



# MATTER, MIND AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Recent trends in science and philosophy

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In the recent times there has been a radical change in the approach of science. Developments in relativity, quantum physics and neuroscience have changed the way people looked at the universe. The mechanistic model of mind-matter dualism of Descartes and the realism of classical physics have been put to question at the wake of relativity and quantum mechanics. The theory of relativity completely



discarded the absolute description of any event of the physical universe by the methods physical sciences. The absolute description of reality started eluding the scientists who had to be contented with the

relative knowledge of reality. On the other hand, the birth of quantum mechanics ushered in the concept of indeterminacy in science.

Heisenberg's uncertainty principle invited subjective speculations to the domain of modern science. Consequently, the Copenhagen meet along with other subjective interpretations of quantum mechanics shook the age-long pillars of classical determinism. The Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen Paradox, the Bell's theorem, the Schrodinger Cat



paradox, the Aspect Experiment posed serious objections against the completely objective descriptions of Reality. The indeterminacy observed in the process of measurement in quantum mechanics engendered several philosophical arguments. The collapse of wave function became a vital issue to the scientists as well as to the philosophers. A large number of scientists accepted the relationship of the collapse of the wave function with consciousness. Thus, the study of consciousness has become a subject matter of deep interest amongst the physical scientists.

The neuro-science, though in its infancy, has been contributing significantly to the modern researches on brain, mind and consciousness. Some scientists are now getting interested in studying the decisive role of quantum processes in understanding the activities



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of the brain. The main issue is whether the indeterminacy of quantum mechanics approves the role of conscious will in influencing the physiological activities of the brain. It is still very difficult to locate the area

where the quantum event actually takes place. There are two different aspects of addressing the problem. On one hand the epistemological issues relating to quantum interpretations are to be studied. On the other hand, the mechanism of synaptic action and its involvement of the quantum processes which control the large scale coherent action are to be investigated. The problems of consciousness in human brain are being studied now with focus on these two vital aspects.

Friedrich Beck and John Eccles were pioneers in this field. They further elucidated the theory of the process of the exocytosis of the transmitter substance at synapses of the neo-cortex which was propounded by Sayer, Redmen and Andersen. Basically they established through statistical analysis that exocytosis is a process which responds to a nerve impulse with a probability much lesser than one. The quantum mechanical process involved has been modelled as a set up which



identifies the process as the quantum mechanical Tunnelling of quasi particle belonging to the micro site. It was also asserted that the long range interaction within the larger area of the microsite results in a coherent quantum state. In 1992 Eccles et al in their work ' quantum aspects of brain activity and the role of consciousness' made a significant contribution. He showed in his paper that the consciousness manifests itself in mental intentions. However the works of Pauli-Jung and Penrose-Hameroff are also worth mentioning. On the other hand the utter impossibility of designing a machine as intelligent as a human being has brought about a serious debate in the areas of artificial intelligence.

However, regarding the nature of consciousness, scientists are clearly divided into two groups. A group of scientists thinks that consciousness is an epiphenomenon being the product of brain and neural activities. The other group of scientist holds the opinion that the Consciousness is fundamental and cannot be treated as an epiphenomenon. In the backdrop of such a controversy between two groups of thinkers, the



perennial philosophies of India, namely, Samkhya, Yoga, Vedanta, Buddhism and Kashmiri Shaivism etcetera may be aptly invoked. Many modern thinkers like Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Abhedananda have also

contributed substantially to this field of studies by way of scientific interpretation of the philosophical concepts of Indian scriptures. Remarkably, some of the modern scientists have now interested themselves in the philosophies of Buddhism, Yogashashtra and Vedanta to have an insight into the nature of the Reality.

The Samkhya philosophy accounts for the universe of relativity considering the Prakriti as primal cause of the creation. The Prakriti is considered to be the ubiquitous, infinite, undecaying, uncontrolled and the ultimate ground of the manifested and united universe. According to the Samkhya philosophers, Prakriti is a beginningless



continuum of infinitesimal reals. These reals, known as gunas, are characterized by medium for the reflection of intelligence, energy and inertia known as sattva, rajas and tamas respectively. The reals remain in a condition of equipose before the creation begins. The breakdown of the equilibrium and the preponderance of one over the others results in the manifestation of various objects of different names and forms. This breakdown is accomplished by the conscious influence of purusha, as the prakriti being inert cannot bring about the disturbance by its ownself. The purushas are infinite in number. The effective contact between a purusha and the prakriti brings about the creation of the physical universe. The seers of Advaita Vedanta, though refuted the concept of prakriti being the ultimate cause of the universe, accepted the Samkhya cosmology in principle to explain the creation of the physical universe. They took up the Samkhya metaphysics with a slight modification. They considered Absolute Consciousness to be ultimate cause of the universe. It is one without a second and it animates this world-order with its cosmic power maya. This maya is sometimes equated with the prakriti of Samkhya philosophy. But in Samkhya the prakriti is devoid of consciousness whereas maya is a conscious entity.

The seers of Vedanta through logical inquiry and immediate realisation arrived at the conclusion that every object can be reduced to an undeniable and irreducible substratum called the Self. This Self is the Absolute Consciousness. It is non dual and without any attributes. Vedanta considers the Self has projected this relative world-order through its apparent modification. The apparent modification of the Self is accomplished by dint of the cosmic power, maya. This maya is the substratum of space-time and causality through which the Absolute Consciousness appears to be relative. The seers of Vedanta through direct experience and logical inquiry discovered that the individual self is one with the cosmic self. A person having this knowledge becomes the knower of the Absolute.

The search for consciousness in Indian philosophy and religion has been pursued in three ways:

- Through the study of Cosmology
- Through the study of Mind or manas



- Through the study of consciousness as manifested in different states of existence, viz, waking state, dream state and the state of dreamless sleep.

The Vedanta philosophy has presented a cosmological model which is not only rational but matches with many theories of modern science. This model has not been projected to stress on the nature of the origin and evolution of the universe, but has been proposed in order to establish the sole reality of the Absolute consciousness, the Self. Through logical analysis of Adhyaropa-Apavada, superimposition and de-superimposition, the seers of Vedanta establish that the changeful universe has an unchanging reality as its cause. The World is a relative reality, mithya, whereas the its cause the Absolute consciousness is the only Truth, Satya. According to the Vedanta cosmology the Prana and the Akasha are the primal evolutes. Prana is the first prominent manifestation of consciousness. The Kathopanishad says:

*'Yadidam kimcha jagat sarvam prana ejati nihsritam.'*

'Whatever there in this world is nothing but the pulsation of the Prana.'

These Prana and Akasha manifest at all the levels of relative existence. At the physical level it represents the sum total of all physical interactions and the sum total of all matter is the Akasha. At the beginning of the creation of the physical universe, the Prana remains as potentiality within the Akasha. The vibration of the Prana on the Akasha triggers off the process of creation in the physical level. Vedanta upholds that the physical level emerged from the mental level. In the mental level the Prana manifests as the psychic forces whereas the Akasha represents the infra-atomic particles called tanmatra. However, the mental level has the spiritual level as its substratum. In the spiritual level the Prana and Akasha remains united as an indivisible whole. Vedanta upholds that these different levels of existence being changeful and ephemeral represent the relative reality but not the Absolute Reality. The Absolute is immutable, infinite and eternal. Being itself uncaused, It is the cause of all the relative levels of existence.



As per the second view, mind is the medium where the consciousness shines in its highest splendour. But the mind being the product of maya is always directed outward and establishes identification with the objects which are illusory and transitory in nature. These identifications are accomplished through the mental modifications. The yoga philosophy starts with the prescription of the control of the mental modifications. When the mental modifications are tamed, the mind becomes inward and concentrates on a single object which is the replica of Reality. Through constant practice the mind ultimately loses its own identity and becomes fully absorbed in that object. But the supreme realisation is not accomplished unless the subject-object duality vanishes. When the mind commits suicide, the individual self merges into the supreme self and becomes one with it. This is highest experience of reality, the cessation of all misery. When this supreme state is attained, the much coveted knowledge of the Absolute is obtained.

According to the third view, an inquiry into the Absolute reality may be accomplished through the study of three states of existences, viz. waking state, dream state and the state of dreamless sleep. In the waking state, an individual gains perception through the inputs of the sense-organs and considers those perceptions as real. In the dream state, though the sense-organs remain inactive, the mind manipulates the stored sensory inputs and animates the reality in a peculiar way. In the state of dreamless sleep the senses become inactive and the mind becomes free from all sensory impressions. It is a very profound state where the mind becomes empty and the individual experiences a profound bliss for a finite period of time. It is to be noted that the same mind returns with different information about the reality in three different states of existences. Therefore, the notions of reality obtained in the different states of existence are relative and not the Absolute. Vedanta considers these experiences as illusory and asserts that the Absolute is beyond all these relative experiences and perceptions. When the mind ceases to be mind, the realisation of the Absolute is consummated. Thus the Vedanta prescribes the scientific praxis which enables an individual to transcend the mind and its illusory experiences and be established in the Absolute Reality- the Supreme Self.



In the present perspective the growing trends among the modern scientists towards the study of the philosophical concepts of Indian tradition religion and philosophy demands the exchange of views between the scientists, psychologists, philosophers and mystics. The Philosophico-Literary Research Department of Kaivalyadhama is untiringly endeavouring to form a conglomeration of the thoughts and views from diverse fields that will contribute to the holistic understanding of the Reality.

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