

SOUL-CULTURE IN THE UPANISADS

THE SOUL-CULTURE IN THE UPANISADS  
IN THE LIGHT OF  
SRI AUROBINDO'S THOUGHT

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## PREFACE

It appeared to the present author that the presentation of the teachings of the Upaniṣads from the point of view of Advaita metaphysics and Jñāna-yoga was to narrow down the message of the great scripture unjustifiably. On the other hand Sri Aurobindo's approach to the Upaniṣads seemed to him to be more reasonable and broad-based. This is the root of the present undertaking. As the author has a practical bias and wants to see what message of practical value the scripture has to hold out before a modern man he has taken up the theme of conscious self-development as the nucleus round which to study the message of the Upaniṣads. The title of the work was suggested by Dr. Arapura.

The present work does not aim at a comprehensive study of the Upaniṣadic philosophy. Its scope is limited. It wants to set forth Sri Aurobindo's approach to the Upaniṣads centering on the practical issue of self-culture. Because Sri Aurobindo is a difficult thinker it was felt necessary to write much about him in order to make his point of view clear. It would be right in an academic study such as this to keep a clear distinction between the view of Sri Aurobindo and that of the author, but it has not been possible all the time. As the author got deep into the study he was so much impressed by the soundness of the approach of Sri Aurobindo that he felt prompted to set forth that approach with conviction.

In doing so he had to construct a little but he has been careful to remain faithful to both Sri Aurobindo and the Upaniṣads.

The number of Upaniṣads is countless. Only the older and major ones--- Brhadāraṇyaka, Chāndogya, Aitareya, Taittirīya, Īśa, Kena, Katha, Praśna, Mundaka, Māndūkya, Kausītaki, Śvetāśvatara, and Maitrī--- have been consulted. Quotation has always been given from the original Sanskrit. In regard to the accompanying English version different books--- Radhakrishnan's Principal Upaniṣads, Sri Aurobindo's Eight Upaniṣads, Madhavananda's Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, Mahadevan's The Upaniṣads and so on---have been depended upon, sometimes for expediency sometimes by the consideration of the happier rendering.

The author expresses his gratitude to Prof. Arapura for the supervision of the work. The learned professor's constructive and suggestive criticism has helped him immensely. The author thanks Mrs. Gordon, Secretary to the Chairman, Department of Religion, and Mills Memorial Library staff on the Main Desk and in the Reference Section for their helpful co-operation.

GRADATIONS OF MANIFESTATION

The Supreme  
|  
Saccidananda-- unmanifest, making possible every kind of  
| manifestation.

Sacciḍānanda in manifestation

The Supreme Planes of Infinite Consciousness

- i) Sat (implying Chit- Tapas and Ānanda)
- ii) Chit (implying Sat and Ānanda)
- iii) Ānanda (implying Sat and Chit-Tapas)

|  
Supermind or Divine Gnosis  
(The Self-Determining Infinite Consciousness)

From the point of view of our ascent upwards this is the Truth-Consciousness as distinguished from all below that belongs to the separative Ignorance.

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Overmind or Maya (in the sense of Ignorance)

(Overmind takes all truth that comes down to it from the Supermind, and sets up such truth as a separate force and idea capable of conflicting with the others as well as co-operating with them.)

|  
Higher levels of mind (Intuition, Liberated Intelligence,  
| etc.

|  
Mind

|  
Vital

|  
Physical

---

The chart was given by Sri Aurobindo, with greater details than what has been quoted here. It came out in Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual No. XIII, 1954, (Calcutta: Sri Aurobindo Pathmandir.

Chart II

B E I N G, P A R Ā P R A K R T I

PARĀRDHA—HIGHER HEMISPHERE

1. Sat      2. Chit      3. Ānanda      4. Supermind
- 

J Ī V Ā T M A N

---

BECOMING, APARA PRAKRTI, APARARDHA, LOWER HEM.				
Subtle or	1.			
Subliminal	1. Subtle	2. Subliminal	3. Psychic	4. Subliminal
Region	Physical	Force of	entity	Mind
	(annamaya	Life	(inmost	(manomaya koṣa
	koṣa and	(pranamaya	being)	and puruṣa)
	puruṣa)	koṣa and		
		puruṣa)		
Gross form	1. matter	2. life	3. desire-soul	4. mind
of manifes-			or ego	
tation				

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"The Being is one throughout, but on each plane of Nature, it is represented by a form of itself which is proper to that plane, the mental Puruṣa in the mental plane, the vital Puruṣa in the vital, the physical Puruṣa in the physical. The Taittirīya Upaniṣad speaks of two other planes of the being, the Knowledge or Truth plane and the Ānanda plane, each with its Puruṣa, but although influences may come down from them, these are superconscious to the human mind and their nature is not organised here." Sri Aurobindo, On Yoga II  
Tome One

List of Abbreviations

Aitareya Upaniṣad	Ai.U.
Aurobindo	Auro.
Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad	Br.U.
Chāndogya Upaniṣad	Ch.U.
Īśa Upaniṣad	Īśa.
Kena Upaniṣad	Kena.
Kaṭha Upaniṣad	Kaṭha.
Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad	Kau.U.
Maitrī Upaniṣad	Mai.U.
Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad	Mā.U.
Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad	Mu.U.
Pondicherry	Pondy
Prasna Upaniṣad	Prasna
Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad	Śve. U.
Taittirīya Upaniṣad	Tai.U.

## CHAPTER I

### SRI AUROBINDO IN THE HISTORY OF THOUGHT

#### Introduction

Sri Aurobindo has been acclaimed by many as the greatest of modern Indian thinkers. Some have found in him a synthesis between the East and the West, as Romain Rolland writes, "(he) has realized the most complete synthesis achieved up to the present between the genius of the West and of the East"<sup>1</sup> We propose to consider his thought under two broad divisions, although one is hardly separable from the other: i) his evaluation of the Indian thought and culture, ii) his system of philosophy.

#### Evaluation of Indian thought and culture

##### Method followed by Sri Aurobindo

In their attempt at a systematic exposition of Hindu philosophy the older savants have been selective in the choice of scriptures; for example, since the days of the great Śankara it has been a common practice to discourse on the three books (prasthānatraya)—the Upanisad, the Gita, and Brahmasutra—for the establishment of any point of view. In fact, the third book has been used by most of them as the key to the meaning of the other two. Sri Aurobindo has avoided this

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<sup>1</sup> R. Rolland, The Prophet of New India, (London: Cassell & Co., 1930), p. 503.

book since it is itself a particular formulation of the teachings of the Upanisad, and it does not fall under the category of Sruti--revealed scripture. Secondly, Sri Aurobindo did not want to use any book as a key either to select scriptures or to interpret them. He has gone straight to all the major books and traditions for a comprehensive understanding of the Hindu philosophy and culture. He has interpreted the Vedas and translated parts of the Rg Veda, he has written elaborate commentary on Īśa and Kena Upanisads and translated these two and six other Upanisads with meaningful foot-notes. His 'Essays on the Gita', a thorough study of the sacred book is an important work of philosophy and yoga. Sri Aurobindo did not confine himself to the study of the scriptures and of the systems of yoga and philosophy. He has written on Sanskrit literature in general and Vālmiki, Vyāsa and Kālidāsa in particular. In a series of essays he has given an estimation with a penetrating insight of Indian architecture, sculpture, painting, literature, polity and so on. And in this broad survey of Indian culture he has not left out of account any of the following things: trade, commerce, law, medicine, crafts, administration, dance, music, aesthetics, psychology, education and so on. Again, he did not stop short of the classical period, he has traced the ramification of the ancient culture through diverse languages and styles during the middle ages and right up to the modern period. He has written a separate series of four essays on the meaning and significance of that phase of modern Indian history which has been considered by many as a

Renaissance. About Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of Indian civilization and culture Dr. Sharma writes,

Nowhere else do we find such an unerring, comprehensive and profound understanding of the civilization of India—its basis and aims, its merits and defects, its rise and decline as well as its present Renaissance and its importance for the future progress of mankind.<sup>2</sup>

Main features of his interpretation

i) Sri Aurobindo has traced, in conformity with the age-old tradition, the seeds and origin of all that constitute the fundamentals of Hindu culture in the Vedas. Religion, spirituality, rituals, rule and conduct of life, music, literature, craft and social system everything has issued out of and shaped basically by the Vedas. (Wilson has traced the origin "of the institutions, religious or civil, of the Hindus" even in the first Mandala of R̥g Veda)<sup>3</sup> The fundamental characteristic of Indian culture is the supreme regard for the spirit. It seizes upon the spirit first and tries to express it in diverse forms and acts. The Vedas have stamped this character upon Indian life and culture. Sri Aurobindo could come to this idea about the Vedas by a discovery of the underlying inner meaning of the texts. The ritualistic interpretation of Sāyana and the naturalistic interpretation of Western scholars have some cogency, but they fail to solve the mystery lurking through the suggestive words and images of the Vedic texts. Sri Aurobindo

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<sup>2</sup> D.S.Sharma, The Renaissance of Hinduism, (Banares Hindu University, 1944), p.313.

<sup>3</sup> Vide H.H.Wilson's Introduction to his 'R̥g Veda Samhitā Vol. 1, (Bangalore City: Bangalore Printing & Publishing Co.)

has given in detail in his 'On the Veda' how he was led to this discovery, and the way he followed towards that. To quote a few lines,

The hypothesis on which I shall conduct my own enquiry is that the Veda has a double aspect and that the two, though closely related, must be kept apart. The Rishis arranged the substance of their thought in a system of parallelism by which the same deities were at once internal and external Powers of universal Nature, and they managed its expression through a system of double values by which the same language served for their worship in both aspects. But the Psychological sense predominates and is more pervading, close-knit and co-herent than the physical. The Veda is primarily intended to serve for spiritual enlightenment and self-culture. It is, therefore, this sense which has first to be restored.<sup>4</sup>

This method of putting double meaning in the same text is rather a common practice of mystical literature. The Buddhist Dhohas' of the tenth to twelfth centuries to which is traced the origin of Bengali, Assamese, Oriya and Hindi languages is a classic example. While surveying Indian literature Sri Aurobindo points to this character of Vedic poetry and continues,

It is in fact the beginning of a form of symbolic or figurative imagery for the poetic expression of spiritual experience which reappears constantly in later Indian writing, the figures of the Tantras and Purānas, the figures of the Vaiṣṇava poets, — one might add even a certain element in the modern poetry of Tagore, — and has its kindred movements in certain Chinese poets and in the images of the Sufis.<sup>5</sup>

This also shows the continuity of a particular Vedic trait right up to the present age. The same may be shown of other aspects too. Actually the Advaita tradition has pushed aside

<sup>4</sup>  
Sri Aurobindo, On the Veda, (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1956.), p.38

<sup>5</sup>  
Sri Aurobindo, The Foundations of Indian Culture, (Pondy: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1959), p.302.

the Vedas with a derogatory label 'Karmakānda', and in the name of the Vedas extolled only the Upaniṣads, which are, though in a sense a part of the Vedas, yet truly of a much later composition and of different character.

ii) Originally the Indian conception of life was by no means negative. "The peculiarity of the Indian will in life is that it feels itself to be unfulfilled, not in touch with perfection, not permanently justified in any intermediate satisfaction if it has not found and does not live in the truth of the spirit." Indian conception of Dharma, Hindu rule of life, theory and pursuit of beauty all through its history amply bear out this truth. "But it does not mean at all that Indian culture concedes no reality to life, follows no material or vital aims and satisfactions, or cares to do nothing for our actual human existence." The two great epics and the classical Sanskrit literature amply testify to this statement. "And human life was in ancient Indian thought no vile and unworthy existence; it is the greatest thing known to us; it is desired, the Purāna boldly says, even by the gods in heaven."<sup>6</sup>

iii) Along with an unbroken continuity, the idea of a progress is suggested by Indian history and religious literature. The incipient metaphysical quest in the Vedas has outflowered itself in many-sided splendour in the Upaniṣads, and later

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Sri Aurobindo, The Foundations of Indian Culture, pp. 110-11.

in the systems of philosophy. The rituals were systematised by the Brahmanas, and the Vedic ideas of Rtam and Dharma were translated into rules of life and conduct. The Tantras have carried over another tradition—esoteric and occult. (The origin of Tantra is, however, a matter of controversy.) Most of all, spiritual pursuit shows an unbroken line of development and of breaking new grounds. Austere metaphysical quest for the First Principle reaches to a dizzy height in the Upaniṣads. One particular line of this manifests itself in the Void of Buddhism. It is to be noted that Buddhism, though illusionistic metaphysically, was, as a religion, gentle and humanitarian with a regard for life, human and sub-human. It is due to this and its later devotionalism that it could be responsible for the creation of noble pieces of architecture, sculpture, painting and so on. However, after the Upaniṣads comes the Gītā with its comprehensive conception of Reality, and a synthesis of the diverse approaches to the Divine. The Puranic-Tantric traditions, though frowned upon by many, do really register a progress. It has, in one hand, brought religion down to the masses and, on the other, given scope to the sensuous and emotional parts in man to be heightened to their noblest lights and powers. The Puranic conception of ten Avatāras representing a hierarchy of evolutionary stages is very significant. It definitely points to an idea of collective progress. However, after the Purānas comes the Bhakti movement and a galaxy of saints and seers in different parts of India. After that is, of course, a period of darkness, and lastly

the recent awakening.

Sri Aurobindo has dealt with the modern period in a separate series of essays. In this he has shown a keen sense of history. Again he has reviewed succinctly more than three thousand years' march of Indian civilization, and in the perspective of this tried to fix the character of the nation and the way it can best meet the challenge of the modern problems. The sheet-anchor of the nation is spirituality. "It was certainly that which saved India always at every critical moment of her destiny, and it has been the starting point too of her renaissance."<sup>7</sup> But this regard for the spirit need not go with asceticism. In fact India has shown prolific creativity in all the different branches of thought, arts, and practical life.

Indeed without this opulent vitality and opulent intellectuality India could never have done so much as she did with her spiritual tendencies. It is a great error to suppose that spirituality flourishes best in an impoverished soil with the life half-killed and the intellect discouraged and intimidated.<sup>8</sup>

Sri Aurobindo does not deny the existence of illusionistic and ascetic tendencies in certain Buddhist and Vedantic schools of thought, but he considers that "this is only one side of its (India's) philosophic tendency which assumed exaggerated proportions only in the period of decline."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Sri Aurobindo, The Renaissance in India, (Pondy: Sri Aurobindo Ashram 4th ed. 1951), pp. 5-6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. pp. 15-16.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

Sri Aurobindo's Evaluation of the recent Indian Awakening

What has happened in the mental life of the nation during the last and the present centuries as a result of its contact with a strong and virile opposite culture is no more than an awakening. The centre of life—spirituality—did not die out altogether, although otherwise the nation came to a stage of utter stagnation, and stagnation is death. The Indian phenomenon, he maintains, is not quite same as the European Renaissance. But the situation is really critical. Everywhere the Western culture is dominant now, and the world is shrinking fast. Different thought-movements in modern India have tried to face the situation in this or that way, but as yet no clear course of Indian way of meeting the situation has evolved. (He wrote these essays in 1918, the statement holds good even to-day). Why does he give stress on Indian way, and what exactly is that? If India has developed a rhythm of her growth in course of a long unbroken history she must not give it up if she is to live as a distinct nation and contribute her mite to the enrichment of world life and culture.

The method of the West is to exaggerate life and to call down as much or as little as may be of the higher powers to stimulate and embellish life. But the method of India is, on the contrary, to discover the spirit within and the higher hidden intensities of the superior powers and to dominate life in one way or another so as to make it responsive to and expressive of the spirit and in that way increase the power of life.<sup>10</sup>

In this difference lies the root of India's present

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<sup>10</sup> Sri Aurobindo, The Renaissance in India, pp.27-28.

failures, as well as the West's misconception about Indian yoga and spirituality.

The mass of Indian action is still at the moment proceeding under the impress of the European motive and method and, because there is a spirit in us to which they are foreign, the action is poor in will, feeble in form and ineffective in results, for it does not come from the roots of our being. ll

As for the West, it has a strong existential attachment to life as it is. The very word yoga suggests an image in its mind— a result of long-standing misunderstanding— of an ascetic who blocks the avenues of normal experience and looks for something nebulous which has no bearing upon the life of a westerner. Yoga does not truly aim at maiming the senses, but rather tries to heighten their capacity, and lead them from their usual limited joy to something more intense, more profoundly satisfying. That height is something almost unknown to the West. The religion of the West has made them dependent on grace for salvation, and their organised Church has always undermined the living experiences of the mystics. It has honoured only a code of ethics. On the other hand India has a very long-standing tradition of Yoga—self-regulation and self-discovery, the highest aim of which is to go beyond the stage of codified ethics.

However, an ancient nation like India cannot grow adequately through imitation only. It has to revivify its

centre of existence constantly and thus quicken and remould its life. It has to solve the modern problems of existence in its own way. Sri Aurobindo is aware of the practical difficulties of involved, particularly in the context of the present shrinking condition of the world. He says that we cannot think of doing without big industries, nor is it possible to accept the good of one thing leaving aside the bad of it; the two are seldom separable. The same is with modern democracy, socialism, technology, education and so on. When India will have worked out her own way in the midst of these then only her Renaissance will be real.

## II THE SYSTEM OF SRI AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY

In Indian tradition philosophical systems have almost always been occasioned by spiritual experiences. This has been the case with Sri Aurobindo also. We gather from his life account that originally he did not have a metaphysical bent of mind. A series of spiritual enlightenments led him to undertake philosophical work. Now the question may be raised how far such personal experiences are dependable. It is true these experiences are not objectively verifiable. But if such experiences are coherent among themselves, if they agree fundamentally with those of many others, and if such experiences are possibly attainable by others through some intelligible well-laid-out discipline then they cannot be dismissed as mere mysticism. On the contrary, if these experiences are put forth in the form of a consistent system of metaphysics then that system gains an additional authenticity

over those built with the intellect alone unaided by higher lights. It should be noted here that Sri Aurobindo is not a mystic in the sense in which it is commonly understood in the West. Here it is too much of a personal thing; the experience, though concrete, is seldom translatable in clear terms, and the emphasis is on the ecstasy and not at all on the knowledge about the Divine. "Not to know about, but to Be, is the mark of the real practioner."<sup>12</sup> as Underhill puts it. On the other hand Sri Aurobindo's emphasis is on knowledge by identity. It implies a clear discipline of conscious self-development which makes it possible to harmonise diverse experiences and integrate the personality in the clear steady light of the spirit. Another authority on mysticism writes, "The mystic indeed does not argue"<sup>13</sup> But Sri Aurobindo has argued all along. In fact he combines in himself the mystic and the philosopher.

However, in Indian tradition the spiritual knowledge has always been given a preponderance over intellectual speculation. Sri Aurobindo has stated clearly how he built the system of his philosophy:

The spiritual experience and the general truths on which such an attempt should be made were already present to us...but the complete intellectual statement of them and their results and issues had to be found. This meant

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E. Underhill, Mysticism, (New York: MacMillan Company) p. 85.

<sup>13</sup> W. T. Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, (Philadelphia and, New York: Lippincott Company), p. 7.

a continuous thinking, a high and subtle and difficult thinking on several lines, and this strain, which we had to impose on ourselves, we are obliged to impose also on our readers.<sup>14</sup>

Spiritual experiences seeking intellectual expression will, of necessity, use the mental stuff. The mind may not take the upper hand, yet all the knowledge accumulated by the mind will aid the expression. Sri Aurobindo was an active politician before his retirement. The problems of his country and in this connection those of the world at large occupied his mind very much. His early education was thoroughly western. His classical studies and knowledge of the major European languages (Greek, Latin, Italian, French, German and English) gave him the scope of a first hand and intimate grasp of the roots of Western culture—ancient and modern. About the depth of his study of the Eastern lore we have already mentioned. Intellectually Sri Aurobindo had the privilege and the capacity to grasp the heritage of the two most outstanding traditions of the world before spiritual illumination took place.

At the same time when he was writing the chapters of 'The Life Divine' he was interpreting the Vedas, Upaniṣads, and the Gita. At the top of every chapter of The Life Divine he has put some verse from those scriptures. His philosophy has been <sup>built</sup> independently, yet in the line of Vedanta with the obvious intention of perfecting the Vedanta and making it competent to meet the challenging problems of this age.

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<sup>14</sup>

Arya, (Pondy: July 1918), taken from S. Iyenger's article 'The Life Divine' in Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual No. 20, (Calcutta: Sri Aurobindo Pathmandir).

Such is the scheme of the human understanding upon which the conclusions of the most ancient Vedānta were built. To develop the results arrived at on this foundation by the ancient sages is not my object, but it is necessary to pass briefly in review some of their principal conclusions so far as they affect the problem of the divine Life with which alone we are at present concerned. For it is in those ideas that we shall find the best previous foundation of that which we seek now to rebuild and although, as with all knowledge, old expression has to be replaced to a certain extent by new expression suited to a later mentality and old light has to merge itself into new light as dawn succeeds dawn, yet it is with the old treasure as our initial capital or so much of it as we can recover that we shall most advantageously proceed to accumulate the largest gains in our new commerce with the ever-changeless and ever-changing Infinite.<sup>15</sup>

#### Main Features of his Philosophy

i) There is a big controversy in Vedānta regarding the character of the ultimate Reality. All the scriptures agree that the Ultimate is indescribable, nothing can express it adequately; yet they have tried to talk about It. In one and the same breath they declare that Brahman—the Ultimate is Immanent in the universe and yet It transcends the universe. How can both Transcendence and Immanence go together? Is there not a contradiction in it? This is the crux of the problem.<sup>16</sup> Relationship between the individual self and the supreme Self is also involved in this issue. Different schools of Vedānta have tried to solve the problem in different ways. Sri Aurobindo has attempted a synthesis among them. He maintains that the contradiction is only conceptual. In the higher consciousness from which scriptural utterances have proceeded there is no real difficulty. "In the vast perception of the supermind, the appearance gains rather than loses the Real,

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Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, (Pondy: Sri Auro. Ashram), pp. 79-80.

and the Real permeates the appearance."16 However, we leave the issue here for a fuller discussion in the following chapters.

ii) Sri Aurobindo's most important contribution to thought is his spiritual interpretation of scientific Evolution. The universe is a manifestation of the Divine and composed essentially of the same stuff as the Divine. Thus matter is divine consciousness brought into nescience by an act of gradual self-obscuration out of a spontaneous free Will. Emergence of life in matter is the evolution of the consciousness involved in it. The process of evolution is constituted by three movements--ascent, descent and integration. The latent consciousness ascends to a higher level, then comes down as it were, and accepts and incorporates the lower form to itself. A plant is a manifestation of a higher consciousness than what we see in inorganic substance; but at the same time the body of the plant, though matter, gets elevated and harmonised with the plant life. Similarly in animals the living body is further elevated with the development of a full-fledged vitality. So in man is seen a still higher elevation of the matter and life principles with the growth of mind and intellect. Since intellect or self-consciousness is far short of the Divine Consciousness involved in creation, Sri Aurobindo maintains, an evolution of a higher grade of consciousness than the intellect, and consequent emergence

of a race of supermen is inevitable. And the process would be basically the same, only in this stage humanity is expected to collaborate individually and collectively for that advancement.

iii) Another feature of Sri Aurobindo's thought that follows from this scheme of future evolution of man is an idea of collective progress. Sri Aurobindo accepts the traditional Indian view of the Cycle of Creation. Creation proceeds from God and returns back to God. The destiny of every soul is to get back into union with the supreme Self. In this Sri Aurobindo stresses the ideal of Jivanmukta--union and liberation while living. This union need not be solely a psychic feature; union may be, rather should be, with the whole of our embodied existence; not only the soul but mind, life and even the body will be vibrant with the living presence of the Divine. This is supermanhood; this is something unique, and this is the meaning of creation (teleology). This destiny is not merely of the individual, it is of the human race. Creation is to come back, or rather to keep us confined to the human level, humanity has to come back to Divine not exactly as it emerged in Nature but as something uniquely richer. To speak of the individual, an integrated being, a superman with all his members--physical, vital, mental harmonised with the spirit in him is a long way off from the primitive man.

Thus within the frame of a cycle of creation is seen a scope of a great collective progress more or less linear. Human existence on earth extends over a million years,

but recorded history covers much less than ten thousand years. The history built up of the later period is mostly sociological. One German thinker Lamprecht attempted a psychological interpretation of the progression of history. He used certain significant terms to describe the different stages of progress. These suggestive names struck the mind of Sri Aurobindo. He left Lamprecht behind, since he considered his theory very imperfect ("Nor does this theory of a psychological cycle tell us what is the inner meaning of its successive phases or the necessity of their succession or the term and end towards which they are driving."<sup>17</sup>) and proceeded to give his own view of the meaning and pattern of social progress using those names.

The early stage of human society is characterised by "a strongly symbolic mentality that governs or at least pervades its thought, customs and institutions."<sup>18</sup> At this stage human intellect is less developed, but his vital is more open and he has intimations from supersensuous forces and beings. He lives under the shadow of archetypal realities and his activities symbolise those forces and types. The early Vedic period is a typical example of this stage. This stage develops into what has been called the typical stage when the growing intellect takes up the archetypal verities into its own mould and seeks to express them systematically in epics, philosophies, and

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<sup>17</sup> Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle, (Pondy: Sri Auro. Ashram, 1962), p. 3

<sup>18</sup>

Ibid.

ethical norms of life. At this stage the symbols take a more rigid shape, and the contact with supersensuous realities becomes less living, less spontaneous. Next comes the conventional age:

The tendency of the conventional age of society is to fix, to arrange firmly, to formalise, to erect a system of rigid grades and hierarchies, to stereotype religion, to bind education and training to a traditional and unchangeable form, to subject thought to infallible authorities, to cast a stamp of finality on what seems to it the finished life of man.<sup>19</sup>

Mediaeval Europe may be taken for an example of this age. The age of Individualism dawns when the intellect rises in rebellion against conventionalism and asserts its right to judge and question everything, <sup>to</sup> reject anything irrational however great or sacred that might appear to a conventional mentality. But this iconoclasm of individualism (obviously the individual is to be understood here as opposed to the collectivity) is only a precursor to a deep subjectivism in which the individual does not know himself to be merely a thinking feeling entity separate from all others, but feels his deeper psychic existence within, and perceives himself essentially one with all others. Similarly the nations also come to a deeper understanding of their selves and the meaning of their existence. This is sure to lead to a happy understanding between the individual and the nation, and among nations. A long period of subjectivism will culminate

in what has been called by Sri Aurobindo a spiritual age of society.

A spiritualised society would live like its spiritual individuals, not in the ego, but in the spirit, not as the collective ego, but as the collective soul. This freedom from the egoistic standpoint would be its first and most prominent characteristic.<sup>20</sup>

The fundamental idea behind this scheme is that early human society starts with certain significant symbolic and intuitive perceptions; gradually attempts are made to bring the mind—its quest for beauty, truth, and good—in accord with those early intuitions; the emotions too join into the symphony. In the process original truth gets shrouded, newer attempts are made to revivify ancient things; complexities, differences and clashes follow; the outcome is the supremacy of a certain trend and its authoritative imposition. Inevitably the human mind revolts against this dead weight, much destruction and novelties follow, but real new creation harmonising and integrating the entire past is the ideal toward which humanity seems to be striving half-consciously at present. How to canalise and fructify this drive is the main concern of Sri Aurobindo in his attempt to give the psychological pattern of social progress. Man and his society are too complex to fit to any set pattern. Sri Aurobindo is perfectly aware of this.

Obviously such classifications are likely to err by rigidity and to substitute a mental straight line for the coils and zigzags of Nature. The Psychology of man and his societies is too complex, too synthetical of many-sided

and inter-mixed tendencies to satisfy any such rigorous and formal analysis.<sup>21</sup>

The fundamental idea of integration and harmonisation that works behind is more important than the pattern itself. As it is a social progress it is intimately linked with the externals of life e.g., with technology--organisation and tools. With the increase of control over nature and improvement of technology bigger and bigger units of collectivity have been formed--family, clan, tribe, kingdom, empire etc. The present nation-idea is the outcome of, on the one hand, much trial and error with different collectivities, and, on the other, tremendous progress in technology. The present stage of technology has made it imperative that man surpass to a great extent the idea of a closed nationhood. But human mind does not seem to be prepared as yet for that. The philosophy of progress that has been cultivated in the West for over two hundred years has failed to give due stress on the elevation and broadening of the human mind. It was a secular materialistic move oriented neither by Christian nor pagan idealism. As it is responsible for the phenomenal progress of technology so is it responsible for the enormous chasm between human mind and technology. Of course technology is the creation of man seeking power and control over external nature. But, for want of a corresponding effort in the control of his

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Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle, p.3.

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K.Lowith has ably demonstrated this point in his Meaning In History, ( Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964)

inner nature and increase of inner power he is being befooled by technology which has grown into a strong autonomous power.

To get out of this predicament, Sri Aurobindo suggests, humanity must concentrate on<sup>a</sup> two-fold endeavour. On the external side it must try to establish a world government which is a must for the prevention of war, which again is indispensable for the supply of bare necessities to all men and women and children on earth, and without this equitable distribution of wealth and also of culture no real progress is attainable in this age of a fast shrinking world. On the internal side humanity--individuals, groups, nations-- must endeavour to discover its real self, the truth of its existence.

#### An Estimation of his Philosophy

In fine it may be noted in which respects Sri Aurobindo's philosophy can be considered to have added to or made improvement upon the traditional Vedānta. It has given a more comprehensive view of life and reality. Without minimising the Absolute in any way it has given a status to the world and a purpose to life on earth; and in keeping with this it has formulated a new synthesis of yoga which can be followed by anybody anywhere coming from whatever walk of life. Keeping these in view Dr. Sharma writes,

The aim of Sri Aurobindo is to supplement all such fragmentary views, reaffirm the integral view of life set forth in the Veda, the Īśa-Upaniṣad, the Gītā and the Tantras, and also to rediscover, as it were, the ancient Sādhanā and free it, as far as possible, from the limitations and symbolism

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of any particular theology and make <sup>it</sup> available for all. <sup>23</sup>

In the final estimate the greatness of Sri Aurobindo would lie mainly in his bringing the Eastern and the Western traditions of philosophy closer to each other. It is difficult to characterise any tradition in a succinct manner. Any such attempt is likely to err by over-simplification. Yet the attempt has been made with utmost caution by Dr. S.K.Maitra who is deeply read in both the traditions of philosophy. We think his generalisations are by and large acceptable. He maintains that Indian philosophy is basically i) value-centric and ii) individualistic on the question of salvation. On the other hand the main characteristics of western philosophy are "i) that it is theoretical, rather than practical, 2) that it is existential, rather than axiological, 3) that it is intellectual rather than spiritual, 4) that it is cosmic, rather than individualistic, and 5) that it believes in change and evolution, rather than in static constancy."<sup>24</sup>

The value-centricity of the Indian philosophic mind has been articulated most forcefully in the words of Maitreyi, the wife of Yājñavalkya in the words: "yenāham nāmṛta syām kimāham tena kuryām?" Br. U.II.4.3. (What should I do with that by which I do not become immortal?) To attain immortality, to be one with Brahman is the ultimate aim of life. In the

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..... 23  
D.S.Sharma, The Renaissance of Hinduism, (Banares Hindu University, 1944), p.324.

24  
S.K.Maitra, The Meeting of the East and the West in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy, (Pondy: Sri Auro. Ashram, 1956) p. 31.

Nārada-Sanatkumāra episode of Chāndogya Upaniṣad also we see that the imposing list of sciences mastered by Nārada is considered as mere names by Sanatkumāra. These could not satisfy Nārada too, so he approached Sanatkumāra for the knowledge of that which would lead him to the other shore—tamasah pāram. Real fulfilment, Sanatkumāra declares, lies in Eternal Bliss: "yo vai bhūma tat sukham, nālpe sukham asti, bhūmaiva sukham." Ch. U.vii.23.1. (The infinite is happiness. There is no happiness in anything small. Only the Infinite is happiness.) Similarly in the Gītā it has been shown how all knowledge, works, and emotions can be made means to attain the highest value of life. In this way all the Indian systems of philosophy (except Lokāyata) have been connected with some system of yoga. This value, however, includes knowledge and existence, even as Ānanda presupposes Chit and Sat. The western tradition of philosophy has, on the contrary, sought the knowledge of the Existent, and not cared so much for getting into union with the Ultimate. In this respect western philosophy is more theoretical, intellectual rather than practical.

But on the other hand, <sup>the</sup> Indian preoccupation with the cycle of existence prevented the development of a dynamic theory of evolution, though imperfect attempts are there in the systems of Sāṅkhya and Yoga. The cycles are repeated endlessly, no real progress is seen in them, the aim for the individual is to get out of this flux and be united blissfully with the Supracosmic Reality---that has been by and large

the value advocated by the philosophies. This has given a static character to the Indian systems and rendered them incompetent to deal with the existential problems of life which are mostly collective in nature.

The western philosophy, on the other hand, from its very beginning in the Greek period has been concerned with evolution, and that in the cosmic sense of the term. But, Dr. Maitra contends, for want of a profound experience of the Spirit, the West has failed to account properly for the evolution. He has demonstrated the point by citing a few examples from modern western philosophy. Natural Evolution of Darwin and Spencer is no evolution at all; evolution presupposes a goal and a criterion of progress; Natural Evolution is only mechanical adaptation. Bergson frees the evolution from its mechanical character by his doctrine of the Creative Evolution; but he also fails to endow it with a teleology. Hegel gives it a teleology, according to him evolution is the fulfilment of the Spirit. But his spirit is not sufficiently spiritual. "For he identifies the spirit with reason, but reason does not represent the highest type of spirituality. There are several rungs in the spiritual ladder above reason. Consequently, a truly spiritual view must transcend reason."<sup>25</sup> Alexander's attempt took that direction. He also speaks like Sri Aurobindo, of the emergence of a higher consciousness for the next step in evolution. But he fails to relate that higher consciousness which he calls Deity or God with the world. This Deity is totally different from man. In fact,

evolution cannot be properly accounted for without linking it to Creation or Involution.

For Sri Aurobindo Evolution means the spirit's return unto itself. Just as in involution or creation it projects itself out of itself, so in evolution it comes back to itself. It is the home-coming of the spirit. It comes back to itself in a manner which is just the reverse of that by which it went out of itself.... Matter can evolve because there has been a descent of Spirit into it. So is with life and matter mind. Each of these can evolve because there has been a descent of the Spirit into it.<sup>26</sup>

Through this spiritual interpretation of evolution Sri Aurobindo has also been able to account for the existence of evil in the world, having avoided the extremes of the Eastern as well as of the Western views in this respect. The traditional Vedāntic view is that there is no evil really, everything is Brahman or Bliss: "na pasyo mṛtyum pasyati, na rogam notu dukhatham." Ch. U.Vii.26.2. (He who really sees sees no death, no illness nor even pain.) On the other hand western tradition by and large accepts evil as a fundamental fact of reality. This does not accord with the idea that God is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient at the same time. Sri Aurobindo has shown that evil emerges as a reality at a particular stage of evolution and plays a definite role in evolution till a stage of it is surpassed. In the purely sub-vital stage there is no evil, on the other hand at the level of unitive superconscience ~~of-ness~~ evil ceases to operate. Where the consciousness of oneness is absent and where there is the necessity of separative self-assertion

there evil is. Humanity can get rid of evil with its ascent to a higher level of consciousness.

Thus we get a process and scheme of collective progress within the general background of a cycle of creation. This has been achieved by combining the Indian spiritual viewpoint with the cosmic stand-point of the West. We need not follow Dr. Maitra in his attempt at showing how in other fundamental issues of philosophy the East and West have met in Sri Aurobindo. What has been said in connection with Evolution is sufficient to indicate Sri Aurobindo's unique position as a bridge between the East and the West. C. Moore another savant well-versed in both Eastern and Western traditions, does also hold similar views.

The comparative approach to the ultimate truth leads Sri Aurobindo to interpret and explain for all--Easterners and Westerners--the rich, full, comprehensive and real content, substance, and meaning of Indian philosophy in a way which makes it infinitely more open to appreciation and understanding by the West and also infinitely more capable of accounting for and including the great variety and range of life, experience, and reality, than earlier, restricted, almost emancipated interpretations have been. This is one facet of the greatness of Sri Aurobindo in the East-West situation. In this achievement he has not only brought Eastern and Western cultures and thought-traditions closer in appreciation and understanding but has also suggested, in his final achievement of the integral philosophy, a world philosophy which does justice to both East and West and also provides at least one formulation of the goal of modern man, a philosophy for humanity as a whole, devoid of the antagonizing, narrowing provincialisms of East and West. 27

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 Charles Moore, in his essay Sri Aurobindo on East and West, in The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, ed. Chaudhury, and Spiegelberg.

## CHAPTER II

### THE STATUS OF THE SOUL

#### The Background and the Problem

In Indian religious tradition the liberation of the individual soul has received utmost emphasis. Although Sri Aurobindo has brought into focus the interdependence of the individual and the collectivity, and the great necessity of collective progress for the individual liberation to be complete, yet he too has given stress on individual enlightenment. The individual is truly the key to all progress in the world. The individual is, however, according to Sri Aurobindo, fundamentally the individual soul; the outer members---body, life, and mind form but parts and means of manifestation of the soul. Soul-culture would, therefore, mean the discovery of the central truth of our being, and moulding our physical, vital and mental life ~~center~~ centering round that Being.

Now, before going to the scope and method of soul-culture it is necessary that we see what exactly is the status of the soul in Reality. The entire issue of soul-culture depends on its status metaphysically. Deussen writes:

All the Upanishads, even the oldest, when they discuss the conditions of bondage in the saṃsāra and of deliverance therefrom, distinguish between the imprisoned soul and that which has been delivered, between the soul entering on deliverance and <sup>that</sup> to which it enters in. 28

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P. Deussen, The Philosophy of the Upanishads, Eng. tr. by A. S. Geden, (New York: Dover Publications, INC.), p. 258.

But at the same time ample indications are there that the two are essentially one. For example:

ēṣa ma ātmāntar hrdaye etad brahma; etaṃ itaḥ pretyā-  
bhisambhāvitāsmīti. Ch.U.iii.14.4.

(This is the self of mine within the heart; this is Brahman. Into him, I shall enter, on departing hence.)

A real distinction between the individual and the supreme Self is found, Deussen says, in the later Upaniṣads like Kāthaka, and Śvetāśvatara where the idea of a personal God occurs over against the souls, and 'grace' becomes a condition of deliverance. But actually the situation does not seem to be so. All Upaniṣadic passages do not maintain an identical position regarding the relation between the individual and the supreme Self. Again, the Upaniṣads are not systematic treatises, nor were they composed by one person or at one time. Divergent positions are seen in them regarding many issues. Efforts have, however, been made to draw a consistent philosophy out of the Upaniṣads; since, despite apparent divergences, they betray a basic unity in outlook on life and reality. Let us now see what the main schools of Vedānta make of the Upaniṣads.

The relationship between the individual and the supreme Self is part of the greater problem of reconciling the Immanent (visvabhūta) and Transcendent (visvātīta) Brahman. If Brahman is considered Immanent in the world, besides being Transcendent, then some distinctive reality of the individual soul has to be recognised; -----

if, on the other hand, this immanence is considered as an appearance, then the soul, along with the world, turns out to be a fiction. The most important school of Vedānta is the Advaita.

Advaita literally means the non-dual. It is the philosophy of absolute non-dualism because, besides Brahman or pure consciousness, it recognises nothing as real....From the point of view of this philosophy, even God is conceived to have reality only from the empirical point of view, devotion or prayer to whom having nothing more than a mere pragmatic significance. 29

Thus according to Advaita, the individual soul has got no status; Brahman or the Supreme Self is the only reality. But as Advaita concedes an empirical reality to the world, it speaks of an empirical soul and its means and method of liberation. The internal contradiction of the system is all too obvious. Deussen who is rather inclined toward the Advaita view, writes:

Accordingly the entire individual soul as such has no reality, and yet the system cannot avoid treating it as a reality, and discussing in detail its organs and attributes, its wandering and final deliverance.30

The world dismissed by Advaita as a mere appearance has been repeatedly spoken of in the Upaniṣads as the manifestation of and one with Brahman; for example:

i) Īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ yat kiṁ ca jagatyāṁ jagat. Īśa.1  
(All this, whatever moves in this moving world, is enveloped by God.)

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D. Chatterjee, Indian Philosophy, (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1964), p. 69.

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P. Deussen, The Philosophy of the Upanishads, pp. 256-57.

ii) iyam pṛthivī sarveṣāṃ bhūtānāṃ madhu, asyai pṛthivyai sarvaṇi bhūtāni madhu... idam amṛtam, idam brahma, idam sarvam. Br. U. II.5.1.

(this earth is sweet as honey to all creatures. All creatures are like honey to this earth... This is the immortal. This is Brahman. This is all.)

iii) Ānanda brahmeti vyajānāt, ānandādhyeva khalvimāni bhūtāni jāyante. Tai. U. III.6.1.

(He knew that Brahman is bliss, from the eternal bliss have proceeded all these.)

On the opposite pole of this pure Non-Dualism stands the dualistic school of Vedanta—Dvaitavāda. The basis of the entire system is dvaita or dualism. There are five real and eternal distinctions (pañca-veda) viz. a) between God and the individual soul, b) between one soul and another, c) between God and matter, d) between the soul and matter, e) between one particle of matter, <sup>and</sup> another. The Supreme Being is independent, all other principles are dependent on Him. Thus the soul though having no independent existence is yet eternally different from the Ultimate (paramātman). Whatever support this system may have of the Upanisads, it definitely fails to do justice to the key Words of the Upanisads, e.g., Aham Brahmāsmi (I am Brahman), Tat tvam asi (That thou art), So'ham (He am I), and so on.

In between these two views stands the Qualified Monism of Ramanuja (Viśiṣṭādvaita vāda). It is a monistic doctrine, for all was conceived as the Brahman or God, but it is a qualified monism inasmuch as there is also room in it for the reality of the individual souls and the external world. Whatever exists is contained within God, so no other independent element is admitted in this system. But within the unity there are distinct elements of plurality, which as effects

or modes (prakāra) of God are yet real, and not figments of illusion. These are souls, of varying classes and degrees (cit), and matter in all its forms (acit). This school tries to effect a compromise between the two aspects of Brahman, Its transcendentality and immanence but fails to do justice to the great words (mahāvākya) of the Upaniṣads referred to above in which the identity of Brahman and Jīva has been unequivocally expressed. According to this system the souls are only parts of God, and being parts they cannot be infinite or all-pervasive. In this way a real difference is posited between the individual self and the supreme Self.

It is to be noted that each school has taken pains to show that it is the truest representation of the Upaniṣad. To do that each has developed a particular method of interpreting the Upaniṣads which, being unsystematised expressions, very often <sup>in</sup> figures and symbols, lend themselves rather easily to different meanings. Perhaps a little deviation here and there from the literal sense is unavoidable for any systematic presentation of the doctrine. But it is to be seen that such deviations are sufficiently warranted, and no violent metamorphosis has been made only to suit a preconceived structure. As each of the three systems noted above has failed to account for some major aspect of truth embodied in the Upaniṣads, Sri Aurobindo considers them as valid only partially.

These three attitudes correspond to three truths of the Brahman which are simultaneously valid and none of them entirely true without the others as its complements.<sup>31</sup>

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Sri Aurobindo, Īśa Upaniṣad, (Pondy: Sri Auro. Ashram), p28.

But how can these three go together? One upholds absolute identity of soul and Brahman, or rather denies the ultimate existence of soul, another speaks of eternal difference between them; one considers the world as an appearance, another considers it real. But Sri Aurobindo adds, "Their co-existence, difficult of conception to the logical intellect, can be experienced by identity in consciousness with Brahman."<sup>32</sup> This reference to mystical experiences is really puzzling to the rational mind, as one writer speaks out, "Transcendence and Immanence on a mystic's lips are challenges to metaphysical convention and not gratifying assurances. The contraries are often huddled together."<sup>33</sup> But on the other hand mystical experience may be the only way out of the impasse created by logical categories and 'metaphysical convention'. In fact this is what has been claimed by Sri Aurobindo when he has pressed into service what he has called the Logic of the Infinite. We propose to consider this new logic in the next chapter.

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Ibid.

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C.T.K.Chari, Towards the Unstructured Human Personality, in Essays in Philosophy, (50th Birthday anniversary vol. to Mahadevan; (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1962), p.266.

## CHAPTER III

### THE LOGIC OF THE INFINITE

The Logic of the Infinite means by and large the ways that are natural to the Divine consciousness. The mind and intellect has been considered in the Indian tradition as belonging to the realm of Avidyā(Ignorance). Intellect does not have the unitive view of things, it works through division, through analysis, comparison and contrast. On the other hand, Truth lies in unity and comprehensiveness. So in the perception of truth intellect has been assigned a secondary role. Even in the matter of empirical knowledge direct impression is received by the senses, the intellect comes next and works upon the data supplied by the senses. Similarly in the sphere of spiritual truth direct mystical experiences are primary, intellectual formulation of the experiences will follow them. And in this it is necessary that the intellect does not impose its categories on the verities of a higher realm, since the intellect suffers from certain limitations, it is bound to groove under the space-time-causation complex. When the monistic Vedānta argues if the world is a real part of the Brahman then the latter loses in its infinity, or when the qualified non-dualist says that the souls, being parts of the Divine, cannot be infinite, they actually think in terms

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of space. Even the One of the monist is a space-bound postulation, since oneness is conceived in relation to multiplicity whereas Brahman is, according to monism, beyond all relations. That is why it is said that Truth cannot be grasped in its entirety by the intellect:

i) na medhayā na bahuna śrutena. Katha. I.2.23.  
(not by intellectual power, nor even through much hearing.)

ii) yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasā saha. Tai.U.II.4.  
(From which words turn away without attaining and the mind also retires baffled.)

The intellect is not discouraged thereby, it has a definite role to play. It brings down higher truths to the mind, for working out in the conditions of life. But in doing so it has to be receptive rather than obtrusive. Sri Aurobindo has clearly shown the difference between the ways of the intellect and that of the higher divine knowledge.

We, human beings, are phenomenally a particular form of consciousness, subject to time and space, and can only be in our surface consciousness which is all we know of ourselves, one thing at a time, one formation, one poise of being, one aggregate of experience; and that one thing is for us the truth of ourselves which we acknowledge; all the rest is either not true or no longer true, because it has disappeared in the past out of our ken, or not yet true, because it is waiting in the future and not yet in our ken. But the Divine consciousness is not as particularised, nor as limited; it can be many things at a time and take more than one enduring poise even for all time.<sup>34</sup>

This way of the Infinite does imply that many of the rules of our logic do not hold good in regard to the Infinite and Its workings. The Upanisad is a body of literature carrying high spiritual experiences about the Infinite. So

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Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, (Pondy: Ashram), p.173

we come across statements in them which flout the law of contradiction without least hesitation; to cite just a few examples, the Infinite is spoken of as

i) *idūrat sudūre tad ihāntike ca. Mu. U. III.1.7.*  
(farther than the far, yet here near at hand.)

ii) *anoraṇīya mahato mahīān. Katha.III.20.*  
(smaller than the atom, bigger than the vast.)

iii) *tad ejati tan naijati tad dūre tad vad antike tad antarasya sarvasya tad u sarvasyāsyā bāhyataḥ. Isa.5.*  
(It moves and moves not; It is far and It is near; It is within all this and it is also outside all this.)

In these paradoxes there is an insistence upon the human intellect to give up its categories and try to conceive the Infinite in terms of the Infinite. What is a paradox to the finite consciousness is natural and no paradox at all to the infinite consciousness.

However, let us see how Sri Aurobindo reconciles the three different schools of Vedānta, thereby the three different positions regarding the status of the soul with the help of the Logic of the Infinite.

In the chapter entitled The Triple Status of Supermind of The Life Divine Sri Aurobindo has shown that the experience of the three different statuses of the soul is the result of the reflection of the three different poises of the Supermind on the purified mind. Now what exactly is the Supermind? Appearance or reality the world has some sort of an existence. Since the world cannot have any independent existence it must in some way be related to the Infinite. Some link must be

there to bring the world out of the Infinite either as an appearance or as a reality. In Advaita this link is God, and the term Saccidānanda properly belongs to Him.<sup>35</sup>

Supermind in the system of Sri Aurobindo corresponds roughly to God of Advaita although Sri Aurobindo does not throw off the Supermind ultimately as a fiction. He defines Supermind thus:

No doubt, it is Sachchidānanda itself that is this principle, but Sachchidānanda not resting in its pure infinite invariable consciousness, but proceeding out of this primal poise, or rather upon it as a base and in it as a continent, into a movement which is its form of energy and instrument of cosmic creation.<sup>36</sup>

Supermind is thus Saccidānanda poised for manifestation, it has in it the creative idea and the energy. Creation proceeds gradually, One Knowledge-Will manifests Itself into many step by step. In the process three poises of the Supermind figure out as the three gradual movements towards differentiation,

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Saccidānanda is applicable to Brahman only in the negative sense. "Sat indicates that Brahman is not non-being, Chit that Brahman is not nescient, and Ānanda, that Brahman is not a mere absence of pain. By such denial the positive nature of Brahman as the Absolute is affirmed." Nikhilananda, The Upanisads, Vol.I, (New York: Bonanza Books ), pp.36-37.

36

Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, (Pondy: Sri Auro. Ashram), p.172.

and individualisation. He describes these movements thus:

The first founds the inalienable unity of things, the second modifies that unity so as to support the manifestation of the Many in One and One in Many; the third further modifies it so as to support the evolution of a diversified individuality which, by the action of Ignorance, becomes in us at a lower level the illusion of the separate ego.<sup>37</sup>

We have to follow these movements further in greater details since the truths represented by the three schools of Vedanta are the result of the reflection of the three poises of the Supermind respectively on the purified mind of the seeker.

The first poise

is an equal self-extension of Sachchidananda all-comprehending, all-possessing, all-constituting. But this all is One, not many; there is no individualisation. It is when the reflection of this Supermind falls upon our stilled and purified self that we lose all sense of individuality; for there is no concentration of consciousness there to support an individual development. All is developed in unity and as one; all is held by this Divine Consciousness as forms of its existence, not as in any degree separate existences. <sup>38</sup>

This is the substance of the truth represented by Advaita.

In the second poise of the Supermind actually individualisation takes place. The Divine Consciousness, though stands back in the idea yet follows and supports all individual play of movement, and upholds the differentiation among them.

This concentration supporting the soul-form would be the individual Divine or Jivatman as distinguished from the Universal Divine or one all-constituting Self. There would

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Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, (Pondy: Ashram), p.174

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Ibid, p.175.

be no essential difference, but only a practical differentiation for the play which would not abrogate the real unity.<sup>39</sup>

This is the substance of the truth represented by qualified monism. Jīvātman, however, is not finite nor many. It is a truth of the Divine, a potentiality in the Infinite for the equal support of the many. Further differentiation takes place in the third poise of the Supermind in which the supporting concentration (Jīvātman) does not as it were stand at the back but projects itself into the movement and gets in a way involved in it. "This tertiary poise would be therefore that of a sort of fundamental blissful dualism in unity."<sup>40</sup> This is the gist of the truth upheld by the dualistic schools of Vedānta. This projection of the individual self (Jīvātman) into many soul-centres and its getting involved in the world of multiplicity does not, however, constitute a real astrangement from the unity. Indeed in this third poise differentiation is the prominent feature, unity remains only in the far background, but it is not lost.

For the individual Divine would still be conscious of itself as the result of the One and of its power of conscious self-creation, that is to say, of its multiple self-centration conceived so as to govern and enjoy manifoldly its manifold existence in the extension of Time and Space; this true spiritual individual would not arrogate to itself an independent or separate existence.<sup>41</sup>

So we see that in the first poise of the Supermind individualisation is absent, Jīvātman is not formed. So Advaita

<sup>39</sup>

Ibid, p.175.

<sup>40</sup>

Ibid, p.176.

<sup>41</sup>

Ibid, p.176.

does not see the ultimate reality of Jīvātman and considers it merely phenomenal. In the second poise Jīvātman appears, as a content of the Divine out of its infinite potentialities, in support of individualisation. Qualified monism sees the Jīvātman to be essentially one with the Absolute, yet because of its being the individual divine, this school fails to reconcile it with the One all-pervading reality and considers it finite and phenomenal. The dichotomy of one and many is a characteristic drawback of our finite logic. "That is identical, and not single, It is identical always and everywhere in Time and Space as well as identical beyond Time and Space. Numerical oneness and multiplicity are equally valid terms of its essential unity." <sup>42</sup> In the reflection of the third poise of the Supermind the individual divine is perceived to be distributed over the many as their soul-centres. Multiplicity is prominent, yet unity is not lost altogether. The many souls, though involved in manifestation, are perceived to be so many rays of the same Light. And this conduces to a relationship of love and worship, and the lover and the worshipper do not want to abrogate the duality, rather they entertain it. But this duality need not be taken as a real fact of existence as was done by the dualists.

Thus we see that the three different schools of Vedānta are grounded on the three different aspects of the Truth. It is the defect, Sri Aurobindo contends, of our finite mentality

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42

Sri Aurobindo, Īśa Upanisad, p. 38.

and its need of exclusive concentration that compels us to dwell on any one of these aspects of self-knowledge to the exclusion of the others. This exclusiveness carried to its logical conclusions gives rise automatically to schools of thought utterly opposed and hostile to each other.

In fine according to the integralist view of Sri Aurobindo the status of the soul may be put thus:

The individual selves, the Jīvātman are both eternally real and distinct and eternally and essentially one with Brahman. 43

Sullivan has put Jīvātman in the plural. It is not incorrect, since in the higher level of superconscience where we can have the experience of the Jīvātman there is no sharp division between the one and many. Yet, strictly speaking, Jīvātman is one, it is the individual self supporting all individual formations. Its chief deputy in the manifestation in each individual is numerous and may rightly be put in the plural. Psychic beings are many though Jīvātman is the same in everything.

This central being has two forms—above, it is Jīvātman, our true being, of which we become aware when the higher self-knowledge comes,— below, it is the psychic being which stands behind mind, body and life. The Jīvātman is above the manifestation in life and presides over it; the psychic being stands behind the manifestation in life and supports it. 44

Thus, according to Sri Aurobindo Jivatman belongs to the higher

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43  
H.P.Sullivan, in his essay on the status of the soul in Sri Aurobindo Circle, No.15, (Bombay: Sri Aurobindo Society, 1959), p.61.

44  
Sri Aurobindo, On Yoga II Tome One, (Pondy: Sri Auro. Ashram, 1958), p.287.

hemisphere, unlike in the systems of Śankara and Rāmānuja where Jīvātman is many and they belong to the phenomenal sphere. The psychic beings of Sri Aurobindo do, however, come down to the lower hemisphere. But in his system no sharp demarcation has been made between the higher and the lower. Here the distinction is not of kind but only of degree. "In all the series of the planes or grades of consciousness there is nowhere any real gulf, always there are connecting gradations and one can ascend from step to step."<sup>45</sup> Therefore, the psychic being, though below, is yet a pure spark of the Divine and one with Him.

To come back to the Infinite and its ways, what exactly is this infinite consciousness? How is it related to the intellect? Normally 'intuition' is the word used by philosophers to denote some sort of higher perception than what is available to the intellect. How is intuition related to the Infinite? To make these points clear it would be necessary to give a fuller account of the dynamic levels of consciousness above the mind in the words of Sri Aurobindo since he has used the terms to describe the overhead levels (please refer to the chart at page vi ) with perfect awareness of the senses in which Nietzsche, Bergson, Bradley and others have used the word 'intuition'. Mind's contact with reality is indirect, through senses, and it works by division and analysis.

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45

Ibid, p.273.

Normally the highest mental power is the intellect. Supermind, on the other hand is

the full Truth-Consciousness of the Divine Nature in which there can be no place for the principle of division and ignorance; it is always a full light and knowledge superior to all mental substance or mental movement.<sup>46</sup>

Beneath this full light there are several levels of consciousness coming down toward mind. Of these Overmind is the highest and most stable.

The overmind is the highest of these ranges; it is full of lights and powers; but from the point of view of what is above it, it is the line of the soul's turning away from the complete and indivisible knowledge and its descent towards the Ignorance. For although it draws from the Truth, it is here that begins the separation of aspects of the Truth, the forces and their working out as if they were independent truths and this is a process that ends, as one descends to ordinary Mind, Life and Matter, in a complete division, fragmentation, separation from the indivisible Truth above.<sup>47</sup>

Intuition is below the Overmind and much above the intellect. It is a dynamic power of direct contact with higher reality, but it works by flashes and hardly constitutes a stable centre of consciousness. Its revelations get mixed with mental stuff rather too easily.

The Intuition is the first plane in which there is a real opening to the full possibility of realisation—it is through it that one goes farther—first to overmind and then to supermind. <sup>48</sup>

Intuition sees the truth of things by a direct inner contact, not like the ordinary mental intelligence by seeking

46

Ibid, p.280.

47

Ibid, pp.280-81.

48

Ibid, p.285.

and reaching out for indirect contacts through the senses etc. But the limitation of the intuition as compared with the supermind is that it sees things by flashes, point by point, not as a whole. Also in coming into the mind it gets mixed with the mental movement and forms a kind of intuitive mind activity which is not the pure truth, but something in between the higher Truth and the mental seeking. It can lead the consciousness through a sort of transitional stage and that is practically its function.<sup>49</sup>

Spiritual realisation i.e., contact with the Infinite may take place in hundred and one ways. The important thing to note is that it is not indispensable to develop the dynamic centres of consciousness noted above for spiritual enlightenment. The Supermind's reflections on the purified mind have already been referred to. Through an inner silence, through complete detachment from the body and mind it is quite possible to be in contact with the Infinite, as a result of the reflection or dawning of the Divine Light. But such contacts happen in a state of samādhi (trance) or of ecstasy. When the person relapses into normal consciousness he can speak of his experiences only from memory, and if he wants to put them in the form of a regular exposition of reality he cannot help following the categories of the mind since he<sup>b</sup> is stationed in the mind. Of course frequent and repeated contacts make it possible to speak out the experiences spontaneously, and such outpourings naturally take the form of figures and symbols; mystical literature abounds in them. But, Sri Aurobindo maintains, for a penetrating and comprehensive discovery of the realm of the spirit it is necessary that the overmental and

supramental centres are developed as instruments of truth vision, so that dependence on reflections and flashes can be done away with. Not that these higher centres of dynamic consciousness were not at all developed at all in the past. The Upanisads testify to a discovery of a whole world of spiritual verities which must have been the work of these centres. But something more is necessary for these centres to communicate to the intellect and for the intellect to enlarge itself and follow them. The intellect, and for that matter the lower parts of our existence, must be made attuned to the higher levels of consciousness; the gulf between them has to be bridged through a gradual process of transformation. The Upanisads did indeed succeed to a certain extent to communicate to the intellect,—it is a real progress over the earlier period of Vedic symbolism,—but evidently it was not carried far enough for a complete rapport between the intellect and the overhead levels of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo says,

I have said that the idea of the supermind was already in existence from ancient times. There was in India and elsewhere the attempt to reach it by rising to it; but what was missed was the way to make it integral for the life and to bring it down for transformation of the whole nature, even of the physical nature.<sup>50</sup>

That is why a gap has persisted between the intellect and the infinite consciousness. When the Upanisads say that the Superconscious is experienced in a state of deep sleep it is

implied that the conscious mind is unable to participate in the experience. A systematic development of the higher dynamic centres would aim at a comprehensive grasp of Reality in all its grades and movements, as well as a capacity to bring the Knowledge home to the mind and intellect so that the latter may act effectively as a channel of Light and Force. Herein lies the significance of the logic of the Infinite. The finite mind is insisted upon to give up its rigid moorings, make itself more open and plastic and try to conceive things differently. And this claim is particularly legitimate when enquiry is made about a body of literature which enshrines higher experiences; the method of enquiry and the measure of assessment must have relevance to the field of enquiry.

As regards the attitude towards intuitive and still higher experiences of truth there is a marked difference between the philosophical traditions of the East and the West. The East, while formulating the philosophy intellectually, assigned highest authority to Śruti or revealed Knowledge. Consequently each school of philosophy has developed side by side a system of yoga as a passage to that Knowledge. In the West, on the other hand, higher knowledge has been made to pass through the test of the intellect which, for all practical purposes, has been held as supreme. Sri Aurobindo has dealt with this difference in the two traditions with the mention of certain minor exceptions. We have but followed him. This difference is significant so far as it concerns the

western mind's sympathy or otherwise for the logic of the Infinite which is indeed a key to scriptural studies besides being a new approach to the problems of metaphysics.

## CHAPTER IV

### ONTOLOGY OF THE WORLD AND LIFE

#### Relevant quotes from the Upanisads

1. ekaṁ vā idaṁ vibabhūva sarvaṁ. Rg Veda, viii.58.2.  
(The One has become all this.)

2. sa yathorṇanābhis tantunocaret, yathāgneḥ kṣudrā  
visphuliṅgā vyuccaranti, evaṁ evāsmād ātmanaḥ sarve prāṇāḥ  
sarve lokāḥ, sarve devāḥ, sarvāni bhūtāni vyuccaranti. Br. U. II.1.  
20.

(As a spider moves along the thread, as small sparks come  
forth from the fire, even so from this Self come forth all  
senses, all worlds, all gods, all beings.)

3. sarvaṁ khalu idaṁ brahma, tajjīlān iti. Ch. U. III.14.1.  
(Verily this whole world is Brahman, from which he comes forth,  
without which he will be dissolved and in which he breathes.)

4. sarvaṁ hy etad brahma, ayam ātmā brahma, so'yaṁ  
ātmā catuspāṭ. M. U. 2.  
(All this Universe is the Eternal Brahman, this Self is the  
Eternal, and the Self is fourfold.)

5. anādimat tvam vibhutvena vartase yato jātāni bhū-  
vanāni visvā. Śve. U. IV.4.  
(Having no beginning you abide through omnipresence. You  
from whom all worlds are born.)

6. yaś cāyaṁ asyāṁ pṛthivyāṁ tejomayo' mṛtamayaḥ  
puruṣaḥ, yaś cāyaṁ adhyātmaṁ śārīras tejomayo' mṛtamayaḥ  
puruṣaḥ, ayam eva sa yo'yaṁ ātmā, idaṁ amṛtam, idaṁ brahma,  
idaṁ sarvaṁ. Br. U. II.5.1.  
(This shining immortal person who is in this earth and with  
reference to oneself, this shining immortal person who is in  
the body, he, indeed, is just this self. This is immortal,  
this is Brahman, this is all.)

#### Predicament of the Advaitist

In many a passage in the Rg Veda and the Upanisads  
it has been plainly stated that it is Brahman who has become  
the world, that the world and the individual soul are truly  
one with Brahman. But there is difficulty in accepting these

statements as they are. If the whole of Brahman becomes the universe then Brahman ceases to be immutable and transcendental which are its basic characteristic as given in the śruti (scripture). If part of Brahman becomes the universe then a division comes upon the indivisible One. Advaita Vedānta solves the dilemma in a very clever way. We do, however, avoid using the name of Śankara although Advaita goes with his name, he being the greatest exponent of the system. Sharma has found fault with Sri Aurobindo for "saying that Śankara taught illusionism."<sup>51</sup> He thinks that Gauḍapāda and some later exponents of Advaita may, however, be labelled as illusionist. In fact there is no unanimity among scholars regarding the exact position of Śankara in this respect. The two eminent interpreters of Advaita in modern time--K.C. Bhattacharyya, and Radhakrishnan-- are also divided in their opinion about Śankara's position. Sri Aurobindo is perfectly aware of the situation. He had no interest in distorting Śankara. He has contended Śankara having taken the latter in his trust. He writes in one of his letters,

It is rather difficult to say now a days what really was Shankara's philosophy: there are numberless exponents and none of them agrees with any of the others. I have read accounts given by some scores of his exegetes and each followed his own line. We are even told by some that he was no māyavadin at all, although he has always been famed as the greatest exponent of the theory of māyā, but rather, the greatest realist in philosophical history. One eminent follower of Śankara even declared that my philosophy and Śankara's were identical, a statement which rather took my breath away.<sup>52</sup>

51

D.S. Sharma, The Renaissance of Hinduism, p.334.

52

Sri Aurobindo, On Yoga II, Tome One, p.43.

However, from our knowledge of Advaita we see, it argues that the manifestation of the world out of Brahman is merely an apparent modification(vivarta), and not a real one(parināma). It is perceived as real by ignorance(avidyā). As soon as ignorance is removed the individual self and the world cease to exist. The world and the self is thus a mere appearance, a superimposition(adhyāsa) of illusion upon Reality. A mere appearance is totally external and unessential to the intrinsic nature of Brahman, so it is false. In this way the purity and Oneness of the Absolute is protected by the pure monistic Vedānta. But in doing so it does virtually deny the statements of the Śruti such as those have been quoted at the beginning of this chapter; because in a very plain and unambiguous manner it has been asserted almost in every major Upaniṣad that the world has been issued out of the Brahman. There is no indication whatsoever that an illusory world was foisted by Brahman. Again in spite of its clever attempt Advaita does not seem to have been successful in maintaining the purity of Brahman. It explains the apparent reality of the world, Jīva etc. through the instrumentation of a darkening force called Māyā.<sup>53</sup> But Māyā it cannot explain.

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53  
 "Māyā, ajñāna(ignorance), avidyā(nescience), and prakṛti(nature) are practically synonymous. Māyā generally signifies the cosmic illusion on account of which Brahman, or Pure Consciousness, appears as the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the Universe. It is under the influence of avidyā that Ātman, or Pure Consciousness, appears as the jīva, or individual self. Ajñāna makes the Absolute appear as the relative, the One as the many." Nikhilananda, The Upanisads vol.I, p.57.

Māyā is stated to be inexplicable(anirvācyā). It cannot belong to Brahman, nor can it be given any status outside Brahman.

When it comes to an explanation of Māyā, he(Advaita Vedantist), like the scientist dealing with Nature, can do no more than arrange and organise his ideas of the process of this universal mystification; he cannot explain how or why his illusionary mystifying Māyā came into existence. He can only say, 'Well, but it is there'.<sup>54</sup>

### Integral Advaitism of Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo shows that these polarities between part and whole, immutability and mutability, one and many and so on pertain to our mental consciousness--to the categories of finite logic. But to the consciousness and logic of the Infinite they melt away; and the Śruti embodies the outpourings of a consciousness throbbing with the experience of the Infinite. So according to him these difficulties cease to exist if we can look into them from the point of view of the all-comprehensive unitive consciousness of the Infinite. Thus he finds no difficulty in accept<sup>ing</sup> the statements of the Upaniṣads regarding the identity of Brahman, world and soul as they are. The Īśa Upaniṣad has expressly combined the apparent dichotomies into an unitive whole(verses 4,5,9-14). We would rather quote extensively from Sri Aurobindo's comments on these verses:

Brahman is one, not numerically, but in essence. Numerical oneness would either exclude multiplicity or would be a pluralistic and divisible oneness with the many as its parts. That is not the unity of Brahman, which can neither be diminished nor increased, nor divided.

The many in the universe are sometimes called parts

of the universal Brahman as the waves are parts of the sea. But, in truth, these waves are each of them that sea, their diversities being those of frontal or superficial appearances caused by the sea's motion. As each object in the universe is really the whole universe in a different frontal appearance, so each individual soul is all Brahman regarding itself and world from a centre of cosmic consciousness.

For That is identical, not single. It is identical always and everywhere in Time and Space, as well as identical beyond Time and Space. Numerical oneness and multiplicity are equally valid terms of its essential unity.<sup>55</sup>

Even in asserting Oneness, we must remember that Brahman is beyond our mental distinctions and is a fact not of Thought that discriminates, but of Being which is absolute, infinite, and escapes discrimination. Our consciousness is representative and symbolic, it cannot conceive the thing-in-itself, the Absolute except by negation, ~~It is all that is here~~ in a sort of void, by emptying it of all that it seems in the universe to contain. But the Absolute is not a void or negation. It is all that is here in Time and beyond Time.<sup>56</sup>

#### Criticism of the Advaita Stand

Advaita Vedantists contend that the oneness of Brahman is upheld by Śruti (śrutipramāṇa), and realisable in Samādhi. We have seen how they in their attempt at drawing a consistent meaning out of Śruti are eventually obliged to contradict the straight meaning of the text by denying reality to the soul and the world. Though we cannot enter here into linguistic analysis, our main concern being interpretative, yet views of neutral scholars may be cited here regarding the distortions an Advaitist often makes in his reading of the meaning of the text. One scholar writes:

Let us stop for a moment to consider the nature of the world as explained in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad.... Do we find it stated here that the world is a mirage, a fiction, the mere

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Sri Aurobindo, Īśa Upaniṣhad, pp. 37-38.

56

Ibid, pp. 40-41.

shadow of something else, or do we not find it distinctly stated in language which does not admit of any ambiguity whatsoever, that the world, like everything else, came out of the Self, the Brahman? We hope no one will have the boldness to say that the Self or the Brahman, here spoken of, is only relatively true, and that, therefore, the world and everything else that came from the Self or Brahman, are only relatively true. It cannot for a moment be doubted that the world is as true as Brahman itself.<sup>57</sup>

Similar charges have also been brought by Keith who has been quoted by Rawson. While pointing out in his introduction to the Kaṭha Upaniṣad that there is no mention of Māyā in any of the older Upaniṣads in the sense of illusion, Rawson adds:

Nor is there any support for Śankara's doctrine of the two orders of knowledge (vyavahārika, and pāramārthika) or the two forms of Brahman (parā and aparā) which, if imposed, distort the sense of the Upaniṣads. It is true that there are different ways of conceiving Brahman and Br. II. 3. 1.<sup>58</sup> does speak of two forms of Brahman--the formed (mūrta) Brahman which is empirically knowable, and the formless (amūrta) which is not an object of empirical knowledge. But though Śankara claims the support of this passage, the distinction between the two forms here described and those of Śankara is evident. For the mūrta brahman is just the universe of which the formless Brahman constitutes the Reality of reality (satyasya satyam). We shall see in our commentary to what desperate expedients of exegesis Śankara has to resort to maintain his position. As Keith says, his whole attempt is 'a clever tour de force without final validity, and its ingenuity is as great as its improbability'.<sup>59</sup>

#### Synthesis on the Basis of Experience

As for the verification of the so-called Oneness by Samādhi, Advaitists always refer to the static experience even as they emphasize the negative description of the Absolute.

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S. C. Chakraborty, The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads, (University of Calcutta, 1935), p. 132.

58

dve vāva brahmano rūpe, mūrtaṁ caivāmūrtaṁ ca, martyaṁ cāmṛtaṁ ca, sthitaṁ ca, yac ca, sac ca, tyac ca. (Verily, there are two forms of Brahman, the formed and the formless, the mortal and the immortal, the unmoving and the moving, the actual and the true)

Samādhi may lead to dynamic experience too, and the Absolute is described as by neti neti (not that not that) so also by iti iti (this is, this is), and neither of it is exclusively correct or exhaustive. However, if the matter is to be verified by a reference to the experiences of Samādhi, then it is necessary that we take account of such high and wide experience as include that of Nirvāna, Māyā, Nirguna, Saguna and all that. Sri Aurobindo claims to have passed through all these experiences before he could harmonise and integrate them.

Now to reach Nirvāna was the first radical result of my own yoga. It threw me suddenly into a condition above and without thought, unstained by any mental or vital movement; there was no ego, no real world-- only when looked through the immobile senses, something perceived or bore upon its sheer silence a world of empty forms; materialised shadows without true substance. There was no One or many even, only just absolutely That, featureless, relationless, sheer, indescribable, unthinkable, absolute, yet supremely real and solely real....I lived in that Nirvāna day and night before it began to admit other things into itself or modify itself at all, and the inner heart of experience, a constant memory of it and its power to return remained until in the end it began to disappear into a greater Superconsciousness from above. But meanwhile realisation added itself to realisation and fused itself with this original experience. At an early stage the aspect of an illusionary world gave place to one in which illusion is only a small surface phenomenon with an immense Divine Reality behind it and a supreme Divine Reality above it and an intense Divine Reality in the heart of everything that had seemed at first only a cinematic shape or shadow. And this was no imprisonment in the senses, no diminution or fall from supreme experience, it came rather as a constant heightening and widening of the Truth; it was the spirit that saw objects, not the senses, and the Peace, the Silence, the freedom in Infinity remained always, with the world or all worlds only as a continuous incident in the timeless eternity of the Divine.<sup>60</sup>

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J.N. Rawson, The Katha Upanisad, (Oxford University Press, 1934), pp. 36-37.

60

Sri Aurobindo, On Yoga II Tome One, pp. 51-52.

This description of diverse experiences on the non-verbal plane precludes us to consider the impersonal static Brahman as even the highest not to speak of considering it the sole Reality. Kaṭha clearly puts the personal over the impersonal:

Mahatah param avyaktam, avyaktāt puruṣah paraḥ  
puruṣān na param kiñcit: sā kāṣṭhā, sā parā gatiḥ. I.3.11.  
(Beyond the great self is the unmanifest; beyond the unmanifest is the Puruṣa. Beyond the puruṣa there is nothing. That is the end, that is the final goal.)

However, we need not accept either the personal or the impersonal as the highest. The concept 'indeterminable' truly implies that no conceptual scheme can be equated with ultimate reality, as Sri Aurobindo writes,

A purely impersonal existence and consciousness is true and possible, but also an entirely personal consciousness and existence; the Impersonal Divine, Nirguṇa Brahman, and the Personal Divine, Śaguṇa Brahman, are here equal and coexistent aspects of the Eternal. Impersonality can manifest with person subordinated to it as a mode of expression; but, equally, Person can be the reality with impersonality as a mode of its nature: both aspects of manifestation face each other in the infinite variety of conscious Existence....61

This indeterminability is what is suggested by the divergent description of the Truth occurring in the Upaniṣads without one contradicting the other. This is the comprehensive logic of the Infinite—the logic of the Reality. This impels us to take both Being and Becoming as the one indivisible reality. But one-sided static experience confront only the Being.

Unless one realises the Supreme on the dynamic as well as the static side, one cannot experience the true origin of things and the equal reality of the active Brahman.... It is only if you approach the Supreme through his double aspect

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61.

Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, (New York: Sri Aurobindo Library), p.258.

of Sat and Chit-Śhakti, double but inseparable, that the total truth of things can become manifest to the inner experience.<sup>62</sup>

### Ontological Status of the World

Thus according to Sri Aurobindo the Upaniṣadic view about the reality of the world is that it is as much real, with all its finitude, mutability, transience and all that, as the immutable infinite Brahman is. Nothing is outside the reality. "He possesses eternally in Himself all that is, has been or ever can be, and He therefore does not increase or diminish."<sup>63</sup> How does One project ~~the~~ oneself into many, how does the Infinite become finite that is a different story, but the many and the finite are within the One and the Infinite, and "if one denies its (Infinite's) capacity for being limited one denies the unlimitedness."<sup>64</sup>

### Creation: Chit-Śhakti and Ignorance

Our account of the ontological status of the world will remain incomplete unless we show how the Infinite becomes the finite, although we had occasion to touch upon this succinctly in previous chapters. The Advaitist, while pursuing a negative method, does almost divest the Absolute of the aspects of Chit and Ānanda, only Sat remains as a sheer abstraction and a logical ground. But if we take account of Chit we shall

<sup>62</sup>

Sri Aurobindo, On Yoga II Tome One, p.39.

<sup>63</sup>

Sri Aurobindo, Īśa Upaniṣad, p.34.

<sup>64</sup>

E. Wood, in his essay The Concept of Integral Unity in The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, ed. Chaudhury & Spiegelberg.

have no difficulty to find a habitation for Māyā. But Māyā not in the Advaitic sense of a darkening force but as the supreme Consciousness-Force which runs out (paryagāt) in rhythmic manifestation out of a sheer inherent Ānanda. This Consciousness-Force of the Absolute is possessed of the power of self-variation, self-limitation and self-absorption. It is not under any obligation to use this power, nor is it determined by anything extrinsic to itself. It energises itself wilfully and plunges into creation by self-limitation and self-obscuration. In our account of the three poises of the Supermind it has been pointed out how the Divine gnosis (Consciousness-Force) comes down successively towards individualisation for manifestation into the many. At the stage where the sense of unity gets shrouded and separativeness begins there actually Ignorance (Māyā in the Advaitic sense) starts. (Please refer to the chart given at page vi ) So Ignorance is not a constituent of the self-revealing (svapra-kāśā) Divine, nor is it utter darkness. It is separative knowledge developed in the process of projecting of the One into the Many. At the culmination of this process (of involu-tion), however, separative knowledge gets lost in utter absence of knowledge--Nescience. From there again evolution starts, as Mundaka says,

tapaśā cīyate brahma tato'annamabhi-jāyate annāt prāno  
manah satyaṁ lokāḥ karmasu cāmṛtam. Mu.U.I.1.8.  
(By energism of consciousness or Tapas, Brahman is massed;  
from that matter is born, and out of matter life, and mind  
and truth and the worlds, and in works immortality.)

That creation is preceded by tapas on the part of the Creator has also been mentioned in the Vedas and some other Upaniṣads, namely, Taittirīya II.6.1.

so'kāmayaṭa, bahu syām prajāyeyeti, sa tapo'tapyata, sa tapas taptvā, idam sarvaṃ asṛjata, yad idam kiṃ ca. (He desired. Let me become many, let me be born. He performed austerity. Having performed austerity He created all this, whatever is here.)

By tapas is meant a self-concentration on the part of the Divine for a movement in self-limitation. Sri Aurobindo observes,

Tapas means literally heat, afterwards any kind of energism, askesis, austerity of conscious force acting upon itself or its object. The world was created by Tapas in the form, says the ancient image, of an egg, which being broken, again by Tapas, heat of incubation of conscious-force, the Puruṣa emerged, soul in Nature, like a bird from the egg.<sup>65</sup>

In the verse just quoted similar result of the tapas is given:

tat sṛṣṭvā tad evānuprāviṣat, tad anupraviṣya sac ca tyac ca abhavat, niruktaṃ cāniruktaṃ ca, nilayanam cānilayanam ca, vijñānam cāvijñanam ca, satyam cānrtaṃ ca, satyam abhavat, yad idam kiṃ ca, tat satyam ity ācaksate. (Having created it, into it, indeed he entered. Having entered it, he became both the actual and the beyond, the defined and the undefined, both the founded and the unfounded, the intelligent and the non-intelligent, the true and the untrue. As the real, he became whatever there is here. That is what they call real.)

So we see creation proceeds from self-concentration (tapas), and in the process of creation, rather self-manifestation, separativeness (Ignorance) as opposed to Oneness develops. It is this Ignorance that has been referred to in the Upaniṣad as Avidyā whereas Vidyā is the knowledge of the One. Polarities of our mental consciousness is the creation of Avidyā as is indicated in the verse just quoted. Right

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Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, Vol. II, part I, (Pondy: Sri Auro. Ashram,) p.336.

relation of all these polarities can be grasped taking both Vidyā and Avidyā together. To reject either or to accept the other exclusively is not the right rule of life or the true understanding of things. As Īśa says:

Vidyāncāvidyānca yastadvedobhayam saha  
Avidyāṁrtyum tīrtvā vidyāṁrtamaśnute. 11.

(He who knows that as both in one, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, by the Ignorance crosses beyond death and by the Knowledge enjoys Immortality.)

Now, how to take up both Vidyā and Avidyā together, how to reconcile the One and the Many in a purposeful life in this world is the prime concern of soul-culture. We are coming to that presently.

## CHAPTER V

### NATURE AND SCOPE OF SOUL-CULTURE

#### A Resume of the Basic Truth about Brahman, World and Soul

It has been shown that the world is a real manifestation of the Divine. But in fact none of the attributes used to describe the Divine is applicable to the world which is finite, mutable, half-conscious, full of limitations and so on. How could it be so? It has been due to the willful self-obscuration on the part of the Divine so much so that He appears to be His opposites. Yet truly in all the apparent negations of Himself He is present; the world is made essentially of the same stuff as the Divine. What is the Divine and what are the stuff of the world? Following Sri Aurobindo we can conceive roughly of the scheme given at page.vii. (Please refer to it).

Saccidananda manifests Itself through Its creative genius the Supermind. Supermind is divine Ideation, divine Gnosis. It brings down in manifestation all the verities of Saccidānanda including itself. In the subtle or subliminal region of manifestation subtle physical, subliminal life-force, psychic entity, and subliminal mind represent the essence of Sat, Chit, Ānanda, and Supermind respectively. Similarly in the material world body, life, ego, and mind are their corresponding forms. The Jīvātman belongs to the upper hemisphere, it is inherent in Saccidānanda and is there as the support of the individualisation i.e., manifestation of the One into the Many. The puruṣas in the subliminal region are its projections

in Becoming; but its primal delegate is the psychic entity, or rather, the psychic being in man; the psychic being is actually the principle of immanence in manifestation.

However, the oneness of the Absolute contains the possibility of the many; and the One manifests Itself into many through particular concentrations.

Multiplicity is the play or varied self-expansion of the One, shifting in its terms, divisible in its view of itself, by force of which the One occupies many centres of consciousness, inhabits many formations of energy in the universal Movement. Multiplicity is implicit or explicit in unity. Without it Unity would be either a void of non-existence or a powerless sterile limitation to the state of indiscriminate self-absorption or of blank repose.<sup>66</sup>

Manifestation implies two movements in the Transcendent--one towards the Vast--universal self-extension, and the other towards Individualisation. These implicit movements in the One are movements in Knowledge (Vidyā), in parāprakṛti through the instrumentation of the divine Gnosis, the Supermind. Avidyā starts from where real descent onsets. The Divine puts on Himself cover after cover as it were and transforms Itself step by step to the apparent opposites of His nature. The unity gets subservient to the separative movements, and the multiplicity gets oblivious of the inherent unity.

sarvā prajā sata āganya na viduḥ sata āgacchāmahe iti.  
Ch.U.VI.10.2.  
(All these creatures come from the Real, and yet do not know that they have come from the Real.)

Nevertheless the world is made essentially of the Real.

Brahman must be the material of the world as well as its base and continent. If the gold of which the vessel is made

is real, how shall we suppose that the vessel itself is a mirage? 67

Taittiriya says, tadātmānam svayam akuruta. II.7. (Itself created itself; none other created it.)

Links between the Higher and Lower Hemispheres of Reality

The distinction between the actual and the Real, between the gross form of phenomena (aparā prakṛti) and divine super nature would not appear so irreconcilable if we take cognisance of the intermediate sphere of subtle worlds lumped together in the chart referred to above as the Subliminal region. That it is through these regions that the Divine has projected Himself in the form of this world, and that it is through these that man has to undertake his journey to the Absolute, and that all these are there as living truths in the deeper layers of our consciousness is testified by many passages in almost all the Upaniṣads uttered in different context, though often in figures and symbols. This subliminal region is the link between the highest and the lowest, between the subtlest and the grossest.

The Jīvātman, we have seen, is the support of all individual formations. It puts forward projections of itself to work as multiple centres in the subtler regions of matter, life, mind etc. In this way different puruṣas--anna<sup>naya</sup>, prāṇa<sup>naya</sup>, mana<sup>naya</sup> etc. are created. The Jīvātman is one, one self in every-thing--sarvabhūtāntarātmā; it is also one with the Ultimate,

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Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, (Pondy: Sri Auro. Ashram,) p.39.

but its projections are countless. Of these that which draws down the Ānanda in the lower hemisphere is the inmost being of all creatures. It is as it were the special representation of the divine Light in the darkness of aparā prakṛti. When the Upaniṣad says that Brahman having created the world entered into it (tat sṛstvā tad evānupraviśat. Tai.U.II.6.1.), it refers to this psychic entity.<sup>68</sup> It is this which is the real integer (that which integrates) of our life and experience. It is the root of our unique individuality, and the true personality. It organises the life secretly in those who live mostly on the surface, and consciously in those who delve deep into the subliminal and meet their real being there. It is this entity which survives death, and carries over the essence of individual progress in this life for fresh adventures in consciousness in newer lives.

It is a flame born out of the Divine and, luminous inhabitant of the Ignorance, grows in it till it is able to turn it towards the Knowledge. It is the concealed Witness and Control, the hidden Guide, the Daemon of Socrates, the inner light or inner voice of the mystic. It is that which endures and is imperishable in us from birth to birth, untouched by death, decay or corruption, an indestructible spark of the Divine. Not the unborn Self or Atman, for the Self even in presiding over the existence of the individual is aware always of its universality and transcendence, it is yet its deputy, in the forms of Nature, the individual soul, 'caitya puruṣa', supporting mind life and body, standing behind the mental, the vital, the subtle physical being in us and watching and profiting by their development and experience.<sup>69</sup>

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Psychic entity and psychic being though refer to the same thing, yet there is a little difference between them. What is psychic entity, the dormant divine principle in all creatures is the psychic being in each man, since in humanity it is more resplendent more active, and the true leader of individual self-existence. This psychic being is considered to be the inmost being or person since it is the centre round which the other beings--physical, vital, mental--and their life and experiences are organised.

Brahman, Jivātman and psychic beings differentiated

In the Upaniṣad we come across innumerable passages speaking about the Ātman. Obviously they do not speak exactly of the same thing, or rather, of the same status of the Ātman. Lofty expressions like so'ham(that am I), tat tvam asi (that thou art) point to the ultimate One, whereas description of the soul in Kaṭha and Śvetasvatara as no bigger than the thumb seated in the heart (anguṣṭhamātrah puruṣo madhya ātmani tiṣṭhati. Kaṭha. II.1.12.) points only to the indwelling spark of the Divine as the leader of the embodied existence, as another verse of Kaṭha points out. 'ātmānam rathinam biddhi śarīram rathameva tu.' I.3.3. (Know the body for a chariot and the soul for the master of the chariot). The Inner Controller spoken of by Yājñavalkya in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka does also refer to this indwelling psychic being:

yo vijñāne tiṣṭhan, vijñānād antarah...yo vijñānam antaro yamayati, esa ta ātmāntaryāmi amrtah. III.7.22.  
(He who inhabits the intellect but is within it, and who controls the intellect from within, is the Internal Ruler, your own immortal self.)

That this inner being is very much involved in the embodied existence as its leader and guide is indicated clearly by a verse in Kaṭha which says, 'vānānāṁ svāc charīrāt pravṛṇen muñjād iveśikām dhairyena.' II.3.17. (One must separate him with patience from one's body as one separates from a blade of grass its main fibre.)<sup>70</sup>

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Sri Aurobindo. The Life Divine, p.269.

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Referring to this verse Ranade writes, "The process of the extraction of the Atman from this frail body implies a thorough immanence of the Atman in the body." R.D. Ranade, A Constructive Survey of Upanisadic Philosophy, pp. 341-42.

In between these two types of description--one of the Absolute One and the other of the individualised souls in man there are many others which speak of the Jīvātman proper, i.e., one self in, or rather as the support of everything. For example, Īśa says: . . .

yastu sarvāni bhūtāni ātmanyevānupaśyati  
sarvabhūteṣu cātmānaṃ tato na vijugupsate. 6.  
(But he who sees everywhere the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self, shrinks not thereafter from aught.)

The Upaniṣad is not a metaphysical treatise. That is why we do not have these distinctions between different poises of the self made categorically, although they have been sufficiently indicated by these spontaneous utterances. Again it would be wrong to overemphasize the distinctions in our attempt at a critical analysis of the self. Even the individualised psychic being involved in the cycle of life in aparā prakṛti is basically the supreme Self itself. Chāndogya has spoken of this identity very clearly:

atha yad atah paro divo jyotir dīpyate visvataḥ  
prṣṭheṣu, sarvataḥ prṣṭheṣv anuttameṣūttameṣu lokeṣu, idam  
vāva tad yad idam asminn antaḥ puruṣe jyotiḥ.III.13.7.  
(Now the light which shines above this heaven, above all, above everything, in the highest world beyond which there are no higher, verily, that is the same as this light which is here within the person.)

Sri Aurobindo writes about this identity exactly in the same manner. While describing the psychic being he says:

Again, an eternal portion of the Divine (Gītā, xv.7.), this part is by the law of the Infinite inseparable from its Divine Whole, this part is indeed it-self that Whole, except in its frontal appearance, its frontal separative self-experience;71

A clear distinction has, however, been made between Jīvātman and the psychic being in a couple of suggestive verses in Muṇḍaka III.1, and 2, and Śvetāśvatara iv.6,7.

dvā suparnā sayujā sakhāyā samānaṁ vṛkṣam pariśasvajāte  
tayor anyañ pippalaṁ svādv atty anaśnann anyo' bhicākaśīti.

(Two birds, beautiful of wing, close companions, cling to one common tree: of the two one eats the sweet fruit of the tree, the other eats not but watches his fellow.)

samāne vṛkṣe puruṣo nimagno'nīśayā śocati muhyamānaḥ  
juṣṭam yadā paśyaty anyam īśam-asya mahimānam iti vītaśokah.

(The soul is the bird that sits immersed on the one common tree, but because he is not lord he is bewildered and has sorrow. But when he sees that other who is the Lord and beloved, he knows that all is His greatness and his sorrow passes away from him.)

The detached Witness-self is the Jīvātman, and the other which enjoys the fruit of the tree of life is the psychic being. The latter realises its greatness and freedom when it looks up and meets the eyes of that of which it is the delegate in Nature. Now, this practical differentiation between the statuses of the self despite real identity is very important. It is only through this a genuine link between Vidyā and Avidyā, between the Divine above and life on earth can be established. We have stated at the beginning of this chapter how through the multiple delegation of the one Self the world of multiplicity has been created. Now we have to see how from the opposite direction through these multiple delegation (psychic beings) men can reach the Divine; and this process is what we have termed the soul-culture.

Psychic Being as the Core of Personality and Individuality

According to Sri Aurobindo, the psychic being is, in its frontal separative aspect, the core of our unique individuality. (By the reference to an aspect of it the psychic being is not, however, being divided again. It is to be understood that there is no real gap or division in Reality terrestrial and supra terrestrial, it is a matter of degree and hierarchy of consciousness. If the one end of the psychic being, if it is permissible to use such an expression, meets the Jīvātman, the other end pilots the life of an individual being involved in the experience of his mind life and body.) In the Kaṭha Upaniṣad the first boon that Nachiketa asks of Yama is that his father should recognise him as the self-same son of him when he goes back to earth. With his death his body has disintegrated, his ātman is the ātman of everybody else. Where lies his distinctiveness, how can he be recognised as the self-same person? It is the psychic being which forms his individuality, his uniqueness as a being. If he assumes a similar body as he had before he passed away from the earth, this will be possible only because of the permanent(yet variable) element of his existence. In a number of Upaniṣads eschatology has been discussed. It has been said, as in Praśna I.10, Kaṭha II.2.7, Īśa 3, that different souls have different lives after they pass away according as the state of their consciousness at the time of death. Some go to darker regions, some to heaven and then come back to earth, yet others get merged into the Infinite and so on. This doctrine of <sup>the</sup> soul's journey and rebirth

and final liberation can be accounted for properly only through this concept of the individual psychic being participating in the experiences of life.

It has been said that this psychic being is our mark of individuality and true personality. This is rather <sup>an</sup> oversimplification of a situation which is really complex. Besides this central being there are other minor projections of the Jivātman in the subliminal sphere—the mental, vital and physical beings, and on the surface we have our surface mind, emotions, body and the ego. Both on the surface and the subliminal levels an individual is in constant commerce with the universal verities. Modern psychology and sociology have made it amply manifest that an average man is almost entirely determined by his heredity and environment. Yet there are certain distinctive features, however insignificant, which mark one person from another. Sri Aurobindo would say that the root of this uniqueness is the indwelling soul, and the more is this soul developed, i.e., the more it can cast its light on the subliminal and the surface existence the greater is the individuality, and scope of richness of personality of the man. (The word individuality is being used in the sense of uniqueness, and personality includes everything connected with all the aspects of life of a man; at the core, however, the person is the psychic being.)

#### Comparison with Advaita and Buddhist Doctrines

This involvement of the soul in phenomenal existence,

its journey in different directions, Karma and Rebirth all these are accepted as valid in the system of Advaita, but only provisionally. As soon as the soul realises its identity with the soul Absolute everything else falls off; the soul is supposed to realise that it had never been in bondage, and that all its travail through the universe is a myth along with the universe itself. The passages of the Upanishads which describe creation of the world, soul's travail, its journey through worlds, rebirth etc. do never suggest that these things are after all fictitious. However, Advaita admits one positive thing--the Reality of the Self or Brahman. Buddhism goes further. It does not say anything positive about the Ultimate; it does not recognise a soul, it recognises an ego which is but an idea or a name given to a combination of mental stuff, and is responsible for their continuity. Even as a chariot has got no reality other than the plank, wheel and spokes of which it is made, so is this ego a mere name, a semblance of reality, a falsity. Similarly the universe itself is no more than a combination, 'samhata', formed and maintained in its continuity by the successions of Karma, by the action of Energy. Liberation in this system lies in giving up of attachment and consequent disintegration of the ego. The result is extinction, so much so that there is nothing which can feel itself to be free.

What we see in both these systems is that spiritual freedom and the cosmic compulsion are equally admitted, but in a total separation and an exclusion from each other's own proper field,--still as absolute opposites and contraries. Compulsion of ignorance or Karma is absolute in the world of birth; freedom of the spirit is absolute in a withdrawal from birth and cosmos and Karma.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Sri Aurobindo, Problem of Rebirth, (Pondy: Ashram)p.97.

Both these systems fail to recognise any principle of Freedom, Divinity or Infinity in the midst of the world of finitude and Ignorance. Yet they insist upon the individual to give up the way of ignorance and strive for the Freedom. How can a man seek Freedom and Light if something of it is not present in him, rather if he is not basically made of that stuff? Again, freedom becomes meaningful only in the context of bondage, --freedom over bondage, play of infinity over finitude. That is why the Upaniṣad has urged to take Vidyā and Avidyā together: yastad veda ubhayam saha. Īśāll. They are not really contradictory, ignorance itself is the veil of a secret knowledge. The Upaniṣad has categorically condemned any exclusivist tendency in this respect:

andham tamah praviśanti ye'vidyāmupāsate  
tato bhuya iva te tamo ya u vidyayam ratāh. Īśa.9.

(Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after Ignorance, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Knowledge alone.)

The exclusivist tendency does not allow any bridge between the two hemispheres of reality, sees no point in Creation, considers life a mere 'sound and fury signifying nothing'. This is not the true import of the teaching of the Upaniṣads. The Upaniṣad has time and again spoken of the world proceeding from the Divine, and has declared the presence of the Delight behind the veil of all apparent contraries:

iyam prthivī sarveṣām bhūtānām madhu, asyai prthivyai sarvāni bhūtāni madhu; yaś cāyam adhātma asyām prthivyām tejomayo' mṛtamayaḥ puruṣaḥ, yaś cāyam adhātman sārīras tejomayo' mṛtamayaḥ puruṣaḥ, ayam eva sa yo'yam ātmā, idam amṛtam, idam brahma, idam sarvam. Br.U.II.5.1.

(This earth is like honey for all creatures, and all creatures are like honey for this earth. This shining, immortal person who is in this earth and with reference to oneself, this shining, immortal person who is in the body, he, indeed, is just this self. This is immortal, this is Brahman, this is all.)

This indwelling principle of the Delight provides a bridge between the two contraries; and it is only on the basis of this bridge, Sri Aurobindo maintains, a really meaningful freedom on earth is conceivable.

Only if there is a soul or self which is not a creation, but a master of Nature, not a formation of the stream of universal energy, but itself the former and creator of its own Karma, are we justified in our claim of an actual freedom or at least in our aspiration to a real liberty.<sup>73</sup>

Obviously it is this Divine principle in man that endows his individuality and personality with a real depth and profundity, and accounts for the inherent urge in man for things higher and nobler, and his capacity to conceive and create images of Truth, Beauty, Freedom and Good.

#### The Ideal of Perfection

However, if our study of the Upaniṣads leads us so far then we may safely conclude that the ideal of the Upaniṣads uphold is a life of freedom on earth--Jivanmukti, to use a master phrase of the Gītā which is regarded as the quintessence of the Upaniṣad, and not escapement from life and world into the Non-existent or some featureless colourless Existent. Nevertheless we must not be hasty in our generalisation. We have to consider carefully the values upheld by different Upaniṣads and the spirit working behind them.

ye nāham nāmrtā syām kim aham tena kuryām. Br.U.II.4.3.  
(What should I do with that by which I do not become immortal?)

Nālpe sukhamasti bhūmaiva sukham. Ch.U.VII.23.1.  
(There is no happiness in anything small. Only the Infinite is happiness.)

These two great sayings (mahavākya) of the two great Upaniṣads may well be considered to have summed up the values of the Upaniṣad. It is to be noted that in both the statements two very positive words have been used to denote the state of ultimate fulfilment, one 'amṛta' (immortal) which is underscored by delight since amṛta literally means nectar, the other is obviously delight--sukham. In many other places like, Madhu Brāhman of Brhadāranyaka, and Brahmānanda and Vrgu Valli of Taittirīya, Brahman, and for that matter the state of fulfilment has been stated in terms of Bliss. We have quoted from Br.U. earlier; let us now present a few words from Taittirīya:

Raso vai saḥ rasam hyevāyam labdvānandi bhavati.2.7.  
(Verily, it is no other than the delight behind existence. When he has got him this delight, then it is that this creation becomes a thing of bliss.)

ānando brahmeti vyajānāt.3.6.  
(He knew Bliss for the Eternal.)

It may be contended that this is but one aspect of the truth. But it does not seem to be so. Of course there are passages particularly in Brhadāranyaka, which speak of the experience of utter silence, like, na pretya samjñāsti.II.4.12.(When he has departed there is no more knowledge) or 'na tatra cakṣur gacchati na vāg gacchati no mano'. KenaI.3. (There sight attains not, nor speech attains, nor the mind). These make an attempt to express the inexpressible. It follows by implication that

these states are most high and should be aspired for, and we shall see later that the experience of the Silent Brahman is a necessity for the perfection of soul-culture, yet these are not specifically held up as the highest values. Wherever values have been stated they have been given in clear terms using very positive words like ānanda, amṛta, sukham etc., as Kena gives out:

tadd ha tad-vanam nāma, tad-vanam ity upāsītavyam.iv.6.  
(The name of That is 'That Delight'; as That Delight one should follow after It.)

Aspiration for the cessation of rebirth has been articulated in quite a number of places, for instance Mundaka says:

upāsate puruṣam ye hy akāmās te śukram etad ativartanti  
dhirāḥ.III.2.1.  
(The wise men, who, free from desires, worship the Person, pass beyond the seed(of rebirth).)

But is it not the idea that the aspiration is for getting rid of the compulsion of rebirth, even as the whole Upanisadic teaching is focussed on knowing the Truth and thus getting rid of the bondage of Ignorance? When Maitreyī wants to be immortal does she think of conquering physical death? When Nachiketa is said to have been void of death(vimṛtyuh) having obtained God-knowledge from Death (KathaII.3.18.) does it imply that he becomes free from physical death(he was already in the realm of death), and that when he comes back to his father he will live for ever on earth? Obviously the victory to be won is in consciousness. A liberated man is really free from death(in consciousness) and the obligation to come back. After physical death he may get merged in the Absolute, or he may

take rest after passing through subtle physical, subtle vital and subtle mental worlds in the psychic world, as Taittiriya II.8. puts it, presumably to assume physical body later on. But he will come back to earth not under any compulsion, but willfully for some divine purpose even as Sri Kṛṣṇa has come many times as he says in the Gitāiv.5.

So the focal point is the inner liberation through God-realisation; if that is there life and work does not bind one--na karma lipyate nare. Īśa2. (action cleaves not to a man)

Thus by dissolution of ego and of the attachment to birth the soul crosses beyond death; it is liberated from all limitation in the dualities. Having attained this liberation it accepts becoming as a process of Nature subject to the soul and not binding upon it and by this free and divine becoming enjoys immortality. 74

Sri Aurobindo guesses almost the same was the teaching of Buddha too:

This possibility of an entire motionless impersonality and void Calm within doing outwardly the works of the eternal verities, Love, Truth and Righteousness, was perhaps the real gist of the Buddha's teaching,-- this superiority to ego and to the chain of personal workings and to the identification with mutable form and idea, not the petty ideal of an escape from the trouble and suffering of the physical birth. 75

The life and works of Upanisadic sages namely, Yājñavalkya, king Ajātaśatru, Śāṅḍilya, Gautama, Satyakāma and so on do also point to the same ideal of action on the basis of Knowledge. The second verse of Īśa categorically enjoins upon the seeker of truth to do works--'kurvanneveha karmāni jijīviṣet śatam samāh.' (Doing verily works in this world one should wish

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74

Sri Aurobindo, Īśa Upanisad, p.114.

75

Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, (Pondy Ashram), p.37.

to live a hundred years.)<sup>76</sup> In Kena part iv we get similar stress on works. After delivering the truth of the Upaniṣad Umā says: 'Tasyaitapo-dama-karmeti pratiṣṭhā. IV.8. (Of the Eternal austerity and self-conquest and works are the foundation) This stress on work is a justification of life and works since, 'works are the essence of Life'. If we consider the spirit in which counsel is given to a student on the eve of his departure from the house of the teacher we find an ungrudging acceptance of life. No artificial division between the life of a truth-seeker and that of a householder is also suggested by them. Rather we see a broad design of life which shows due regard to man's normal propensities, and needs of the society, and at the same time lays down a discipline that is expected to lead to spiritual attainment. Let us quote a few words:

satyaṁ vada, dharmam cara, svādhyāyan mā pramadaḥ...  
prajātantum mā vyavacchetsiḥ, ...deva-pitr-kāryābhyām na prama-  
ditavyam.

mātr devo bhava, pitr devo bhava, acārya devo bhava,  
atithi devo bhava, yāni anavadyāni karmāni tāni sevitavyāni,  
no itarāni,...

eṣa adeśāḥ, eṣa upadeśāḥ, eṣa vedopaniṣat. *Tai. U. I. 11.*

(Speak truth, walk in the way of thy duty, neglect not the study of the Veda. Thou shalt not cut short the long thread of thy racee. Thou shalt not be negligent of thy works unto the Gods or thy works unto the Fathers.

Let thy father be unto thee as thy God and thy mother as thy Goddess whom thou adorest. Serve thy master as a God and as a God the stranger within thy dwelling. The works that are without blame before people, thou shalt do these with diligence and no others.

This is the law and the teaching. These are the Commandments.)

76

Sri Aurobindo has added the following note to his translation of the verse: "kurvanneva. The stress of the word eva gives the force, 'doing works indeed, and not refraining from them.'" 1ṣā Upaniṣad p.2.

Again in quite a number of passages it has been urged and quite naturally so that we make effort to reach the Truth here itself, as Kena says:

iha ced avedīd atha satyam asti na ced ihāvedin mahati  
vinastih. II.5.

(If here one comes to that knowledge, then one truly is; if here one comes not to the knowledge, then great is the perdition.)

If we take all these different lines of thought and counsel together what appears to be the teaching of the Upaniṣad is that life should be ~~best~~ lived in a way that can lead us to the realisation of Truth, and that on the firm foundation of Truth alone<sup>is</sup> a life of bliss and fulfilment possible.

It has been shown that evolution is the inverse process of involution. The divine spark within us-- the psychic being is the leader of individual evolution. We shall now see what exactly is the method of that evolution, the other name for which is soul-culture. Obviously fulfilment is to be reached through soul-culture.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE METHOD OF SOUL-CULTURE

#### Life of a man: outer and inner view of it

According to Sri Aurobindo, man, in his surface existence, is an aggregate of body, life, mind and the ego. The body is full of inertia; the life, source of energy, is full of turbidity, it is ever eager for self-aggrandisement, yet never satisfied; the mind and intellect operates by division even in its highest flight. The ego effects some sort of a compromise among the diverse tendencies of the body, life, and mind, and carries on a self-centred existence so far as it goes. But such a poor image of life is not the truth of our existence; our destiny is not so much circumscribed. The Upanisads are eloquent about the high destiny of man. In one and the same breath they say that body life and mind are Brahman and yet not Brahman in Its inherent effulgence. The self-imposed cover has to be pierced through, and then alone the truth of the body life and mind will be revealed and also the purport of the cover.

The life of the mind, senses, vital activities in which we dwell is not the whole or the chief part of our existence, not the highest, not self-existent, not master of itself. It is an outer fringe, a lower result, an inferior working of something beyond.??

We have to grope almost in the dark till that something beyond which holds the key to life and existence is discovered. And it is to this discovery that the Upanisads point to unequivocally:

To rise out of this external and surface consciousness towards and into that superconscient is our progress, our

goal, our destiny of completeness and satisfaction.

The Upanisad does not assert the unreality, but only the incompleteness and inferiority of our present existence.<sup>78</sup>

On the surface the ego or the desire-soul is the organiser of our life; it plays a real role in the evolution of the human individuality. But it is oblivious of the universals. However may our intellect and emotion realise the fact that we are bound on all sides interminally with all others, that an individual life in isolation is inconceivable, yet the ego cannot get out of its inherent separativeness. This is the root of our trouble, the evil we must fight out. Multiplicity divorced from unity is a state of Ignorance. Nevertheless the ego is but a reflection of the inner person (psychic being) on the surface of existence. The apparent rule of the ego has to be replaced by the real rule of the psychic being. (yah kartā so'yam vai bhūtātmā karanaiḥ kārṣṇīyitāntaḥ-puruṣaḥ. Maitri III.3. Verily, he who is the doer is the elemental self: he who causes to act by means of the organs is the inner person.) The psychic being is the secret guide of our nature---pracodayitā vaiśo (this very one is the mover. Maitri II.6.), and as a genuine spark of the Divine it is never oblivious of the real root of life and existence. Now, how to establish the rule of the psychic over our nature? That is the crux of the problem. Here exactly we are concerned with the actual method of soul-culture.

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Sri Aurobindo, Kena Upanisad (Pondy: Ashram), p.91.

78

Ibid.

### Means of Elevation

The Upaniṣads have not dealt with the method of soul-culture elaborately. They have, however, given sufficient indication and uttered a good (many) suggestive expressions. Most of all the truth itself implies how to reach that. If we have come to an understanding of the fundamental truth of the Upaniṣads then it should not be difficult for us, with the explicit suggestions and indications, to work out a broad method of soul-culture as envisaged by the Upaniṣads. Obviously at this stage we are actually entering into the consideration of Yoga. But before we start doing that we have to steer our way clear of certain misconceptions.

### Yoga Defined

Yoga literally means union (with the Divine). This is the sense in which the word has been used in Katha II.3.11. and Śve. U. II.11. It has been used in the sense of discipline in Śve.U.VI.13. and to indicate Rāja Yoga in general in Mai. U.VI.18. Though in older Upaniṣads this word does not occur, union has been spoken of, and the discipline thereof indicated. Infact the Upaniṣads taken together do not warrant the use of the word in the restricted sense of Patanjali's Yoga, which is a later development. The seeds of all the yogas—jñāna, karma, bhakti, rāja, haṭha are spread over the Upaniṣads and no particular system has been emphasized over against the others. The Gitā in its attempt to bring out the essence of the Upaniṣadic doctrine and showing the path toward realisation and living of that truth has, infact, effected a synthesis

among the different lines of yoga indicated in the Upanisads, Obviously for a comprehensive experience of the many-sided truth of the Upanisad it is necessary to take up all the lines of approach in their essence. It is in this general sense that we use the term yoga; it implies union with the Divine but more particularly the discipline that leads to this union.

#### Yoga Distinguished from Mysticism

It is necessary to distinguish yoga from mysticism.

This has been done very clearly by H. Chaudhury:

Mystics in the best sense of the term are those who attain direct personal realization of the fundamental truth of existence, whether that truth be called God, Self, Void, Nothingness, Being, Silence, or the supreme Mystery. But mysticism does not involve any definite methodically chalked-out path by following which mystic realization may be achieved. Mystics often stumble into their strange and unusual experiences. Mysticism does not provide any technique for systematic organisation of such unusual experiences or for their proper co-ordination with the ordinary non-mystic areas of human consciousness, sensuous, intellectual, moral, aesthetic and emotional.

Yoga implies faith in definite and systematic procedures by following which mystic experience of pure existence can be achieved. It shows a scientific spirit of investigation in the domain of the spirit or in the realm of the unconscious. It also believes in the need for a rational understanding of the interrelations that exist between mystic realization and other provinces of human experience.<sup>79</sup>

The Upanisad embodies a good deal of mystical experiences, but at the same time it dwells upon metaphysical questions and the method of self-discovery.

#### Yoga Further Explained

The first step towards self-discovery would be to turn inwards; our senses and the desire-soul have a tendency to move

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H. Chaudhury, Integral Yoga, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1965), p.31.

outwards, to crave for things external; they must be made to give up their preoccupation with externalities, and impressed upon to turn inwards. This does not imply any mortification of the flesh or starvation of the senses. This inwardization is a necessity for the deeper satisfaction and fulfilment of the senses themselves. But this inward-turning, to be natural, would presuppose certain dissatisfaction with the way of superficial existence, and a capacity to discriminate between the good and the pleasant (Kaṭha I.2.2.). It is idle to construe asceticism in the rejection of wealth by Maitreyī (Br. U.II.V.3). Some divine discontent must work behind every spiritual effort.

Deussen has brought the charge of artificiality against yoga in general:

The first (annihilation of desire), as we saw, is the aim of the sannyāsa; to effect the latter (annihilation of the illusion of a manifold universe) by preparatory artificial means is the function of the yoga.<sup>80</sup>

A thing becomes artificial when it is applied as a formula to all cases irrespective of suitability. The Upaniṣad does not prescribe any rigid discipline for everybody. Maitreyī rejects wealth, but not Kātyāyanī. Virocana pursues Prajāpati's instruction so far as his natural endowment allows, whereas Indra goes far ahead. What is given by way of instruction to the scholars on their way to the life of a householder is not the same what is enjoined upon Nārada by Sanatkumāra, since Nārada wants to be led right away beyond the realm of darkness. Śvetāśvatara has expressly forbidden to declare the highest

mystery to one who is not fit to receive it(VI.22.). In this connection Deussen has quoted one of the famous sayings of Napoleon that whatever is not natural is imperfect (Tout ce qui n'est naturel est imparfait.) To move outwards, to seek pleasure is indeed the natural tendency of the senses and the desire-soul. But to be dissatisfied with them, to seek ways of surpassing the limitations of normal existence is as much natural. If the latter natural urge is taken up by something in us--the will or the intellect, and canalised deliberately in a systematic manner we have what is called yoga, and if this is considered as artificial then any systematic effort any discipline has to be condemned as such. Yoga is perfectly natural. Only it gives up the way of 'laissez faire' and takes to the rule of 'up and doing'. What in normal course would take many years or lives is sought to be achieved within a much shorter span of time. Yoga only hastens the process of nature, and it is the privilege of self-conscious man to do that. Inwardization of nature, after an initial formation of the individuality through the instrumentation of the ego, is the normal course of human growth and evolution. Yoga is indeed meant to hasten the evolution. Inwardization is facilitated by, among other things, the study of scripture (śravana), reflection (manana), and a stock-taking of one's life and existence. The Upaniṣad speaks of the way fathers (pitryāna), way of the gods (devayāna), the way of the good (śreya), the way of the pleasant (preya), the way of the desire and the way

of the sacrifice of desire and so on. It is up to an individual to choose his own course of life. There is, therefore, no artificiality in choosing the path of austerity, of deliberate application and foregoing many things of apparent attraction.

Yoga is not Anti-existentialist

This willful choice of the path of austerity and the effort at turning the consciousness inward seem to imply a turning back from the life of the world. For does not the doctrine of equanimity (samatvam), a basic prerequisite of yoga, urge that a yogin has to take pleasure and pain equally, without being affected by either of them? But truly this instruction is not meant to starve or maim the senses, rather to make them keener still by replacing the normal external ego-centric response by the penetrating soul-view of things. The latter is a truer view, and it can take equal delight in what on the surface appears to be the duality of pleasure and pain. It would be wrong to equate equanimity with indifference.

In the view of old philosophies pleasure and pain are inseparable like intellectual truth and falsehood and power and incapacity and birth and death; therefore the only possible escape from them would be a total indifference, a blank response to the excitations of world-self. But a subtler psychological knowledge shows us that this view which is based on the surface facts of existence only, does not really exhaust the possibilities of the problem. It is possible by bringing the real soul to the surface to replace the egoistic standards of pleasure and pain by an equal, an all-embracing personal-impersonal delight.

To elaborate the point Sri Aurobindo has given a number of illustrations; he continues:

The lover of Nature does this when he takes joy in all the things of Nature universally without admitting repulsion or fear or mere liking and disliking, perceiving beauty in

that which seems to others mean and insignificant, bare and savage, terrible and repellent. The artist and the poet do it when they seek the rasa of the universal from the aesthetic emotion or from the physical line or from the mental form of beauty or from the inner sense and power alike of that from which the ordinary man turns away and of that to which he is attached by a sense of pleasure.<sup>81</sup>

### Yoga is Integral Self-development

So we see inwardization means opening up of a newer dimension of consciousness. Ego-centricity is replaced by a psychic approach, and consequently our life and mind come to take something of the nature of the universal principles of which they are manifestations on the physical plane. What would be the result of a complete psychic orientation of our life and existence can best be given in the words of Sri Aurobindo:

If the secret psychic Person can come forward into the front and, replacing the desire-soul, govern overtly and entirely and not only partially and from behind the veil this outer nature of mind, life and body, then these can be cast into soul images of what is true, right and beautiful and in the end the whole nature can be turned towards the real aim of life, the supreme victory, the ascent into spiritual existence.<sup>82</sup>

This will virtually mean a new birth into a higher consciousness —punar utpādanam evāsyā(Ch.U.III.17.5.) This is possible only with the co-operation of all the members of our being—body, life, mind and ego. Nowhere in the Upanisad body and physical life is seen to have been neglected. On the contrary it has been asserted that annam(matter) is also Brahman and that work is the foundation (Kena IV.8.) of spiritual effort.

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<sup>81</sup>

Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, (Pondy:Ashram), pp. 267-68.

<sup>82</sup> ibid, pp.270-71.

In Chandogya III.17. the entire life has been conceived in the image of a sacrifice. Everything has to be done, not excluding eating and sex act, in a spirit of sacrifice, as an act of offering to the gods and for that matter to the dynamic Divine upholding the cosmos. This is the gist of Karmayoga. In Maitri Upaniṣad there is a passage (I.3.) in which king Brhadraṭha, who took to extreme austerity after having established his son on the kingdom, reflects that this foul-smelling body is but a conglomeration of bone, skin muscle, marrow, mucus, urine, bile etc. This is an unusual description, not characteristic of the Upaniṣad; perhaps it is the result of Buddhist influence. But even here in this Upaniṣad the sage Śākāyana who appeared before the king to instruct him showed (VI.9.) how all acts--physical and mental could be elevated, made pure by offering to the divine fire, and he prayed:

viśvo'si vaiśvānaro'si viśvam tvayā dhāryate jāyamānam,  
viśan tu tvām ahutayaś ca sarvāḥ. VI.9  
(Thou art all, thou art the Vaiśvānara (fire). All that is born is supported by thee. Let all oblations enter into thee.)

Indeed according to Śākāyana all life should be lived as a sacrifice.

As for the support of the vital, the great necessity of keeping the passions in control has been urged. Brahmacharya (conservation of energy by a regulated use) has been enjoined upon (e.g., Katha I.2.24, Mu.U. III.1.5.), and virtues like austerity, almsgiving, uprightness, non-violence, truthfulness have been prescribed (tapo dānam ārjavam ahimsa satya-  
vacanam iti. Ch.U. III.17.4.)

For the upward and inward turning of the mind meditation on various symbols of Truth, particularly Om which epitomises the entire Reality has been recommended. Most of all the Will, key to any spiritual endeavour, has to be steadily focussed on the goal. Seeking support of the Fire for that--  
 agne naya supathā rāye, Īśa 18. (O god Agni, lead us by the good path to the felicity) is actually invoking the latent will-force.

Agni is the seer-will in the universe unerring in all its works...he is a Truth-conscious soul, a seer, a priest and a worker,--the immortal worker in man.83

In this way when the entire nature gets attuned to a higher endeavour a solid step is taken toward self-discovery. It is then that the inner psychic being begins to put forth its light directly on the more receptive parts of our nature; knowledge, love, delight begin to issue out. The psychic has been spoken of by Taittirīya (III.5.) as the bliss self (ānanda ātmā), and Love is the head of him (tasya priyameva śiraḥ).

#### Steps towards self-development

##### Guru

After this plenary turning is taken it is necessary that the truth-seeker approaches a teacher who himself is a seer for further progress onward, as is said in Katha, Mu.U. and others:

tadvijñā<sup>nā</sup>rtham sa gurumevābhigacchet samitpāṇiḥ śrotṛiyam  
 brahmaniṣṭham. Mu.U. I.2.12.

(For the knowledge of That, let him approach, fuel in hand, a Guru one who is learned in the Veda and is devoted to contemplation of the Brahman.)

In fact much of this higher knowledge is communicated silently

to the disciple by the Guru. So we see in the Upanisadic episodes pupils are coming to live with the Guru whose example also is an important thing. Much of this teaching is non-verbal, even when it is verbal, it is more than what mere words can convey; it comes as a force and light. The light suffuses the entire being of the person who receives the Truth, as we see in the case of Satyakāma and Upakosala who could at once be recognised as having been blessed by the Truth (Ch.U.IV. 9.2., IV.14.2.). This perhaps is the reason that we do not get elaborate description of the method of attaining the higher knowledge.

#### Faith

..... This being the character of the teaching, Faith has been considered as an important prerequisite. Nachiketa had the Faith, so he got the supreme Knowledge—prabruhi tvam śraddadhānāya mahyam (expound unto me, for I have Faith Katha I.1.13.). Faith is not something blind or irrational. It is a foreknowledge, an inchoate intuition of something yet to come in the front. It arises as a result of the action of the psychic being on the mind and heart of us, as the <sup>Gita</sup> says: śraddhāmayo'yam puruṣo yo yacchraddhaḥ sa eva saḥ. XVII.3. (This Puruṣa is made of Faith and whatever is that faith he is that and that is he.) Katha aptly asks: 'astiti brubato' nyatra katham tadupalabhyate?' II.3.12. (Unless one says 'He is' how can one become sensible of Him?)

#### Divine Help

..... It is not always that teaching is imparted by the human Guru, it may even come from supernatural agencies, as we see Satyakāma receiving the Truth from a bull, a fire,

a swan and a diver-bird (Ch.U. IV.5-8), so much so that his Guru found nothing left to be taught by himself--*atra ha na kim cana vīyāyeti, vīyāyeti* (In it nothing whatsoever was left out, yea, nothing was left out. Ch.U. IV.9.3.). Similarly Upakosala got instruction from the fire (Ch.U. IV.14); Umā appeared before Indra to enlighten the gods (Kena III.12). Even Prajāpati and Sanatkumāra, the two great teachers occurring in Chāndogya are not human beings, neither Yama of Katha, (of course their disciples too are not human). Whatever be the immediate agency from which the truth proceeds, it is ultimately the Self which chooses to reveal Itself. Katha and Mundaka has made this point clear:

yamevaisa vṛnute tena labhya tasyaisa ātmā vivṛnute  
tanum svām. Katha I.2.23., Mu.U. III.2.3.  
(Only by him whom It chooses can it be won; to him this Self  
unveils its own body.)

#### Fruits of Soul-culture

We have indicated earlier what is the culmination of soul-culture, in what form highest spiritual experiences dawn on the seekers. We have descriptions in the Upanisads of the individual consciousness getting merged into the indefinable Absolute, of blissful union with the Divine who is realised to be All-Delight, of the experience of One Vast Reality pervading the universe, and of one's identity with all creatures high and low. The Divine is inexhaustible, so is the experience of Him diverse and many-sided. The sages have aspired to realise the Truth here itself-- *ihaiva śanto'tha vidmastad vayam. Br. U. IV.4.14.* (May we know It while we are here itself), and after realisation of the Truth they felt like

living long to help others, through example and instruction, to take to the path of Truth. Many of them like Janaka, and Ajātaśatru have not shunned their kingly duties however worldly and strenuous these might otherwise appear. Kings and Brahmins, old and young, men and women have sought the truth and lived a life in society as perfect as their inner light has made them capable of. Soul-culture as envisaged by the Upanisads is not something extraordinary to be practised by a few, in the remoteness of the forest or the monastery. The sages are mostly householders, and they lived in villages not very far from cities and royal capitals. There was free exchange both as regards things temporal and eternal.

Upanisads foster all the lines of Yoga

It is sometimes contended by those who prefer to consider the Upanisad as the Jñāna-Kānda that it is the way of the knowledge--jñāna-yoga which is upheld by the Upanisads. We have shown in the first chapter how ill-founded is the division of the Vedas into Jñāna and Karma, and we shall now see how partial is this idea that jñāna yoga predominates in the Upanisads. We have pointed out earlier in this chapter that the synthesis attempted in the Gītā of the different paths of yoga is the only logical sequel of the teachings of the Upanisads. In fact, separation of the different paths--it is, however, doubtful if thorough separation is at all possible -- is a much later phenomenon. It is the result, on the one hand, of specialisation i.e., exploring the utmost possibilities of a particular line of approach to the Divine, and, on the other, of a narrowing down and a deviation from the many-

sided comprehensive approach of the Upanisad. Pūrva Mīmāṃsā laid stress on works, Uttar Mīmāṃsā on jñāna, sects centering round Rudra, Visnu, particularly the latter, prized devotion above all others. Another line followed a more rational procedure which did almost usurp the name yoga exclusively for itself. This is the way chalked out in the Yogasūtras of Patanjali. Buddhism has used a good deal of it. However, though the seeds of all these are spread over the Upanisads, they are not distinguished from one another in the period of the early and principal Upanisads with which we are concerned.

Indeed a good deal of stress is there in the Upanisads on knowledge. It is asserted time and again that knowledge brings liberation. It has to be like that since the entire effort of the Upanisads is to bring down the message of a higher awareness of things, of a different dimension of consciousness. But whereas the way of knowledge gives exclusive stress on the featureless Absolute, which alone is Real according to this, we come across in the Upanisad other dynamic aspects of the Absolute and at the same time its universal and individual aspects. Stress is on meditation quite much, but at the same time recitation (Japa) of Pranava, Gāyatrī and other chants has been eulogised; this actually comes under the purview of the way of the devotion (Bhakti-yoga). We do not have much of the raptures of union with the Personal God in the Upanisad, as we see in later Bhakti literature, but the Divine has been repeatedly conceived as the All-Delight—raso vai sa. And there is no dearth of such elements as prayer for temporal

and spiritual results, grace, devotion, and submission. References are there in a number of Upanisads to some steps of the eight-fold path of Rāja yoga. As for Karma yoga, Upanisad does not make any artificial division between ritualistic and non-ritualistic work. Works in general it accepts as part of the world process. This is the idea we get from the counsel given to the graduates in Taittiriya. But this is no passive acceptance of something that cannot be dispensed with. When stress is given on a particular mode of giving-- hriyā deyam, samvidā deyam (give with shame, give with fellow-feeling. Tai.U.I.11.)--we see the importance of the attitude behind a work. It has been urged to do all works with the spirit of sacrifice i.e., as offerings to the cosmic God or the gods who are active in the maintenance of the cosmos. Offering has particularly been recommended to the inner fire-- the psychic being who is to carry the fruit high aloft, who is the leader of individual existence, who has the onus to fashion this life in the image of the Divine. Kapali Sastry has shown through elaborate and technical discussion of mystical symbols that most of the Upanisadic Sādhanās which comprise Bhūmā Vidyā, Prāna Vidyā, Sāndilya Vidyā, Vaiśvanara Vidyā and many others and which have formed parts of the discussion in Brahma-sūtra, start with the heart i.e., the seat of the psychic being, the awakening of which is the most important step towards final realisation. In this way elements of knowledge, devotion

work etc. get merged together.

Again, hardly any distinction can be made between a physical and a mental work. Performance of a ritual--is it an external work or an internal one? Hands and mind go together. What matters most is the mind operating behind the work. An offering done with a desire produces quite a different result from one done without desire. So distinction between internal work (study, teaching, thinking, meditation etc.) and external work (giving, tilling ground, ruling a country etc.) are very much relative, almost artificial. Life is made of work, and if it is done in the right spirit all life can be made yoga, i.e., means of hastening the inner progress. When the Upanisad says, 'Doing verily works in this world one should wish to live a hundred years' (Isa 2), it means to work in this spirit. The Vedic Aryans made a ritual of their entire life; this also is the legacy of the Upanisad. Only in the Upanisad we see a greater deliberation on the inner aspect of life, and queries about the Truth.

Ethical Stand of the Upanisad viewed as an aid to  
Soul-culture

This stress on the inner aspect of all work leads us to another controvertial issue posed by the modern mind. It is about the ethics in the Upanisads. In the Western religious and philosophical tradition ethics has received almost an absolute status, and they have always insisted on certain objective standard of ethics. The case is a little different with the Eastern tradition. That is why even the most

sympathetic western mind finds it difficult to understand the Eastern point of view, and modern Indian thinkers, like Ranade, strain themselves to show that the Upanisads are not devoid of ethics.

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Ethics deals with rules of conduct on the basis of our notion of right and wrong, good and bad. It tries to formulate a universal norm of conduct and put that in objective terms as laws. Now, if we schematise the sentient world into three psychological stages, e.g., infrarational, rational and supra-rational we shall see how the so-called universal laws fail to carry any sense for either the first or the third stage. In the infrarational stage life is guided by instinct, and the instinct may carry some sense of right and wrong but it cannot be brought under any rational term. What we have called supra-rational is a stage of freedom that results from an identity in spirit with the Divine. At this stage of utter liberation the conduct of a man is determined divinely. There is no point in going to bind the conduct of such a man with the categorical imperatives of our mental code. Even in the rational stage there can hardly be any universal rule of conduct valid for all time and all climes. Is it not a fact that our ethical laws are largely determined by social factors--ethnic, economic, educational, cultural and so on? The ancient sages must have been aware of the situation, i.e., the relative character of ethical rules, and at the same time their indispensability

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Vide chapter VI of A constructive Survey of Upanisadic Philosophy, by R.D.Ranade, (Poona: Oriental Book Agency, 1926)

for the discipline of an individual and the smooth running of the society. They were not surely lacking in ethical sense as has been complained by Deussen:

The ancient Indians, whose consciousness of human solidarity, of common needs and interests, was but slightly developed, the sense of the objective worth of moral action is very inferior to ours,...<sup>86</sup>

We may well remember the counsel given to the disciples in Taittirīya I.11., the famous da da da of Brhadāraṇyaka V.2., and Chāndogya III.17.4. where five moral virtues--tapas, dānam, ārjavam, ahimsā, satyavacanam--have been put forward incidentally while imaging life as a great sacrifice, or the virtue of straight forwardness eulogised in the Gautama-Satyakāma episode. Still more important is the fact that the sages were discussing things in the background of a society well established in morality as has been pointed out by Deussen himself:

Offences of this character (theft, drunkenness, murder and adultery) were not common and that many an Indian chieftain might make in substance his own the honourable testimony which Aśvapati Kaikeya bears to his subjects:

'In my kingdom there is no thief,  
No churl, no drunkard,  
None who neglects the sacrifice or the sacred lore,  
No adulterer or courtesan.' (Ch.U. V.11.5.) <sup>87</sup>

From the historical point of view also it may be said that ethical rules founded on the metaphysical wisdom of the ancient sages are even now truly instrumental for the maintenance of order and cohesion in Indian society, and not the laws passed by present-day clamorous legislatures having no roots in the soil.

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<sup>86</sup>

P. Deussen, The Philosophy of the Upanisads, pp. 364-65.

<sup>87</sup>

Ibid., p. 366.

However, for any spiritual development what is important is not so much the rules of conduct as the spirit in which something is done. Efficacy of ethics is to be judged from the subjective point of view and not by any objective standard. Deussen has come to the point, yet has missed much of the subjective issue involved.

Such a standard must have regard rather to the subjective worth of an action, which consists in the greatness of the personal sacrifice which is involved, or more strictly speaking in the actor's consciousness of the greatness of the sacrifice which he believes himself to be making, and consequently in the degree of self-denial (tapas), and self-renunciation (nyāsa), which is exhibited in the action, whether in other respects it be of great or little or absolutely no value for others.<sup>88</sup>

To be conscious of the greatness of the sacrifice one is making, or to exhibit self-denial and self-renunciation is not the right import of the subjective approach to ethics. The former may well inflate one's ego and the latter may be mere exhibitionism. The western mind seems to find it difficult to get rid of its objective criterion. Stace writes while defending mysticism,

We are left at least with the assurance that mystical consciousness should be, for those who possess it, a powerful motive and impulsion towards ethical, and therefore towards social, action. <sup>89</sup>

Social action is something good and noble, it may be indicative of a sense of identity developed in the mystic with all men but by itself it cannot be the measure of the worth or otherwise of mysticism. What he insists as social or ethical action

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P. Deussen, The Philosophy of the Upanisads, p. 364.

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W. T. Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, (New York: Lippincott & Co.), p. 333.

boils eventually down to charity and philanthropy. And it has been amply demonstrated by social psychology that charity and philanthropy as such without the deeper subjective element operating behind, may give rise to a good deal of social evil. Socialists are always protesting against the idea of charity. If by social action is meant exertion of some beneficial influence on society, well that may be done in a characteristic mystic manner--silently and imperceptively. It is wrong to hold up some objective moral law as of universal validity.

The Good sought after by ethics is one of the divine verities like Truth and Bliss. Rational codes of ethics try to approximate the Good, but ultimate Good transcends the limitations of all codes. The foundation of all ethics is the inherent sense of good in man. But this sense is not the same or equally developed in all. Outer code helps us no doubt, but a thing really becomes our own and contributes towards our self-development only when it answers to the promptings of our inner nature. In fact in his journey towards progress every man has to work out his own ideal of good, as was done differently from the same clue of 'da' by the gods, men and demons. (Br.U. V.2.) He may err, he may stumble but it is he who has to find out his law which is the same as his soul. If his soul is unique inspite of its being one with the universal Self, his law of conduct and ideal of good has also to be unique.

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The gods took the syllable to mean damyata (control yourself), men took it as datta (give), and the demons as dayadhvam (be compassionate), according to the intrinsic ethical needs of them.

He obeys an inner ideal, not an outer standard; he answers to a divine law in his being, not to a social claim or a collective necessity. The ethical imperative comes not from around, but from within and above him.<sup>91</sup>

The Indian tradition of absolving the sannyāsin from all social and religious obligations has got this undertone of significance that a person who is entirely devoted to the seeking of Truth should be free to find out his own law of conduct. And obviously the law lies deep in his soul.

It is this secret psychic entity which is the true original Conscience in us deeper than the constructed and conventional conscience of the moralist, for it is this which points always towards Truth and Right and Beauty, and towards Love and Harmony and all that is a divine possibility in us, and persists till these things become the major need of our nature. It is the psychic personality in us that flowers as the saint, the sage, the seer; when it reaches its full strength, it turns the being towards the knowledge of Self and the Divine, and towards the supreme Truth, the supreme Good, the supreme Beauty, Love and Bliss, the divine heights and largenesses, and opens us to the touch of spiritual sympathy, universality, oneness.<sup>92</sup>

So we see it is no lack of ethical sense, but the presence of a keener sense of the limitations of objective universal codes in the discovery of the soul and spiritual orientation of life which is responsible for the paucity of ethical deliberations in the Upanisad. Moral sermons are there in abundance in the Mahābhārata and other books of Smṛti; the Upaniṣads have dealt with the highest truth and law of life. So they could give utmost emphasis only on the Self and the method of discovery of the individual and supreme selves as the means of fulfilment of life. The self has been found

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Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle, (Pondy: Ashram), p.200.

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Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, (Pondy: Ashram), p.270.

to be the secret and source of all divine verities. To find the self man must turn inwards, he will get an inkling of it at the first, then promptings will come, then he will feel the concrete presence of it, and eventually will dawn the realisation of it in more and more completeness. The capacity to do real good to others is maximised only when one realises, through plenary self-discovery, one's identity with all others. Till then all our efforts are relative and tentative though useful for the individual and the society, and needs be pursued as a means of soul-culture.

## CHAPTER VII

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

We have attempted a reappraisal of the teachings of the Upanisads in the light of Sri Aurobindo. Though we have limited ourselves to a particular aspect of the Upanisadic teaching yet the whole message of the sacred literature has come under our purview directly or indirectly.

Among modern thinkers Sri Aurobindo occupies a unique position. Through first hand knowledge and experience he has grasped the great traditions of the East and the West, and brought them closer to each other in his Integral System of Philosophy. Secondly he combines in himself a keen intellect, erudition and spiritual wisdom which make him particularly competent to take up the study of the Upanisads.

Sri Aurobindo has approached the Upanisads directly, and not via media the Brahmasūtra as was done by older Achāryas. He has tried to evaluate the Upanisads having placed them in proper perspective. He has not pushed aside the Vedas dubbing them as mere Karmakānda, rather has traced in them the early inception of spiritual illumination and revelations of which the Upanisad is a particular later development and to which it refers with special reverence. The Vedas have also set the tone for the entire ancient culture which by and large testifies to a balanced outlook on life, and is by no means ascetic. The Upanisads embody the spiritual quest of the ancient people. Of necessity they are occupied more with

the abstract than with the concrete realities of life. The urgency of finding out the Truth by all means is there writ large on the pages of every Upaniṣad. But this does not involve contempt for life, rather the use of life and works for finding the Truth, and after the discovery to make them expressive of the truth for others to emulate. It has been urged by the Upaniṣad to take Vidyā and Avidyā together, and not to renounce work.

Vedānta philosophy is based on the Upaniṣads. But different schools of Vedānta differ a good deal from one another. Each school gives stress on a particular line of thought in the Upaniṣads and tries to formulate a complete system from that point of view. In fact it is difficult to harmonise all the different trends of thought intellectually. The Upaniṣads abound in paradoxes, and these are puzzling to the intellect. Our reasoning works on the basis of certain a-priori categories of logic. The Upaniṣad very often flouts them. We expect reality to conform to our logic, but reality may well escape our logic; this is what Sri Aurobindo particularly points to in what he has called the Logic of the Infinite. The Upaniṣads do not quarrel with one another because their view is the view of the Infinite, of the Reality itself. All the schools of Vedānta are bogged down by the dichotomies of part and whole. They are obliged to make a sharp division between the Real and the phenomenal. Advaita, like all absolutism tries to safeguard the purity of the Absolute by denying the reality of the phenomena ultimately.

It thus fails to reconcile Immanent and Transcendent Brahman spoken of together all the time in the Upanisads. Qualified Monism makes a compromise between the two. It puts the world and Jīva as appendages to the Brahman endowed with personal qualities. Jīva is considered by it as finite since it is but a part of the whole. But Upaniṣad is never tired of speaking of the identity of Jīva and Brahman. Dualism ends up with all sorts of differences between God, Jīva, elements of matter and so on, which is obviously quite far from the essential teaching of the Upaniṣad which is the unity of all reality.

Sri Aurobindo has demonstrated the ways of the Infinite, and the necessity of our giving up of much of our finite logical categories when we try to conceive the Reality which transcends finitude. His stand on the indeterminability of the Absolute, the static as well as the dynamic aspects of Brahman, the method and process of self-manifestation of Brahman, gradations of consciousness, and the relationship between different categories of reality in the whole chain of involution and evolution go a long way towards harmonisation and integration of the diverse trends of thought in the Upaniṣads. He has found certain basic truth in all three major schools of Vedānta noted above, but otherwise he considers them to be too partial. He has shown that the three views of the soul's relation to Brahman entertained by the three schools are the result of the reflection on our purified mind of the three statuses of the Supermind--the dynamic Divine poised

for manifestation. From the high altitude of supramental vision it is possible to reconcile the contraries.

Ātman has been variously described in the Upaniṣads. In some passages it is synonymous with Brahman, in some it is said to be the same truth in everything, yet in some others it is spoken of as the indwelling person in man. All these passages are based on truth-vision. In the transcendental consciousness of Brahman there is but One. When there is a movement towards self-extension for manifestation to be possible, Jivatman appears as the support of that, to be the self-same truth in everything. When manifestation takes place and the Divine dons the garb of Nature a delegate of Jivatman, an individualised soul, a spark of the pure Light comes down as the secret support of each individuality. In man this divine principle is sufficiently awakened, it is the inner person. Essentially this person is the same with the Supreme Person.

Again, this person is the bridge between the manifest and the unmanifest. The unmanifest One brings out of itself this world of manifestation through a gradual process of self-obscuration. The world is made of the same stuff as the Divine, but with a difference. Self-obscuration, the donning of Ignorance made the manifold world of mind, life and body forgetful of their divine essence. They do, therefore, grope in the darkness, or rather, the half-light of Ignorance (Māyā). Behind all their strivings for strength, delight, knowledge, power they are obscurely seeking for the truth of themselves, their origin. They obscurely feel but are yet to realise

that 'bhūmaiva sukham, nālpe sukham asti' (Bliss is in the Infinite, not in finitude). The discovery of the essential truth of their existence will be possible through the knowledge of the self,-- first the individual person in us, who is seated in the heart to lead us towards light, then the one self in everything, and ultimately the Absolute Self or Brahman. That is why 'ātmanam biddhi' (know thyself) comes as a refrain in the Upanisads. For to know the self, the nature parts in us-- mind, life and body have to turn inwards. Normally they are outward going. A change of direction has to be introduced. This is what has been called soul-culture, ancient people called it yoga.

Turning of the mind and senses from out to inwards may mean turning back from life; but it need not be so. Every time the mind turns inward it may feel reinforced to meet the outside world with greater confidence. The idea is to replace a separative ego-centric view by a more unitive soul-view of things. Such a process is sure to give greater mastery over life. Obviously the attempt has to be made with the whole of one's existence--thought, emotions, physical propensities everything has to agree to a joint undertaking. Life cannot be divided into compartments. Branching out of the yoga into different lines based predominantly on some aspect of our life--thought, emotions, works etc. is a later phenomenon. In some <sup>way</sup> this has lead to specialisation, i.e., utmost development of a particular line of approach to the Divine,

but on the other hand this is a deviation from the total approach suggested by the Upaniṣads. In the Upaniṣads we see the elements of all the yogas but none of them seems to be recommended exclusively. There is a great stress on knowledge indeed, but this is natural; whatever be the line of approach it is through knowledge that the bondage of Ignorance has to be cut. This stress on knowledge has an added significance. It marks off Upanisadic yoga or soul-culture from what is commonly known as mysticism or ecstatic union with the Divine. Liberation in the Upanisadic sense means attaining to a higher consciousness in which one realises one's own self, feels one's identity with all others and meets the essential truth of existence—phenomenal and transcendental.

Soul-culture is obviously a way of life motivated by the highest values. All that concerns our life—art, literature, ethics, love, affection, physical work, family and social relations and so on and so forth will come under this motivation, and be confronted from that point of view. Since the process of soul-culture will be something dynamic and progressive, no fixed code of ethics and for that matter no fixed category may help this culture for long. Much will depend upon the rhythm of inner growth of an individual.

In fine it may be pointed out that Sri Aurobindo's approach to the Upaniṣads is full of significance. It implies the necessity of a reassessment of much of Indian

religious tradition and culture. Secondly, this approach is largely free from mediaeval theological notions; consequently it opens the door of the Upaniṣads to the modern man. Soul-culture in the Upaniṣads as explained in the light of Sri Aurobindo puts up the ancient scripture as a living source of inspiration. Indeed soul-culture has a bearing upon world life and society to-day, since ultimately society depends on the quality of the individuals. Lastly, the Logic of the Infinite points to a new approach to scriptural studies.

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