CHAPTER - V

RELIGIOUS INTUITION, THE HIGHEST
KNOWLEDGE OF REALITY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Radhakrishnan defines philosophy as a logical inquiry into the nature of Reality. It is an attempt to think out the presuppositions of experience and to grasp by means of reason, the life or reality as a whole. In the history of mankind, philosophers and saints of religions have attempted to obtain the knowledge of God or Reality through various sources which can explain the origin, the purpose and the destiny of the Universe and the human individual. Some of them felt that absolute knowledge of Reality is an impossibility for the human mind which has a limited structure confined to the perceptions and conceptions only of the phenomenal world. Some others felt that though knowledge of Reality or God is an impossibility, God Himself of His own initiative, out of His own pleasure, reveals to mankind the purpose of the existence of the world with all its beings, living and non-living through a few chosen men called prophets to convey the message to the people. Such a knowledge was called as Revelation of God, which mankind cannot know in any other way.

There are others who believe that knowledge of God can be felt within themselves through an experience. This experience does not come to
every individual except to those who follow a method of purification of mind, body and soul waiting upon God for such an experience. These experience have changed lives of the experienced completely. These men of experiences are called mystics, saints and sages. They belong to every period and every religion known to human history. The upanisadic sages, the saints of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism etc., are some examples.

5.2 MAIN SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE OF REALITY

Saints and sages, prophets and philosophers belonging to every period in every land from ancient times, whether in the East or in the West made every possible attempt to obtain knowledge of Reality. Some of the main sources of the knowledge of Reality are (1) Scripture, sruti or revelation or Word of God. (2) Reasoning - inferential or mediate knowledge, or Natural or rational theology. (3) Religious or spiritual experience - intuition or immediate knowledge.

Radhakrishnan does not grant equal validity to all the three, though he does not undermine their value and significance in spiritual matters.

5.2.1 Scripture

Radhakrishnan rejects the absolute authority of the scripture as a valid source of knowledge concerning Brahman, the Absolute Reality. He writes:-
"The old days when the scriptures were accepted on trust that God was their author are no more. There is a new approach today. We do not accept scriptural documents apart from other books, unquestionable in their accuracy and advice. The view that they are inherent word of God, does not carry conviction".\(^1\)

However they can be considered as eternal records of the direct experiences of the seers. He points out: "It may be noted here that all leading vedantins including Sankara accept the authority of Sruti\(^\circ\). The ultimate source of authority for Sankara concerning the knowledge of Brahman rests on the (Upanisads), reason being given merely a supplementary place, and allowed to have validity only in so far as it does not contradict the Vedic text. It appears as though Radhakrishnan’s rejection of the authority of Scripture, is a clear case of departure from the tradition.

5.2.2 Reason

Radhakrishnan does not believe in the demonstrability of the existence of Brahman or God through the various logical proofs. He considers them as only approximations. However, he feels that the rational arguments are essential to prove the validity of those who have direct experience of the Divine. He writes: "In these days ........ it is essential to emphasis ....... the predominantly rational character of religious insight. As the experience has cognitive quality in it, the judgements based on it should be subjected to logical analysis".\(^3\)

In some of his writings he points out the necessity of such logical arguments for the human mind but insists that they should be supported by
the direct experience. As a synthesizer, he makes provision for reason and intuition since both of them are necessary to the human mind.

5.2.3 Religious Experience

Religious or spiritual experience is considered by Radhakrishnan as an all comprehensive source to know the Reality. Though man is finite, he has the capacity for self transcendence and the ability to look at himself objectively. The rational and spiritual character of man's existence provides him with the power and determination to stand out of existence and in the truth. Hence man can obtain the knowledge of Reality through his spiritual experience directly.

5.3 Three Kinds of Knowledge

The human mind possesses three kinds of knowledge according to Radhakrishnan. They are (1) Sensory or perceptual knowledge (2) Intellectual or logical knowledge and (3) Intuitive knowledge. Though each one of them appears distinct from the other, the human mind does not function in fractions. But the whole mind is involved in its work, for we cannot assume that at the sense level there is no work for intuition and at the level of intuition there is no work for the intellect. It is the reaction of the whole man to the whole of Reality. We seek the object of Reality by the totality of our faculties and energies.
Our intellect can gain the knowledge of God while the intuition offers truth concerning the Absolute; and intuition is considered by Radhakrishnan as higher than the intellectual knowledge.

5.3.1 Distinctive Characteristics of Intellectual Knowledge and Intuitive knowledge

Intellectual knowledge and perceptual knowledge are obtained through the process of observation, analysis and synthesis. Our age, the age of science and technology, the methods of scientific rationalism have been the demand of civilization. The method of observation, analysis and synthesis employed in descriptive sciences have benefitted mankind enormously. However, the theories of science which are useful as tools to control the nature and its laws are unable to determine and reveal the mystery of Reality. Moreover, abstract notions of God, soul etc., cannot be brought under scientific observation or treated as mathematical equations. Many of our deepest convictions which form the very foundation of our life in the world, do not have their bases on rational calculations. Personal experiences in life cannot be comprehended in scientific theories and formulas. Therefore, intellectual knowledge is inadequate to know the Reality.

Spiritual certainty can be conveyed only by spiritual knowledge which goes beyond the perceptual and the conceptual. Such a knowledge is not a-logical but super-logical. It is not irrational or anti-rational, but supra-rational. It is called integral insight or intuitive knowledge. Intuitive knowledge is considered by Radhakrishnan as non-sensuous and immediate
knowledge and hence is called self-knowledge for it is true and direct knowledge. This knowledge results from an intimate fusion of the mind with the Reality. It is only through the intuitive apprehension that deepest things of life can be unravelled.

Both intellectual and intuitive kinds of knowledge have their own specific purposes. Logical knowledge gives us only the structure of Reality. But intuition puts us in touch with eternal Reality. This intuitive knowledge is the Highest which transcends the distinction of subject and object. While we gain the knowledge relating to the conditions of the world through the intellect, we receive the knowledge of things in their indefeasible reality through intuition. Intuition and intellect are not unrelated or opposed to each other. The intellectual knowledge serves as the preparatory ground for the intuitive apprehension.

5.3.2 Relation between Intellectual and Intuitive Knowledge

5.3.2.1

Intuitive knowledge is not non-relational; it is only non-conceptual. It is rational intuition in which both immediacy and mediacy are comprehended. As a matter of fact, we have throughout life the intellectual and intuitive sides at work. While the two are not exclusive, the intellectual processes are more useful in the comprehension and description of things and their quantitative relation. Intuition gives us an idea of the whole and intellect an analysis of parts. The intuition gives an object in itself, while intellect details its relations. Every intuition has an intellectual content and by making
it more intellectual we are deepening the content. If intuitive truths cannot be proved to reason, they can be shown to be, not contrary to reason but consistent with it. The Hindu thinkers affirm that the sovereign concepts which control the enterprise of life are profound truths of intuition, born of the deepest experience of the soul.

5.3.2.2

Both intellectual and intuitive kinds of knowledge are justified and have their own rights, for each is useful for its own specific purpose. Logical knowledge enables us to know the conditions of the world in which we live and to control them for our ends. But if you want to know things in their uniqueness we must transcend discursive thinking.

Intuition stands to intellect in somewhat the same relation as intellect stands to senses. Though intuition lies beyond intellect, it is not contrary to it. Reflective knowledge is a preparation for this integral experience.

5.3.2.3

In moving from intellect to intuition we are getting into the deepest rationality of which human nature is capable. In it, we think more profoundly, feel more deeply and see more truly. We think with a certain totality or wholeness. Both intellect and intuition belong to the self and their activities are inter-dependent.
5.3.2.4

The intuitive knowledge arises from an intimate fusion of the mind with Reality. It is knowledge not by senses or by symbols. We become one with the truth, one with the objects of knowledge.

5.3.2.5

Can we term intuition as a kind of knowledge? If the term knowledge is restricted to what is communicable, and what can be expressed in formulae and propositions, then intuitive insight ineffable and non-proportional is not knowledge. But certainty and not communicability is the truest test of knowledge and then intuitive experience has this sense of assurance and certainty and therefore is the species of knowledge.

The proof of the validity of intuitive principle is somewhat similar to Kant's proof of a priori elements. We cannot think them away. We cannot disbelieve them and remain intellectual. They belong to the very structure of our mind. They are native to the soul. In the second and third sutras of the first Adhyaya of the Brāhma Sūtra, Radhakrishnan finds an intimate connection and continuity between reason and intuition. He discovers a cognitive quality in the religious experiences of the mystics. He writes: "As the experience has a cognitive quality about it, the judgements based on it should be subjected to logical analysis. Logical scrutiny is the only safeguard against mere caprice."
5.4 CONCEPTION OF INTUITION IN THE EAST AND THE WEST

The emphasis on the creative intuition is the main feature of Eastern thought, whereas greater emphasis to critical intelligence is the general characteristics of western thought. This distinction is only relative and not absolute. It is only a question of the distribution of emphasis.\(^5\)

The Western mind lays emphasis on science, logic and humanism. The Hindu thinkers as a class hold with great conviction that we possess a power more interior than intellect by which we become aware of the Real in its intimate individuality. For the Hindus a system of philosophy is an insight (A Darsana). It is the vision of truth and not a matter of logical argument and proof. Intuitive realisation is the means to salvation. The acceptance of the authority of the Vedas by different systems of Hindu thought is an admission that intuitive insight is a greater light in the abstruse problems of philosophy than logical understanding. Sankara regards *anubhava* or integral experience as the highest kind of apprehension. While it may not be clear and distinct, it is sure and vivid. The concept of bodhi or enlightenment and Prajna or intuitive insight of Buddhism represent the highest knowledge of Reality won by spiritual effort.

Throughout the history of Western thought, philosophers have invoked the aid of intuition to help them to attain truth. They felt that intuitive conclusions have more certainty and are far more reliable than logical thinking. Intuition or an immediate or direct perception, carries with it, the conviction that demonstrative support becomes not only useless but relegated
to inferior position. Plato introduces it to grasp the world of Ideas, especially the Idea of God without the intervention of mathematical demonstration. Plotinus, the mystic, relies on intuition to visualise the spiritual unity of the world. The emphasis of the scholastics on faith or feeling is an important organ of understanding. Schelling refers to three kinds of intuition. Artistic intuition, Aesthetic intuition and Intellectual intuition. Intellectual intuition is the faculty of seeing things as a whole, the Universal in the particular and the unity in the plurality. Radhakrishnan observes: "In the last stage of this philosophical development, Schelling reaches a religious mysticism achieved in a mystical intuition in which the soul strips off its selfhood and becomes absorbed in the Absolute".

Bergson refers to two ways of knowing an object, (1) by moving around the object and (2) by entering into it. The first one is Scientific or logical knowledge and the second is Intuition. Bergson defines Intuition as sympathetic intelligence by which we enter into the object, identify ourselves with it, feel its pulse, view it from within, and reach what he terms, the Absolute, the unique characteristic of the object. On the other hand, Science by analysis, views the object from without, represents the parts by symbols, employs concepts to convey its meaning and fixes its attention upon various aspects of the object from different points of view. The scientific method is relative, abstract, partial, external, while Intuition yields the knowledge of the object - its wholeness and in its uniqueness.

In the opinion of Radhakrishnan, Bradley refers to the symbolic character of logical knowledge. All intellectual analysis for Bradley is a
falsification of the Real. The unified structure of Reality is revealed more in feeling than in thought, in what Bradley calls the higher unity in which thought, feeling, volition are blended into whole. It is the creative effort of the whole man as distinct from mere intellectual effort that can comprehend the nature of Reality.

During the early 20th century, a group of thinkers consisting of Idealists and Romanticists agreed that the intellect or discursive understanding cannot comprehend the meaning of Reality and therefore attempts should be made to discover a surer source of knowledge in other phases or functions of human mind, such as feeling, belief, immediate experience, will or intuition. Strong anti-intellectualistic or anti-rationalistic tendencies were discussed within the school of Idealism.

According to Radhakrishnan some of these philosophers and theologians sought out to find justification for the notion of Reality (existence) in the sphere of religious experience or mystical experience or intuition, which they sometimes interpreted as meaning a man’s total experience of life and sometimes meaning as indescribable feeling of the certainty in divine Reality. Intuition was described as the ineffable experience beyond thought and speech, which transforms life and yields certainty of divine presence. Many of them found that mysticism and mystical experience referred to such experiences. While Radhakrishnan wrote his idealistic view of life defending reason and intuition number of other scholars wrote on mysticism and mystics in different parts of the world during this period. Which includes Mysticism by Evelyn Underhill, R.M. Jones’ Studies in Mystical Relation, Mysticism - its true nature
and value D.C. Butler’s *Western Mysticism*, F.V. Hugel’s *The mystical element of Religion*, W.R. Inge’s *Christian Mysticism*, Dasgupta’s *Hindu Mysticism*, Religious Mysticism of *Upanisads* by Garden Milbourne, *Indian Mysticism* by R.D. Ranade, and several others. All these books pointed out that the mystics are speaking more or less the same language despite the fact they were divided by the boundaries of country, language, religion, sects etc.

5.5 **DIFFERENT KINDS OF INTUITIVE EXPERIENCES**

All creative work in Science and Philosophy, in art and life, is inspired by intuitive experience. While we all possess intuitive perception and exercise it to some extent, it is only in exceptional minds, it is well developed.

Creative work is a synthetic insight which advances by leaps. A new truth altogether unknown, startling in its strangeness comes into, suddenly and spontaneously owing to the intense and concentrated interest in the problem. A genius is extremely sensible to the truth. Radhakrishnan refers to different kinds of intuition such as philosophic or Rational intuition, Scientific intuition, Poetic or Aesthetic intuition, ethical intuition and Religious intuition.

5.5.1

The great philosophers admit that the root principles of philosophy are articles of faith and not attained by logical argument. The archetypal ideas of Plato and *a priori* of Kant, are the contents of Intuitive wisdom and the conditions of human knowledge. They point to the working of the universal spirit in us.
The scientific discovery is more like artistic creation in its reaching out after a new truth. Tindall, referring to Michael Faraday’s electro magnetic speculation, said: "Amid much that is entangled and dark, me have flashes of wondrous insight which appear less as the product of reasoning than of revelation".7

A new law in mathematics is just as much a bit of spontaneous intuition as is a composition in music by Mozart. In his work *Science and Method*, Henri Poincare has a chapter on *Mathematical Invention*, where he contends that his own mathematical discoveries were more or less artistic intuitions.

Intellectual inaction seems to be the prelude to the intuitive flash. The truth shapes itself from within and leaps forth as a spark from fire. When the flash occurs we feel it to be true and find that it lifts up the puzzles and paradoxes into a luminous atmosphere. The truth is not so much produced as achieved. Archimedes solved his problem in his bathroom and not at his study room or laboratory.
5.5.3

The poet believes that his work is due, not to his intellectual skill or imaginative boldness but to what he calls as his inspiration. John Keats, William Blake, Wordsworth, Robert Browning, Byron, Milton, Robert Bridges are all examples, the spell of the experience is still on the poet and under its influences he employs intuitive words and images which possess emotional value more than logical meaning. While poetry is not the vision itself but only the image of it, still its quality depends on the degree with which it calls up the vision.

5.5.4

A true work of art is an unanalysable one, comparable to a lightning flash flung from heaven which strikes the earth, and lifts it into a blaze. The Testament of Beauty, the aesthetic appreciation demands the exercise of mind and not merely of the logical understanding. We cannot truly appreciate, if we are not aided by a higher insight. Aesthetic creation and enjoyment are both non-intellectual actions.

5.5.5

In the ethical life also, intuitive insight is essential for the highest reaches. The moral consciousness is the point where we touch Reality. Conscience is the call of Reality within the individual mind. The intuitive apprehension of the Moral Law is quite different from the logical apprehension of any object in the space-time scheme.
To one who is ethically sensitive, the path of duty is clear. We have in it a case of intuitive apprehension, though later reflexion may discover reasons for its truth. He, whose life is directed by insight, expresses his deeper consciousness in a superior type of life. The lives of heroes like Buddha and Christ are not merely truthful and austere but also beautiful beyond all dreams.

5.5.6

Religious consciousness is not reduced to either intellectual or ethical or aesthetic activity or a sum of these. It is an autonomous form of spiritual life which includes all these elements and yet transcends them. The religious intuition is an all comprehensive one, covering the whole of life. While the spirit of man fulfills itself in many ways, it is most completely fulfilled in the religious life. Here is consciousness at its full and simultaneous realization. While every genius in his own way is a pioneer of the evolution of the spirit, in the religious genius, we have a simultaneous exaltation of the different powers of the inward life. An integral life is entirely free from error and perception. These religious souls are men transfigured, rendered new whose every power is raised to its highest extent. In them the Universal finds its expression and God manifests Himself more than in others. The contours of their God-intoxicated forces, possess the radiance of those who have seen eternity \(\text{Brahma tejas}\). Creativity in cognitive, aesthetic, ethical, scientific and religious activity springs from thought which is intuitive. The heroes of humanity, Buddhas or Christs, its Platos and Pauls are all shaped after the same pattern and are inspired from the same elemental source of life. When
the Supreme Light in us inspires the intellect, we have a genius. When it stirs the will, we have heroism, when it flows through the heart we have love and it transforms us; the son of man becomes the Son of God. Inspiration in every one of its Forms is a manifestation of the Universal Spirit in us.

Radhakrishnan says that it is unfortunate that we are obliged to employ the simple term 'intuitive' to represent scientific genius, poetic insight, ethical conscience as well as religious faith.

5.6.8 Religious Intuition or Mystical Experience - As Highest Knowledge

Among the variety of intuitions such as rational intuition, aesthetic intuition, poetic intuition, artistic intuition, ethical intuition, scientific intuition and religious intuition, Religious Intuition has been considered by Radhakrishnan as 'an all-comprehensive one, covering the life'. Consciousness is realised completely and fully in this state. Sometimes he calls it as religious or spiritual experience. It is a state of ecstasy or complete absorption of ourselves, where we seem to be standing literally out of our narrow selves. In this experience, one finds himself transcending the limitations of every kind including the subject-object structure. The experience can be felt by the individual but cannot be analysed or examined, verified or authenticated by any external standards of logic or laws of thought for it is self-established and self-evident according to Radhakrishnan.
Indians idealise intuition as a source of knowledge for it grasps the unity of the whole, immediately and directly. Intuitive knowledge is self-knowledge. *anubhava* or integral experience is the highest kind of knowledge. There are synonyms to this concept which he mentions in his writings such as *darsāna*, insight, vision of truth, *prajna* or intuitive insight, Bodhi or enlightenment, *Samyagijnana* or perfect knowledge, integral experience or spiritual or religious experience.

As stated earlier, spiritual experience or religious intuition has been considered as the highest knowledge. Radhakrishnan came to this conclusion after a careful study of mystics of all religions and lands belonging to various periods of time in the East as well as in the West: "In the seers of the *Upanisads* and Buddha, Plato and Plotinus, in Hillel and Philo, Jesus and Paul and the medieval mystics of Islam".

5.7 NATURE AND VALIDITY OF INTUITIVE OR MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

A wide variety of religious experiences have been very carefully studied, analysed by philosophers like William James, Rudolf Otto, D.T.Suzuki, R.C.Zechener, R.M.Bucke, J.B.Pratt, W.T.Stace and several others. They found very wide varietics of Religious experiences among the mystics.

5.7.1 General Features of Mystical Experience

Mystics were largely divided into two categories as Introversive and Extrovertive. Some of the mystics were deeply emotional and some were
intellectual. Some experiences were sudden and spontaneous, and others acquired the same in stages through discipline and practice. For some, personal Gods (Local) were objects of their mystic experiences; while some others conceived the impersonal as their spiritual object. Some had monistic conception of their experience, while others had dualistic conception. Some of the mystics conceived the object of realisation as immanent or subjective (within the Atman), while others felt the presence of Transcendent (outside themselves), some others described their experience as something beyond the subject and the object. These are some of the distinct features found among different mystics of various religions and cultures. It is very difficult to conclude that they are speaking the same language in describing their mystical experiences as similar to one another.

5.7.2 Criticism of Psychologists and Philosophers, against Mystical Experience

Many psychologists and philosophers who examined the Mystical experiences were highly critical of them. The authenticity of the mystical experience has been questioned by many psychologists. Some of them find a wish-fulfillment, auto-suggestion a desire or wish to perceive God in the religious experience of the mystic. The mystic’s perception of voices and visions, his raptures, transports and religious frenzy often associated with his or her experience is considered by the psychologists as the result of mental ailments and psycho-physical disorders. The mystic language of bridal love, nuptial and wedlock, the psychologist thinks that it is resulting from erotic mania - that sex aberration coming out as spiritual ecstasy. Some medical
materialists ascribed the mystic state to the action of intoxicants and narcotic drugs, alcohol and opium. According to Leuba, drug intoxication frees man from the worries of life and while in this stage the mystic is considered as divinely possessed. After taking the drug "Mescaline", Aldous Huxley had an experience which he identified with mystic consciousness. Prompted by this R.C.Zaechner made a similar experiment on himself by taking the same drug. But he disagreed with the view of Huxley and said that the genuine mystic experience is entirely different from drug experience. However, the famous modern psychologist C.G.Jung felt that there are genuine cases of mystic experiences inspite of their peculiarities in behaviour and description.

Some philosophers who analysed the experiences of mystics discovered that their statements were paradoxical, containing elements of misdescription, vagueness and ambiguity. The mystic makes use of rational modes only as symbols to translate and describe his experiences. The terms, void, desert, silence, dark night etc., are only metaphors to describe their experiences. Prof. Ivan Ramsay thinks that such expressions have objective references and are descriptive of objective depth. According to Rudolf Otto, the contradicting statements of mystics are the result of the peculiar logic of mysticism which does not take into account the two fundamental laws of natural logic. W.T.Stace asserts that God is known only by Intuition and not by logical intellect.
6.7.3 Radhakrishnan's Explanation to the Criticisms

Thus there are for and against arguments among philosophers and psychologists concerning the validity of the religious experiences of the mystics. Radhakrishnan offers an explanation to the criticisms of psychologists, psychoanalysts and medical materialists.

5.7.3.1

Psycho-analysts find only a wish fulfillment and an auto-suggestion in the experiences of mystics. Radhakrishnan points out to the psychoanalyst that he is passing beyond his limits of psychology and stepping into metaphysics when he declares that a religious person is deceiving himself. Religious ideas, he says, are certainly due to psychological processes which are different from those at work in self-conscious reasoning. In his view, even Science cannot proceed with its work if it does not assume principles from beyond itself.

5.7.3.2

To the criticism of the medical materialists that religious experience results from the action of the intoxicants, narcotic drugs, alcohol and opium, Radhakrishnan replies that the ecstatic moods induced by drugs, anaesthesia and other aids are quite different from spiritual attitude of those who have won integrity and wholeness of life. Spiritual life of the seer takes on a new depth, a marked increase in coherence and character. There is a general enrichment of personality.
The visions, voices, raptures, frenzy and hysterical behaviour often associated with religious experiences of mystics are attributed by the psychologist to mental ailments and physical disorders.

Religious experience is not pathological, asserts Radhakrishnan, though it may happen to accompany certain morbid states. The nervous disturbances which may develop sometimes are merely accidental. The passage from static to dynamic from ignorance to knowledge is a shock to the mental system. The sudden break down of the barriers and exaltation of the mind may disturb mental equilibrium. Transports, raptures, delirium etc., are not the essentials of spiritual experiences. They may arise from spurious sources. The real blessing is not the thrill but the experience of Reality. 8(1) (Recovery of Faith P.102) (4) Intuitive knowledge is criticised as something private, subjective, incommunicable, vague, ambiguous; and that it does not give universal truth and therefore it is incapable of verification.

Intuitive knowledge, says Radhakrishnan, is verified by its capacity to bring coherence and harmony into systems framed by the intellect. We use intellect to test the validity of intuition and communicate them to others. Intellect is an indispensable aid to support and clarify spiritual experiences. "Intellect itself is an instrument of the spirit and therefore, it should receive and accept direction from the spirit."
REFERENCE

2. *The Brahma Sutra*, P.243
5. *Ibid.*, P.246
6. *An Idealist View of Life*, P.101
7. *History of Philosophy*, P.472