Introduction
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The topic of research “cognitive nature of religious experience: a philosophical investigation” was chosen for this research work because normally religious experience and its impact is talked about as being pragmatic, sociological and psychological. It is normally considered as pragmatic as it has some uses, it happens in certain situations and helps man to come out of those difficult situations. It is considered sociological as those people who have had such an experience do bring about some social changes by their efforts. It is considered as psychological as others consider it just as a psychological state or a mental state of the person having an experience, (as though it is some disease, which it is not).

Such an understanding is just a partial understanding of religious experience and its impact on the experienceer and those who come in contact with him.

In this thesis we talk about epistemology of religious experience and about the cognition of truths that the experienceer has during religious experience.

Talking about the cognitive nature of religious experience becomes important because its non-cognitive nature has been at times emphasised so much that people hearing to this non-cognitive discourse become so influenced by it that they refuse to see the cognitive aspect of religious experience and start considering it wrongly as wholly non-cognitive. To correct this wrong an effort is being made to emphasise the cognitive nature of religious experience.

In the first chapter after clarification about the use of words the problem of religious experience is stated.

The problem is regarding the cognitive nature of religious belief.

Some thinkers consider religious assertions to be cognitive whereas some others consider them as non-cognitive.

Some consider it as non-cognitive since they can’t be shown to be referring to any facts of sense experience. Those who have the agenda to
show the worthless-ness of these assertions knowingly misinterpret these assertions. They don’t want to look at the cognitive import of these assertions which is implicitly present in them.

Those thinkers who don’t dismiss religious assertions as meaningless but present their importance on some non-factual grounds such as emotional or moral, fail to notice the importance of implicit cognitive import of these assertions.

The precise formulation of the non-cognitive view of religious experience could be presented as follows:

Religious experience is to be accepted (if it is to be accepted at all) as a strange non-cognitive experience because it can’t be adequately categorized with the publicly verifiable sense experience which is accepted as the paradigm of cognitive experience.

The acceptance of publicly verifiable sense experience is the basis of putting religious experience into the category of non-cognitive experience. Verifiable sense experience is habitually accepted as the only kind of cognitive experience and beliefs formed on this basis alone are accepted as knowledge. But there is no good reason to accept that no other kind of experience is possible for human beings which could qualify to be called a cognitive experience.

Thus, the part of the problem of religious experience lies in the non-acceptance of the possibility of any other experience (apart from the publicly verifiable sense experience) as a cognitive experience.

A part of the problem of cognitive nature of religious experience crops up due to the failure to notice that the demand to show the ‘cognitivity’ of any experience always in sense experience is an unjust demand.

Finally, a part of the problem of cognitivity of religious experience arises from the failure to notice that the practical significance of religious
beliefs would be lost completely if this feature (i.e. cognitivity) is not acknowledged as its essential feature.

Even in the cases where a believer believes in something only because he is brought up in tradition to believe that, he believes that there is some reality behind which is beyond sense experience. Cutting the religious belief from their ground, which is acknowledged as real, is to render them unworthy of consideration for shaping life on them.

Religious assertions without relating them to religious experience and acknowledging its cognitivity leaves them as a matter of non-serious choice for a particular life style. No religious believer ever accepts such a position. Thus the supporters of non-cognitivist view of religious assertions don’t do justice with religious belief.

Religious believers, especially the enlightened ones, don’t explicitly make a claim that what they say as a matter of their belief is true also. It is trivial. Believing in anything is to believe it to be true. Although instances of belief could be sighted where this acceptance is not necessarily involved. But in the case of religious beliefs the believer necessarily believes in the truth of his beliefs, although he may not explicitly state so. Most enlightened believers don’t want to enter into intellectual debate and prefer to avoid giving any categorical reply regarding the cognitivity of religious experience.

The fact that religious person does not take interest in making sharp distinction between cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of religious experience further aggravates the problem as religious persons do not even attempt to defend explicitly the truth content present in his experience. They do not do so (attempt to defend truths) because under the influence of ecstasy of the experience they do not find any relevance of it.

However, when one hears religious persons’ speeches and observes their lives then one does get a clear indication that what they say and do, are responses of some sort of cognition. Their consistent pursuing of a particular way of life implicitly shows some adherence to a truth of a different order that
these people have experienced. However, at the level of confinement of sense experience based knowledge one doesn’t have adequate ground to substantiate that.

The attempt to maintain the importance of religious assertions as the prescription and instructions of a particular way of life through mythology are not in tune with their internal realistic import. A fiction writer knows that the characters and events of his fiction are not historically true. The difference between mythology used in fiction and the mythology presented in religion is that the religious believer knows well that the moral code recommended in his religion is recommended only because that is in accordance with the truth that is known in the deeper awareness of reality obtained in religious experience. In fact this refers to the subtle but clear distinction between poetic or aesthetic experience and religious experience.

A part of the problem of cognitivity of religious experience crops up due to the failure of recognizing it as different from Aesthetic experience. Religious experience is acknowledged to be cognitive since it contains the truth-content of the reality looked at from transcendence. Aesthetic experience may have a truth-content of a deeper vision of reality but not so deep to transcend historicity of human life completely.

The use of the term religious experience covers in general those experiences which occur to the enlightened religious believers and is not confined to theistic religious experiences only but also of non-theistic experiences like ‘Nirvāṇa’ and ‘Kaivalya’ in Buddhism and Jainism respectively. The problem of cognitivity arises with the experience of Nirvāṇa and Kaivalya also in the same manner as it arises with religious experience of theistic variety.

The problem of cognitivity of religious experience is primarily not related to the question of the nature of its object. The problem is connected to the issues of the validity of its truth-claim, which arises due to the fact that it is very uncommon or rare sort of experience that evades all tests in sense-experience.
The problem of cognitivity is the problem of proving religious experience as a self-validating experience and also proving that it enables the person to prefer to adhere to the religious way of life (in accordance with this experience) to the non-religious way of life.

Proving that religious experience is self-validating alone is not the problem. To show that it is the serious reason to prefer the religious way of life to the non-religious way of life also is an inextricable part of the problem.

In the end of first chapter I formulate the problem in precise terms.

In the second chapter traditional epistemology is criticized. It is criticized because traditionally sense experience is considered to be the only source of knowledge and other ways of gaining knowledge are neglected or not even considered to be sources of knowledge, religious experience which is not a sensual experience, but provides knowledge is one of the many ways of gaining knowledge.

In the second chapter it is shown by Gettier’s criticism of traditional epistemology that even so called knowledge provided by sense experience may not be true knowledge. Gettier pointed out that even justified true belief might not be knowledge. As it is possible for a person to be justified in believing a proposition that is true, but yet the person may not know. While Gettier asserted that although justification is necessary to convert true belief into knowledge, but it is not sufficient. Alston asserts that justification isn’t even necessary to convert true belief into knowledge. Alston suggests that we should abandon the idea that there is a unique something or other properly called ‘epistemic justification’. Alston holds that there is no fact of the matter about what constitutes epistemic justification. Alston’s rejects the centrality of epistemic justification and suggests that epistemology should move ‘Beyond “Justification”’. Once the ‘justificationist’ approach to understanding the epistemic evaluation of belief is rejected, one would be, according to Alston, better equipped to articulate and understand the interrelations between a variety of different epistemic desiderata. Alston proposes a package of epistemic desiderata framed around the central cognitive aim of acquiring, retaining and using true beliefs.
Alston treats truth as the most basic epistemic desideratum.

We are (deontologically) justified in accepting immediate beliefs because it is not in our control to stop formation of any such belief. We don’t have voluntary control over our believing. Belief formation is involuntary, we have a disposition to form belief in God just like we have a disposition to form perceptual and other basic beliefs.

These beliefs are generated by belief forming mechanisms which are triggered by a kind of evidence in experiential circumstances. Belief forming mechanism and the appropriate circumstances, in which we sometimes are disposed to form a particular belief, suggest an account of knowledge while there is an impulsive ground of belief formation also.

A belief formed by the proper functioning of the belief-forming mechanism is a well-founded belief and acceptable solely because it is well-founded. It is not necessary for any belief to be supported by evidence to be accepted. What Alston argues for is a foundationalism without evidentialism or rational justification.

Alston argues that we do not have effective voluntary control over our beliefs. Since one does not have full control over one’s beliefs, by the time-honored principle “Ought implies can”, it follows that the deontological epistemology is not acceptable.

In view of the above stated criticisms of traditional epistemology, it is clear that the doubt cast on the epistemic justification of religious belief is based on the notion which itself is vague and not related to any matter of fact. Doubt extended to the cognitivity of religious experience on this ground, therefore, is based on confusions only. Religious beliefs are inextricably connected to religious experience (since they are directly formed in the mind of religious persons due to the religious experience that he passes through) and this direct connection itself is an indubitable justification for religious beliefs.

The criticism of traditional epistemology, in its second part, consists in the detailed presentation of the argument which support the view that apart from sense experience there are other varieties of experience also which serve as the strongest justification for the beliefs formed as their direct
consequences. Religious beliefs also draw their very strong justification from the religious experience as a direct consequence of which they are formed.

Alston contends that religious experience can provide justification for religious beliefs.

Alston says — There is something which can be called, “experiential awareness of God” which has some similarities to sense perception. As some beliefs formed due to sense perception, directly by perception e.g. I saw a tree, are basic. Similarly belief in God formed due to experiential awareness of God is also direct and basic. It is rational even and should be considered as rational until proved guilty and should not be accepted as guilty until conclusively proved irrational. We are rationally justified in holding a belief unless we have adequate reasons to think that they are false. Theistic beliefs are rational because there are no adequate reasons to accept it as false; criticism does not establish its falsity beyond doubt.

All perceptual beliefs involve experiential justification. Theistic belief is also produced in an experiential situation that itself confers its justification. The person whose belief is formed in such a situation can’t refuse to form the belief (as it is involuntary) and lacks any reason for not believing or considering the belief false or un-reliable. Logically any belief can be doubted but experientially produced beliefs are not doubted or considered false until there is a reason for it. Such a belief is not a result of any induction or deduction, it is spontaneous. It does not require any argument or reason in its support. It is a basic or foundational belief. A basic belief is not subject to doubt because it is basic. Doubt comes up only after the formation and acceptance of basic beliefs. Some skeptics doubt whether theistic belief is really a basic belief. But Alston argues that if the basic status of such beliefs is denied then the basic status of many other well-accepted beliefs (e.g. belief in immediate memory, belief in other minds etc.) also would be lost.

Belief in God is formed as naturally as the belief that, one is seeing a tree.

Belief in God is a basic, immediate belief and this is formed in a person’s mind in appropriate circumstances.
Alston develops a model according to which a person’s beliefs about the activities, intentions, and character of God can owe their justification directly to his own religious experience, in much the same way our perceptual beliefs about our immediate environment can owe their justification directly to perceptual experience and not to arguments.

Alston’s argument in favor of the basic status of religious beliefs (because of their direct formation from religious experience of the person) is an indirect but decisive criticism of traditional epistemology. In his arguments some fundamental assumptions of traditional epistemology are challenged which had been habitually accepted for ages.

Alvin Plantinga, too, criticizes the Traditional Epistemology against the notion of ‘evidence’ and develops a Religious Epistemology to show that the experiences of religious believers directly and indubitably justify the beliefs produced from them (those experiences).

Plantinga invokes the notion of ‘warrant’ of beliefs in place of the notion of ‘evidential justification’. A belief is justified, according to Plantinga, if it is produced by the proper function of the belief forming mechanism with which human beings are endowed.

Plantinga holds that the belief in God is very much a warranted belief in the situations of experiences which the believers pass through. Their warrant is their justification for the believer and it is so clear and strong that he neither needs any further reason for its support nor he finds himself in doubt when his belief is criticized by the skeptic.

Traditional Epistemology had been accepted since alternative possibilities were not thought.

Plantinga’s elaboration of Religious Epistemology on an Externalist view is an indirect criticism of the Traditional Epistemology which presupposes that sense-experience-based beliefs alone are justified.

In the third chapter a review of some fundamental issues of epistemology like evidence, observation, theory, simplicity, falsifiability is made.
In cognitive understanding of a phenomenon, reason is identified with understanding. To understand a phenomenon cognitively is to understand what reason or evidence is in its support. However, evidences cannot go beyond a certain boundary of the accepted bulk of knowledge, thus we cannot attain truth with certainty. As. Evidence is a piece of information whose truth we already believe in (with or without any sufficient reason), on which the rest of the information or the whole of new information is dependent in such a way that if evidence is true the whole information becomes highly probable.

However, every sort of knowledge does not require evidence for its support. Some beliefs are accepted to be true without any evidence.

Ordinarily it is considered that evidence is required, for religious experience to be acceptable. However, even in cases of scientific beliefs, evidences only support the beliefs, they don’t form them. In fact we already believe in a theory in support of which we later bring in certain instances and tests which, at the most, corroborate the theory.

The so called knowledge which is justified on the basis of evidence does not go beyond the realm of rational doubts. It always remains probable and it lacks certainty which, by implication, takes away the very notion of truth from knowledge.

Theories can’t be verified, for we are never in a position to observe all the instances of past, present and future. Theories can’t be proved to be true. At the most, theories can be falsified, if a falsification instance can be found, but they can never be refuted even if some instances contradicting some of its consequences can be found as they may be rehabilitated by adjusting background knowledge (the premises, axioms upon which theory is based), or by providing further auxiliary hypothesis to support them. No conclusive disproof of a theory can ever be produced.

Theory choice is generally settled with the methodological principle of simplicity.

A more universal statement can take the place of many less universal ones, and for that reason is called ‘simpler’. The degree of universality and of precision of a theory increases with its degree of falsifiability.
Simplicity is so highly desirable because knowledge is our object, and simple statements are to be prized more highly than less simple ones because they tell us more as their empirical content is greater and are better testable.

The epistemological questions which arise in connection with the concept of simplicity can be answered if we connect this concept with degree of falsifiability.

The hypothesis which is falsifiable in a higher degree, or the simpler hypothesis, is also the one which is corroborable in a higher degree.

Theories may be more, or less, severely testable; that is more, or less, falsifiable.

A theory is falsifiable if there exists at least one non-empty class of its potential falsifiers, i.e. basic statements which are forbidden by it.

A theory which forbids too much would be very easy to falsify, since it allows the empirical world only a narrow range of possibilities and rules out almost all conceivable, i.e. logically possible, events. It asserts so much about the world of experience, its empirical content is so great, that there is little chance for it to escape falsification.

Thus the amount of empirical information conveyed by a theory, or its empirical content, increases with its degree of falsifiability.

Theories which stand falsification attempts contain even those truths which lesser theories which were falsified, attempted to establish, provided both these theories are comparable, i.e. are in the same field and attempt to establish the same truths.

There are infinite number of theories but there is no guarantee that the theories which we are comparing do contain a true theory, as we may be involved in comparison of false theories. Psychologically we are inclined to establish relations where none may exist. Thus many theories may in fact be involved in wrongly establishing relations.

Empirical content of a statement increases with its degree of falsifiability: the more a statement forbids, the more it says about the world of experience.
‘Empirical content’ is closely related to, but not identical with, ‘logical content’.

The degree of corroboration actually attained does not depend only on the degree of falsifiability. A statement may be falsifiable to a high degree yet it may be only slightly corroborated, or it may in fact be falsified, or it may, without being falsified, be superseded by a better testable theory from which it can be deduced.

In general an inter-subjectively testable falsification is regarded as final.

A theory can be better corroborated the better testable it is.

The degree of corroboration of a theory will increase with the number of its corroborating instances.

That hypothesis is simple which has no or minimum number of auxiliary hypotheses supporting it. A hypothesis which is supported and defended and strengthened (and/or protected) by auxiliary hypotheses each time it is attacked becomes too strong or complex to be indefeatable or nonfalsifiable, it does not remain simple any more. A system is complex in the highest degree if one holds fast to it as a system established forever which one is determined to rescue, whenever it is in danger, by the introduction of auxiliary hypotheses. The degree of falsifiability of a system thus protected is equal to zero.

Simplicity must be logically defined and not defined within a system as a thing defined within a system though it may appear to be simple within the system but it may be really very complex.

The simple theories are those which make little use of auxiliary hypothesis.

Simplicity in the sense of high testability, because of high falsifiability, leads to the rule that auxiliary hypothesis should be used as sparingly as possible and that the number of our axioms should be kept down.

Those theories which are on too high a level of universality, that is too far removed from the level reached by the testable science of the day give rise to a ‘metaphysical system’. In such a case, there will be no new testable
statement among them. It means that no crucial experiment can be designed to test the system in question.

The scientific research program may be degenerating or progressive. It all depends upon what is our paradigm, if old paradigm then nothing new can be found, as no new questions arise. Science progresses when there is some problem, which demands an explanation and to explain the problem a theory is devised, and the theory explains other than this particular problem, many other problems also, while it predicts about future events also. But to explain the prediction, is itself a problem which is solved – either by adjusting the assumption, the background knowledge, or by supporting the assumption and theory by auxiliary hypothesis – or by going ahead, to challenge even the assumption, the background of the theory, in a new direction, to gain new knowledge. Thus breaking the shackles which belief in old knowledge (to be true) was imposing upon one’s scientific growth of new knowledge.

Though commonly it is believed that a single crucial experiment may often decide between two rival theories, which are comparable, but this is not always the case.

Therefore, every experiment tests not only an isolated hypothesis, but the whole body of relevant knowledge logically involved. If the experiment is claimed to refute an isolated hypothesis, this is because the rest of the assumptions we have made are believed to be well founded. But this belief may be mistaken.

Thus, “Crucial experiments” are crucial against a hypothesis only if there is a relatively stable set of assumptions which we do not wish to abandon. But no guarantees can be given that some portion of such assumptions will never be surrendered.

Even for evidence to work efficiently, to provide us knowledge we must have some basic axioms, some certain truths to begin with. We believe and have faith in the truth of these axioms and even in the truth of methods of evaluation and comparison, but it is to notice that it is a belief that is not testable.
The demand for justification of a belief itself raises certain questions because all experiences can’t be substantiated on the basis of evidence, proofs and/or justification can’t be given of recent memory, or perception or belief in other minds. They are directly apprehended. Moreover, the notion of proof itself needs to be examined. Proof is a method by which from some believed truth, by relations and deductions, we arrive at the desired truth. Though man may make relations where none may exist, but relations may also be directly apprehended. By deductions we arrive at no new truths but at truths which are already contained in the initial statement. Thus no real advancement in empirical knowledge can be made by proofs.

Science is not a system of certain irrefutable statements; nor is it a system which steadily advances towards a state of finality. Our science is not that knowledge which can ever claim to have attained truth, or even a substitute for it.

We do not actually claim to know: we can only conjecture. Our conjectures are guided by the metaphysical faith in laws, in regularities which we can discover.

These conjectures or ‘anticipations’ are controlled by systematic tests. Once put forward, none of our ‘anticipations’ are dogmatically held. Scientific method of research is to try to falsify them.

The description of scientific progress - ‘by gathering new perceptual experiences, and by better organizing those which are available already’, though not wrong, is too reminiscent of induction.

The advance of science is not due to the fact that more and more perceptual experiences accumulate in the course of time. Nor is it due to the fact that we are making ever better use of our senses.

Even the careful and sober testing of our ideas by experience is, in its turn, inspired by ideas: experiment is planned action in which every step is governed by theory. We do not stumble upon our experiences, nor do we let them flow over us like a stream. Rather, we have to be active: we have to ‘make’ our experiences. We formulate the questions to be put to nature; we put
these questions to elicit a clear-cut ‘yes’ or ‘no’. And, it is again we who give the answer; we ourselves who, after severe scrutiny, decide upon the answer.

In the history of science it is always the theory and not the experiment, the idea and not the observation, which opens up the way to new knowledge, although it is always the experiment which saves from following a track that leads nowhere.

The old scientific ideal of epistēmē – of absolutely certain, demonstrable knowledge – has proved to be an idol. The demand for scientific objectivity makes it inevitable that every scientific statement must remain tentative for ever. It may indeed be corroborated, but every corroboration is relative to other statements which, again, are tentative.

The advance of science is towards the infinite yet attainable aim of discovering new, deeper, and more general problems, and of subjecting its ever tentative answers to ever renewed and ever more rigorous tests.

Scientific knowledge is always theory impregnated and is conjectural in character. We first postulate theory and make observations in its light. So observation in our so-called cognition is theory laden. Theories are accepted because of their heuristic (explanatory) power. A theory tries to explain a phenomenon but explanation is not a guarantee of truth. Theories are conjectures which may be refuted by a new counter evidence. Any new information, which is contrary to the explanation provided by the theory, may prove to be an instance for the refutation of the theory. Theories at the most can claim to help us reach near the truth or provide greater truth content but they can’t give us certainty about the truth of the phenomenon. More than one theories can explain the same phenomenon. Which one of them is better or progressive – is decided on the ground of their power to add more truth content to our available bulk of knowledge. However, this is not the proof of certainty of that truth. The belief in the truth of a theory is accepted on the ground of the instances that it predicts. But observation itself is theory laden. Hence the truth of the theoretical belief and the truth of the observed instances end up in theoretical framework only and the realistic link that is intended to be established can never touch the reality with certainty. While by induction
we can, at the most, attain truths which are probable, lack certainty and can be doubted. While by deduction we cannot proceed beyond what we already have or know, and thus can’t attain any new knowledge, or truth. Thus we can never attain truth and certainty, in Science.

In the attempt of over emphasizing the notion of evidence traditional epistemology fails to secure certainty not only about newly discovered truths but also fails to recognize truths that are directly apprehended, for which evidence is not required. A belief may be without any evidence. In direct apprehension no such evidence is required, belief comes with apprehension. In traditional epistemology it is completely overlooked that the link between the truth of theoretical belief and the truth of the evidence is also a directly apprehended link. If we go into a thorough analysis of the steps between a theoretical belief and the evidence that supports it, we find that every step is related to another with direct apprehension. Truths may be related to each other in the world of objective knowledge but they become our knowledge only when they become objects of direct apprehension.

Scientists and philosophers of science believe that there are no truths in science and certainty was lost many centuries ago. To believe that science gives us truth is an unfounded belief.

There are many other modes of knowing, which can be shown where evidential support is not needed. In those cases where our knowledge is dependent upon some evidence, the relation between the truth of the belief and evidence remains problematic.

In the fourth chapter some fundamental issues of epistemology like foundationalism, the doctrine of the given, the basic cognitive states, directly apprehended truths and its various types are discussed.

When we talk about truth we, generally, assume that there would be proof or evidence behind it. But there could be truths which don’t need any proof.

We cannot gain any knowledge without already having some beliefs, presumptions and assumptions. Knowledge is also a belief, there is a belief factor in it.
A person cannot be held epistemically responsible in accepting the belief unless he himself has access to the justification. A reason for thinking that the belief is likely to be true and no reason for questioning this claim or belief has so far emerged.

Directly apprehended truths become the basis of other truths, which are supported by evidences. Directly apprehended truths are the basis of evidential knowledge and they can’t be supported by it. Direct apprehensions are certain cognitive states and experiences which justify themselves. One and the same cognitive state can be both the original cognitive apprehension of the contingent state of affairs and at the same time a justification of that apprehension, i.e. a reason for thinking that the state thus apprehended genuinely exists. Thus, direct apprehension of empirical knowledge itself provides the standard or criteria of epistemic justification and also provides a *meta-justification* of that standard or criteria of epistemic justification. That is, there are good reasons for thinking that following the standard of direct apprehension will lead to truth in the long run.

Empirical knowledge requires foundation in order to avoid skepticism. The epistemic regress problem, is solved by epistemological foundationalism.

The fundamental concept of foundationalism is the concept of a basic belief. It is by appeal to basic beliefs that the threat of an infinite regress is to be avoided and empirical knowledge given a secure foundation. A basic empirical belief is in effect an epistemological unmoved or self moved mover. A basic empirical belief is able to confer justification on other beliefs, but inspire of being empirical and thus contingent, apparently it has no need to have justification conferred on it.

Foundationalists argue that the believer’s cognitive grasp required for the justification involves cognitive states which do not themselves require justification, despite having the capacity to confer justification on beliefs. Thus, these cognitive states are the ultimate source of epistemic justification.

But the basic beliefs are not to be confused with the basic cognitive states. There is a difference between them. The basic cognitive states are intuitions, immediate apprehensions, direct apprehensions or direct
awareness, and the objects of such states are usually said to be given or presented.

The view of given provides an answer to the elusive and nagging problem of how the system of beliefs achieves that input from or that contact with non-conceptual reality.

The central thesis of the doctrine of the given is that the basic empirical beliefs are justified, not by appeal to further beliefs or merely external facts but rather by appeal to the states of “immediate experience” or “direct apprehension” or “intuition.” These states allegedly can confer justification without themselves requiring justification.

Thus, immediate experience brings the regress of justification to an end by making possible a direct comparison between the basic belief and its object. The justificatory appeal is directly to the objective world, to the relevant fact, while avoiding the need for any appeal to further beliefs which would perpetuate the regress of justification rather than solving the regress problem, hence the regress problem is solved.

The doctrine of the given does not hold that the mere existence of some appropriate objective state of affairs is sufficient for justification. The objective state of affairs must be experienced or apprehended by the believer, and it is this experience or apprehension, and not the objective state of affairs itself, which constitutes the primary source of justification. The nature of such an experience or apprehension is suggested by the terms, employed to describe such an experience, like “immediate,” “direct,” “intuitive” and “presentation”.

Wherein the underlying idea is that of ‘confrontation’. In an immediate experience mind directly confronts the object without intervention of any kind of intermediary. It is in this sense that the object is simply given to or thrust upon the mind.

In cognitive enterprise propositions fundamentally depend on certain truths which are directly apprehended. Doubts regarding directly apprehended truths can be removed or clarified by intra sensory observations and experiences and by intra subjective observations and experiences. Moreover, for certain and true knowledge, certain other conditions also need to be
satisfied so that direct apprehension really takes place. For example, in order to see something with eyes the light should be accurate as well as the eye-sight should be normal so that one gains true knowledge by direct apprehension by one’s eyes.

Directly apprehended truths are of various types. Most common of them with which we are all familiar are the truths of the world around us which we directly come to know by our senses. Sense experience is the most private but it is basically objective.

Human beings come to know these truths because they are human beings. It is because of empathy that one comes to know that other human beings are also just like him. Human experiences, pain and pleasure are human feelings. They don’t vary from person to person. The content of all these are directly apprehended.

Even our internal senses like hunger, thirst, pain are directly apprehended.

Other truths which are directly apprehended are the content of anxiety, memory, happiness etc.

Still other truths which are directly apprehended are higher order intuitive truths like in mathematics. Like $2 + 2 = 4$.

Knowledge of moral values also come in the realm of directly apprehended truth claims which one gains through an moral experience which is a direct experience.

Aesthetic experience also contain within it its content that is directly known. Apprehension of beauty is a capability with which all (normal) human beings are endowed. Apprehension of the beautiful is a direct apprehension.

In religious experience also religious persons come to know (or recognize) certain truths. These truths also fall in the category of directly apprehended truths. They give a community its cultural foundation and give the individual its identity and moral strength. In fact truths of religious experience form the most fundamental class of the directly apprehended truths. There is nothing deeper than them from which they could be deduced.
or inferred. All operations of inference or deduction ultimately depend on them in an existential sense.

Although Religious Truths are ultimately the foundation of a community, a discussion about their nature has to be done in some of the cultural presuppositions. Given this condition Religious Truths are discussed in broad conceptual frames of Theistic Religious Truths and Non-Theistic Religious Truths.

In the fifth chapter an outline of religious epistemology is given.

Religious experience is a direct experience and religious statements bear the content of the truths experienced or disclosed in that. Epistemology required for understanding directly apprehended truths whether religious or sensual is almost the same. However, given the specificity of religious experience the epistemology for it needs to be grasped in a specific manner.

Religious experience is a simple human experience and any one can have it, provided certain conditions are fulfilled like deconditioning from the sensual materialistic world. Though any one can have it, but to apprehend it certain religious-cultural background is required. Religious-cultural background does not produce religious experience, it helps one to attend to it and apprehend it. A person would not be able to recognize a religious experience as something worthy of attention even if it occurs to him many a times. Without a cultural conceptual framework the content of religious experience can’t be grasped by a person’s mind and is left unattended. But this line of thinking cannot be correctly used for supporting any form of radical religious-cultural relativism.

Religious experience is a very simple human experience which is in a way pre-cultural experience. The person who undergoes this experience within his religious-cultural belief system recognizes it as such. For attaining religious experience no special training is required. On the contrary, religious experience is availed by a person only when he unlearns for the time being everything else.

Changing the direction of the focus of attention from all that we do in our day to day life and to fix it on that which is underneath is the way to attain
religious experience. Religious-cultural upbringing of a person makes her/him susceptible to this dimension of human experience.

A religious person — a person who is brought up in a religious environment of a particular community becomes sensitive (at least supposed to be so) to that which is happening beneath or behind all that is happening at the level of sense experience in our day to day life. A person who is brought up in a religious tradition and utters the statement, God is benevolent, to refer to his experience intends to say that something is there underneath this world of sense experience that helps him (others also) when he is in distress. The person is making a truth claim implicitly but definitely because he feels it. He is no, talking about his imagination. He is primarily and essentially talking about what he experiences or feels.

It is true that at times strong imagination makes a person feel what he imagines. Hence it can be argued by the critics that the religious believers feeling or experience is generated by his own imagination. Imagination and feeling are different. Even if the feeling is produced by an imagination it is a feeling and not merely imagination. Imagination of anything does not always generate feeling/experience although feeling/experience may involve some imagination. Religious truths cannot be undermined by declaring them as mere figments of the believers imagination: they are felt or experienced by the believers. When a religious believer states that God is benevolent, he is talking about what he actually feels or experiences and not what he imagines.

A religious believer brought up in a particular religious tradition is, of course, supplied with an image of the divine (person or state). But in his real life he encounters innumerable situations in which the effect of the presence of that image is directly felt/experienced by him. If somehow he comes to know that what he imagined was actually present independent of his imagination then he would have no surprises and will come to know the reality of that image. Earlier it was an image for him but once he comes to know that it exists independent of his mind also then he will realize that even earlier he was knowing the truth although not aware of it.
Religious believer brought up in a particular religious tradition is given a truth about how the divine operates in human life. He does not know it in the beginning. He passes through various situations in life when he experiences the effects personally although he does not know the divine personally. But even in this state what he conceives is not false but true.

The experience of the divine presence is not a figment of one’s imagination but it is a matter of mind independent reality. The experience is not because of religious-cultural background, religious-cultural background only helps one to understand it. Even culture is a gift of God, even life and the sustenance of it in the given material conditions is a gift of God and is because of God, even the proper functioning of different systems in the organism is a gift of God, even self-consciousness, reason, feelings and emotions are a gift of God and they all help the person to have a religious experience and to realize the religious truth that there is something supramundane behind or beneath them. The statement “God is benevolent” is the manifestation of that simple directly apprehended truths. Though the critic may criticize it that this is the doxastic belief of the religious believer. The critic may go on to assert that such beliefs are irrational, and only those beliefs are rational which fall within the scope of scientific explanation. The critics or scientists attitude towards truths known in religious experience is prejudiced or biased.

The religious believers experience contain a definite truth (religious truth) in it. Different religious believers of the same community, despite variation in their mode of experiencing, acknowledge that what they are talking about is a mind independent reality and not a product of their subjective imagination.

The mind independent truths of religious experience are grasped in that realm of experience only. Although that experience affects the material realm of sense experience also, these truths can’t be grasped and judged appropriately at that level. Truths of religious statements like “God is benevolent” is a truth that is grasped by the believers of a particular religious community in an experience which they avail by deconditioning themselves from the material realm of their being.
God believer comes to know these truths directly as a matter of his immediate experience. The person, who makes the statement (God is benevolent), is only uttering what he directly feels and not interpreting anything that is not before his direct perception. Believing in God is only a way, through the religious-cultural upbringing to decondition oneself from all the mundane surroundings to reach the state of simple self awareness.

The epistemology of religious truths contained in the statements of religious beliefs is an epistemology of deconditioning and unlearning all that is acquired by a self conscious human person since his early childhood. This epistemology is of two folds. Religious belief is given to a person in his early childhood from his religious tradition towards which he sticks as some kind of positive assumptions regarding the world and his own being. Most people till their death use them like that only. However, the most important function comes later when these assumptions help him to decondition himself from all the mundane engagements and see the simple truth of the world and his own being, directly. Not all people could rise to the level of this function of religious belief but that is the more or the most important function of it. Religious beliefs, in fact, enable the persons mind to be aware of that which is beyond or beneath the mundane prevalent eternally. Theistic religious beliefs give a person a notion of God which is beyond all sorts of mundane limitations and conditions. Any anthropomorphic understanding of God is surely a misunderstanding of it. A proper understanding is achieved by the person when he deeply meditates on the notion of God and realizes that such a person or power is not present in the world of sense experience or even the world created by imagination. Sooner or later he realizes that this makes a space within him, where, detached from his mundane engagements he could see that which operates in and around him. By providing a seemingly positive assumption religious belief eventually draws the person’s attention towards that simple plane reality which generates and sustains life, consciousness and all its marvelous beautiful modes.

Those religions which do not provide the notion of creator God also do the same function. In religions like Buddhism and Jainism there is no concept
of creator God. However, both the religions instruct people of their community to withdraw from the pressure and compulsions of worldly desires to realize their supramundane unearthly essence of being where neither suffering nor death reaches. Believers of Buddhism aspire for Nirvana that is a state of pure complete unconditioned state of consciousness (which is called anatta or shunyata). Jainism also teaches people to withdraw from all mundane desires to lead that austere life in which the person realizes his infinite essential being in all its grandeur (anantchatushtraya).

Epistemology of religious truth is an epistemology of that sort of simple directly apprehended truths which is the very essence of human self and which he realizes in entering into his deepest core of subjectivity.

Verifiability in shareable experience

Since religious experience is acknowledged as a completely private experience in which no other person is involved, the question whether religious experience is verifiable or not arises. Two points are to be taken into consideration in this regard – (a) The nature of any ordinary experience as such. (b) The nature of religious experience.

(a) The nature of any ordinary experience as such – It is to be looked into clearly whether any experience – sense experience or any other common experience is public or private. There is a misgiving that if some object is placed in the external space one would see the features of it as the same or very much similar. It is wrongly assumed that the experience of an object in a physical publicly shareable space is a common or shareable experience. The so called common sense experience of an object placed in a publically shareable space is also completely private. In fact experience as such takes place only in a living individual's mind and there is nothing like commonly shareable experience in this sense.

The sense perception is not doubted not because it is tested to be indubitable but because it is a matter of general practice of believing in the veracity of this experience. So it should be clear that the acceptance of sense experience or any other experience of our day to day ordinary life is a matter of doxastic practice. Religious experience also have the similar nature to a
very large extent. It also occurs in the mind of the religious person and it is also personal or private as any other experience is. Doubting about its veracity is a matter of doubting it from the level of sense experience of physical objects. This is not justifiable. Given the above analysis it is clear that the doxastic practice about the acceptance or non acceptance of the veracity of an experience is to be decided by the community of the people where this is practised. The veracity of religious experience, therefore, is to be decided within the community of the religious persons who undergo this sort of experience. Deciding its fate by common experience is just irrational and unjustified.

(b) The nature of religious experience – Religious experience also is a human experience but not in the sense of sense experience. Without having a background of the upbringing in a particular belief and value system one cannot attain a religious experience but that does not mean that it is not a common human experience. Religious experience to some extent is availed by many but clearly attained by a few only. A particular religious background of belief and value system in which a person is brought up, enables him to be susceptible to that dimension of his life which is ordinarily referred to in philosophical language as the innermost core of subjectivity. This upbringing does not generate this experience; it only directs the attention of the person inwardly and creates environment to realize it with full vividness. It is available to every ordinary person because no human individual can be thought of as devoid of an innermost core of subjectivity. Most people don’t undergo this experience because the outward directed attention does not leave space for thinking and deciding to direct it inwardly. It is for this reason that religious experience becomes a rare phenomenon. Though religious experience is rare but structurally and essentially it is available to all and since it is an experience of one’s own subjectivity it cannot be called abnormal at all.

Despite the fact that religious experience is availed fully by only a few does not make it private or personal in the sense of nonshareability. One who undergoes this experience communicates with the fellow men of his religious
community and that of others also. Although people do not fully understand his experience but they do not feel stunned or left in complete darkness as it happens in the case of complete failure of grasping what the other person says. People understand partly what the religious person states about his experience. They also understand what implications are to be drawn (and what not to be drawn) for their lives in the light of what he utters. This means that people do not completely fail to understand the religious experience attained by some persons even if they themselves have not attained it fully or properly.

Some other persons having attained religious experience understands another religious persons experience also. A religious person understands some another person’s experience also if he belongs to his own religious community, but also understands him if it is not so. Within a community of religious believers one religious person who has attained religious experience fully does understand another person’s experience also since he knows what the other person is talking about. Ordinarily there is agreement between two persons religious experience belonging to the same religious fold. But there could be difference between them also. Such differences usually result into the beginning of a new stream within that religious tradition or a new religion in itself. Whatever the case may be, one religious person understands another religious person’s experience also, and he also understands the difference between the persons who have attained religious experience and who have not. These differences are the marks of the fact that there is a genuine content of religious experience with reference to which these differences arise, disputed, sorted out or resolved. Only because religious experience is a rare phenomenon, it seems that there is no possibility of shareable intelligibility regarding it. But the rareness of religious experience cannot be acknowledged as a rational ground or proof for its being illusory or imaginary. Religious experience is, in principle, available to and attainable also to every human individual. As such there is no privacy or inscrutability regarding it. Obviously no test can be conducted about it in the sense of scientific tests conducted for verification of phenomena of outward world. But it is quite shareable an experience in the sense of understanding of others pains and happinesses.
Behavioural reactions alone are the clue to understand that the other person is in pain. The doubt that the behavioural reactions can be artificially produced is a genuine logical doubt. However, this doubt does not prove that the other person is actually producing the behaviour artificially. The doubt in this regard could be called a rationally acceptable doubt only if we have good reasons to do so. Doubt can not be accepted practically as a rational doubt just because one can logically doubt over something. What is practically accepted rational doubt and what is not - is a matter of doxastic practice. Experiences regarding one’s internal parts of the body or about the description of one’s own mental states also need to be seen in this light. They cannot be doubted only because it is logically possible to doubt over them. Statements about these matters cannot be doubted for the sake of doubt only. Religious experience also is open to logical doubt but that could not be the reason to look at it as a matter of doubt only. Religious experience is an intelligible human experience and questions regarding its genuineness or fakery can be decided in view of the doxastic practice in this regard. Religious experience of people are not doubted, or at least it is not regarded as merely a matter of doubt. There is a shareability in religious experience somewhat similar to the shareability of pain and pleasure. Religious person undergoes an experience of the deepest core of his subjectivity and another person (even if he also undergoes religious experience) cannot experience what another person is experiencing. However, he can understand what it is like that he is experiencing.

Thus all baseless doubts and misgivings about the so called privacy and abnormality of religious experience gets dissolved.

Religious experience is pre-rational

Religious experience is an experience of the deepest core of the subjectivity which is obviously pre-rational. It is pre-rational in the sense that reason has not started functioning at this level. Reason functions when a question arises. Any question arises only when a ground of acceptance of certain common elements or features is prepared. Only on that ground a
question stands. The deepest core of one’s subjectivity is that inner most level of being and experience on which alone all further questions and queries arise. Therefore this is obviously a level of being and experience which is pre-rational.

A bare feeling of pure presence of self is felt or known by the presence of the content itself. It does not need a judging function (what it is) since there is nothing to be judged as this or that. Phenomenologists like Edmund Husserl would deny the possibility of such an experience since consciousness always has an intentionality in it and without that consciousness cannot be meaningfully talked of.

The innermost core of subjectivity has no content in itself except for the feeling of its own presence. Thus the religious experience has to transcend essentially this barrier of mental consciousness. It, therefore, has to be strictly pre-rational. In fact this very deepest core of subjectivity, which is the very root of one’s being, becomes religious experience only when it becomes conscious (or self conscious). There is no rational way to establish the essential sameness of religious experience (because it is pre-rational) there always remains a doubt about it at the rational and mental level. There is no way to dissolve this doubt at all. However, religious people are not worried about this doubt because they, at the pre-rational level directly experience it.

Finally, in the conclusion one comes to know how far the cognitive claim contained in religious experience is acceptable.