

CONCEPT OF REALITY IN AAD GURU GRANTH SAHIB AND ITS PHYSICAL, METAPHYSICAL AND MYSTICAL ASPECTS

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ABSTRACT

The concept of reality and its various interpretations exist both in science and religion. The advent of Relativity theory and Quantum mechanics in modern physics led to formulations of new concepts regarding matter, space, time and reality. The introduction of Uncertainty Principle by Heisenberg and the concept of dual nature of matter and radiation by Louis de Broglie gave a serious blow to the philosophy of determinism based on Newtonian world - view. The great debates between Einstein and Bohr at Solvay Conferences about the inadequacy of quantum mechanics to describe physical nature of reality are a part of history of science now. To the Indian philosopher, experience is the ultimate test of truth or reality. Since the reality is trans-empirical, it cannot be known through sense experience in the way in which empirical/scientific knowledge is gained. Reality is comprehended through intuitive experience for it transcends both the rational and the sensory aspects of human experience. The concept of reality in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) is most scientific, precise and dynamic in nature. It is summed up in *Manglacharan* (the Commencing Verse of the AGGS). According to Nanakian philosophy, Reality is both transcendental and immanent, i.e., it has dual nature as *nirguna* and *sarguna* at the same time. Reality is also equated with Being and Existence. It was experienced by Guru Nanak in Nature and the whole of the AGGS is a vision of reality.

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginnings of culture, man has been curious about the world in which he lives and eager to explain it. The explanations have taken different forms: mythological, magical, religious or philosophic. The world is not presented to the reflective mind as a finished product. The mind has to form its picture from innumerable sensations, experiences, communications, memories and perceptions. Hence the concept of reality or world-view has been changing with evolution of man.

With the dawn of modern era in physics, the gap between physical and metaphysical aspects of reality has almost disappeared. Science must admit the psychological validity of religious experience. The mystical and direct apprehension of God is clearly to some men as real as their perception of the external world. It is this sense of communion with the Divine Reality through practice of *Naam* which is the *summum-bonum* of the AGGS. Modern physics is inadequate to reveal the true nature of reality even in the material world but it has parallels with mystical philosophies of the East [18].

PHYSICAL NATURE OF REALITY

In the old picture of classical physics, it was assumed that the natural phenomena arise from the interplay of a large number of minute particles, so-called atoms (*parmanus*), which are the ultimate constituents of matter. The doors through which Nature imposes her presence on us are the senses. Their properties determine the extent of what is accessible to sensation or intuitive perception. The natural phenomena are the result of interaction of atoms as experienced through the medium of our senses. This is the reason classical physics was subdivided into mechanics, heat, sound and light, i.e., concepts determined by the qualities of sense impressions.

But the modern physics reveals the inadequacy of this approach to the understanding of the nature of reality [17, 25]. Every student of science knows that our vision is limited to a small part of the spectrum (4000-8000⁰ A) perceptible to the human eye. We cannot experience the phenomena in the infrared or ultraviolet or in the X-ray region of the spectrum with our eyes. If our eyes were sensitive to the X-rays, the whole

natural phenomenon will appear to us in an entirely different perspective. Our ears are sensitive to sounds of audible range while the frequencies on both sides of this interval are inaudible to human ear. It has been verified by experiments that bats and dogs are sensitive to ultrasonics while these sounds are inaudible to human beings. In the flood of invisible light that is accessible to the mental eye of the physicist, the material eye is almost blind, so small is the interval of vibrations which it converts into sensations. Inaudible tones, invisible light, imperceptible heat, these constitute the world of modern physics, cold and dead for him who wishes to experience living nature.

Quantum theory presents the penultimate view about the nature of physical reality. It has created new problems in philosophy by introducing consciousness in physics. Knowledge of Universal reality demands a much closer integration of our understanding of physical and mental phenomena. In our present scientific thinking either sensations and the consciousness play no role at all, or they are brought in as a *deus ex machina* as in quantum mechanics.

According to Heisenberg [22], "All the information concerning any object is given by its wave function in quantum mechanics. The wave function permits us to foretell with what probabilities the object will make one or another impression on us if we let it interact with us either directly, or indirectly. The impression gained through interaction with the system modifies the wave function and the impression enters our consciousness. Therefore, the consciousness enters the theory unavoidably or unalterably."

The hypothesis of dual nature of matter put forward by De Broglie is an enigma in understanding the physical nature of reality. Elementary particles behave as waves as well as particles. Similarly, a beam of light can be treated as a bundle of waves or particles known as quanta. The important fact to note is that this duality and dichotomy is not exhibited in one and the same experiment.

The idea that it is possible to think about the same phenomenon with the help of two entirely different and mutually exclusive pictures without any danger of logical contradiction is certainly new in science. Bohr's complementarity principle may help to solve fundamental problems in other spheres of life [17]. A

living creature, plant or animal, is certainly a physico-chemical system. But it is also something more than this. There are apparently two aspects again. The time of materialism is over, we are convinced that the physico-chemical aspect is not the least sufficient to represent the facts of life, to say nothing of the facts of mind. The processes of life and mind need other conceptions for their description than the physico-chemical processes with which they are coupled.

Bohr introduced the idea of complementarity to express the fact that the maximum knowledge of a physical entity cannot be obtained from a single

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observation or a single experimental arrangement. The observation of atomic phenomenon needs instruments of such sensitivity that their reaction in making measurements must be taken, and, as this reaction is subject to

the same quantum laws as the particles observed, a degree of uncertainty is introduced, which prohibits deterministic prediction. Therefore, strict determinism is not possible in microscopic world. The word 'reality' does not connote the meaning 'known in every detail'. The mere fact of observing the phenomenon interferes with its reality.

The old physics assumed that we observed directly real things [20]. Relativity theory says we observe "relations," and these must be relations between physical concepts, which are subjective. But according to quantum theory, we only observe probabilities; future probabilities can be determined, but future observational knowledge is essentially indeterministic. By scientific methods, we cannot reveal the intrinsic nature of reality. There seems an ultimate impossibility of exact knowledge, a fundamental indeterminacy behind which we cannot go. It looks as though the final limits of human knowledge are approached.

METAPHYSICAL NATURE OF REALITY

Metaphysics is a systematic and sustained inquiry into the nature of ultimate reality. It is an attempt to know the reality as against mere appearance. Metaphysics is the bridge between science and religion. Religion relies both on reason and revelation in its attempt to study the nature of reality. In the *Mandukya Upanishad*, the method of inquiry into the states of experiencing, waking, dreaming and deep sleep is frequently adopted.

To the Indian philosopher, experience is the ultimate test of truth [23]. Since the reality is trans-empirical, it cannot be known through sense experience in the way in which empirical objects are known. It is known through intuitive experience (*anubhuti*), it is the experience of the highest level, for it transcends both the rational and the sensory aspects of human experience with which we are normally acquainted.

Since the ultimate reality is trans-empirical, the Hindu philosophers rely on scripture (*sruti*) for obtaining the knowledge of the real. Discursive reasoning functions at the relational level. Since the ultimate reality is distinctionless, reason is not competent to comprehend it. So the proper ground of rational knowledge is immediate experience which differs from experimentation in science.

The truth which the scripture speaks about is the direct outcome of the intuitive or mystic experience of the ancient seers. It contains what is borne out by their direct and authentic experience.

Though the scripture is authoritative, the knowledge which one derives from it is only mediate. The knowledge which is revealed by the scripture must become a matter of experience, only then revelation would have fulfilled its mission. A man who has realised the integral experience, there is no need for him to depend on any external authority in the form of a scripture. His wisdom is self-certifying or self-revealed.

According to *Upanishads*, *Brahman* or *Atman* which is the ultimate reality is of the nature of existence (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ananda*). It is one only and non-dual. The pluralistic universe is only an illusory appearance of *Brahman* or *Atman* due to *maya* or *avidya*. There are two views of reality in the *Upanishads*, the cosmic view and the non-cosmic view. These two views serve as the bases for the theistic and absolutistic schools of Vedanta. Hindu Philosophy of Vedanta considers this word as *Maya* (illusion) and lays stress on Reality beyond appearance in phenomenal world.

MYSTICAL NATURE OF REALITY

Many people feel that science should be able to answer all questions. However, it is probably a narrow view to expect that the scientific method is the only way of learning and knowing. In view of the changes within the field of science itself, a scientist must keep an open

mind in these matters. After all, science was invented by human beings and is based on the assumption that there actually is a physical world out there beyond our senses.

Capra [18] in his book 'Tao of Physics' has established parallels between the principal theories of modern physics and the mystical traditions of the East, viz; Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism. For example, we have no direct sensory experience of the four dimensional space-time continuum, and whenever this 'relativistic' reality manifests itself we find it very hard to deal with it at the level of intuition and ordinary language. A similar situation exists in Eastern mysticism. The mystics seem to be able to attain non-ordinary states of consciousness in which they

transcend the three-dimensional world of everyday life to experience a multi-dimensional reality, which is impossible to describe in ordinary language.

Opposed to the mechanistic conception of the world is the view of the Eastern mystics

[19] which may be characterized by the word 'organic', as it regards all phenomena in the universe as integral parts of an inseparable harmonious whole. For the Eastern mystic, all things and events perceived by the senses are interrelated, connected, and are but different aspects or manifestations of the same ultimate reality. Our tendency to divide the world we perceive into individual and separate 'things' and to experience ourselves in this world as isolated egos is seen as an 'illusion' which comes from our measuring and categorizing mentality. The division of nature into separate objects is, of course, useful and necessary to cope with our everyday environment, but it is not a fundamental feature of reality. For the Eastern mystic, any such objects have therefore a fluid and ever-changing character.

The Eastern world view is thus intrinsically dynamic, and contains time and change as essential features. The cosmos is seen as one inseparable reality-forever in motion, alive, organic-spiritual and material at the same time.

Mysticism is the art of union with reality [21]. A mystical state has the quality of ineffability. It thus resembles a state of feeling rather than a state of intellect. The mystic experience is imbued with a noetic quality, a quality of transience and of timelessness. There are many stages of evolution in the

life of a mystic. Ultimately, the mystic attains the perfect union with God and he cries: 'I am God- *aham brahm asmi*'. It is a well known fact that mystics feel that exalted state of ecstasy but fail to describe it in ordinary language. The mystics use the simile of a dumb person who cannot describe the taste of candy [2]. Saith Kabir : "*Such state is like the dumb tasting of sugar, which no way can be described*".

Mystics believe in the integral or holistic experience of reality. We need not rest content with the partial truths revealed by astronomy, by physics, by biology, by history; each true in its own field, none complete in itself, none giving the whole picture; nor yet with the truth of mathematics or the truth of language, primarily truths of expression, obeying rules which men themselves have made. Beyond all these, beyond the contradictions of each separate truth, lies concealed the supreme and final truth.

The realm of mystic experience is a reality beyond the comprehension of our senses. But there is a clear evidence in AGGS regarding the transcendental nature of this phenomenon: "*In this realm, one sees but without the eyes; one listens but without the ears; one walks but without the feet; one works but without the hands; one speaks but without the tongue; thus attaining life in death. O Nanak, one meets the God after realisation of the divine law*".

CONCEPT OF REALITY IN AGGS

The concept of ultimate reality propounded by Guru Nanak in the AGGS is most scientific; as a consequence, it is also dynamic and precise. The *Manglacharan* (the Commencing Verse of the AGGS) is a philosophic testimony of Guru Nanak's poetic and scientific vision of the supreme reality [24]. Reality is one and non-dual. Hence the *Manglacharan* [1] commences with the numeral 1 before '*Open Oora*' which represents Existence or Being. It is followed by *Satt Naam* which means the supreme reality is True and it is manifested in Truth, Existence and Being. The other features of reality are its transcendence and immanence, creator person, without fear or hatred, beyond time and space, self-existent, transcendental cosmic spirit made manifest by grace of the Guru. Thus Guru Nanak projects the nature, potentialities and characteristics of supreme reality or God of his vision. This concept of reality is unique, scientific and revolutionary and it differs in its connotation from the Vedantic concept. According to Ahluwalia [16]: "This new conception of God marks a qualitative change in the cognition of the Ultimate Reality from Being to Spirit. This evolutionary change, heralded by the Sikh metaphysics in the history of the Indian religious

thought, leads to a new conception of time".

The very first *sloka* [3] after *Manglacharan* elaborates further the nature of ultimate reality. Reality or God was in existence before the commencement of creation and time (*yugas*) during the epoch of cosmic void. God existed at the beginning of this universe i.e., creation of space and time. God exists now and will also exist in the future (even when the universe is annihilated). The Nanakian philosophy dialectically unites the ideas of God and the world. Transcendence shows that God is prior to and distinct from the world. Immanence of God represents God's connection with the world. God himself transforms into creation, that is, changing His *nirguna* form into *sarguna* form [4]. "*The Formless is attributed and un-attributed; and gone into absorption in the cosmic void. Saith Nanak : Himself has made creation, Himself on it meditates*".

The *Manglacharan* in the AGGS is an expression of Guru Nanak's intuitive insight into the metaphysical realm which presents an integrated view of the basic reality that is monistic, but whose manifestation is pluralistic [5]. The conceptual framework of the *Manglacharan* is comprehensive enough to include some of the most significant attributes of the Absolute (supreme reality). Even the manifest aspect of reality, namely, the physical universe, defies measure and count [6]. "*Limitless the creation; Limitless the expansion*". Perhaps, God alone can contemplate the vastness and totality of the cosmic existence. The Guru assures us that the light and grace of the Absolute are ever with man in his search for supreme reality. A person of cosmic consciousness (*brahm gyani*) can experience reality and all his doubts are dispelled [7]. "*He, who receives faith of Lord in himself, his mind is illumined by the Reality of the Real*". Ultimate reality is subtle and incomprehensible but can be realised through Guru's *sabda* unconsciously [8]. "*The Lord is the subtle, unfathomable entity; so how is one to attain Him? It is through Guru's Word that our doubt is dispelled and the self-dependent Being cometh into our minds*".

Guru Nanak has combined the symbol *Satt* with *Naam* which literally means 'Name'. When we refer to the world of names and forms, we refer to the concrete, empirical universe which we know in our ordinary experience and discover through the agency of science. In short *Naam* is Truth, or the knowable aspect of Reality. *Naam* is immanent in the universe and its practice is the only formula prescribed by the Sikh Gurus to realize God. In fact, whatever is created, is *Naam* [9]. "*All that is created is His manifestation*".

Guru Nanak was always antipathetic to any view of the world, which denigrated its reality or made the world illusory. He was, therefore, firm on the principle that the creation is as real as the creator- it includes, besides material existence, the culture of man, his thoughts and his values. Guru Nanak discards the Vedantic conception of reality in *Asa - di - Var*, and proclaims that this universe is real, not an illusion [10]: “*Real are Thy continents; Real is the universe; Real are these forms and material objects; Thy doings are Real, O Lord*”.

The Guru calls this vast universe as His mansion [11]: “*This moving universe is the divine mansion of the true Lord; And the true one lives therein.*”

Guru Nanak has identified the manifest reality with Nature [12]. “*Nanak, the beneficent Lord alone is true and He is revealed through His Nature*”. God transformed Himself from *nirguna* to *sarguna*, created *Nam(u)* and *Kudrat(i)*, i.e; Nature [13]. “*His - self He created and manifested His Name; And then He created Nature and abiding within it, He revelled in His wonder*”. The description of Nature [14] by Guru Nanak in *Asa - di - Var* is a new dimension in the history of religious thought. In a way, scientific study of Nature is sanctioned in Nanakian philosophy. “*All that is visible is His Nature; All that is heard too is His Nature..... In the nether regions and skies is the manifestation of His Nature ; Of His Nature are all the manifestations*”

To sum up the concept of supreme reality as presented in AGGS is unique, scientific and revolutionary. It is not a mere abstraction. Its realization is possible through the practice of *Sabd* and *Naam*. Guru Nanak was blessed with the vision of God or Reality in Nature [15]. “*The Guru hath revealed the Lord’s presence to Nanak in the three worlds; in the woods, waters and over the earth*”.

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