

CHAPTER - II

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### THE SCOPE OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

In the previous chapter we have dealt with the nature of religious belief and its classifications. In this chapter our attention will be on religious knowledge. Before explaining about religious knowledge, first attempt would be on the question what is epistemology are limits of human knowledge.

People believe there is religious knowledge. They believe that the sacred books of their religion contain knowledge or the beliefs of their religion gives the knowledge about men and the universe. They believe that these books contain wisdom to enlighten their action and to illuminede a way of life. They believe that religion can teach them things of great importance.

Here one question may arise that is religion true ? There can be no doubt religion means to be true. The religious man takes his religion seriously, as involving a true revelation of the character of the reality which is behind Phenomenn. He can not rest content with benevolent and picturesque lies or with a merely subjective feeling. He takes his religion not as a narcotic, but as a revelation of the real nature of things, so

far , at any rate, as the nature of things stands related to personal and social values.

Religion regards itself as a normal and healthy appreciation of the inner meaning of things in so far as they bear on human life.

If this is so, then is the mind of man capable of knowing ultimate reality ? Has it resources for grasping the nature of the suprasensible ? To answer this question is the task of that branch of metaphysics known as Epistemology, or the problem of the nature, origin, possibility and limits of human knowledge. It is impossible wholly to isolate the problem of knowledge from the problem of the nature of reality. They can not but overlap each other, for the views of the possibility and nature of knowledge will largely depend on the views of the nature of reality, and vice versa.

From the very early periods the thinkers have confidence in the competition of human reason as an instrument - in the discovery of truth. The philosopher like Plato, Aristotle among the ancients, Descartes Spinoza, and Hegel among the moderns do not recognize any gulf between thought and truth. For them in Spinoza's words -

"It is *prima facie*, of the nature of a thinking being to

frame true or adequate thoughts".<sup>1</sup>

And the greatest triumphs of the human mind in science and philosophy has been inspired by this healthy truthfulness of thought in its own capacity for knowing the truth.

The faith in the competence of the mind to grasp the truth of things has not been allowed to pass unchallenged. In ancient Greece it was challenged by the Sophists and the Sceptics.

In modern times while knowledge of the Phenomenal world has made unparalleled progress, doubt or denial of the mind's capacity to know the reality behind phenomena has amounted to be a disease. Modern philosophy has been obsessed by the epistemological question. How can man get to know the world? The problem owes its origin in its acute form to the sharp distinction created by Descartes between the mind and body being conceived as two distinct substances. By his dualism of substances Descartes created a chasm between the knowing mind and the known world which philosophy has even since been trying to bridge.

It was English empiricism, beginning with Locke, that set thought on the path which led to scepticism as to the

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1. Cited by E. Bosonquet - "the meeting of extremes in contemporary philosophy (1921) p. 82

possibility valid knowledge of reality. To empiricism of lockian type sense perception is the ultimate source of knowledge, and since sense perception can never lead us beyond particular facts to universal and necessary truths. For Hume universally valid knowledge is impossible what we know is not objective world but simply our own ideas.

For Locke the primary qualities (extension, motion, rest figure etc.) as inherent in the objects where as the secondary qualities (colour sounds, heat and cold etc) are not copies of things, but merely subjective sensations in us which erroneously ascribe to objects. After that Berkeley reduced the primary qualities into inner states of the mind, until there was nothing in the universe but mind and their ideas. This is known as subjective idealism or mentalism in its extreme form. Hume developed empiricism still further into radical scepticism, and resolved both the knowing mind and the known world into a succession of isolated impressions and ideas linked together by the mere habit of association. It is not depend on any universal and necessary truth. Impressions arise out of the unknown and give no ground for asserting anything of the real nature either of the self or of the world. Thus knowledge is completely dissociated from reality.

Kant finds in concrete experience, a synthesis of rational (transcendental ) and empirical factors, yielding a knowledge, that is valid, indeed, within the phenomena on scientific sphere, but which is still incapable of penetrating beyond the veil to the suprasensible or "noumenal" world. Thus the subjectivity of knowledge remains, in as much as knowledge is conditioned by certain "a priori" forms and categories (space, time, causality ) which have their origin in the mind itself, and can not be predicated of reality as such. Ultimate reality is forever concealed behind experience and is inaccessible to knowledge in the strict sense. We do not know the thing in itself we only know things as they appear to us.

In this process the knowledge develop from early period to modern times. But on the other hand, if we have look towards religious philosophers, the vital interest is the nature of knowledge and the validity which attaches to the knowing process. For there is a cognitive element in faith and it involves a claim to know.

The distinction between the facts of sense perception and the dream or memory image, and hard experience forced him to separate between what seemed to be and what truly was.

It is true that in experience we have a subject which knows and an object which is known. Both these two are

intimately related ~~one~~ to the other. The object involves data which are given to the mind and determine the content of knowledge in the mind. Data are only data because they are experienced facts. But the content of knowledge is a mental content entirely, it is the embodiment of mental activity. There is no way outside the circle of experience and from reality supposed to transcend experience there is no way to pass within it.

"Knowledge is determined from the side of the subject, and is made possible by the mind's activity."<sup>2</sup>

For Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz, knowledge is not impressed on the mind by real objects which act upon it from outside. The mind is a close sphere to external impressions and thoughts moves within its own order.

From the rationalistic theory of knowledge certain theological inferences have been drawn.

The ideas of Plato were found to lead up to and receive their place and value through a Supreme ideas, the Idea of the God ; and this he certainly seems at times to identify with God. The forms of Aristotle culminated in a perfect form,

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2. The Philosophy of religion - by G. Alloway, p. 277

free of material taint , and pure spirit or God, who transcends the world but moves it as object of desire. Descartes again, found that - God was necessary to guarantee the truth of our ideas of external nature, and Spinoza postulated substance or God to embrace in one whole the double orders of thought and extension.

Religious knowledge in the proper sense of the word, neither is nor claims to be the knowledge of scientific understanding men believes in their gods because they need them, not because they can understand or explain things through them. If scientific knowing is the only form of knowing, then of course religious knowledge is an illusion.

While insisting on the unitary character of knowledge, we must not ignore the fact that the unity of knowledge is a unity in difference. The case is not so simple as Henry Jones says -

"There is only one way of knowing".<sup>3</sup>

It we have see the scientific explanation is in fact, inapplicable in the case of a Being who transcends the external order of reality , and is not to be understood through it.

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3. Henry Jones - A faith that enquires - (1922) ,p. 63,79

The atmosphere in which the religious spirit moves is one of reverence, and mystery, and in the clear and cold air of scientific explanation it can not breathe freely.

Theoretical explanation has grown out of the needs of life ; religion, too, is an out come of the needs of life, but the knowledge it aspires after is knowledge of a direct and personal kind.

Viscount Haldane recognize the truth that,

"Knowledge is not always of the same kind" that there are levels or degrees in knowledge which have relations to each other, but are not reducible to each other."<sup>5</sup>

Reality itself has many strata ; hence our knowledge of reality, if it is to be at all adequate must have its corresponding gradation. Each new level demands a new category which is not relevant to the lower levels. And so the categories must be capable of being arranged in a ascending or hierarchical

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4. Philosophy of religion - by George Galloway, pp. 310-11

5. V. Haldance - The reign of relativity - 1921, pp. 130

order according to degree of complexity and approximation to the concrete universal. In this way we ascend from the plane of pure mathematics to those respectively of physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, sociology, ethics, aesthetics religion and each new step in the ascend reveals a new phase of reality which demands new and richer categories for the understanding of it. Each category has a claim to be regarded as valid and adequate within its own frame of reference.

In religion the value judgements have always been <sup>and</sup> primary central. In relation to himself, the religious man knows the object of his reverence first and foremost as a value. He seeks to know God as the Supreme Good - who satisfy the soul, rather than as the Being who explains the universe. This knowledge is practical ; it has its motive and is concerned with the working relations of the human spirit to the Divine. The judgements of faith express what God is for us, not what he is in himself so it implies that the spiritual insight is in terms of value ; it is personal through out the frait of faith which is prompted by inner needs of a spiritual person.

The religious consciousness moves in the realm of value.

Value-judgement presuppose and rest on a Supreme-value, and this plays an important part in defining religious world view and shaping the idea of religion.

Life and its meaning will always depend on what we conceive to be best and most important i.e. on our conception of value.

For all knowledge ought to subserve the realisation of the good, and, whether in its scientific or religious aspect, it has its goal in a complete and harmonious life. It does not depend on any authoritative value or any single principle. Religious knowledge unites harmoniously with other human activities in realising human good.

The religious consciousness is committed to a belief in the objectivity of values. It believes that the Supreme values of life are not mere human conventions pitted against the nature of things, but that the ultimate ground of things as revealed to us in the universe is akin to what we recognize as the highest and best in our own experience.

Now we have the point that there are two kinds of knowledge. Firstly of all, the matter of fact knowledge

of the world, and, secondly, the practical acquaintance or familiarity gained by experience and aided by sympathetic intuition and appreciation. Such acquaintance as is well exemplified in the relation friends to one another.

The intimate knowledge which friends have one of another is not the result of a process of reasoning or scientific research, but is based on mutual confidence and affection gained through practical experience and insight. It is different from scientific knowledge which is intellectual, impersonal and unemotional. It is not information about God acquired by a strict process of induction but an acquaintance with God accompanied by a strong emotional tone as in the case of human friendship.

The distinction between knowing about and having acquaintance with, a distinction expressed in some languages by the use of two different words corresponding to the one English word "to know", such as in German "wissen", and 'kennen' in French 'savoir'. In none the less deserves the name of knowledge provided it is sufficiently ratified by individual and social experience.

Some philosophers (specially the linguistic Philosophers)

argue that philosophical problems can be cured by linguistic therapy. For them the question that "Is their religious knowledge" is pseudo problem. By actual uses of the epistemic terms like 'know' and 'true' can be resolved. All of them depend upon context.

No one use is reducible to another, we do infact, speak of religious knowledge. The word has an intelligible application in religion. To be sure, the concept "knowledge" may not perform the same function or use in religion as it does in science. But it does have a legitimate use. Our perplexities concerning religious knowledge may stem from the assumption that the concept 'knowledge' has but one meaning or use. If we rid ourselves of this initial prejudice and simply look at the various uses this concept has in various areas of discourse, we can rid ourselves of our perplexities.

The view that "Is there religious knowledge?" can not be solved simply by describing the use or uses of the concept "knowledge".

The term 'knowledge' is honorific, and many people mistakenly apply it to beliefs which do not the application.

Implicit here is a prescriptive or persuasive definition of 'knowledge'. Some such definition - some set of criteria is implicitly or explicitly appealed to whom this is applied. Now need such a definition of arbitrary and philosophically pointless. It can be viewed as one of a series of distinctions which intelligent men have felt impelled to make over the centuries and which they have conceived of as a tool for philosophical clarification.

Now the thing is that whether a given cognitive sentence constitutes knowledge involves an appeal to criteria which function as a norm for the term 'knowledge' and the problem of justifying such criteria is that of justifying a norm.

"Professor James Oliver has recognised that criteria for the term "knowledge" function normatively. These criteria amount to a set of epistemological rules, and a given sentence is to be characterized as true ( or given a certain degree of credibility ), if it conforms to those epistemological rules. Oliver argues that criteria for the term "knowledge" or sets of epistemological rules are devised in order to answer the fundamental and central problem of epistemology, namely, "What statements should an individual believe ?" He puts the issue in the form of a question : "Why should one be interested

in distinguishing what is true from what is false except as a means of deciding what right to be believed."<sup>6</sup>

Professor Oliver does insist that not all sentences are assertions (or statements) and there must be some clear meaning for a statement before the question of believing it is considered at all. He also insisting further that a sentence having some clear meaning is logically prior conditions for the adoption of attitudes of belief or disbelief toward it.

Oliver points out that although Descartes, and the rationalists generally have advocated views involving only two attitudes of belief-complete certainty and complete disbelief. People can and do take a wide range of attitudes or degrees of beliefs towards statements. Thus one problem, important but subordinate to the central problem of epistemology ; is that of providing a useful scale of degrees of belief.

We have the comprehensive classifications, among analytic, synthetic, and self-contradictory statements, among

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6. Jame W. Oliver. The Problems of Epistemology -  
Journal of Philosophy- Vol. 57, No. 9 (1960).

universal, existential and singular statements, and among statements in various levels of language, Distinctions have been made among statements purporting to refer to abstract entities, and those purporting to refer to supernatural beings. A comprehensive classification of all statements is a problem preliminary to the solution of the central problem of epistemology.

We have classifications of cognitive religious sentences which includes descriptive sentences, predictive sentences, explanations, historical sentences, and autobiographical sentences. We can assume that there is a scale of attitudes (including the attitudes of belief, disbelief, no opinion, and other intermediate attitudes ) which one may adopt which given cognitive religious sentence.

The question of whether there is religious knowledge, or take the phrase 'religious knowledge' to designate cognitive religious sentences toward which it is appropriate to adopt an attitude of belief.

Like cognitive religious sentences in different religions the beliefs and the claims to knowledge shows that they appear to offer knowledge about a great variety of general subjects.

In different religions we can find statements proposing knowledge about the following general topics, cosmology , theology, psychology, history, ethics, proper rituals, and devotions and proper attitude for living.

Cosmology deals with the origin, structure, development or purpose of the universe. Here God or Gods are responsible for the origin. But it is not necessary. Usually the evidence for such claims to knowledge is insight or revelation guaranteed by belief in the particular religion. Cosmological statements propose facts, true or false, about the universe.

"In the Upanishads of Hinduism we find the following statements : "The whole universe come forth from Brahman , and moves in Brahman". Brahman sees all, knows all, he is knowledge itself, of him are born cosmic intelligence, name form and material cause of all created beings and things. The entire book of the Upanishads known as "Prasna" is cosmology."<sup>7</sup>

Theological knowledge deals with the existence and nature of a god or gods and with the relations of a god to the world and man. We can find it in Upanishad also. In

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7. Upanishads - p. 18

Upanishad, "The self is the omniscient Lord. He is not born. He does not die. He is neither cause nor effect. The Ancient one is unborn, imperishable, eternal, though the body be destroyed he is not killed.

Although the early Buddhism rejected theological knowledge, the latter Buddhism accepts the theological claims, for instance ; the universal mind alone is the Budha and the sentient beings, but sentient beings are attached to particular forms and so seek for outside it.

For historical knowledge the claims contained in the world religions have some special features that distinguish them from ordinary or scientific history. But the ethical claims to knowledge inform us about what is good and what is bad, right and wrong, our moral obligations, and also about the foundations of our values.

The claims to knowledge about attitudes or kinds of behaviour appropriate to some way of life. Such attitudes are often presented in an indirect or metaphorical manner and are often connected with statements belonging to one of the other subjects of knowledge.

Unlike the other claims to knowledge, they are abundant in all the world religions. Hinduism says, "Blessed are they

that choose the good, they that choose the pleasant miss the good". I have told you the secret knowledge. Austerity, self-controll, performance of duty without attachment what is called salvation is really continence. For through continence man is freed from ignorance. And what is known as the vow of silence, that too is continence. ~~For a man through continence~~ For a man through continence realizes the self and lives in quiet contemplation. Be self controlled. Be charitable. Be compassionate.

Christianity says: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Psychological claims to knowledge about the nature of man are found in many of the world religions. They are usually presented to make plausible some view of survival of death, or mystical way, or ethical claims or attitudes for living. "Hinduism says, "The self-existent made the senses turn outward. According man looks toward what is without, and sees not what is within".<sup>8</sup> "In four Noble-Truth of Buddhism 'Existence is unhappiness (painful). Unhappiness is caused by selfish craving. Selfish craving can be destroyed.

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8. Upanishad - p. 20

It can be destroyed by following the eight fold path."<sup>9</sup>

"For Christianity and Judaism, a vast amount of practical information about human behaviour is contained in the proverbs of Solomon,"<sup>10</sup> and much of this depends upon the knowledge of good and evil that man acquired from the fall of man.

### Faith and Knowledge

#### According to Y. Masih

"Faith is a matter of acting, doing, and becoming and in an existential decision for a certain kind of life. It is only by risking our persons from one hour to another that we live at all. "A life lived according to its faith creates its own verification. Faith is not a matter of scientific or intellectual cogency, but is in perfect harmony with the task of living of rational creatures. Faith is a matter of conviction in relation to a convictor. It is not a cognitive affair."<sup>11</sup>

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9. The Compassionate Buddha - p.28, p.30
  10. The Holy Bible, pp. 670-80
  11. The nature of Religious knowledge - Y. Masih.  
Centre of Advanced Study in Philosophy,  
Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan - 1971.

Faith can not be said to be knowledge, because faith is belief and belief may or may not be rational, that is may be rational, irrational, a-rational and non-rational. John Hick regards "faith" to be cognitive in as much as he thinks that a faith-proposition concerning God is verifiable in terms of post-mortem experience and so-according to him one has the right to be sure. However, knowledge properly so called has some rational justification in its favour.

"Knowledge and faith alike subserve the struggle of the human spirit to its divine goal, and they should interact with one another in the cause of spiritual progress."<sup>12</sup>

Faith is neither purely theoretical nor purely practical, but something both in human life. It has middle position in human life.

The advocates of simplicity who seek to reduce faith to knowledge fail, for faith can not be absorbed in the theoretical process of knowing without losing its specific character. While the contents of faith are taken to be theoretically true, they are not reached by rational

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12. Philosophy of Religion - by George Galloway, p. 333

inferences, but are maintained in a practical interest.

The specific objects of faith are primarily values, which evoke the affective life, and furnishes a centre around which the feelings gather. Faith embraces facts and their relations only insofar as they are involved in the values, and necessary to support them. In its full spiritual development it is a stable attitude of mind, and a response of the whole personality to the object. In this respect it differs decidedly from mere 'belief' or 'opinion' in the sense of Plato.

Faith, on the contrary, is an act of the spiritual and self-conscious person, who affirms the religious values, and God the Supreme Value to be essential to his own soul and to the meaning of the world. It is a movement of the self, conscious and free, which expresses the needs and states the postulates of the spiritual life. Faith is so conceived, is neither practical non-wavering, but speaks of full assurance and an abiding ideal.

Knowledge itself is stimulated by faith, and ends with faith in the ideal which has inspired its partial achievement. Faith again, in the interests of spiritual life goes beyond knowledge in order to find a final ~~value~~ value and meaning in the world.

In claiming theoretical validity for its object, faith admits its affinity with knowledge. Both movement issue from the living self as it reacts on the experienced world, and are complementary aspects of its purposive activity what is important to the one can not in the end be indifferent to the other.

Aquinas discusses faith in all its aspects in "Somma Theologica". For him, faith is a propositional attitude, that is to say, it consists in asserting to proposition. This is unambiguously stated and its implications unambiguously accepted, both by Aquinas and through out the Catholic tradition. He explains that "the thing known is in the knower according to the mood of the knower" and "the mood proper to the human intellect is to know the truth by composition and division", man's knowledge of God takes the form of knowing proposition about him, through God himself is of course not a proposition but the Supreme being.

Faith, say Aquinas, occupies a position between knowledge (scientia) and opinion (opinia) and accordingly falls on a common scale with them; and since they are both concerned with propositions, so also is faith.

The propositions which faith believes or at any rate those that are of faith absolutely. From this it follows that faith is distinguished from scientia by a difference between their objects : the objects of scientia is such as to compel the assent of the human mind, whilst the object of faith is distinguished from opinion by the subjective or psychological difference that opinion is and faith is not accompanied by an inner feeling of doubt or uncertainty.

The main aspects of Aquinas doctrine of faith, its voluntary character follows naturally. Faith is belief which is not compelling evoked by its object but which requires an act of will on the believer part. Faith is a virtue precisely because it is not compelled. Faith is belief which is not coercively evoked by intrinsic evidence but which is produced by a voluntary adhesion to divine revelation.

So "faith" is employed both as an epistemological and as a nonepistemological term. The words "fides" and "fiducia" provide conveniently self explanatory labels for the two uses. We speak, on the other hand, of faith (fides) that there is a God and that such and such propositions about him are true. Here 'faith' is cognitively, referring to a state, act, or procedure which may be compared with standard instances of

knowing and believing. On the other hand, we speak of faith "fiducia" as a trust, maintained sometimes despite contrary indications, that the divine purpose toward us is wholly good and loving. This is a religious trust which may be compared with trust or confidence in an other human person.

The view of matter today, that, faith is unevidenced or in adequately evidenced belief. To quote a typical definition,-

"The general sense is belief perhaps based on some evidence, but very firm, or at least more firm, or/ and of more extensive content, than the evidence possessed by the believer rationally warrants."<sup>13</sup>

Reason itself is a matter of faith. The confidence of reason in itself as the faith which lies at the root of all knowledge.

In a unified and harmonious experience there can be no such antithesis between faith and knowledge. Religious faith must not claim special privileges in the sense of immunity from rational inquiry. It must be prepared to come out into the open and allow its tenets to be subjected to critical tests like any other hypothesis.

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13. A Philosophical Scrutiny of religion - by C.J. Ducasse  
( New York 1953)

We can identify faith with a set of beliefs in when the belief-in-demand some sort of behaviour in accordance with them. A religious faith will be set of beliefs-in about particular sorts of objects such that certain attitudes, that is disposition to behave, will be installed in the believes.

This view of faith differs from the view that faith is a way of knowing. When faith is taken as a way of knowing then all the old conflicts between faith and reason break out, both are making knowledge claims. In this view that faith does not depend upon the foundations of morality, non does it depend on any beliefs that certain absolute values are ingredient in the world.

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