

MAN IS NOT HORMONES AND GLANDS!

Since the scientific paradigm cannot adequately deal with consciousness, it takes the position that for all the internal states of man, for all the thoughts and ideas, dreams and motivation, vision and creativity, there is a physical basis. The oppressive reductionism of science says that they are the products of our glands and hormones; of physiological chemicals like endorphins, oxytocin, serotonin, or whatever. The logic seems to go like “if you are having a headache, it’s because there’s a shortage of aspirin in your system!”

Protesting against this tyranny of scientific materialism, Sri Aurobindo had penned an extraordinary satirical poem called *THE DREAM OF SURREAL SCIENCE* which is striking in its sharpness and sarcasm:

*"One dreamed and saw a gland write Hamlet,
Drink at the Mermaid, capture immortality;
A committee of hormones on the Aegean's brink
Composed the Iliad and the Odyssey.*

*A thyroid, meditating almost nude
Under the Bo-tree, saw the eternal Light
And rising from its mighty solitude,
Spoke of the Wheel and eightfold Path all right.*

*A brain by a disordered stomach driven
Thundered through Europe, conquered, ruled and fell,
From St Helena went, perhaps, to Heaven
Thus, wagged on the surreal world, until*

*A scientist played with atoms and blew out
The Universe before God had time to shout."*

The first two lines refer to Shakespeare and the Mermaid Tavern was a bar in London during the Elizabethan era which Shakespeare used to frequent. The next two lines of course refer to Homer, and “Aegean’s brink” is a reference to Greece which is on the west of the Aegean Sea.

The second stanza is about the mighty and immortal quest of Gautam Buddha. By “the Wheel,” Sri Aurobindo refers to the Wheel of Dharma which Buddha gave a turn or got it moving through his first teaching after he attained Enlightenment (eternal Light) at Bodh Gaya. Hence his first teaching is known as the *Dharma Chakra Pravartana Sutra* (Teaching of the Turning of the Wheel of Dharma). And the Eightfold Path as laid down Buddha is a step-by-step guide for the emancipation and inner transformation of man.

The third stanza is obviously about Napoleon and St Helena is the island in the south Atlantic Ocean where he was exiled by the British after his defeat and where he finally died. The last two lines are a reminder of the precariousness of our existence brought about by the scientific technology and the looming threat of a nuclear Armageddon that hangs over mankind like a Damocles sword all the time.

An extract from my book AN ODYSSEY OF THE MIND - Journeys in the Modern Mindscape