the Omniscient and Omnipotent,

Awake a forgotten Almightiness within.
In its own plane a shining emperor,
Even in this rigid realm, Mind can be king:
The logic of its demigod Idea
In the leap of a transitional moment brings
Surprises of creation never achieved
Even by Matter's strange unconscious skill.
All's miracle here and can by miracle change."[30]

List of References:

1 *SABCL 17, Page 97*
2 *SABCL 18, Page 19*
3 *SABCL 18, Pages 20-21*
4 *SABCL 18, Page 22*
5 *SABCL 19, Pages 647-51*
6 *SABCL 17, Pages 50-51*
7 *SABCL 19, Page 729*
8 *SABCL 15, Pages 214-15*
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11 *SABCL 20, Pages 493-96*
12 *SABCL 22, Pages 190-91*
13 *SABCL 22, Page 192*
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15 *Mother's Agenda 1972-73, Vol 13, Pages 365-66*
16 *Talks with Sri Aurobindo, by Nirodbaran Vol. I, Pages 74-76*
17 *SABCL 17, Page 91*
18 *Evening Talks, by A.B.Purani, Pages 75-76*
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26 *Mother's Agenda, Vol 7, Page 112*
27 *SABCL 13, Pages 539-40*
28 *Readers' Digest, Jan 2002, Pages 126-27*
29 *SABCL 22, Pages 201-02*
30 *Savitri, Revised Edition, Pages 84-85*
31 *SABCL 5, Page 168*

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