

SRI AUROBINDO'S CONCEPT OF THE SUPERMAN

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OF THE  
SUPERMAN

By

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS:

The subject matter of this thesis is the concept of Superman as developed by Sri Aurobindo, a great thinker of modern India. This concept is found to be the result of an extension of the scope of ancient Vedanta in an effort to answer existential questions of the modern era, like, the destiny of man and society, as well as to accommodate with the findings of modern science. The work is primarily an analysis of the writings and practical efforts of Sri Aurobindo, and secondarily a consideration of Indian and European thoughts as related to his philosophy.

## PREFACE

The Superman, a being functioning with the Supermind as his natural endowment even as mental intelligence is the natural endowment of man, is the focal point of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of 'the life divine'. In the following pages an attempt has been made to examine this concept from two main perspectives. One, the development of the concept as part of a complex many-sided vision of life and reality, two, as a unique concept compared to similar concepts old and new, and in relation to cognate ideas in Indian and European traditions. In this study besides Sri Aurobindo's own works, most of the books and papers produced in the English language on his thought have been consulted. In the course of my long contact with the philosophy and yoga of Sri Aurobindo I have learnt a good deal from discussion with a number of people given to the study of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. I acknowledge my debt to all those whose words written or spoken have helped me to understand Sri Aurobindo.

I am especially grateful to Professor John Arapura for supervising the work. I am indebted to him in many ways. In fact the period of my association with him forms a significant phase of my mental life. I have found in him a rare thinker who combines in himself the insights of Indian and Western traditions.

It was my great privilege to study Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta with Prof. T.R.V. Murti. His criticism of Chapter III of this work in which I have dealt with Advaita rather critically has been of much help to me.

Professor George Grant by coming into contact with whose great



mind I was initiated into a new line of approach to the study of human destiny kindly took pains to go through the work, and offered constructive criticism on important aspects of it. I am grateful to him for all the help I received from him. I am also indebted to Prof. C. Georgiadis of the Department of Philosophy who made himself always available for consultation about Greek thoughts.

I have deep gratitude to McMaster University for the unique opportunity it has given me to study Eastern and Western thoughts with a number of distinguished scholars in the Department of Religion as well as in the Department of Philosophy. I am thankful to the Canada Council for making my practical problems lighter with a good Doctoral Fellowship. I have a measure of debt to my wife also for, among other things, the difficult job of typing the first draft of the thesis.

The first American edition of five major works of Sri Aurobindo — The Life Divine, Essays on the Gita, The Synthesis of Yoga, The Ideal of Human Unity, The Human Cycle — was brought out in 1949 by The Sri Aurobindo Library, New York. I have used this edition of the above mentioned books. As numerous editions of these and other books are coming out I felt it urgent to give reference to the Chapters of the major books in addition to the pages.

The second Chapter of the thesis, 'A Study in the Sources', was the most difficult part of the project for me. Wherever I drew conclusion I did it with some hesitation. What seems to be conclusive in this respect is strictly tentative, as definitive conclusions are both difficult to arrive at and not considered absolutely necessary for the pursuit of my subject.

## ABBREVIATIONS

<u>Ashram</u>	.....	Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Auro	.....	Aurobindo
<u>Br. Brhad</u>	.....	Brhadāranyaka
<u>Chānd.</u>	.....	Chāndogya
Com.	.....	Compiler
E. T.	.....	English Translation
<u>Gītā</u>	.....	Bhagavad Gītā
<u>L. D.</u>	.....	The Life Divine
<u>Mu.</u>	.....	Mundaka
Pondy.	.....	Pondicherry
Tr.	.....	Translation, Translated
<u>Up. Upa.</u>	.....	Upanisad

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
<u>PREFACE</u> .....	iii
CHAPTER ONE <u>INTRODUCTION</u> .....	1
CHAPTER TWO <u>A STUDY IN THE SOURCES</u>	
I) Deliberation on Methodology.....	31
II) Indian.....	39
III) Greek.....	66
IV) Christian.....	91
V) Modern European.....	101
CHAPTER THREE <u>THE VISION OF THE REALITY</u>	
I) Sri Aurobindo vis-a-vis the History of Indian Thought.....	136
II) Integral Non-dualism and the Logic of the Infinite.....	144
III) Comprehensive and Synthetic Character of the Vision.....	175
IV) Gradation of Reality.....	185
V) The Status of the Individual.....	191
VI) The Spirit of Brahmanical Scripture.....	199
CHAPTER FOUR <u>ESCHATOLOGICAL VISION</u>	
I) The Superman.....	208
II) Supramental Society.....	235
III) Social Evolution from the Present to the Supramental Stage.....	243
IV) Freedom of the Individual in the Gnostic Community.....	251

	Page
V) Sri Aurobindo's View of History and Time.....	255
CHAPTER FIVE <u>SUPRAMENTAL MANIFESTATION AS A MOVEMENT</u> .....	265
<u>SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION</u> .....	304
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u> .....	324

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Sri Aurobindo is acclaimed as the prophet of the race of Supermen. The idea of a higher type of man was spelled out first by Nietzsche. After Nietzsche, it is Sri Aurobindo who has developed the idea of Superman very thoroughly. Sri Aurobindo's concept of the superman is generic and evolutionary. His superman is to be understood only in terms of the way in which he looks upon evolution.

#### Evolution

Evolution means an orderly development. Ancient thinkers both in the East and the West have tried to account for the multiplicity of the world, and in the process have formulated certain theories of evolution. For example, early Greek thinkers traced the origin of this world of multiplicity to one primal substance. Thales considered that substance to be Water, Anaximenes took it to be Air, whereas Heraclitus tended to think it to be Fire. Similarly in Indian philosophy, Sankhya has tried to show that the world has evolved out of one indivisible primal stuff called by it Prakriti. Other schools of Indian and Greek thought have tried to show some primal principle, mostly supersensuous, as the root and origin of the concrete world of multiplicity. The primal

unitive principle, in most cases, is superior and supersensuous; the concrete manifestation is diverse and secondary or inferior.

Formal sciences, on the other hand, would not recognize any insubstantial, unempirical stuff as the root or origin of the world, and they cannot, strictly speaking, make any value statements either. So the same word 'evolution' (an ordered development) describes a process of general entropy in Geology and a process of splendid outflowing in Biology. In the former, evolution stands for the emergence of the stellar universe or the solar system through that dissipation of energy from the radiant activity of the nebula which, after the rich temporary diversity of our present planet, will lead eventually to the inevitable extinction of life and movement. In the latter, evolution stands for the first manifestation of vital processes, the emergence of the multicellular from the unicellular, and the onward and upward development which has its present culmination in mankind.

However, it is the Biological sense of evolution that has exerted a tremendous influence on all disciplines that deal with man, his life, society and destiny. This has happened after the publication of The Origin of Species by Charles Darwin in 1859. Darwin tried to account for the countless varieties of living things on earth. Variety results from the means adopted to survive in the tremendous battle for existence. Members of each species compete with each other, as well as with members of different species, for a chance to live. In this competition any helpful

variation gives its owner an advantage over neighbours that are not so well adapted. Individuals or groups with such variations will win the struggle for existence; they will live and reproduce while others not so well equipped will die. This process has been designated as Natural Selection by Darwin. In Darwin's time, however, very little was known about the process of variation. Darwin could not distinguish between inheritable and non-inheritable characteristics. Later studies have demonstrated that acquired characteristics are not inherited by the progeny. Variation takes place mainly through mutations.

Modern studies of evolution have shown that inheritable variations arise in at least three ways. Many develop because genes change...Other variations appear when chromosomes with their sets of genes make new combinations...Still greater changes take place when chromosomes are doubled or when sets of chromosomes are repeated in the process of reproduction.<sup>1</sup>

All the same, Variation and Natural Selection remain the last words of the Biological theory of evolution. "Most authorities also agree that natural selection has controlled the results of inherited variations, just as Darwin supposed".<sup>2</sup>

Now, what does Natural Selection mean? Normally, selection implies an intelligent action -- appraisal and decision. Certainly Darwin did not attribute intelligence to

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<sup>1</sup>C. L. Fenton, "Evolution", in The World Book Encyclopedia, Vol. 6, (Field Enterprise Educational Corporation, 1973), pp. 333-334.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 334.

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Nature. He has used the term only metaphorically. It stands for the shifting process in nature, but this process is mechanical and unintelligent. What does eventually determine this selection and consequent variation? Biological theory has really no answer to this question. "Darwin's hypothesis is mainly concerned with the effects of natural selection between variations, not with the origin of variations".<sup>3</sup>

Again, the struggle for existence presupposes a will to live. Without this vital impulse the struggle carries no sense. If survival is the objective then there is no necessity of evolution of more and more complex and higher types; a rudimentary type of organism might survive better and longer. Thus, without proper answer about the principle of life and the upward tendency of living things the meaning of evolution remains undisclosed. The last word of physical sciences is accident. They attribute the emergence of the universe to a series of accidents. Similarly, the last word of Biological theory of evolution is random variation. They attribute the ordered and systematic evolution of living creatures to random variations. Order in the universe is so perfect that it is difficult to conceive that it resulted from a number of accidents. There is a wholeness in any living thing; no amount of chemical and physiological data about living organisms can adequately account for this wholeness. The core of the matter

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<sup>3</sup>H. Hoffding, A History of Modern Philosophy, Vol. 2 (Dover Publications, Inc.), p. 445.



-- a solar system in the atom -- is a mystery. How the physical energy transforms itself or evolves into vital energy is another mystery. From physical energy to conscious mental volition and thought is indeed a long way. Random variation is no explanation for this. Perhaps science cannot go beyond the sphere of positive evidences, perhaps ultimate questions are not the concern of the sciences. In any case, in search of the meaning of life and evolution we have to go back to philosophy. Natural sciences have established the fact of evolution and have unearthed a great deal of information about the wonderful hierarchy of species and the struggle of life for self-expression, but for a fuller and comprehensive understanding of the whole thing philosophy alone can help us.

A large number of philosophers, particularly of the modern period, have developed theories of evolution. We shall mention here only a few, those of Hegel, Bergson, and S. Alexander, which are very close to Sri Aurobindo's view of evolution and which will help bring Sri Aurobindo's theory into relief. For a fuller study of different theories of evolution in comparison with that of Sri Aurobindo, the reader is referred to the works of Maitra, Chaudhury, Srivastava, Misra, and Reddy.

#### Hegel's Idea of Evolution

According to Hegel, the universe is a process of evolution. The Absolute is realizing itself through this process. Evolution is being guided by the Reason of the Absolute. Since.

the Absolute manifests itself through evolution, evolution follows the pattern of Thought or Reason which is absolute. Thought follows the triadic rhythm of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, and it is a continuous process. We see a number of difficulties for this position to account for the fact of evolution established by the natural sciences. First of all, the Absolute of Hegel, being Thought and Reason, does not seem to have the potency of evolving the world. The Absolute is not truly absolute. It is seeking fulfilment all the time. Secondly, Thought or Reason, which is the other name for the Hegelian Absolute, does not have the connotation as carried by the Consciousness of the Upanisadic Brahman. They are only magnified and heightened forms of normal human thought and reason to which we can hardly attribute the capacity to create and evolve a concrete world of multiplicity. Thirdly, the triadic conception of evolution is too narrow and inadequate. Thought may follow this process, but for a living world to limit itself to this is unimaginable. There is conflict and struggle in the process of evolution, but conflicts need not always be resolved for a step forward. Life is so fluid, so dynamic, that its movements cannot be bound by a supposed law of the operation of the mind. And, in fact, evolution is not a continuous and straight as suggested by the Hegelian law of thought. This triadic law restricts the freedom of the Absolute as well as that of the Evolution. There are many missing links in the chain of evolution. How would Hegel account for them?

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## Creative Evolution of Bergson

Bergson's Creative Evolution presents a different picture.

He takes full cognisance of the constant change that meets our eyes on all sides. Change is the basic principle of Nature. In fact, he reduces the universe to Life and its principle, the élan vital. This principle of life is in constant movement; it is the Reality, it is the never-ending flow of Time or Duration. This concept of life and movement accounts squarely for the perpetual creation, invention and generation of continual novelty. It rejects the mechanical view of the Biologists as well as the teleological view of the Hegelians. Mechanical theories conceive evolution of new products to be calculable from their causes, which means the past governing the future. Teleological theory conceives evolution to be a process for the realization of a specific future; here the future is the controlling force for the present. They are, according to Bergson, outside, and as such faulty, views of evolution.

Evolution will thus prove to be something entirely different from a series of adaptations to circumstances, as mechanism claims; entirely different also from the realization of a plan of the whole, as maintained by the doctrine of finality.<sup>4</sup>

He therefore urges us to look at evolution from inside and have the intuition of its innate tendencies which brook no control, no

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<sup>4</sup>Henry Bergson, Creative Evolution, authorized trans. by A. Mitchell (New York: The Modern Library, 1944), p. 113.

check from any side.

However brilliant Bergson's view of evolution might be, it suffers from certain serious defects. For him Reality is just Becoming. He rejects the Being, and this makes it impossible for him to explain the reality of unity, oneness, etc. without which becoming, multiplicity, dynamic flow all remain practically unexplained. Bergson has nothing to say about the meaning of evolution except that "it is not the realization of a plan" and that it "is a creation unceasingly renewed".<sup>5</sup>

But if it is not in any way governed by some goal how can we speak of any progress or forward movement at all?

Bergson says:

No doubt there is progress, if progress means a continual advance in the general direction determined by a first impulsion.<sup>6</sup>

This "first impulsion" does not seem to endow evolution with any significant meaning. Srivastava observes,

A sourceless, ceaseless and goalless motion is a contradiction in terms. How can he speak of a forward or backward movement of a process which has no goal?<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 115-116.

<sup>7</sup> R. S. Srivastava, Sri Aurobindo and the Theory of Evolution (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1968), p. 303.

### Emergent Theory of Evolution

Samuel Alexander's theory of Emergent Evolution is a more balanced presentation of the fact of evolution. According to him, Space-Time is the basic reality out of which matter, life, and mind have emerged. There is a drive, a *nisus* in Space-Time which makes this evolution possible, and there is no reason to think that evolution has stopped with the emergence of mind. The *nisus* is sure to lead the evolution forward into some higher category of existence. He writes,

There is a *nisus* in Space-Time which, as it has borne its creatures forward through matter and life to mind, will bear them forward to some higher level of existence.<sup>8</sup>

The gaps or missing links that are observed in the series of evolutes are explained by him in terms of emergent qualities. Many of the qualities of life are absent in matter even in the latent form. They do not develop gradually from the material structure, but rather they emanate from without or from above. "They are, as it were, thrust into the evolutionary series at certain critical stages".<sup>9</sup>

The main defect of this theory is that we do not see anywhere the source of the emergent qualities. Alexander says,

New orders of finites come into existence in Time; the world actually or historically develops from its first or elementary

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<sup>8</sup>S. Alexander, Space, Time and Deity, Vol. II (Macmillan and Co. Ltd., Reprinted ed., 1934), p. 346.

<sup>9</sup>H. Chaudhury, The Philosophy of Integralism (Pondy: Ashram, 2nd ed., 1967), p. 102.

condition of Space-Time, which possesses no quality except what we agreed to call the Spatio-temporal quality of motion.<sup>10</sup>

It is actually in the complexities of motion that Alexander sees the source of the emergent qualities: He continues:

But as in the course of Time new complexity of motions comes into existence, a new quality emerges, which is, a new complex process as a matter of observed empirical fact, a new or emergent quality.<sup>11</sup>

This leaves us unconvinced, for if the basic stuff Space-Time had a spiritual content, the emergence of new qualities through the complexity of motion might be conceived. But how does Space-Time, which is unconscious and seems lower than even matter, be eventually the cause of the emergence of conscious qualities like life and mind? How does it develop a *nisus* at all?

### Integral Theory of Evolution

Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution steers clear of the defects of most of these theories of evolution. He starts with the Vedantic Sat-Cit-Ananda as the Absolute Reality. His Absolute is bound by nothing; it is governed by its own logic. It does not need any fulfilment like that of Hegel. It manifests itself out of its fullness and yet retains its transcendence. It has no need

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<sup>10</sup> Alexander, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

of following the rhythm of Thought as it manifests itself, since thought is not its essence, thought is only an evolute at a certain stage.

In Sri Aurobindo's theory terrestrial evolution has been linked with supraterrrestrial worlds, evolution is preceded logically by involution. In the process of self-manifestation the Supreme has created a series of worlds — the supernal worlds of infinite existence, infinite consciousness, and infinite delight in each of which one of the infinite components of the Absolute function as the basic and dominant principle. There are worlds in which the supermind or some derivative of it is the dominant principle. And in this process of Descent, mental, vital, subtle-physical, and many intermediary worlds have been created. The primal stuff, called by Alexander Space-Time, from which matter, life and mind have evolved, is therefore, according to Sri Aurobindo, not unconscious. All the principles from the components of the Absolute down to the subtle-physical are involved in it. But for the presence of these principles there could not be any *nisus* nor could the emergence of higher existences be possible.

This reference to supersensuous worlds, (these are typical; that is to say, they are fields of manifestation of fixed types, whatever takes place in them is in the nature of the Divine self-expression within the limits of these types), may well appear puzzling. While considering the Biological theory of evolution

we have seen the inadequacy of the empirical data to explain life; the necessity of rational speculation is thus admitted. But Sri Aurobindo goes further. He attempts, indeed, a rational explanation, but relies on non-empirical supersensuous data. It can be said, however, that all the religious traditions have testified to subtle worlds and beings though hardly anywhere is there presented as consistent and integrated a picture (covering the physical and the subtle) as in Sri Aurobindo. However, according to Sri Aurobindo, evolution takes place not only because of the latent principle and its urge to emerge, but also from the pressure of the corresponding typal world for increasing self-expression. Mind could emerge in the living body due to the operation of two pulls: one is the drive of the mind latent in life to emerge, the other is the pressure of the typal world of mind on the vital world to receive its force and light in the mould of the living body. This two-fold pull, an ascent and a descent, makes novel qualities emerge and create the impression of a gap or link in the chain of evolution. Alexander spoke of the emergence of higher qualities as if from outside or above like a miracle. Here in Sri Aurobindo we see a plausible mechanism. Higher qualities are not devoid of organic connection with their substructure as supposed by Alexander. They evolve from the substructure, yet there is an element of leap in it, due mainly to the descent from above and also due to the integration that follows. (This point will be clarified later.)



### Novelty in the Evolutes

Obviously Sri Aurobindo rejects the mechanical view of evolution. It is Consciousness which is at the root of everything; all the different grades of reality descending in the process of involution, and the grades of existence in the scale of evolution, according to his view, are grades of consciousness. Consciousness does not behave mechanically. Sri Aurobindo's theory is teleological like that of Hegel, but with certain qualifications. Supermind or the divine Gnosis presides over the whole process of involution and evolution. Evolution is certainly not an aimless, goalless thing. But, on the other hand, it would be wrong to say that everything is pre-planned or chalked-out beforehand. We have seen that in this theory creation proceeds from the fullness of the Supreme. It is like an adventure of the One to see itself variously. The delight is in the unexpected, in the constant novelty of self-expression and self-finding. Secondly, though mind is a verity pre-existent in its proper sphere, its manifestation in a living body has been a unique thing. Similarly, Supermind's descent on the mentalized, living organism would be a thing without precedence. The results of this combination are certainly not all predetermined.

### Goal of Evolution

As for the goal of evolution, Sri Aurobindo steers clear of two opposite notions, one progressus ad infinitum, and the

other progressus ad finitum. In the notion of infinite progress the goal keeps on receding from the view, there is only striving and no reaching. This makes striving almost meaningless. On the other hand, a definite and final goal militates against the infinite Consciousness and its infinite potentialities.\* Sri Aurobindo speaks of an immediate goal -- man's ascension into superhumanity, or rather a nearer goal of New humanity --, but he does not say that this is the final goal of evolution. May be with the ascension into superhumanity evolution in the twilight of knowledge-ignorance will end, but evolution will continue smoothly in knowledge toward newer and more marvellous goals.

#### Evolution of Form and Soul

Now, Sri Aurobindo explains the whole meaning and method of evolution in terms of consciousness. "An evolution of consciousness in Matter is...the keynote, the central significant motive of the terrestrial existence".<sup>12</sup> Mutation or Variation in Nature takes place for the facilitation of the outflowering of a better consciousness; the more complex and refined the organism the better is the chance of a higher and higher consciousness to find play in it. This involves a two-fold process of physical

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\*The author is indebted to Professor H. Chandhuri for this point.

<sup>12</sup>The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter 23, p. 734.

evolution and soul-evolution. Physical evolution proceeds with birth as its machinery. Through heredity the evolved traits are transmitted to, and continued in, the posterity, and thus a general higher form develops. Side by side, a soul-evolution proceeds through rebirth. The evolved soul comes back assuming the higher form developed in the type through heredity. Physical evolution is of a general type, it takes place over a long time involving generations and quickly perishing individuals. Soul-evolution is the individual's progress in consciousness through multiple births.

### Conscious Evolution

There is a tendency in scientific circles to explain the human mind and all that concerns mind in terms of the operation of the sub-human consciousness. Sri Aurobindo emphasizes the point that, with man, evolution has itself evolved, that is to say, unconscious evolution has been replaced by conscious evolution. He writes,

Up till this advent of a developed thinking mind in Matter evolution had been effected, not by the self-aware aspiration, intention, will or seeking of the living being but subconsciously or subliminally by the automatic operation of Nature.<sup>13</sup>

This is so because evolution began from the Inconscience, and the secret Consciousness had not emerged sufficiently from it.

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<sup>13</sup>The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter 23, p. 750.

to operate through the self-aware participating individuals.

The passage from unconscious to conscious evolution has an enormous significance. Man is not only going to cooperate with Nature and expedite the process of evolution, but a real change in the process itself is anticipated. In the previous stages "Nature's first care and effort had to be directed towards a change in the physical organization, for only so could there be a change of consciousness....But in man a reversal is possible, indeed inevitable".<sup>14</sup> Through conscious will man will widen and heighten his consciousness and transmute the body appropriately so that it can be the natural vehicle of the new gains in consciousness. That man will make the necessary effort is indicated by his restiveness:

The spiritual aspiration is innate in man; for he is, unlike the animal, aware of imperfection and limitation and feels that there is something to be attained beyond what he now is.<sup>15</sup>

This urge towards self-exceeding is, for Sri Aurobindo, the most promising thing for humanity. It is the sure indication of the glorious future. He says that at each step one receives an intimation of what the following step will be.

Already, in what seems to be inconscient in life, the signs of sensation coming towards the surface are visible; in moving and

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 751.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 750.

breathing life the emergence of sensitive mind is apparent and the preparation of thinking mind is not entirely hidden, while in thinking mind, when it develops, there appear at an early stage the rudimentary strivings and afterwards the more developed seeking of a spiritual consciousness.<sup>16</sup>

### The Present Evolutionary Crisis

Why should man try to surpass himself? Where is the urgency of such an endeavour? Sri Aurobindo has tried to show that reason, the highest developed faculty in man, has gone so far as its capacities go, to enlighten man and to ameliorate his society. Reason by itself can lead us no further. Reason does not have the integral vision of truth, so in the process of rationalization of life and society certain serious problems have been created which are threatening the very existence of human civilization and race. Man can face this situation only with the help of a higher light and force.

Man has created a system of civilization which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilize and manage.<sup>17</sup>

About intrinsic limitations of the intellect he has written at great length. He says, "The root powers of human life, its intimate causes are below, irrational, and they are above, supra-rational".<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., Book II, Chapter 24, p. 758.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., Book II, Chapter 28, p. 933.

<sup>18</sup> Human Cycle, Chapter 12, p. 134.

Reason does not have the authentic light, that is why all sorts of contrary theories or opposed ideas in the sphere of metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, sociology, and so on are equally and vehemently supported by reason. Reason seems to be guided by something else -- sometimes some interest, some motive, some propensity or drive. But in the midst of all these it is guided, Sri Aurobindo would say, secretly by the inner being, the spirit in man.

It [Reason] will equally well justify the one or the other [view] and set up or throw down any one of them according as the spirit in man is attracted to or withdraws from it. For it is really that which decides and the reason is only a brilliant servant and minister of this veiled and secret sovereign.<sup>19</sup>

To try to listen to the voice of this spirit in us is the way to go beyond reason and receive a light which is more authentic and more forceful. But is this light so new? Have not many people received it and spoken a good deal about it? Sri Aurobindo does not deny that. He recognizes some spiritual perception at the root of every major religious movement. But this spiritual perception which is the deepest heart of religion has been mixed up with many external things -- creed, cult, ceremony, symbol, etc. -- and in the process has gradually lost its force. Religions have done a lot to enlighten and civilize men, but they can no longer help men, not after the revolt of

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<sup>19</sup> The Human Cycle, Chapter 12, p. xii. The excerpt has been taken from Sri Aurobindo: The Future Evolution of Man, com. P. B. Saint-Hilaire (Pondy: Ashram, 1971), p. 37.

reason against them, not in this age of technology and global organization of life and society.

### Psychological Break-up of the History of Civilization

Sri Aurobindo has schematized the history of human civilization in two different ways. In one way he has used the following divisions: Infrarational, Rational, and Suprarational. In another way, he has divided the growth and development of a culture into five stages: Symbolic, Typal, Conventional, Individualistic, Subjective.\* He is conscious that no scheme can be adequate for all cultures, or perfectly fit any one culture. Yet the latter way, i.e., the five-fold division, gives a psychological interpretation of social growth and development that has a considerable force and validity in it. The early stage of human society is characterized by "a strongly symbolic mentality that governs or, at least pervades its thought, customs and institutions".<sup>20</sup> At this stage man's 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 symbolize those forces and types. The early Vedic period is a typical example of this stage.

This stage develops into what has been called the Typal

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\* He borrowed these terms from the German historian Lamprecht.

<sup>20</sup> The Human Cycle, Chapter I, p. 12.

stage when the growing intellect takes up the archetypal verities into its own mould and seeks to express them systematically in epics, philosophies and 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 formalize, 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>21</sup>

Medieval Europe and most of the Asian societies in the pre-modern centuries may be taken as examples 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, to reject anything irrational, however great or sacred that might appear to a conventional mentality.

The present age is the age of individualism. But Sri Aurobindo hopes that this age will be followed by the age of 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. Sri Aurobindo sees many signs of the approaching age of subjectivism which he hopes will usher in a

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



spiritual age of society.

### The Role of Religion

What could be the role of religion in ushering in the spiritual age, and if Supramental age is the culmination of the spiritual movement, what would be the place of religion in society then?

The great role of religion as a civilizing force in the past history of mankind has been undoubtedly recognized by Sri Aurobindo. But during the modern period

humanity got rid of much that was cruel, evil, ignorant, dark, odious, not by the power of religion, but by the power of the awakened intelligence and of human idealism and sympathy.<sup>22</sup>

In recent history, religions "have too often been a force of retardation, have too often thrown their weight on the side of darkness, oppression, and ignorance".<sup>23</sup> As a result many a sensitive man and group have revolted against religion. Sri Aurobindo has no support for this extreme reaction, for he thinks "religious instinct in man is most of all the one instinct in him that cannot be killed, it only changes its form".<sup>24</sup> That it changes its form is clear from the presence of strong religious

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., Chapter XVII, p. 193.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

elements in such atheistic movements as Marxism. On the other hand, disillusionment resulting from such secular movements as progressivism, technological revolution, etc., is giving rise to the ideas of reviving religion and going back to the old practices. This again is not desirable, if not impossible, from the point of view of human evolution. A disciple of Sri Aurobindo writes,

But this solution of the crisis of the modern age by a return to religion is from the point of view of human evolution a swinging back to a past stage of development and not a movement in the forward direction of true progress.<sup>25</sup>

So we see that Sri Aurobindo favours neither rejection of religion nor the revival of it in its earlier forms. He analyzes the causes of the disrepute of religion and suggests certain means of getting rid of them. He does not blame religion as such, he blames the infrarational parts of our nature, "our ignorant human confusion of religion with a particular creed, sect, cult, religious society or church".<sup>26</sup> He admits the necessity of creeds, rituals, intellectual ideas for the human mind as "aids and supports" but he insists that the foundation of religion is spirituality.

True religion is spiritual religion, that which seeks to live in the spirit, in what is beyond the intellect, beyond the aesthetic and ethical and practical being

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<sup>25</sup> K. Gandhi, Social Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and the New Age (Pondy: Sri Aurobindo Society, 1965), p. 212.

<sup>26</sup> The Human Cycle, Chapter XVII, p. 195.

of man, and to inform and govern these members of our being by the higher light and law of the spirit.<sup>27</sup>

When this high and truly religious ideal is compromised, what results is "religionism".

Religionism on the contrary entrenches itself in some narrow pietistic exaltation of the lower members or lays exclusive stress on intellectual dogmas, forms and ceremonies, on some fixed and rigid moral code, on some religio-political or religio-social system.<sup>28</sup>

Preponderance of religionism is, according to Sri Aurobindo, the root of the degradation of religion. But is this understanding of religion very common? Is it not an enlightened Eastern understanding of religion? A French disciple of Sri Aurobindo writes,

The so-called 'Hinduism' is an invention of the West; the Indian speaks only of 'the eternal law', sanātana dharma, which he knows is not an Indian monopoly but is also for the Mussulman, the Negro, the Christian and even the Anabaptist. That which seems to be the most important part of a religion for the Westerner, a structure which distinguishes it from all other religions and which says that a man is not a catholic or a protestant unless he thinks in this way or in this other and subscribes to such and such an article of faith, this is the least important part for the Indian, who instinctively seeks to remove all outward differences in order to find the whole world at a central point where all things communicate.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Satprem, Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness (New York: Indian Library Society, 1964), pp. 22-23.

This most liberal sense of religion was perhaps not the only sense prevailing in India; on the other hand, this sense was perhaps not entirely unknown in the West.

However, what Sri Aurobindo wants in religion is spirituality. Spirituality is the core of religion, it is the only thing that is important. By spirituality he means roughly the development of inner consciousness and moulding of life in the light of this consciousness, "A total spiritual direction given to the whole life and the whole nature can alone lift humanity beyond itself".<sup>30</sup> This understanding of religion does not in any way suggest a desire to go back to the older periods of history when religion governed the whole of life. Preoccupation with salvation, Heaven, personal liberation is almost irrelevant in this day. Secondly, according to Sri Aurobindo's understanding of history, we can never go back to the past; the experiences of the past make us a different people. Thirdly, the older ages (Symbolic, Typal, Conventional, as designated by him), though predominantly religious, were bound within a limited structure of belief and practices, whereas the spirituality Sri Aurobindo advocates as an aid to the advent of the Supramental age has to be most flexible; in fact, freedom would be its watch-word.

Spirituality respects the freedom of the human soul, because it is itself fulfilled

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<sup>30</sup> The Life Divine, Chapter XXVIII, p. 938.

by freedom; and the deepest meaning of freedom is the power to expand and grow towards perfection by the law of one's own nature, dharma.<sup>31</sup>

This tremendous stress on spirituality cannot respect the boundaries of different religions, nor the exclusive claims of any scripture. So the question of consciously reforming a particular religion does not arise at all. In fact, the indirect suggestion is to leave the organized religions behind, and go ahead with a spirit of universalism to the development of higher and higher unitive consciousness. This is how the religious instinct in man could best serve his evolution into the Superman.

One question remains to be considered. Would there be religions as we understand them in a general way in the Supramental society? We shall deal with this question at some length subsequently. Here this much can be said: that stress on pure spiritual development already undermines religions in organized forms; the introduction of the principle of Supermind is sure to disturb the whole gamut of human understanding and institutions. So it seems religions in their present forms have hardly any chance of survival in the New Age. The Mother, spiritual consort of Sri Aurobindo and head of the group organized around his teachings, has said something categorically in this respect:

In the supramental creation there will no more be religions. All life will be the

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<sup>31</sup> The Human Cycle, Chapter XVII, p. 201.

expression, the flowering in forms, of the Divine Unity manifesting in the world.<sup>32</sup>

### Triadic Movement in Evolution

However, conscious evolution would mean not only gaining higher consciousness, as was the spiritual aim until now, but also striving to bring it down and to let it work on the lower and external parts of our being. This will lead to the elevation of the lower and external parts. This process involves three movements: Ascent, Descent, and Integration. The whole process of evolution is said to have progressed through these three movements. The latent life (consciousness) in matter has ascended at the opportune moment propelled by the nîsus, it has been followed by the Descent of Life from its own typical sphere (these are not to be understood in the physical sense) which led to the taking up of the lower principle, in this case matter, and integrating it to the higher one, i.e., life. This is how, as the evolution of higher and higher consciousness has taken place, a corresponding change has come in the lower members. The physiology of animals is far more complex than the physiology of plants; the human body is much more refined than that of an animal. There might be similarities between human and animal psychology, but one is far more complex and diversified than the other. Only what has taken place unconsciously at the subhuman levels will have to be conscious at the human level. Man is not an automaton. He has the privilege

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<sup>32</sup> Bulletin of Physical Education, November, 1957.

of freedom, so he has the responsibility of participating consciously in the design of the Divine. It is the time -- the Hour of God -- says Sri Aurobindo, for man to decide and take the step. This is the only way to find a real solution to the problems besetting human life and society. As there are innumerable gradations in the stages of life and mind so also it is possible that there will be intermediate beings and societies between man and the race of superman. These intermediaries may not be permanent features. But nobody knows anything for sure. Evolution, though teleological, is not planned ahead in the details; it is an adventure of consciousness to the surprises of the known-unknown.

### Social Evolution

We have spoken of two-fold evolution: evolution of the form and evolution of the soul. Evolution of the form refers to the evolution of man's body, and his environment. Man's environment includes both the physical and social environment. It goes without saying that there is a constant interaction between man's physical existence and his environment. Evolution of the soul, on the other hand, refers to man's consciousness, -- the depth of his self-awareness. Interdependence of the form and the soul is obvious.

It is difficult to say whether any significant change has occurred in the texture of man's body over the milleniums. But a very drastic change has come in his physical and social environment in this age due to the advancement in technology. The

change in physical environment -- conditions of work, conditions of living, medicine, transportation, etc., must have some effect on the capacity of the body's resistance, assimilation, adaptation, and so on. Modern technology with its easy transportation, mass production, sophisticated methods of distribution, marketing, etc., has made all modern societies very mobile. But this mobility cannot exist without any effect on the human consciousness; that is to say, it must have an effect on the evolution of man's soul. In fact, not only are the territorial boundaries of nations becoming anachronistic, but also the boundaries of religion, race, art-form, thought-tradition, and so on. A young university graduate, who can find fault with the logic of Plato, does certainly not possess a keener mind than that of the great ancient philosopher. Nonetheless, it is a fact that in no pre-modern age was so much knowledge open to the majority of the people. Similarly, in no other period of history has the common man received the recognition he has now. To attack a neighbouring country and take its territory was legitimate not very long ago. Now we are looking forward to the elimination of war from society; until a few years ago it was difficult to even dream of it. All these are signs of an impending change in human form and psyche.

#### Man's Responsibility in His Evolution

We spoke of unconscious and conscious evolution and have said that in humanity a transition has taken place from one to the other. In fact, the transition has been slow and has not yet been



completed. It is man who has brought about change in his mind and environment, yet it seems that he has done that without fully knowing what he is searching for. Nature's intention or the design of the Divine has not been clearly understood by him. That is why, in spite of tremendous leaps forward, man is persistently clinging to old values, old institutions, old sentiments, old ideas about possession, domination, conversion, and so on. Sri Aurobindo says that it is time man realized his situation and the role he has to play in evolution, and act accordingly.

#### Sri Aurobindo as the Usherer of the New Age

How is he so sure that this is the meaning of life and existence on earth? He simply says that the meaning was revealed to him so he knows. One's claim to revelation is not sufficient to take him for his words. But there are other things. The message of the superman has not come as an isolated piece of precious knowledge. It has come along with the interpretation and assessment of the whole gamut of human thought and culture. It throws a flood of light on many issues of the present world that have been baffling human intelligence. Secondly, other people have spoken, one before and some others after him, of the prospect of man's surpassing himself, though not as clearly as himself. Many others are having glimpses and premonitions of the New Humanity. Last, but not the least, Sri Aurobindo devoted the greater part of his life to initiating a movement for the realization of the Superman. He worked hard, with considerable success,

to bring down the supramental Consciousness-Force with a view to transforming his body representing the human elements. All these carry a weight, and the concept of Superman demands serious attention.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A STUDY IN THE SOURCES

#### I. Deliberation on Methodology

Sri Aurobindo was born near Calcutta, India, on August 15th, 1872. His maternal grandfather, Rajnarayan Bose, was one of the leaders of the Indian Renaissance; his father, Dr. K. D. Ghose, was a high-ranking civil servant. The latter was an atheist in his views, anglicized in his habits of life, he was generous and he held high hopes about his children. When he was five, Sri Aurobindo was "sent, -- along with his elder brothers, -- to the Loretto Convent School at Darjeeling, run by Irish nuns".<sup>1</sup> Two years later, in 1879, he was taken along with the two older brothers and their sister by his parents to England. "The boys were entrusted to an English family, the Rev. William Drewett, a congregational minister, and Mrs. Drewett, who lived at...Manchester".<sup>2</sup> Sri Aurobindo was educated privately by the Drewetts; they gave him "a good grounding in Latin and made him proficient in English, besides teaching him history, geography, arithmetic and French".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> K. R. Srinivasa Iyenger, Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History, in 2 vols. (Pondy: Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, 1972, 3rd rev. ed.), p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

Four years later, in 1884, Sri Aurobindo was admitted to St. Paul's School, London, and remained there until 1889. The Head Master of the school was impressed by his abilities, "and especially his knowledge of Latin, and took him up to ground him in Greek".<sup>4</sup> He did remarkably well at St. Paul's, and among many other things he studied "the history of ancient, mediaeval and modern Europe".<sup>5</sup> He came to King's College, Cambridge, in 1890 with a Senior Classical Scholarship. He had also passed the Indian Civil Service Examination "securing record marks in Greek and Latin".<sup>6</sup> So at Cambridge he worked hard as a classical scholar as well as an I.C.S. probationer. However, he was not accepted for the I.C.S., either due to his failure to attend the riding test, or more probably to the fiery speeches he delivered as the Secretary of the Indian Mazlis. He came back to India in 1893, at the age of twenty-one, with his Cambridge degree in Classics and joined the Baroda State Service. He taught at the Baroda College for about twelve years, first as professor of French, then as professor of English. At the time he left Baroda he was the officiating principal of the college.

During his stay in England, his knowledge about India was not extensive, but he developed a strong patriotic feeling and almost a resolution to work for the political liberation of

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

India. About Yoga and spirituality, he had no interest at all. However, he had a feeling, we learn from his own testimony,<sup>7</sup> that he would play a significant part in the change coming over the world. This is corroborated by the account Dinendra Kumar Roy has left of Sri Aurobindo's life at Baroda.<sup>8</sup> Dinendra Kumar, a Bengali literateur, went to Baroda to help Sri Aurobindo perfect his knowledge of Bengali. He lived with him for a year in 1898-99 under the same roof as a friend and had the unique opportunity of observing him at close quarters. The unmistakable impression we have from the perusal of this book is that Sri Aurobindo was preparing himself for something great. He lived like an ascetic; he was quiet, meditative, and he studied enormously. He had no worldly ambition, although he was keenly concerned about the world. Dinendra Kumar writes,

Desireless, a man of few words, balanced in his diet, self-controlled, always given to study.

Again,

Sri Aurobindo is not a man of this earth, he is a god come down from heaven by some curse.<sup>9</sup>

Here at Baroda he turned gradually from an agnostic to a believer, but kept aloof from other-worldly mystical practices.

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<sup>7</sup> Sri Aurobindo, On Himself and on the Mother (Pondy: Ashram, 1953), pp. 11-12.

<sup>8</sup> Dinendra Kumar Roy, Sri Aurobindo Prasanga, in Bengali,

<sup>9</sup> A. B. Purani, The Life of Sri Aurobindo (Pondy: Ashram, 1964), pp. 46, 57.

In 1906, Sri Aurobindo gave up his job at Baroda and joined the political movement that was triggered by the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon, the then Governor General of India. In no time he became one of the foremost leaders of the Indian National Congress and a great source of inspiration to the youth for self-dedication to the cause of the mother-land. In the midst of hectic political activities he remained a brooding, meditative type of personality. He was arrested by the British India Government in 1908 and for one full year (May 4th, 1908 to May 5th, 1909) he remained in jail under trial. This period he considered an opportunity given to him by the Lord to discover the truth of himself and the world, and his part in it. He was acquitted and released from jail. Apparently he continued his political work, but with a remarkable change in tone. He now talks more and more about God. Country, humanity, politics, ultimate Reality, all these are brought together. In fact, the experiences in jail mark a turning point in his life and thought. They are the beginning of a series of experiences which took the shape later (he left British India and politics in 1910 and began to live at Pondicherry, Capital of French India where he passed away in 1950) of the philosophy of the 'Life Divine'. The solution of all human problems, he found, lay in the divinity latent in man. The meaning and purpose of humanity is to find out this divinity and forge a divine humanity -- a race of Supermen.

The philosophy of the Superman has been developed mainly

in the line of Vedanta; in its attempt, however, to account for biological and sociological evolution it has extended the scope of traditional Vedanta considerably. In the process much of occidental thoughts and ideas have been incorporated. And, as we have seen, Sri Aurobindo was well grounded in the Western traditions. It is, therefore, necessary to look for the roots of the concept of Superman both in the East and the West.

The concept of Superman as developed by Sri Aurobindo is not found as such in any earlier traditions, but some elements of it are traceable. In fact, Sri Aurobindo's concept of the Superman is intimately linked with a number of other ideas, e.g.,

- a) The world is a real manifestation of the Divine.
- b) Evolution is by and large the reverse process of involution; in other words, involution precedes evolution.
- c) Basic unity of all the grades of reality; thus matter is but a form of spirit.
- d) Transformation of the lower grades into its higher archetypal stuff is possible.
- e) Though the individuals are to lead, the idea is of collective evolution of humanity into a higher type.

In our study of the sources we have to trace these ideas in the traditions of India and Europe. Some of these ideas may well be traceable in other cultures, e.g., Chinese, Islamic, etc. But since we have no reason to think that Sri Aurobindo had any real contact with these traditions we shall restrict our enquiry to the Indian and European traditions. The European tradition we

propose to divide into three sections: i. Greek; ii. Christian; and iii. Modern European. Greek and Christian stand by themselves as two separate traditions; modern Europe is not just a combination of these two, it has its distinct character, and it comprises to a minor extent other elements than these two principal constituents of itself.

Our enquiry is primarily philosophical, and only secondarily historical and biographical. We shall, however, use biographical and historical data wherever it is feasible. The growth and development of the mind of a great thinker is an internal process and is seldom accounted for by external events of life. It is all the more true in the case of Sri Aurobindo who has dismissed his biography by saying that his life was not lived on the surface for men to see. He has, however, given an inkling of his internal life in some of his letters addressed to two of his intimate disciples -- D. K. Roy and Nirodbaran. We shall make some use of them.

Again, there is a difference in the manner in which a philosopher normally writes and in which Sri Aurobindo wrote. A philosopher writes after a systematic organization of his thinking, and he usually indicates the sources from which he drew certain ideas. Sri Aurobindo plainly says that he wrote from the silent mind and did not think out what he wrote. He writes to Nirodbaran:

Let me remind you also that when I was writing the Arya [in which periodical his major philosophical writings appeared first] and also since....I never think or seek for expressions or try to write in good style; it is out of a silent mind that I write



whatever comes ready-shaped from above. Even when I correct, it is because the correction comes in the same way.<sup>10</sup>

He had indicated in these letters that he had no philosophical talent, it developed later with yoga and "it burst out like a volcano as soon as I started writing the Arya".<sup>11</sup>

For us it is difficult to understand how he could produce thought without thinking. In any case, it is evident that in his case philosophizing did not follow the usual course. He does not quote anybody, he refers to other philosophers very rarely; only at the top of the chapters of his The Life Divine does he quote certain cognate passages from Hindu scriptures. In this situation the very attempt to trace the roots of his philosophy of the Superman in earlier thoughts tends to be questionable. It is, however, justifiable on the ground that his philosophy is not a thing in isolation; it is in continuation of the thoughts of humanity, particularly those of the two hemispheres referred to above. But the manner of his presentation makes it difficult to pin-point influences. Even when we hear clear echoes of some early thought, can we really assert with confidence that it is due to the influence of this or that? His philosophy has assimilated things of divergent character, but all are harmonized in a superb, gigantic synthesis. How can we say that he got this thing from that quarter and that thing from another? The system does not seem

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<sup>10</sup> Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, Nirodbaran (Pondy: Ashram, 1969), p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

to have been built like this. Even a superficial reading of some of the chapters of The Life Divine would rule out the idea that things were culled from different sources and put together in a coherent manner. Everything seems to have issued out of a central unitive vision.

So our study in the sources is bound to remain a tentative thing. We shall try to locate certain influences but never to pronounce that the influence is definitive unless we have reasons to do so.

Another difficulty in this search for the elements of his thoughts in other thinkers and traditions is that an element dissociated from its perspective loses much of its significance, and when joined to a different set of thoughts assumes quite a different meaning. ]

All the same, the social, political and historical setting of the life and thought of Sri Aurobindo cannot be ignored. Great creative minds go ahead of their time; yet, in most cases, their thoughts are answers to the problems of their times; that is to say, linked directly with the historical situation. It means that they are not unconnected with other thinkers who have thought more or less in the same period or along similar lines at other periods. Only we have to be careful in our search for influences not to obscure the fact that a great mystic thinker is speaking here out of the depths of his 'silent' mind and from the height of his creative vision.

## II. Indian

In his fundamental intuitions Sri Aurobindo is deeply rooted in the Vedas, and he has developed his philosophy in the lines of Vedanta.

In this our search for the roots of Sri Aurobindo's basic inspirations in the Indian tradition we are obliged to be guided mainly by his own understanding of himself vis-a-vis the Indian tradition. At every step there is a possibility of disagreement about the right stand and meaning of the scriptural texts and verses. In his exegesis of the Upanisads and the Gita, Sri Aurobindo is in direct confrontation with the Advaita school. As regards the Vedas, however, there is hardly any conflict with the traditional schools of Vedanta. His mystical interpretation of the Vedas which was followed up by Kapali Sastri with profound scholarship in the latter's translation and commentary on the Rg Veda, with a long introduction, has been widely accepted by the Indian scholars.

The concept of Supermind, or the Truth-Consciousness is vital in Sri Aurobindo's scheme of things. He claims that this concept is available in the Rg Veda.<sup>1</sup> The Vedic seers were aware of this vast dynamic Truth-Consciousness which is Force and Will as well. They referred to it as the fourth besides Sat Chit and

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<sup>1</sup>"It is the cryptic verses of the Veda that help us here; for they contain, though concealed, the gospel of the divine and immortal supermind". The Life Divine, I.14, p. 116.

Ānanda, "Turiyam Svid, 'a certain fourth', also called turiyam dhama, the fourth placing or poise of existence".<sup>2</sup> The principle of Knowledge-Will is sine qua non for creation or manifestation. Sat Chit and Ānanda, throwing themselves out into apparent being, would not be cosmic being at all "but simply an infinity of figures without fixed order or relation if they did not hold or develop and bring out from themselves this fourth term of Supermind, of the divine Gnosis...This power of self-limitation is necessarily inherent in the boundless All-Existent".<sup>3</sup> The Supermind brings out the cosmos in perfect order with the Laws of Becoming determining its movements. The Vedic gods "who in their highest secret entity are powers of this Supermind"<sup>4</sup> wield the Law and are engaged in the maintenance of the order (Rtam). "Their conscious force turned towards works and creation is possessed and guided by a perfect and direct knowledge of the thing to be done and its essence and its law".<sup>5</sup> In other details also Sri Aurobindo has traced the presence of the Supramental gnosis in the verses of the Rg Veda.

Evolution, according to Sri Aurobindo, is a reverse process of involution. The Divine has involved Himself into this world through a process of self-obscuraton, so is the opposite

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., I.17, p. 246 n.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., I.14, p. 116.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

process of gradual unfoldment. This idea of involution is there all through the Indian tradition. The "Purusa Sūkta" of Rg Veda (X.90, Rk 2-3) states,

The Purusa was all that is and all that will be, ruling over immortality he was all that grows by food. Such was his greatness; and the Purusa was greater still, whole world is a fourth of him, three fourths are immortal in the sky.

Devī Sūkta (Rg V.X.125) speaks in a similar vein, e.g.:

And it is I who, like the wind, breathe forth, and set all existing Worlds in motion. Beyond heavens and beyond the earth am I, and all this I have become in my splendour.

Rk 8

So also Nāsadiya Sūkta Rg. V.X.156,1 and 2.

This monistic idea of one reality manifesting itself as the world and yet retaining its transcendence is there in the Upanisads, the Gita and Tantric and other religious texts as well, for instance Br. U. 11.5.15 says, "As all spokes are contained in the axle, and in the felly of a wheel, thus also, all beings and gods, all worlds and all organs, also are contained in that self". Tait. U. 111.1 says, "That from which these beings are born, that in which when born they live, and that into which they enter at their death, that is Brahman".

There is scope of controversy regarding the exact import of verses like these. The Advaita school of Vedānta for instance, considers the manifestation of the Brahman into the world is not real, it is only apparent. Other schools of Vedānta, non-dualistic

Sāktaism, Kāshmir Saivism, and Saiva-Siddhānta, however, do not consider the world of Becoming as appearance. We shall, however, deal with this problem in greater detail in the next chapter. Here it is enough to state that the immanence of the Real in the world without which no idea of evolution can stand is borne out by most of the currents of traditional Indian thought.

Gradation of reality and different levels of consciousness is another common feature of the Hindu thought which supports Sri Aurobindo's spiritual interpretation of evolution.

Tait. U. (Chapter II, Section 2-5, Chapter III, Section 2-6) has spoken very clearly of the different grades of reality -- anna, prāṇa, mana, vijnāna, and ānanda, and that one is involved in the other, and the unfolding is gradual. It gives what is the reverse process of the self-manifestation of Brahman. Sankhya, Vedānta and other systems have described this process of involution in a slightly different manner. According to Sankhya, the creation has proceeded from Prakṛti, the ultimate ground, which is conceived as formless and undifferentiated, limitless and ubiquitous, indestructible and undecaying without beginning and without end. The first evolute is Buddhi or intelligence from which comes ahaṁkāra, from ahaṁkāra, again, are derived the subject and object series. The Vedānta has replaced unconscious Prakṛti by Māyā and maintains that Māyā is the material cause of the world (upādāna kāraṇa); the world evolves out of Māyā (māyā parināma), the first evolute being ākāśa, which is infinite, ubiquitous, imponderable, inert, and all-pervasive; from it comes the subtle elements (sūkṣma bhūtas) and

from the subtle the gross elements -- maḥābhūta (Brahma Sutra II.111).

The Grammarians maintain that the Supreme Word is the primal Reality (Sabdabrahman).

The Eternal Verbum lies beyond time and space, it is non-relational and featureless, and eludes all description by means of positive and negative predicates.<sup>6</sup>

But the objective world is the manifestation of this primal Reality known also as Parāvāk. And the manifestation is conceived to have taken place through a gradual process of Descent. From Parā has emanated Paśyanti. Paśyanti Vāk is the stage of synthetic unity of all diversification, and from it actually diversification proceeds through the intermediary subtle forms and forces (Madhyamā) until it becomes the external world of objective facts (Vaikhari Vāk). The Supreme Word (Parā Vāk) is not, however, diminished in any way by its self-manifestation.

The process of evolution which proceeds from the Absolute and occurs in it does not involve a change of being in the Absolute. The Absolute though identical with the plurality does not forfeit its simple unity at any stage.<sup>7</sup>

Kashmir Saivism has spoken of the Parama Siva's manifestation of the universe out of his own free will (citiḥ svatantra viśva siddhihetuḥ -- the Absolute citi of its own free will is the

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<sup>6</sup> Gaurinath Sastri, The Philosophy of Word and Meaning (Calcutta: Sanskrit College, 1959), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

cause of the siddhi of the universe)<sup>8</sup> and his coming down to the grossest forms and objects through gradual stages, although he is by no means exhausted by this process (citisankocātma cetanah api sankucita visvamaya -- the experient also, in whom citi or consciousness is contracted has the universe as his body in a contracted form).<sup>9</sup> Commenting on this verse, the author writes:

The magnificent highest Siva desiring to manifest the universe, which lies in Him as identical with Himself, in the form of Sadasiva and other appropriate forms flashes forth at first as non-different from the Light...Then He unfolds Himself in the totality of manifestations viz., worlds, entities, and their respective experients which are only a solidified form of cit-essence.<sup>10</sup>

From these schemes of involution follows almost as a logical corollary the evolution as described by Sri Aurobindo. For him, however, Prakṛti is not inconscient as in the Sankhya, nor appearance as in the Advaita Vedānta. He has avoided the detailed terminology used by these schools, and has shown that both the movements of involution and evolution are movements of consciousness -- one toward self-obscuration, the other toward self-finding.

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<sup>8</sup>Pratyabhi jñāhrdayam, verse 1. By Ksemarāja, it is a digest of the Pratyabhiñā Sāstra which embodies the metaphysics of Kashmir Saivism. Ksemarāja himself has commented on the digest. Tr. with Notes by J. Singh (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1963).

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., verse 4.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 43.



The Upanisads have always considered the different grades of reality -- anna, prāna, mana, etc., as different levels of consciousness.

### Special Affinity with Kashmir Saivism

Here we should mention some special affinity that we notice between the metaphysics of Kashmir Saivism and that of Integral Non-dualism of Sri Aurobindo.

In both the systems the ultimate Reality is beyond all determinations, it is utterly pure and transcendent; yet the universe has been said to have proceeded from the same Reality in both systems. Sri Aurobindo says Force is inherent in the Being. Kashmir Saivism also conceives Parama Shiva, the Ultimate, as possessed of infinite powers of self-manifestation.

Thus, in reality, the Universe is only an 'expansion' of the Power of Parama Shiva Himself; or -- to put it perhaps more correctly -- of Parama Shiva in his aspect as Shakti, by which aspect he both becomes and pervades the Universe thus produced, while yet he remains the ever transcendent Chaitanya without in any way whatsoever being affected by the manifestation of a Universe.<sup>11</sup>

The above quote summarizes the first principles of both systems.

The world is therefore, according to both, real and not a mere appearance. "The appearances therefore are not the forms of

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<sup>11</sup> J. C. Chatterjee, Kashmir Shaivism (Government of Jammu and Kashmir, 1914, Reprinted by Research and Publication Department, Srinagar, 1962), p. 47.

some indescribable, sadasadbhyām anirvācyā Māyā, but real, Sat, in essence".<sup>12</sup> The manifestation or the world of appearance has been technically called Vivarta in Advaita; as against this Kashmir Saivism calls it Ābhāsa. The world is real yet the way we see it does not have perfect validity. We are under the influence of Ignorance, we do not have the unitive vision so as to perceive the underlying unity of all things, i.e., to see things in their right perspective. Sri Aurobindo has not used the word Ābhāsa to designate this situation. This word may well fit his position.

As regards the mode and method of manifestation we come across further similarities. Both systems have conceived two aspects of the Divine Force, Pure and impure, Parā and aparā, and two levels of manifestation, spiritual and temporal. The archetypal world of Sat, Chit, Ananda and Vijñāna in Sri Aurobindo's scheme and the transcendental manifestations of Siva, Sakti, Sadasiva, Isvara and Sadvidya, all powers and forms of Parama Siva, in Kashmir Saivism are very similar. The process of how the pure Force (śuddha-māyā in one, and Supermind in the other) assumes an impure state (māyā, Overmind) and brings out the inferior worlds through self-obscurations is also strikingly similar. Ignorance or Māyā in both systems is only a limited and limiting consciousness and not an opposite principle of Consciousness (Prakāśa) as in Advaita.

We have noted that the idea of gradation of reality and

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

levels of consciousness is common, with slight differences in formulation, to Vedanta, Gramatical school of thought, and to Kashmir Saivism, presumably all of them drawing heavily on the Upanisads. Yet here also we notice a greater affinity between Sri Aurobindo and Kashmir Saivism. The terms used by the two systems to give the descending series of reality (tattva) or consciousness are quite different. But Kashmir Saivism, as well as Sri Aurobindo, has made it very clear that the higher principle is present, i.e., involved entirely in the lower ones while remaining what it is. "Thus the whole range of Tattvas are present in their entirety even in the lowest of them".<sup>13</sup> Sri Aurobindo has depended very much on this notion in the formulation of the details of his theory of evolution. Life emerges in matter not only because life-principle is involved in it but also because of the pressure from the world of life intact above. Kashmir Saivism does not seem to have followed up the notion of involution to develop a theory of evolution analogous to any of the modern ones.

However, although the similarities are great as regards the first principles and the process of involution, we come across a world of difference when we consider the details of evolution and the aim and meaning of existence. In these respects, in Sri Aurobindo, we leave behind all mediaeval associations. The world is no longer a wretched place from which every individual should

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

seek to escape through self-recognition (pratyaviṣṇā); it is a unique creation waiting for greater fulfilment through individual and collective transformation. This situation makes the similarities between the two systems all the more intriguing. Normally identical concepts are never found in two different systems.<sup>14</sup> And we do not have any evidence to show that Sri Aurobindo had any acquaintance with Kashmir Saivism. Therefore, an independent project to examine the two systems thoroughly would be a worthwhile scholarly undertaking.

In this connection the closeness of the 'philosophy of the word' to Kashmir Saivism and for that matter to the Integral Advaitism of Sri Aurobindo will figure prominently. These monistic schools are one in their view of identity of the Supreme Being and Power as opposed to Sankara's non-dualism where Power (Māyā) is only "a false adjunct".<sup>15</sup> Bhartrihari states clearly that the Eternal Verbum and its Powers are identical in essence -- Sarva Saktyātma bhūtatvam ekasyai 've'ti nirṇayaḥ (Vākya Padiya III. 1, 22).

As regards Sri Aurobindo's contact with the grammatical school of thought, we are on a slightly surer ground. He has used terms like Paśyanti, Vaikhari, in a number of his letters commenting

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<sup>14</sup> Dr. R. S. Srivastava writes, "The principle of Maya in Kashmir Saivism is identical with the principle of Overmind in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy". Sri Aurobindo and the Theories of Evolution (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1968), p. 208.

<sup>15</sup> Gaurinath Sastri, The Philosophy of Word and Meaning, op. cit., p. 19.

on verses written from mystical inspiration (vide Letters, 3rd Series, Pondy: Ashram). And his designation of the highest type of poetry as Mantra ("that rhythmic speech which, as the Veda puts it, rises at once from the heart of the seer and from the distant home of the Truth"<sup>16</sup>), and his description of the phenomenon of genius (Pratibha) as the dawning of higher knowledge and power in the mind -- "penetration from above into our mental limits" (The Life Divine, Book I, Chapter XXVIII, p. 252) bear resemblance to the philosophy of the Word.

In fact, the roots of the common doctrines referred to above are there in the Vedas and the Upanisads as well as in early Āgamas and Saiva literature. All the schools of thought have drawn on these sacred texts and articulated some of the doctrines in a special manner. Sri Aurobindo has drawn very consciously on the Upanisads and the Gītā. ("The only two books that have influenced me are the Gita and the Upanisads".<sup>17</sup>) It is possible that he was influenced by other things as well, although not so consciously.

The next important point in relation to the evolution of the Superman is the possibility of developing higher consciousness.

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<sup>16</sup> Sri Aurobindo, The Future Poetry (Pondy: Ashram, 1953), p. 11. Cf. Woodroffe's comment: "Mantras are manifestations of Kulakundalini which is a name for the Sabda-Brahman or Saguna-Brahman in individual bodies". Sakti and Sakta (Madras: Ganesh and Co., 1965), p. 486.

<sup>17</sup> M. P. Pandit, Reminiscences and Anecdotes of Sri Aurobindo (Pondy: Ashram, 1966), p. 131. (Compiled by Pandit.)

The whole of the Indian tradition -- Hindu, Buddhist, and Jaina -- speaks of this possibility. The liberation comes from an elevation to a higher state of existence, some kind of transcendence of ignorance and bondage. Different schools have conceived of this high state in slightly different ways. They have given different names to the liberated person -- Jīvanmukta, Bodhisattva, Tīrthankara, Divyācārī, etc. -- and described them in a slightly different manner. But what is common in all these is the belief in the possibility of one's developing into a higher type of existence through a particular discipline of self-culture attached to each school of thought. Sri Aurobindo's conception of the superman is a direct outcome of this legacy of the Indian tradition of liberation through yoga.

But in a very important respect Sri Aurobindo's conception of the superman differs from anything conceived in the past. Sri Aurobindo thinks not only of individual superman but also of a race of supermen. The collectivity is conceived to evolve gradually to a higher stage of life and being. When the Bodhisattva resolves not to get into Nirvana (final fulfilment) until all others are made ready for the same, the stress is purely on individual liberation, one by one. The idea of a society of the liberated is altogether absent in the Indian tradition. Liberation has been conceived basically as something trans-social. Sri Aurobindo's conception seems to be very new, but still it is not without its roots in the Indian tradition.

The Vedas do not emphasize liberation out of the cycle of Karma and rebirth, rather they emphasize the winning of Truth and Immortality, happiness on earth and in heaven. The gods are propitiated very much, since everything belongs to them; they are the guardians of the world. By sacrificing to them, by receiving their sanction and protection, the humans felt assured of their prosperity and good life.

Brahmanic ceremonies and Brahmanic law are systematized forms of the practices of the Vedic people. The ceremonies are classified into Śrauta and grihya.

The Śrauta ceremonies are literally those that are in accordance with Śruti or scriptural revelation, in opposition to the grihya rites, which are smārta, or based on religious tradition, smṛti.<sup>18</sup>

Agni-Ādheya, Agni-hotra, Pinda-pitri-yaṇa, Chāturmāsya are some of the Śrauta rites still prevalent in India; Grhya rituals, Jāta-Karma, Namakarana, Annaprāsna, Upanayana, Śrāddha, and so on, are almost universally practised in India even to this day. In all these ceremonies the gods are propitiated, the underlying idea being mutual relationship between gods and man, parasparam bhāvayantah śreyah paramavāpsyatha (fostering each other [gods and men] you shall attain to the supreme good) as the Gītā puts it (III, 11).

The Brahmanic law is embodied in a number of books, the most important of which are the following: Gautamadharmasāstra,

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<sup>18</sup> L. D. Barnett, Antiquities of India (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1964; originally published in 1913), p. 177.

Vasishtha-dharma-sāstra, Baudhāyana-dharma-sūtra, Mānava-dharma-sāstra, and so on. These are the sources of Hindu Law. These books cover all the different branches of civil and criminal law pertaining to personal and public life. Obviously here we do not meet any secular conception of law. Human life is conceived as part of the cosmos governed by Divine law of which the gods are the guardians. For example, Mānava-dharma-sāstra starts with an account of Creation; it states how originally everything was covered by darkness -- asīdīdam tamobhūtam aprajñātam alaksanam (I.5). Then appeared Light -- the Almighty self-existing Being, the creation of the multiple worlds followed, and order was established in them. All these suggest that a perfectible collective life organized on the basis of eternal law was then very much in the mind of the ancient sages.

The Gītā IV.7 says, "Whensoever there is the fading of the Dharma and the uprising of unrighteousness, then I loose myself forth into birth". This doctrine of the coming of the Avatāra at critical junctions of society to lead humanity to the right path may be interpreted as suggestive of a progressive social evolution.

Ten Avatāras spoken of by most of the Purānas suggest to Sri Aurobindo's mind some kind of gradual emergence of higher and higher types of existence on earth. Sri Aurobindo has looked upon this in the following way:

The Hindu procession of the ten Avatars is itself, as it were, a parable of evolution. First the fish Avatara, then the amphibious animal between land and water, then the land



animal, then man as dwarf, small and undeveloped and physical but containing in himself the god-head and taking possession of existence, then the rajasic, sattwic, nirguna Avataras, leading the human development from the vital rajasic to the sattwic mental man and again the overmental Superman.

Krishna, Buddha and Kalki depict the last three stages, the stages of the spiritual development -- Krishna opens the possibility of overmind, Buddha tries to shoot beyond to the supreme liberation but that liberation is still negative, not returning upon earth to complete positively evolution; Kalki is to correct this by bringing the kingdom of the Divine upon earth, destroying the opposing Asura forces.<sup>19</sup> The procession is striking and unmistakable.

### Transformation

Another important issue connected with the evolution of the superman is the possibility of the transformation of human nature. All major religions and some philosophical movements have emphasized the need of transformation of man's nature and approach to life and reality. To effect such a change some of the following have been used in various degrees and combinations by different traditions: faith, submission, devotion, meditation, contemplation, service to God and men, esoteric psycho-physiological practices, rituals, and so on. The aim in a general way

has always been, not information, but transformation: a radical changing of man's nature, and, therefore, a renovation of his understanding both of the outer world and of his own existence; a transformation as

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<sup>19</sup> Sri Aurobindo, On Yoga II Tome One (Pondy: Ashram), p. 405.

complete as possible, such as will amount when successful to a total conversion or re-birth.<sup>20</sup>

It may not be an overstatement to say that the Indian tradition has laid greatest stress on transformation, since here it is mainly through one's self-effort that one has to work out the salvation. Devotional schools have put a strong premium on Grace, no doubt, but in them also complete surrender and giving up of one's personal desires, likes, dislikes, ambitions, has been made the precondition for the Grace to descend in its completeness. In fact, each school of religious thought has conceived of an image of perfection according to its own point of view. For Theravada the Arhat, "a Buddhist monk who has attained enlightenment" (Zimmer, p. 492 n) represents the highest state, while for Mahayana, the Bodhisattva, a compassionate being who remains "at the threshold of nirvana for the comfort and salvation of the world" (Zimmer, p. 535) is the highest ideal. The Jains have conceived of the ideal of Tirthankara, a being poised in transcendent peace, who has "passed beyond the godly governors of the natural order". (Zimmer, p. 182). Advaita Vedanta is inspired by the ideal of Jivanmukta, literally, emancipated while living. "For him all world-appearance has ceased. He is the one light burning alone in himself where everything else has vanished for

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<sup>20</sup> H. Zimmer, Philosophies of India (Princeton: Bollingen Series, 1951), p. 4.

ever from the stage".<sup>21</sup> But Tantra has held before itself the heroic image of a Siddha, one who has attained the goal of Knowledge and Power (mukti and bhukti) after striving.

Sri Aurobindo's concept of the superman is in line with these images of perfection, but it differs markedly in two respects. First, it aims at a radical change of consciousness, and second, it has as its goal the transmutation of the whole earthly existence into something Divine; body and mind and life, all are to undergo a thorough change of the modes of their functioning. These evolutionary overtones relate to the other aspects of difference. All of these traditional ideals of perfection referred to above have been individualistic, i.e., to be pursued for one's own perfection, and others are touched only indirectly by such effort. On the other hand, emergence of the superman in Sri Aurobindo's ideal would imply the descent of the high, Supramental Consciousness-Force into the planes of the physical, the vital, and the mental, and working in the very stuff of them. This will mean the introduction of a new principle in human nature for its transformation, it will make it possible for others to partake of this transforming principle and evolve themselves consciously. Sri Aurobindo maintains that only a thorough supramental change of body-life-mind can make the principle of spirituality "affirm itself in its own complete

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<sup>21</sup>S. N. Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. I (Cambridge: University Press, 1932), p. 492.

right and sovereignty".<sup>22</sup> So far, it has been "a power for the mental being to escape from itself or to refine and raise itself to a spiritual poise".<sup>23</sup>

In the traditions of Hatha yoga and Tantric practices some kind of physical changes in the practitioner and achievement of supernatural powers (siddhis) are referred to. It is difficult to say how far these are real or mythical. Woodroffe has mentioned them briefly. He says those who succeed in these rather risky practices

do so in varying degrees. One may prolong his life to the sacred age of 84, others to 100, others yet further. In theory at least those who are perfected (Siddha) go from this plane when they will.<sup>24</sup>

We come to learn from a recent publication<sup>25</sup> embodying twenty-six letters of Sri Aurobindo written to one of his disciples during the early years of his stay at Pondicherry that Sri Aurobindo experimented with some of these Siddhis with considerable success. But what he means by Supramental Transformation is something entirely different. He considers the Hatha and Raja yogic

<sup>22</sup>The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter XXV, p. 792.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Woodroffe, Śakti and Sakta, op. cit., p. 441.

<sup>25</sup>Light to Superlight, com. Arun Ch. Dutt (Calcutta: Prabartak Publishers, 1972).

siddhis "uncertain in their application and precarious depending on the maintenance of the process by which they were obtained".<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand,

The working of the supramental power envisaged is not an influence on the physical giving it abnormal faculties but an entrance and permeation changing it wholly into a supramentalized physical.<sup>27</sup>

As regards this idea of transformation, he attempts an evaluation of himself in relation to earlier spiritual efforts:

I was putting forward a thing to be achieved,...not yet clearly visualized, even though it is one natural but still secret outcome of all the past spiritual endeavour.<sup>28</sup>

### Metaphysics of Transformation

This idea of the transformation of the entire human nature is based on a definite metaphysical position. In this respect Sri Aurobindo has the strong support of the entire Indian tradition.

According to the Sankhya, creation proceeds from unconscious Prakriti through the presence of conscious purusa. Prakriti is one, purusas are many. This dualism of conscious purusa and unconscious Prakriti has been rejected by Vedanta. (Brahma Sūtra, Adhyāya I, Pada IV, Adhik. VIII, Sūtra 23-27). According to Vedanta, the Real

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<sup>26</sup> Letters on Yoga, Centenary Vol. No. 22, p. 28.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>28</sup> On Himself, op. cit., p. 166.

which is Brahman is homogeneous. Brahman is "not only the efficient or operative cause (nimitta) of the world, but its material cause as well".<sup>29</sup>

Advaita Vedanta, however, explains this position in a special way. According to it, the homogeneity of Brahman is absolute. Strictly speaking, the world cannot be said to have proceeded from Brahman. In the words of Thibaut:

Brahman is associated with a certain power called Māyā or avidyā to which the appearance of this entire world is. This power cannot be called 'being' (sat), for 'being' is only Brahman; nor can it be called 'non-being' (asat) in the strict sense, for it at any rate produces the appearance of this world. It is in fact a principle of illusion.<sup>30</sup>

From the transcendental point of view, this principle of illusion and its product, the world, do not exist. Thus a sharp distinction is made in Advaita Vedanta between Brahman and avidyā or Prakriti. Other schools of Vedanta, e.g., Visistādvaita, however, say that the world has come from Brahman (Brahma parīṇama), but on the other hand, they fail to maintain the absolute unity of Brahman.

Some other schools of thought, viz. Kashmir Saivism, Grammatical school, Śākta Tantra, have tried to maintain the unity of the Reality -- transcendental and phenomenal. The metaphysical

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<sup>29</sup> The Vedānta Sūtras of Bādarāyana, tr. G. Thibaut (New York: Dover Publications), p. XI.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. XXV.

position of Sri Aurobindo is closest to them, and his philosophy of supramental transformation is based on this notion of the integral unity of Reality. Dr. Kaw sums up the analysis of Somananda's Sivadrsti, a representative work on Kashmir Saivism, with the following:

Somananda concludes the topic (sarva-śivata), saying that the Lord fashions by Himself His own self in the form of diverse objects:

tasmāt sa eva bhagavān svayam eva prakalpate, tathā tathā bhāva-rūpāḥ sann eva paramesvarah

*Sivadrsti Commentary, 47<sup>31</sup>*

According to the Grammarians, the objective world is "the manifestation of the different Powers of the Eternal Verbum".<sup>32</sup> The Ultimate Reality and its power have been conceived to be identical in these systems, as Bhartrhari says,

Sarvasaktyātma bhūtatvam ekasyai 've' ti nirṇayah

V.P. III. 1.22

The world is thus the creation of not avidyā but Supreme consciousness-force (kālaśakti, vidyā-māyā, parā-prakṛiti, ādyā-śakti); it is real as Brahman is real. Vidyā-māyā had, however, to assume avidyā māyā to manifest itself into the world of multiplicity. In this process

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<sup>31</sup> R. K. Kaw, The Doctrine of Recognition (Hoshiarpur, India: Vishevsvarananda Institute, 1967), p. 101.

<sup>32</sup> Gaurinath Sastri, The Philosophy of Word and Meaning, op. cit., p. 26.

of self-manifestation, many planes and levels of existence have been created according to these schools, and these planes interact one on the other since one (apara) is a diminutive form of the other (para), the lower nature of the three gunas may well be transformed into the higher nature.

Brahmacharya (literally, culture of Brahman or Self, derivative meaning -- "chastity of body and mind"<sup>33</sup>) which has been emphasized with varying degrees in all the schools of spiritual discipline in India is based on this idea of a lower energy turning into the higher. All energy is supposed to be latent in retas (seminal fluid). Self-control and purification of body and mind contribute to the increase and conservation of the energy in the retas; with the sublimation of some of this energy moral and spiritual capacities are heightened. For instance, in the Saiva tradition Paśu is said to turn into śiva; in Śākta tradition the paśu nature is said to be replaced by that of vīra. Of course, practice of Brahmacarya has to go with other things, e.g., rituals, psychological discipline, and so on.

This effort at sublimation, transformation, heightening of consciousness has taken two slightly different courses in the Indian tradition of sādhana. Śaktaiśm has emphasized the female or Prakṛiti aspect of the higher truth while Vedānta has emphasized the male or puruṣa aspect of the higher truth present in us. This

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<sup>33</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, The Brahma Sutra (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960), p. 164.



distinction between the Tantrik and Vedāntic method is well-known to Hindu sādhakas (practitioners of spiritual discipline). Of course, the distinction is not final. At many points the two methods coalesce; as Woodroffe points out, "Most of the commonly accepted ritual of the day is Tantrik".<sup>34</sup>

Sāktaism says that Divine Consciousness-Force is present in each of us as the Kundalinī.

The Cosmic Sakti is the collectivity (samaṣṭi) in relation to which the Kundalinī in particular bodies is the Vyaṣṭi (individual) Sakti.<sup>35</sup>

The Kundalinī is imaged as a coiled-up snake at the base of our spine, it has to be awakened, its awakening and rising up would mean the ascension of our consciousness. The Vedantic tradition has spoken of the presence of the same higher Consciousness-Force in terms of puruṣa, mamaivamso jīvo-loke jīva-bhūtaḥ sanātanaḥ (The Gītā, XV.7) and located the heart (Br. U. 4.4.22; Taitt. U. 2.1; Katha 1.14; 2.20, 3.1) as the sacred spot of its dwelling. The same thing has been described in the Rg. Veda VI 9.4 as jyotiramṛtam martyesu (the immortal light in the world of mortality). It is because of the presence of this direct representative of the Supreme in the midst of the world of Ignorance

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<sup>34</sup> Sakti and Sakta, p. 91.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 444.

that it is possible to transform the lower nature into the higher. This representative of the higher nature has been designated by Sri Aurobindo as the Psychic being. Keeping perfectly with the Upanisadic tradition, he has shown this to be the leader of our journey toward perfection. Rg Veda VI 9.5 has spoken of this steady light (dhruvam jyotih) as the guide of our life. In Br. U. III.7.3-23, it has been spoken of as the inner Controller, in Katha U. I.3. 3-9, and the Gītā, it has been described as the charioteer of our earthly existence.

#### Transformation as Related to Goal

It is clear that all of the different schools sought some kind of transformation -- purification of body, mind, complete reversal of the ordinary attitude toward life and so on. As regards the extent toward which physical change is aimed, we can make a gradation of the schools on the basis of their goals.

The primary aim of Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta is liberation. This does not necessitate any great change in one's body. As Woodroffe points out:

Liberation may be obtained by pure Jñānayoga through Detachment, then exercise and then the stilling of the mind, without any reference to the central Body-Power at all.<sup>36</sup>

Vaisnava schools, on the other hand, aim at communion

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 438.

with the Lord and different kinds of proximity (samīpya, sālokya, sāyujya, and so on) with Him. Intense devotion to the Lord produces certain effects on the body indirectly. These effects have been classified into eight different types known as asta sātṭvic vikāra (eight symptoms of Sattva). But since Vaisnava schools conceive of eternal difference between the jīva (individual) and Īsvara (God), they do not aim at any radical change of the physical. In fact, the communion with the Lord would be perfect when they give up the material body and continue to exist in the spirit-body in the spiritual realm. Sircar has brought out this point clearly, while dealing with the concept of supramental change envisaged by Sri Aurobindo:

The Vaisnavas conceive a sort of spirit-body, but they do not consider that flesh can be spiritualized. This conception of the spiritual and the material as two distinct orders of existence stands in the way of their accepting the possibility of spiritualizing the flesh. Hence they conceive the Divine forms to be purely spiritual.<sup>37</sup>

The aim of Tantra (saivism and Saktaism have used Tantric methods a good deal) is manifestly liberation as well as enjoyment.

In Kaula i.e. Tantric teaching, Yoga is Bhoga, and Bhoga is Yoga, and the world itself becomes the seat of Liberation (yoga bhogayate, mokṣayate samsarah).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> M. Sircar, Eastern Light (Calcutta: Arya Publishing House, 1935), p. 300.

<sup>38</sup> Sakti and Sakta, p. 441.

This aim follows directly from the idea of essential unity of the phenomenal and the transcendental, Śiva and Sakti, Prakṛiti and Puruṣa, matter and spirit. As we have already noted, Sri Aurobindo's position is closest to this. Yet, as regards aim, Sri Aurobindo goes a little further. Over and above liberation and enjoyment, he would emphasize the need of supramental transformation of body, life, mind as the way to the collective evolution of mankind into superhumanity.

Since the aim differs, the method also varies. It has already been noted that Sri Aurobindo followed the Vedantic method of making the inner being as the leader of the spiritual journey, as opposed to the Tantric method of awakening the kundalinī. Nevertheless, something of the method of Tantra has been incorporated in the conception of Integral yoga. In Tantra, kundalinī is expected not only to rise high up to meet the static puruṣa (Śiva) above, but also to come down after the meeting. In the process knowledge, power, bliss descend to the ādhāra (body-mind complex). To this process of ascent and descent Sri Aurobindo has added integration. This last movement properly effects transformation. And only the descent of the all-effectuating supramental can transmute the lower nature into something higher. In the words of Sri Aurobindo himself:

In our yoga there is no willed process of the purification and opening of the centres, no raising up of the Kundalinī by a set process either. Another method is used, but still there is the ascent of the consciousness from and through the different levels to join the

higher consciousness above; there is the opening of the centres and of the planes (mental, vital, physical) which these centres command; there is also the Descent which is the main key of the spiritual transformation. Therefore, there is, I have said, a Tantric Knowledge behind the process of transformation in this yoga.<sup>39</sup>

So we see, on the one hand, Sri Aurobindo is deeply rooted in the Indian tradition, and, on the other, that he goes beyond the tradition in his aims and methods. For him the world is not just a Līlā, it is more purposive, it is "a field of manifestation in which there is a progressive evolution of the soul and the nature..."<sup>40</sup>

This message of the evolution of the superman is an addition by Sri Aurobindo to the Indian tradition. And he states it clearly:

What I received about the supermind was a direct, not a derived knowledge given to me; it was only afterwards that I found certain confirmatory revelations in the Upanisad and Veda.<sup>41</sup>

Of course, this is a tremendous message. It brings a new look into the whole gamut of human effort, experience and spiritual achievement, both within and without the Indian tradition.

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<sup>39</sup> Centenary Vol. 22, p. 74.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

### III. Greek

Sri Aurobindo started learning Greek at the age of twelve when he was admitted to St. Paul's School, London. He later did his Tripos, as we have mentioned earlier, in Classics. "He also won the Rawley Prize for Greek Iambics", and other prizes, in King's College, Cambridge.<sup>1</sup> He was deeply impressed by Greek thought, myth, and poetry. In fact, he cherished Greek things all his life. His early poem, Songs to Myrtilla, is written in the form of an argument between two Greek characters — Glaucus and Aethon — about the respective beauty of Night and Day. Love and Death (1899), a narrative poem of 1,000 verses, celebrates the affairs of Ruru and his lady-love Priyuvada; the story has been taken from the Mahābhārata, but a critic says, "The story has its affiliations also with the Hellenic myth of Orpheus and Eurydice".<sup>2</sup> Perseus the Deliverer (1907) is a bold piece of drama. Here the Greek myth of Perseus and Andromeda taken from Euripides has been rendered in the language of modern thought. Perseus is portrayed as a hero who "inaugurates a forward movement in the history of humanity as the result of participating in a monumental clash of mighty opposites".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History, 2 vols., 3rd revised ed., 1972 (Pondy: Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education), Vol. I, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

Sri Aurobindo is full of praise for Homer and the early Greek tragedians. He has worked hard to forge a truly English Hexameter so as to transcribe the Homeric grandeur into English poetry, and he has left an unfinished epic in Hexameter -- Ilion (eight complete books and fragments for a ninth -- over 4,800 lines) -- in which part of the story of Troy from the point where Homer ends has been developed in a novel way. His little treatise on Heraclitus, written by way of reviewing R. D. Ranade's paper on the same philosopher, is a testimony of Sri Aurobindo's deep interest in early Greek thought and mystical tradition.

There is no doubt that Sri Aurobindo studied Greek history and literature extensively, but how extensive his study in Greek philosophy was is uncertain. His biographer, Iyengar, writes:

Before coming to Baroda, he had read something of Plato, as well as Epictetus, and the Lucretian statement of the ideas of Epicurus.

And he adds,

Only such philosophical ideas as could be made dynamic for life interested him.<sup>4</sup>

However, Sri Aurobindo has referred, time and again, to the Greek mystery tradition. He has also expressly referred in his The Life Divine, unlike his usual manner, to Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Socrates, Plato, the Stoics, and Epicurus.

Of all Greek thinkers, it is with Heraclitus that Sri

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

Aurobindo seems to have found his affinity most. He was unwilling to consider Heraclitus a pure rationalist. "He has something of the mystic style, something of intuitive Apollonian inlook into the secret of existence".<sup>5</sup> The aphoristic writings of Heraclitus reminded him of the "Vedic language and turn of thought",<sup>6</sup> and although the Vedic conception of Reality is not identical with the Heraclitean conception of Fire as the primary and imperishable substance of the universe, "there is a clear kinship".<sup>7</sup> Sri Aurobindo is unwilling to accept that Heraclitus' theory of perpetual change denied the Being and affirmed only the Becoming. He concludes with a thorough analysis of Heraclitus' writings that the latter recognized "the inextricable unity of the eternal and the transitory".<sup>8</sup> "Out of all the one and out of One all", as Heraclitus put it. Heidegger, in his attempt at reinterpreting ancient Greek terminology, has also shown that according to Heraclitus there is no opposition between Being and Becoming.

Becoming thus emerges from Being, rather than being in opposition, as the Western world has traditionally interpreted Parmenides and Heraclitus.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Sri Aurobindo, Heraclitus (Pondy: Ashram, 1968), first published in Arya (1916-1917), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Rhoda P. le Cocq, The Radical Thinkers: Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo (San Francisco: CIAS, 1969), p. 23.



In Heraclitus' account of the cosmos, Sri Aurobindo has seen "an evolution and involution out of his one eternal principle of Fire".<sup>10</sup> As Heraclitus says, "The road up and down is one and the same". In the 'conflagration' of Heraclitus he sees a clear correspondence with the Indian Pralaya as a part of the cyclical view of creation and dissolution. And when he forcefully states the view of Heraclitus that the world of becoming is a scene of constant strife and war ("Force created the world, force shall end the world, -- and eternally recreate it".<sup>11</sup>), we can hardly miss the fact that it is his own view too. This is the way he saw Heraclitus.

Of course, we are speaking of apparent similarity and not of any identity of views. It is extremely difficult to get a clear picture of the world-view of Heraclitus from a mere 150 aphoristic sayings left by him. However, scholars have put it as follows:

The clash of opposites is the very condition of life. Evil and good, hot and cold, wet and dry and the rest are each other's necessary complements, and the endless strife between them is the sum of existence. The only harmony possible is a harmony of conflict, a counter-pulling harmony like that of a bow or a lyre.<sup>12</sup>

The total balance in the cosmos can only be maintained if change in one direction eventually leads to change in the other, that is, if there is unending 'strife'

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<sup>12</sup> A. H. Armstrong, An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy, (Boston: Beacon Press), p. 10.

between opposites.<sup>13</sup>

In Sri Aurobindo's conception of the world, forces and clashes of the opposites play an important part, but there are many overtones and undertones in it. The picture of the world with many grades of reality (or consciousness) and their interactions is extremely complex indeed. And his idea of harmony is rather different -- it is no mere balance between opposing forces, it has to be more than that -- an integrated whole with cooperating coalescing elements.

Whatever might be the objective value of Sri Aurobindo's masterly analysis of Heraclitus, it remains a fact, however, that he drew some inspiration from his understanding of Heraclitus even though he was basically grounded in the Indian tradition.

Next to Heraclitus, Plato comes to mind in our search for the roots of Sri Aurobindo's thoughts in the Greek world. The two basic streams of Greek thought, Socratic and Pythagorean, meet in Plato. This is particularly manifest in Plato's conception of the soul, and in this respect we see a striking similarity between Plato and Sri Aurobindo.

The soul for Plato as for Socrates is the intellectual and moral personality, the most important part of man;...but Plato's doctrine, as I said before, has a double origin, and the soul for him is not only the personality, according to Socrates, but the divine soul of the Pythagoreans....The soul for him is truly

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<sup>13</sup> G. S. Kirk, The Pre-Socratic Philosophers, with J. E. Raven (Cambridge: The University Press, 1962), p. 195.

divine in the Greek sense; it is a being immortal in its own right and not by gift of any higher divinity, and therefore it has existed always, before its indwelling in any body, and will continue to exist after it has won final release from its chain of incarnations. Immortality is part of its nature.<sup>14</sup>

Another scholar, J. E. Raven, has given the Pythagorean position thus:

Pythagoras believed that 'life' was somehow a unity, a single mass, a part of which was scattered in an impure form throughout the world, while another part into which the individual soul would be reabsorbed after its final incarnation, retained its purity.<sup>15</sup>

The Pythagorean conception of soul depicted above is almost identical with the conception of traditional Vedanta. (An element of uncertainty, of course, prevails among the scholars regarding the exact position of Pythagoras, regarding the doctrine of the soul and its "effect on the cosmological side of Pythagoreanism".<sup>16</sup>) Plato has joined this with the Socratic conception of soul as the moral and rational part of our being. In one respect, the soul is other-worldly, in another it is a part of life in corporeal body. In Timaeus II.43, in an allegorical description, it is said that the human soul has been made of the same mixture as the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>15</sup> J. E. Raven, The Pre-Socratic Philosophers, ibid., p. 224.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

world soul, and therefore has the same structure, but it has some mortal additions.

Sri Aurobindo's conception of the Psychic Being is unique in the Indian tradition. It is the self or the soul of the Vedanta, but it is not just the Witness-self, it is involved in earthly life and is carrying the individual existence forward towards fulfilment which is, in one respect, the realization of identity with the Supreme, and, in the other, building of a divine life on earthly mould. The soul as a divine element is latent in everything, but in man it has come of age, as it were; it is no longer a mere principle, it is a being. It is the leader of individual existence. While describing it, Sri Aurobindo has referred to Socrates:

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 [*italics mine*], 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.<sup>17</sup>

It is difficult to say if the otherworldly conception of the soul coming from the Pythagorean tradition and the comparatively this-worldly Socratic conception of the soul as the integer of individual life on earth have been harmonized in the vision of

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<sup>17</sup> The Life Divine, Book I, Chapter XXIII, p. 207.

Plato. Sometimes one aspect comes to prominence, sometimes the other is emphasized. Copleston writes "that Plato asserted the immortality of the soul is clear enough". But then he asks, "Why did Plato assert the tripartite nature of the soul?" The answer he attempts is interesting:

Mainly owing to the evident fact of the conflict within the soul...Plato, therefore, takes as his point de depart the fact of experience that there are frequently rival springs of action within man; but he never really discusses how this fact can be reconciled with the unity of consciousness, and it is significant that he expressly admits that 'to explain what the soul is would be a long and most assuredly a godlike labour' whereas 'to say what it resembles is a shorter and a human task' (Phaedrus 246 a 4-6). We may conclude, then, that the tendency to regard the three principles of action as principles of one unitary soul and the tendency to regard them as separable remain unreconciled in Plato's psychology.<sup>18</sup>

In the final analysis, whatever may be the exact constituent of the soul, it remains, all the same, the link between the two worlds — phenomenal and archetypal. And we shall see later that as regards this idea of the soul's linking the two hemispheres Sri Aurobindo comes very close to the above writers' account of Plato.

In Phaedo it is clearly stated that it is the philosopher who particularly longs to die, for he realizes that so long as he is not freed from the body, there is no chance for him of escaping evil. In Theatetus 176, it is stated: "One must strive to flee

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<sup>18</sup> Copleston, A History of Philosophy, Vol. I, Greece and Rome (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1963), pp. 210-211.

from this world as quickly as possible". On the other hand, in The Republic, the soul's role as the establisher of harmony among the three parts of our existence, the rational, spirited and the appetitive (designated by Sri Aurobindo as mental, vital, and physical) has been emphasized. In Book VII, 514 A-521 B of The Republic, the rejection of the worldly life after attainment to the highest knowledge has been expressly forbidden:

Then, I said, the business of us who are the founders of state will be to compel the best minds to attain that knowledge which we have already shown to be the greatest of all -- they must continue to ascent until they arrive at the good; but when they have ascended and seen enough we must not allow them to do as they do now.

What do you mean?

I mean that they remain in the upper world, but this must not be allowed; they must be made to descend again among the prisoners of the den, and partake of their labours and honours, whether they are worth having or not.

There is a stress on descent after the ascent in higher consciousness for an effective existence on earth. This is an important feature of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of The Life Divine

Plato's account of the creation has, however, given the world a shadowy, almost an evil, character. Ideas are the highest reality in his philosophy, but they are static. The Demiurge creates the higher archetypal world according to the pattern given by the ideas. The human world was not, however, created by the Demiurge; he left it to the inferior powers. It is thus further removed from the Real. How can we think of the possibility of a

divine life in such a shadowy world? But the soul comes as the link between the two worlds — the Real and the shadowy, the eternal and the temporal. In Symposium, the Greek poet Hesiod has been quoted:

First Chaos came, and the broad-bosomed Earth,  
The everlasting seat of all that is,  
And Love.  
In other words after Chaos, the Earth and  
Love, these two came into being.

178 B

Love signifies the soul. In Tait. U., on which Sri Aurobindo drew heavily, we read tat sṛstvā tad evānuprāviṣat tad anupraviśya sac ca tyac ca abhavat, niruktam cāniruktam ca.... II.6.1. (Having created it, into it, indeed He entered. Having entered it, he became both the actual and the beyond, the defined and the undefined.) Sri Aurobindo apparently saw this view of the Tait. Up. and the view of the Symposium as similar. Socrates asks about Love:

What such a thing, Diotima?

A great daemon, Socrates. The entire world of the daemonic is intermediate between divinity and mortality.

What power does it possess? I asked.

Interpreting and communicating human affairs to the gods and divine matters to men.... Being in the middle, it fulfils both, and in this way unites the whole with itself.

The Symposium, 202 E.

N. K. Gupta gives the position of Sri Aurobindo regarding the soul or the psychic being thus:

The Psychic is like the wire between the generator and the lamp.... The Divine is the generator and the body, the visible

being, is the lamp. The function then of the Psychic is to connect the two. In other words, if there were no Psychic in Matter, Matter could not come in direct contact with the Divine.<sup>17</sup>

In Symposium it has been established that all human yearning for the eternal in the forms of Truth, Beauty, Good, etc. originates from the presence of this divine principle in man, and that it is from lesser forms of these divine verities that the journey starts to be culminated in the finding of the Supreme Beauty, "the great sea of beauty" (Symposium 210 D) and, for that matter, of supreme Truth, Good, and so on.

Sri Aurobindo has developed these two ideas, e.g., i) the indwelling soul is the root of all longing for the divine verities of Truth, Beauty, Delight, Good, etc., and ii) that the journey is progressive — starting from the infra-rational, it reaches, through the rational, to the supra-rational vision of Truth, Beauty, etc., in a number of essays in his The Human Cycle. The style and method of treatment are obviously different, and there are some disagreements in the details, e.g., about the status of role of poetry, but essentially the ideas are the same as in the Symposium.

As regards the idea of evolution of men into a higher type of being, nothing can be traced in Plato. Nevertheless, Plato gave serious thought to the perfection of collective life. The

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<sup>17</sup> The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, Parts V-VII (Pondy: Sri Aurobindo Ashram), p. 287. These writings are based on the talks of the Mother, the spiritual consort of Sri Aurobindo.



Republic and The Laws bear ample testimony to this. In fact, The Republic has influenced all subsequent thoughts regarding an ideal society until this day. The philosopher-rulers of the ideal republic are certainly not the supermen of Sri Aurobindo's conception, yet they are integrated personalities with a profound love for wisdom, their passions under control, desires minimized, attention focused on the contemplation of the Truth and the pursuit of Justice for all. But Plato takes the wickedness of some people and the limitations of the citizens in general for granted, and he wants the guardians of the state to deal with them severely. In this respect Sri Aurobindo differs greatly from Plato. Of course, Plato's guardians are not just autocratic rulers, it is their superior knowledge and character that give them the position of authority. Yet in Plato's conception of the ideal society we notice a relatively great stress on external organization and the use of power. For instance, he recommends the banishment of the poets. In Sri Aurobindo's conception of the gnostic community, or the intermediate society of "The New Humanity" preceding the gnostic community, enforcement of authority has no place at all. The more developed beings, the leaders of the society, do not impose anything on the others -- they only help them to develop. They are like elder brothers to the less evolved ones and not rulers over them. This may seem rather too idealistic, but Sri Aurobindo anticipates a radical uplifting effect on humanity of the Descent of the Supermind on the physical plane.

It is in regard to the idea of the transformation of human nature and the possibility of man's evolving into a higher type of being that Sri Aurobindo moves into an altogether different course. Plato did not believe that the mortal nature could be transformed into the elements of the immortal world. So, for him, escape of the soul from the bondage of mortal parts remained the eventual aim of life. Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, wanted the transformation of the mortal into the stuff of the immortal. So, for him, the Greek ideal of life,<sup>18</sup> however lofty, cannot be "either the highest or the widest goal of social development".<sup>19</sup>

The view of history upheld by Plato is also opposed to a general collective progress. Of course, he did not subscribe to the earlier traditional view that history was moving through a process of decline and that the earliest age was the golden age. But he was a votary of the cyclical view; it means that even if the ideal state is ever realized it will inevitably be followed by a regressive movement. He does not seem to have seen, unlike Sri Aurobindo, the prospect of a stable and ongoing progress until the aeonic destruction. However, there is some uncertainty about the exact position of Plato in this regard:

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<sup>18</sup>"The Hellenic ideal of an all-round philosophic, aesthetic, moral and physical culture governed by the enlightened reason of man and led by the wisest mind of a free society". Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle, Chapter XIII, p. 136.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

Whether Plato held that an ultimate cyclic destruction in the future was inevitable, or whether he believed that with Divine aid, human intelligence and devotion might be capable of setting up a sound and lasting society on the earth is uncertain. But the Laws end on a hopeful note.<sup>20</sup>

A great deal of similarity is found between Sri Aurobindo's conception of the Reality and that of Plotinus, the last great thinker of the Greek world. Plotinus conceives of the ultimate reality as One, out of which has emanated the Spirit or Intelligence or Divine Mind, and out of this, the Soul (these three forming the higher hypostases). From the Soul has emanated the lower world of body and matter. This hierarchic conception of the reality, and its two broad divisions of higher and lower hemispheres is to be found in Sri Aurobindo also, although certain differences are there in the details. Again, as in Plotinus', so also in Sri Aurobindo's conception, the One does not diminish due to the emanation from it of the other principles, and in both systems the world has a status; it is no mere shadow of the Reality, and the Soul with its higher and lower aspects stands as the link between the higher and the lower worlds. In another respect also the similarity between these thinkers is striking: both have combined in themselves philosophy and religion -- thought and mystical union with the Truth.

However, despite all of these similarities, we see

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<sup>20</sup> John Wild, "The Concept of Man in Greek Thought", in The Concept of Man, ed. Radhakrishnan and Raju (Lincoln: Johnsen Publishing Co.), p. 75.

striking differences when we look at the issues more closely. The One is the transcendental Reality in both systems. Both thinkers have tried to show that One is the ground of all existence and is limited by nothing. The One is described better in negative terms rather than in positive terms. But Plotinus has gone too far in this method, he has divested the One of all contents so much so that the One has been said to be void of consciousness. "Plotinus repeatedly and strongly states that the One is void of any cognition and is ignorant even of itself (IV 9[9], Ch. 6, I.42; III 9 [13], Chs. 7, 9)".<sup>21</sup> According to Sri Aurobindo, the One is supreme Consciousness, and 'unconscious' is the attribute of the lowest grade of the manifestation. Of course, Plotinus has qualified his statement in some places; the One has been called "the Good", and some kind of self-awareness has been attributed to it (V 4[7], Ch. 2, I.16). Again, in Plotinus the One emanates out of necessity; in Sri Aurobindo creation proceeds from the free will of the Supreme. The latter position seems to be more compatible with the freedom of the transcendent One.

Copleston cautions us against reading a monistic or pantheistic theory of creation into Plotinus "without due qualification".<sup>22</sup> Plotinus pictures the emanation of light from the

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<sup>21</sup> Philip Merlan, "Plotinus", in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. 6 (New York: Macmillan Co. and Free Press), p. 353.

<sup>22</sup> F. Copleston, A History of Philosophy, Vol. I, Part II (A Doubleday Image Book), p. 211.

centre, and as the light passes outward it grows dimmer and dimmer gradually, "until it shades off into that total darkness which is matter-in-itself".<sup>23</sup> But in the darkness of the matter the presence of the centre is dubious. Of course, the soul is the link between matter and spirit, and matter can rise above its grossness by the influence of the form, but "such influence is not the influence of an agency working within, but that of one which is more or less external".<sup>24</sup> It seems that matter has no inherent possibility of being transmuted into something divine.

If "emanation" is the word to describe the hierarchial structure of reality/as conceived by Plotinus, "Descent" is the correct word to describe Sri Aurobindo's understanding of the structure of the world of manifestation. Descent implies the positive presence of the Divine even in the grossest matter. In fact, following the Upanisadic tradition, Sri Aurobindo has spoken of the presence of the Being at every grade of our existence — physical, vital, mental, and so on. Because of this presence of the Being in the lower grades of reality, and the lower grades being the diminutive forms of the higher hypostases, they have an inherent potentiality of being transmuted into divine elements.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>24</sup> S. K. Maitra, "Sri Aurobindo and Plotinus", in his The Meeting of the East and the West in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy (Pondy: Ashram, 1956, Reprint, 1968), p. 201.

It is not only the indwelling soul which aspires to meet the Infinite, but body, life, and mind themselves have a drive in them to transcend their limitations. This is the idea behind Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of transformation and divine life on earth. In Plotinus, the journey is of the lonely soul toward the One — "A flight of the alone to the alone", as Plotinus put it. The body and mind cooperate in this journey by submitting to the influence of the form, but they themselves do not, rather cannot, participate in the union with the One.

It has to be borne in mind that Sri Aurobindo's conception of divine life is not just a life of reason, not even of higher gnosis in a body and mind subject to earthly imperfections. For him divine life would mean, on one hand, surpassing reason and attaining to higher gnosis, and, on the other, exceeding the limitations of the body and mind, and their transmutation into higher archetypal shapes in earthly mould. In this sense the idea of divine life is not to be found in Plotinus, and for that matter, in any other thinker of the Greek world. Again, divine life is not an individualistic concept. It has of necessity to be a collective phenomenon. But Plotinus, of all ancient mystical thinkers, is most isolationist and individualist in his conception of the multiple souls' journey back to the original One.

However, both Plotinus and Sri Aurobindo have given a high place to philosophical knowledge in the soul's effort at ascending to the One. But here also a difference is noticeable.

Plotinus would recommend the annihilation of the intellectual knowledge for the "vision" of the One:

Awareness of the One comes to us neither by knowing nor by the pure thought that discovers the other intelligible things, but by a presence transcending knowledge. When the soul knows something, it loses its unity; it cannot remain simply one because knowledge implies discursive reason and discursive reason implies multiplicity.

VI, 9[9], Ch. 4.

Sri Aurobindo would suggest leaving discursive reason behind, yet he would not say that the One cannot be known, it is known by identity. Knowledge by identity is not discursive knowledge, yet it is knowledge; in this the reason is not annihilated, it is heightened and fulfilled. Since Sri Aurobindo is concerned more with the life on earth and its advancement than with the flight of the soul, he is keen about bridging the gulf between reason and supra-rational Knowledge. He is not only conscious about the limitations of reason but also about those of the Intuition. He writes, "Intuition is unable to give us the truth in that ordered and articulated form which our nature demands".<sup>25</sup> As he would like to heighten the intellect by intuition, so also he would like intuition to lend itself to the ordering of reason so as to be of greater service to humanity. He says:

There must be a bridge between the spirit and the intellectual reason: the light of a spiritual or at least a

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<sup>25</sup> The Life Divine, I.8, p. 65.

spiritualized intelligence is necessary for the fullness of our total inner evolution, and without it, if another deeper guidance is lacking, the inner movement may be erratic and undisciplined.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, according to Sri Aurobindo, philosophical knowledge "receives completion and does not suffer annihilation in supramental knowledge".<sup>27</sup>

It is in connection with this bridge-building that we see some other points of contact between Sri Aurobindo and the Greek tradition. He considered the Pythagorean, Stoic and Epicurean systems as spiritual philosophy.<sup>28</sup> The aim of this philosophy was to express the spiritual truth in terms of the intellect so that the intellect may be able to conceive the spiritual truth and discipline itself appropriately. Sri Aurobindo has followed the same method in his philosophical writings, and thus has tried to build "a bridge between the spirit and the intellectual reason".<sup>29</sup>

We have mentioned Sri Aurobindo's great appreciation for Homer and the Greek tragedians. The Greek view of life as reflected in the works of Homer, and the tragedians in particular,

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., II.24, pp. 782-783.

<sup>27</sup> S. K. Maity, The Meeting of the East and West..., p.

<sup>28</sup> The Life Divine, II.24.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 782.



seems to have stirred the soul of Sri Aurobindo, and he seems to have formulated his ideas of Greek thought in the manner outlined below. It is a tragic view of life. An inscrutable fate seems to dominate man's life; he is a victim of forces over which he has no control. The point may better be brought out through a concrete example. Let us consider the fate of King Oedipus in the famous play of the same name by the Greek playwright Sophocles. Oedipus was exposed as a baby for no fault of his own, he became the murderer of his father unknowingly, he married his mother and begot children by her unknowingly, and when the dire knowledge came upon him he could not but pierce his eyes so that he might not see his mother who was now his wife. Loss of kingdom and other calamities followed suit. He was a worthy king, a valiant warrior, a loving husband and affectionate father. What was it that had hurled him down to the pit of bottomless suffering? Fate -- inscrutable, inexplicable, against which no revolt prevails. The idea of nemesis does not lead us anywhere near a reconciliation, for Oedipus did not knowingly do anything seriously wrong.

This situation raises most fundamental questions about the meaning of life -- why and wherefrom this thing called Fate? It seems that the Greek mind did not come to any satisfactory answer. The naturalists tried to rationalize suffering,

The most formidable of all evils, death, is nothing to us, since, when we exist, death is not present to us; and when death is present we have no existence. It is no

concern then to either the living or the dead.<sup>30</sup>

whereas idealists, like Plato, recommended the flight of the soul from the fetters of physical existence. Death has been considered the most desired by the philosopher.

The Greeks obviously did not have the Christian answer to this wrongness of existence. "'Christ', declared St. Paul, is 'to the Greeks foolishness' because they seek after 'wisdom'!"<sup>31</sup> In a word, their understanding of the world did not create any expectation for the Christ.

During the Renaissance, again, the Christian answer was by-passed and the same old soul-stirring questions about the meaning of life were raised by the tragedians, the Elizabethans in particular. Shakespearean heroes like Hamlet and Othello have defects in their characters, but the doom they meet is by no means proportionate to these defects. Hamlet's incapacity to make quick decisions, or Othello's rash actions are only channels through which Fate works itself and no real cause of their demise. The absurdity of life looms large here also as the inevitable suggestion.

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<sup>30</sup>From a letter of Epicurus to Menaeceus in Diogenes Laertius' Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers, Yonge's tr., p. 468. This excerpt is taken from R. Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, p. 9.

<sup>31</sup>R. Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), p. 11.

Sri Aurobindo's studies in the Renaissance tragedies (he was a very keen student of Shakespeare) probably reinforced in his mind the great questions about the meaning of life raised by the Greek poets and playwrights. On the other hand, both the early Greek and the Renaissance authors betray a tremendous love of life. This makes the questions about life all the more poignant.

Sri Aurobindo was conscious that there was no tragedy in Sanskrit literature, and he read in it a lack of depth. He could not, therefore, put Kalidasa as a dramatist by the side of any of the early Greek tragedians -- such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, -- although he rated Kalidasa very high as a poet. (Vide Letter of Sri Aurobindo, 3rd Series.)

The Indian theory of Karma makes it easy, apparently, to reconcile to the calamities of life, but is it very different from the Greek Fate? One has no control over one's previous Karma, it is unseen (adrsta) and inexorable -- niyati kena bādhyate (who can arrest the course of destiny?), as the Ājivakas would say.

If for Sri Aurobindo Karma and rebirth as generally understood in the tradition were adequate answers to the questions of life, he would be satisfied with the corollary of this theory which is to work for the release of the soul from the cycle of existence, since existence is bound to remain under the domination of the three gunas and for that matter of Karma and rebirth. This is the most common attitude of the Indian mind and in this it does not seem to differ fundamentally from the Greek idealist tradition.

But it seems that the early Greek humanist tradition left an indelible mark on Sri Aurobindo's mind. He remained a lover of life and opposed to asceticism. This must have been reinforced by his studies in the Vedas, Upanisads, and the Tantras. If everything was manifestation of the Delight, if Delight underlies all apparent suffering, why not the whole of existence be a thing of delight? Sri Aurobindo thinks that Greek and subsequent European thought, "such of it at least as has not been profoundly influenced by Asiatic religions or Asiatic mysticism",<sup>32</sup> did not know much of this third aspect of the Reality, Delight, although he admits the presence of a little of this knowledge in Heraclitus. He adds:

Of this last secret power Western thought has only seen two lower aspects, pleasure and aesthetic beauty; it has missed the spiritual beauty and spiritual delight.<sup>33</sup>

This search for meaning and perfection of life seems to be at the root of his philosophy of the Life Divine. We shall deal with The Life Divine in the following chapter. Here in our consideration of the lingering Greek humanist tradition in his concept of the Superman, we would rather deal briefly with the greatest of his poetical works, Savitri, A Legend and a Symbol. This epic poem of about 25,000 lines is considered by many of equal importance with

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<sup>32</sup> The last section, VII, of Heraclitus.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

The Life Divine. In many respects Savitri is more concrete, since it is poetry, in the delineation of the human problem, the way to perfection and the conquering of evil itself. It is also largely autobiographical in its essence. "The poem was in some measure -- perhaps in substantial measure -- his own spiritual autobiography".<sup>34</sup>

However, Savitri is based on the legend, taken from the Mahābhārata, of princess Savitri's marrying Satyavan, a prince in exile with his parents; even though she came to know, after her selection, that the prince was destined to die just after one year; she succeeded eventually by sheer force of love and chastity to get her husband back from the clutches of the god of Death.

In Sri Aurobindo's Savitri, in the words of the poet himself:

Satyavan is the soul carrying the Divine Truth of being within itself, but destined into the grip of death and ignorance. Savitri is the Divine Word...who comes down and is born to save.

Savitri fights as a woman, although divine within, for humanity and shows man

the way from his mortal state to a Divine consciousness and immortal life.<sup>35</sup>

The mother of Savitri tried to dissuade her from marrying Satyavan, but in vain. Savitri answers, "Once my heart chose and chooses

<sup>34</sup> Iyengar, op. cit., p. 1235.

<sup>35</sup> Sri Aurobindo, Mother India, June, 1971, p. 312; taken from Iyengar, op. cit., p. 1205.

not again". She adds, "Fate's law may change, but not my spirit's will".

The poet speaks of Sāvitrī:

To wrestle with the Shadow she had come  
And must confront the riddle of man's birth  
And life's brief struggle in dumb Matter's  
might.

Whether to bear with Ignorance and Death  
Or hew the ways of Immortality,  
To win or lose the godlike game for man,  
Was her soul's issue thrown with Destiny's  
dice.

Book I, Canto II

A discerning reader may well see in the verses a reflection of the great question about life and Fate. The following description of the human situation is more eloquent about the Greek legacy:

The Dragon of the dark foundation keeps  
Unalterable the law of Chance and Death;  
On his long way through Time and Circumstance  
The grey-hued riddling nether shadow-sphinx,  
Her dreadful paws upon the swallowing sands,  
Await him armed with soul-slaying word:  
Across his path sits the dim camp of Night.  
His day is a moment in perpetual Time;  
He is the prey of the minutes and the hours.

Book III, Canto IV

Before concluding this section, it must be stated that the author is aware of the fact that his understanding of Greek thought is very inadequate, and his search for Greek elements in Sri Aurobindo's thought is no more than a conjecture.

#### IV. Christian

The most impressionable period of his life -- from the age of seven to twenty-one -- Sri Aurobindo passed in England. That was during the last quarter of the nineteenth century when Christianity was definitely a living force in England, particularly in its schools and colleges. He lived first with the family of a Congregational minister at Manchester (1879-1884). He attended services in the Church occasionally, but, as we learn from his memoirs, he did not appreciate them. From Manchester he came to London to study at St. Paul's School (1884-1890), and from there he proceeded to Cambridge. He did his Tripos in Classics, but he was a keen student of English literature and was writing poems in English regularly. He was thoroughly acquainted with European history and culture, and his writings show that he was not unacquainted with the doctrines of the major denominations of Christianity.

In a way, all the modern Indian thinkers have been influenced by Christianity since they have assimilated a good deal from the modern West of which Christianity is an important constituent. How far should the modern West be considered Christian? This is a big issue. On the proper answer to this question will depend the extent and character of Christian influence on modern Indian thought. Christian writers see Christianity in everything of modern India, so much so that some have considered Gandhi and Tagore unbaptized Christians. On the other hand, Indian writers in general try not to see Christian influence on their ideas. We shall deal with this

issue in the next section. Here our attempt will be to trace specific links between Christianity and the concept of Superman with its concomittant ideas.

Here we must remember that there is hardly any unanimity regarding even the principal tenets of Christianity among different denominations. Diversity of interpretation is so great regarding every issue that it is almost impossible to say anything in the name of Christianity; so, when we say something in the name of Christianity, what we mean is that some major school or schools of Christianity subscribe to this view. Of course, if we ignore the minor differences in interpretation, it is possible to say something in the name of Christianity while contrasting it with Indian religions -- the two being two different types -- without getting into serious errors.

In Sri Aurobindo's concept of Superman the idea of Descent figures very prominently. The Supramental consciousness descends on the body, life, and mind, cleanses them of their Ignorance, transforms them and takes them into its own mould. Now, Descent, though in a slightly different sense, is a central Christian idea. God has descended in humanity in the form of Jesus Christ, and, having suffered, paved the way for man's deliverance from sin. In explicating the doctrine of Incarnation (avatāra), Sri Aurobindo has used Christian imagery, but what the Christians consider a unique single act of grace has been taken by him as a general fact of periodical Descent governing the principle of



spiritual evolution. According to him, each avatāra came to bring down certain levels of consciousness and establish them on the earth (Rama brought down the sattvic mind, Krishna the Overmind). He even found fault with the Christian understanding of the phenomenon and indicated that the Hindu tradition, particularly the Gītā, stood for his view. We have to quote him extensively to demonstrate his position.

The Avatara comes as the manifestation of the divine nature in the human nature, the apocalypse of its Christhood, Krishnahood, Buddhahood, in order that the human nature may by moulding its principle, thought, feeling, action, being on the lines of that Christhood, Krishnahood, Buddhahood transfigure itself into the divine. The law, the Dharma which the Avatar establishes is given for that purpose chiefly; the Christ, Krishna, Buddha, stands in its centre as the gate, he makes through himself the way men shall follow. That is why each Incarnation holds before men his own example and declares of himself that he is the way and the gate; he declares too the oneness of his humanity with the divine being, declares that the Son of Man and the father above from whom he has descended are one, that Krishna in the human body, mānusiṁ tanuṁ āśritam, and the Supreme Lord and friend of all creatures are but two revelations of the same divine Purushottama, revealed there in his own being, revealed here in the type of humanity.<sup>1</sup>

Along with the Descent of God into humanity the idea of the Ascent of man into divinity is equally prominent in this conception

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<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo, Essays on the Gita, Book I, Chapter 15, p. 133.

of Avatarhood.

One is a descent, the birth of God in humanity, the other is an ascent, the birth of man into the Godhead, men rising into the divine nature and consciousness, madbhāvam āgatāh.<sup>2</sup>

In the Gītā, verses 7 and 8 of Chapter IV, it has been said that the Divine incarnates at the time of critical junctures of history with a view to re-establish Righteousness having destroyed the forces of evil and darkness.

Sri Aurobindo says that we have to read the verses minutely and in the context of the whole teaching, to arrive at their true import. No mere upholding of Dharma is sufficient ground for the Divine's incarnation; the new birth of humanity into the divine nature is also intended, rather the latter is the more cogent necessity. He also says that this idea of God's revelation in humanity was there in Indian consciousness from very ancient times, and due to the absence of this idea in the West Christ's incarnation could not be rightly understood.

India has from ancient times held strongly a belief in the reality of the Avatar....In the West this belief has never really stamped itself upon the mind because it has been presented through exoteric Christianity as a theological dogma without any roots in the reason and general consciousness and attitude towards life.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., Book I, Chapter 2, p. 12.

Something of ascent is present in Christianity also. Man has been urged to become perfect even as the Father in Heaven is perfect. But this refers to moral perfection, and not to man's attaining to divine nature, because this does not fit in the Christian concept of reality. Man's aspiration for divine nature can be based only on the idea of essential unity of man and God. Some idea of the Immanence of God in man and the world is in the Bible. Man has been said to have been created in the image of God (Genesis I. 27). Psalm 139, 5-7 says:

Thou doest beset me behind and  
before, and layest thy hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is high, I cannot attain it.  
Whithershall I go from thy spirit?  
Or whithershall I flee from thy presence?

Revised Standard Version

But these sayings had never been understood in the Vedantic sense of Immanence, and the entire Semitic tradition is opposed to pantheistic ideas. The sharp difference that prevails in the Christian tradition between the sacred and the profane is also opposed to the idea of man's transformation into divine being or Superman.

One aspect in which Christianity seems to have had a strong impact on Sri Aurobindo is his conception of the future. As against the conventional Indian idea of a Golden Age in the distant past, he conceived of a Golden Age in the future. Christianity, like Judaism from which it emerged, has always looked forward to the Kingdom of God.

It is difficult to develop a philosophy of history within the cyclical view of the world of becoming. If things revolve in a cycle where is the scope of any great fulfilment in history? In fact, classical Greek and Indian thought have considered the world "as a corruption of eternity"<sup>4</sup> and sought fulfilment in the eternity beyond this world. Sri Aurobindo has deviated partially from the traditional Indian view of samsāra as a circle. According to his interpretation, there are cycles of ages, each cycle has in it movements of contraction and expansion, one cycle leads to another and in this transition there is a progress.

The wheel of Brahma rotates for ever  
but it does not turn in the same place; its  
rotations carry it forward.<sup>5</sup>

This view of the world may properly be designated as spiral. [A fuller treatment of his view of history has been made in Chapter IV, Section V.] This view is not without foundation in the Indian tradition. At the individual level each jīva (the soul entrenched in samsāra) makes some progress as it passes through series of births. At the universal level each age (yuga) is supposed to have its own dharma (characteristic law or movement) and a downward movement is a preparation for an eventual upward turning.

However, the vision of the Life Divine in the future

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<sup>4</sup>Niebuhr, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Man -- Slave or Free, p. 9.

is likely to have a reflection of the Christian hope for the Kingdom of God.

Of course, there is some confusion, ambiguity, and divergence of opinion regarding the exact import of the Kingdom of Heaven in Christianity. The Kingdom of God has been considered realized by some ("The Church is not the Kingdom of God as St. Augustine asserted and as the majority of Roman Catholic theologians after him have likewise thought"<sup>6</sup>), whereas others have thought it would be realized outside history and time. Early Christians expected an imminent end of the world and the coming of the Kingdom of God -- "The first Christians awaited the second coming of Christ, the Messiah, and the end of the world".<sup>7</sup>

In the present day, the dominant view seems to be this: that the hope for the Kingdom of Heaven has been partially fulfilled by the coming of the Christ, but the final fulfilment is to be looked for in the future.

On the one hand, history has reached its culmination in the disclosure of the hidden sovereignty of God and the revelation of the meaning of life and history. On the other hand, history is still waiting for its culmination in the second coming of the triumphant Messiah.<sup>8</sup>

Sri Aurobindo does not speak of the end of history and

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<sup>6</sup> N. Berdyaev, The Beginning and the End (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1952), p. 203.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Niebuhr, op. cit., Vol. II.

time at all, whatever they mean. He is emphatic on the point that it is upon earth and in embodied life that man will realize the Divine in their collective existence.

The idea of a collective fulfilment is indeed suggestive of a Christian influence. Christianity as a religion is more communal than individualistic; it has given greater thought to collective well-being and collective salvation. Indian religions, on the other hand, have been predominantly individualistic.

In connection with our search for the sources of Sri Aurobindo's thoughts in the Christian tradition, one phenomenon deserves mention. Christian thinkers hear the echo of Christianity in Sri Aurobindo. Maybe they fail to realize that what they consider Christian might well be there in the Indian tradition, if not explicitly at least in seed form. Nevertheless, that Christian thinkers detect Christianity in Sri Aurobindo's thought cannot be rejected as meaningless. For example, Ernst Benz, a Protestant theologian, has devoted one full chapter in his book Evolution and Christian Hope (originally written in German) on the consideration of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of the Superman. This philosophy, according to him, "shows amazing agreement with similar European conceptions".<sup>9</sup> He opens the discussion, after giving biographical data, with the following:

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<sup>9</sup>Ernst Benz, Evolution and Christian Hope (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1966), p. 190.

Aurobindo is the first spiritual leader of the Hindu tradition to have broken with the radical dualism of Indian thinking. Not flight from the world but affirmation of the world appears to be the decisive task for him.<sup>10</sup>

All of the schools of Indian thought have not turned their backs on the world, yet an overall tendency to denigrate the world characterizes the sphere of traditional Indian thought. On the other hand, according to the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the world is good. It is more so for Christianity because of the coming of Christ.

Benz appreciates Sri Aurobindo for his regard for the human personality. "Another new facet introduced by him is the affirmation of personality, of personal and individual values".<sup>11</sup> In support of his view he quotes the following from one of Sri Aurobindo's letters:

Therefore, when the heart and life turn toward the highest and the infinite, they arrive not at an abstract existence, a Sat, or else a Nirvana, but at an existent; not merely at a consciousness, but at a conscious Being; not merely at a purely impersonal delight of the Is, but at a finite I am of the bliss.<sup>12</sup>

We know that getting merged in the 'Absolute' has no

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Letters of Sri Aurobindo, 1st Series, 2nd ed. (Pondy: 1950), p. 77; Benz's book, pp. 194-195.

appeal to a Christian, but this is true of a devotee also in the Indian tradition. As Ramakrishna said: he wanted to taste the nectar, but not to get lost in it.

In Sri Aurobindo's criticism of Nietzsche, Benz finds in the former a champion of Christian values:

As the cause of Nietzsche's one-sided, titanic interpretation of the superman, Aurobindo mentions with deep insight, Nietzsche's 'hostile prejudice against the Christ-idea of the crucified God and its consequences', and the adoption of incomplete Greek ideas of the superman. Compared to Nietzsche, the Hindu appears here as an apologist of Christianity. He also defends the Christian concept of suffering and self-humiliation of Christ as the only condition of raising man to the level of the superhuman.<sup>13</sup>

Benz, however, is no confused thinker. He sees wherein Sri Aurobindo differs from Christianity.

Aurobindo's image of the superman thus absorbs the Christian concept of man. But it goes farther than just looking at the cross, death and suffering.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 202.



## V. Modern European

The modern period in European history starts with the Renaissance and the Reformation in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Modernism articulated as Progressivism became a great force in the eighteenth century and started to carry the rest of the world with it. Since then until the present day modern European thought and culture and their wonderful discoveries in science and technology have swept over the face of the earth, from East to West and North to South it is the same phenomenon of modernism that meets our eyes. But what we see on the surface is not the totality of the picture. Behind the din and bustle of the industrial-commercial-technological complex the spirit of the indigenous cultures is still thriving in India, China and other ancient lands.

Modern India is the outcome of the interaction of the traditional Indian thought and modern European thought. Consequently, no thinker in modern India could escape the impact of the West, much less Sri Aurobindo, who drank deeply in the sources of Western thought even before he was acquainted properly with India. But what exactly is the nature and extent of this impact? The answer lies mainly in the understanding of the phenomenon of the modern West. But it is an extremely complex thing. There are many different studies of this phenomenon from many different points of view. No particular study seems to be complete, and not one covers the whole range of the issue. We shall submit our

understanding of the phenomenon of the modern West as relevant to our present study in a very brief and summary manner. It is an attempt made with a limited purpose; it does not claim any finality, nor is it possible, with the limitation of space, to substantiate the views at every step.

Before the revival of the Graeco-Roman learning, Europe was Christian under the common rule of the Church of Rome.

Graeco-Roman civilization did not care for the masses; Christianity brought light to them, and it captured the soul and ethical being of the barbarians who came from the North. It civilized them, having brought them under the rule of one theology and dogma, but it certainly did not intellectualize them. Mediaeval Christianity was, in fact, distrustful of the free play of intelligence, and it imposed a very rigid and definitive theological view of man, the world and life on the minds of the people. The natural man in the Middle Ages, although exuberant enough, "had been hidden behind the pious fictions, or portrayed only as a sinful man".<sup>1</sup>

The two outstanding results of the revival of ancient learning are: i) liberation of the mind and intellect, and ii) development of the natural view of things as against the theological.

However, the Renaissance brought the changes more or less in the following sequence: Revival of ancient learning created a

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<sup>1</sup> H. F. Muller, The Uses of the Past (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 273.

great stir in Europe — first in Italy, then in other parts of Europe. With great avidity, thinking minds started imitating and assimilating the classical thought and style. The clergymen were partially instrumental in the propagation of the ancient things, but eventually the conflict between the two outlooks — Christian and Graeco-Roman — became evident. The Christian outlook was entirely theological and dogmatic; the Graeco-Roman culture was essentially rational, human and naturalistic. Some great men, Erasmus, for example, entertained a rational and natural outlook on life without involving themselves in any open conflict with the Church. The conflict came with the discovery of certain fundamental truths about the physical world. The Church refused to accept them since they went against the teachings of the Church. Bruno was burnt to death, Galileo was imprisoned. But it is these scientists who worked to establish the fact of a natural order and law (without reference to the supernatural) in the universe. With the discoveries of Newton the new cosmology<sup>2</sup> was completed. Following the lead of the scientists, philosophers parted company with theology. Descartes and Spinoza were rationalistic in their approach to the fundamental questions of philosophy. The Deists headed by Voltaire were also anti-Christian and naturalistic.

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<sup>2</sup>"In this intellectual era the universe was discovered to be a mechanical machine designed by an efficient engineer or Prime Mover according to the rules of Newtonian physics". Carl Becher, Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers, taken from The Age of Reason, by Louis L. Snyder (New York: D. Van Nostrand Co. Inc.), p. 88.

Sceptics like Hume, agnostics like Kant, were rationalists. Not that Christianity had no influence on them, but in their pursuit of philosophical enquiry they left Christian theology behind as irrelevant.

However, the study of physical nature was followed by the study of human nature; after the progress of the physical sciences the social sciences started to grow. Hobbes (a scientific materialist) followed philosophers like Descartes, Spinoza, and tried to build a concept of man based on natural laws. He was followed by Locke, Hume, Rousseau, Bentham, and others.

It is the Greeks who showed a real interest in man qua man and who were successful in making many valuable contributions to the understanding of social relationships, but they did not have enough scientific knowledge to establish a solid structure of the social sciences. This was achieved during the Age of Reason. Democracy, Socialism, Utilitarianism -- all of these developed as natural corollaries of the application of reason to the understanding of man and his endowments as a thing in nature. Locke demonstrated that man's mind was a tabula rasa (a clear slate); that is to say, his whole development is dependent on the influence of the environment and education. The senses are the origin of knowledge. This doctrine put all men at the same level.

From the generalizations on sensationalism by Hobbes and Locke to the concept of the democratic ideal was but a short step.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> L. L. Snyder, ibid. p. 49.

Locke's projection was converted by Rousseau into a magnificent piece of popular political propaganda: Equality is the birth-right of everyone. In this way attention has been shifted from God and salvation in the other world to man and his life in this world. The human mind experienced for the first time a sense of release from the fetters of a dogmatic tradition and became enthused about its own capacity, it hoped and aspired to forge a world and society of its own dreams.

The Renaissance was, however, accompanied by the Reformation which was a movement inspired by religious feeling. Nevertheless, the Reformation was partly a revolt of reason against conventional beliefs, customs and the authority of the Church. Sri Aurobindo is perfectly aware of this phase of European civilization, as he speaks of

usurpations, pretensions and brutalities of the ecclesiastical power which calimed to withhold the scripture from general knowledge and impose by moral authority and physical violence its own arbitrary interpretation of Sacred Writ, if not indeed another and substituted doctrine, on the recalcitrant individual conscience.<sup>4</sup>

The Reformation let loose certain forces, the consequences of which were not anticipated by its leaders. The revolt of reason against conventional forms of religion, against the mediation of

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<sup>4</sup>Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle (New York: Sri Aurobindo Library), Chapter II, p. 19.

the priesthood between God and the soul, and the substitution of the authority of the Pope for Scripture led eventually to the questioning of the Scripture itself, and then all supernaturalism, religious belief, supra-rational truth, and so on. The Reformation sought the help of secular powers which became predominant before long. Luther agreed that the princes should determine what would be the religion of the state. This gave authority to the king over the spiritual domain. Thus the Reformation came to contribute a good deal toward the revolt of reason against faith, and to the emergence of the secular power as the real arbiter of human destiny. Zaehner says:

In Europe the process of secularization started with the Renaissance and, whether the reformers like it or not, was immensely strengthened by the Reformation.<sup>5</sup>

It is not, however, suggested that the Reformation was basically a rationalist movement. The movement was deeply religious, it did, in a way, reinforce faith in its revolt against the authority of the Pope. But it was also actuated, as we have seen, by the spirit of rationalism and humanism, and this spirit proved fruitful in Catholicism also in the form of the Counter Reformation. Christianity, Protestant and Catholic, passed through a process of rationalistic and humanistic cleansing. And this new spirit, once incorporated, brought in significant

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<sup>5</sup>R. C. Zaehner, Evolution in Religion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 2.

changes in the whole outlook of the Church, especially the Protestant Church. Gradually the Church has given up its mediaeval associations and has been concerned more and more with this-worldly preoccupations. In actual fact, it meant the preponderance of the secular forces in the shaping of the character of the modern West.

A study of progressivism as a doctrine of history that developed with the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century amply bears out this proposition. Progressivism is directly responsible for the boom in Technology. Renaissance, Enlightenment, Science, Technology — these are the things which characterize modern Europe especially. Bury, who has shown how the idea of progress emerged in the seventeenth century and developed later on into common opinion, has remarked: "It was not till men felt independent of providence that they could organize a theory of progress".<sup>6</sup> Karl Löwith has given a systematic analysis of the writings of those thinkers — Vico, Voltaire, Comte, Proudhon, Hegel, Marx, and so on — who are responsible for the development of Progressivism as a doctrine of history. These speculations about the meaning and purpose of history show very clearly a long-standing process of alienation of the Western mind from the theological preoccupations of the past, — "from the natural theology of antiquity and from

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<sup>6</sup>J. B. Bury, The Idea of Progress (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1921; New York ed., 1932), p. 22.

the supernatural theology of Christianity".<sup>7</sup> There is a natural fatalism in the cyclical view of history upheld by the Greeks and Romans. Growth, decay and death follow in a natural order, as in the life of an individual so in that of a nation. Progressivism is opposed to this fatalism. It believes in endless progress; it has of necessity to be opposed to the Christian view of history as well. The Christian view is linear, it starts somewhere and ends at a point. Progressivism gives up all hope in after-life, it has no need of that, it wants progress without any end. In fact, Progressivism is a materialist secular philosophy.

Technology is a direct outcome of the spirit of Progressivism. Success begets further success. Man marvelled at his own discoveries. Any technological invention meant power, and power brought self-confidence and generated thirst for more power. Brunner aptly writes:

Modern technics is the product of the man who wants to redeem himself by rising above nature, who wants to gather life into his hand, who wants to owe his existence to nobody but himself, who wants to create a world after his own image, an artificial world which is entirely his creation. Behind the terrifying, crazy tempo of technical evolution, there is all the instability of secularized man who, not believing in God or eternal life, wants to snatch as much of the world within his lifetime as he can.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> K. Lewith, Meaning in History (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1964), p. 192.

<sup>8</sup> E. Brunner, "Christianity and Civilization", in Religion and Contemporary Western Culture, Vol. II, ed. E. Cell (Nashville: Abingdon Press), pp. 342-343.



In some way Christianity might have contributed to this spirit of secular progress and thirst for power and possession. God created the world and "it was very good" (Genesis I.31). God's command to men is "be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis I.28). Nature could easily be looked upon as a thing to be subdued without caring for the maintenance of its balance. And since the Christian sense of justice was rather ineffectual even in the West the wealth could be accumulated in fewer hands, and this wealth again worked as a stimulus to further progress in scientific and technological discoveries.

In fact, Progress, Technology, Democracy, Socialism, -- none of these things are truly Christian. These are the results of rationalism and humanism engendered by the Renaissance, -- rationalism and humanism that took, in the course of time, a very secularist turn; and, having abjured religious dimensions, sought to be satisfied with the empirical and the positivist view of reality.

Notwithstanding all of these, it remains a fact that Christianity has continued to exist during this period of modern European history. It must have had, therefore, some influence, direct or indirect, on the modern developments. We have considered progressivism (and the view of history that goes with it) and the modern conception of man. These we have found very secular. But even in these the impact of Christianity has been detected by some authors.

The Renaissance itself, which we have seen as basically a

rebirth of the learning in general and of classical learning in particular with its cult of reason and humanism has been considered partly Christian. Niebuhr says that the word Renaissance

also meant something much more significant. It meant the rebirth of the earth and of human society. It was an expression of Christian eschatological hopes. This profounder meaning may have been less conscious than the former.<sup>9</sup>

As regards progress, Niebuhr says,

The idea of progress is possible only upon the ground of a Christian culture. It is a secularized version of Biblical apocalypse and of the Hebraic sense of a meaningful history, in contrast to the meaningless history of the Greeks.<sup>10</sup>

As we have already indicated, the issue is controversial.

Brunner, another theologian of repute, is not so sure about the Christian character of the modern cult of endless progress in history. He gives the Christian position as opposed to the modern as follows:

The goal of history is reached not by an immanent growth of progress, but by a revolutionary change of the human situation at the end of history, brought about not by man's action, but by divine intervention.<sup>11</sup>

In this connection, it would be appropriate to note the view of Ginsberg, a sociologist of considerable depth:

<sup>9</sup>R. Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II (New York: Charles Scribners & Sons, 1964), p. 160.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup>E. Brunner, Christianity and Civilization (London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1947), pp. 52-53.

It is true that now a days theologians often claim that the root of the modern belief in progress is to be found in the Judeo-Christian concept of history as moving towards a Messianic age. The belief in the moral perfectibility and indefinite progress of mankind is then represented as a secularized version of the Christian faith in the life of the world to come as the goal of human effort. It would, however, be as easy and as misleading to represent the modern interpretation of the Christian philosophy of history as theological versions of secular utopias. Christian theologians seem to have become deeply interested in the idea of progress only after it became a dominant element in Western thought. The Catholic Church has on occasion explicitly repudiated it, and Protestant writers find great difficulty in coming to terms with it.<sup>12</sup>

As regards the modern view of man, Niebuhr admits that it is very marginally Christian. He mentions the "contradictory emphasis of the idealists and the naturalists"<sup>13</sup> among the moderns. The idealists "disavow both the doctrine of man's creatureliness and the doctrine of his sinfulness",<sup>14</sup> whereas the naturalists protest against the idea of "man as the image of God".<sup>15</sup> He concludes his survey of the modern view of man in the following vein:

The idea that man is sinful at the very centre of his personality, that is in his will, is universally rejected. It is this rejection which has seemed to make the Christian gospel simply irrelevant to modern

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<sup>12</sup> M. Ginsberg, Essays in Sociology and Social Philosophy, Vol. 32 (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1961), p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> R. Niebuhr, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

man, a fact which is of much more importance than any conviction about its credibility.<sup>16</sup>

Max Weber, in his famous book The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, originally published in German in 1904-1905, has taken pains to show how Protestant theology, Calvinism in particular, has contributed to the development of capitalism in Western Europe and North America. Capitalism in this context includes in a general way science and technology as well. "The Puritan's serious attention to this world, his acceptance of his life in the world as a task"<sup>17</sup> is considered to have fostered the frame of mind that goes to build business and industry, and for that matter more and more efficient methods of production, distribution, trade, and so on. This influence of Protestantism is, however, in most cases indirect, "unforeseen and even unwished for results of the labours of the reformers".<sup>18</sup> All the same, religious forces have played a part "in forming the developing web of our specifically worldly modern culture".<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, Jacques Ellul, a more recent social philosopher, contends in his The Technological Society (originally

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>17</sup>Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1958), p. 88.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

published in French in 1954), that "the economic consequences of this movement [Protestant Reformation] have been singularly exaggerated".<sup>20</sup> He has shown with elaborate historical analysis that Christianity in the pre-Renaissance era "was 'a-capitalistic' as well as 'a-technical'".<sup>21</sup> Some of the barriers in Christianity for scientific and technical developments were removed, he admits, by the Reformation, but

even then, it was not so much from the influence of the new theology as from the shock of the Renaissance, from humanism and the authoritarian state, that technique received a decisive impetus.<sup>22</sup>

[Ellul has earlier demonstrated that capitalism is only one aspect of technological society, and that technique and science are interdependent.]

Similar divergences of views are met as regards the presence of the elements of Christianity in such modern phenomena as democracy, socialism, sanctity of the individual, regard for the scientific truth, and so on. One thing is, however, clear. Neither the advocates of the Christian influence nor the opposite camp feel it appropriate to describe modern Western culture as Christian. Niebuhr is almost angry with the profaneness of the

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<sup>20</sup> Jacques Ellul, The Technological Society (Vintage Books, 1964), p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

modern West. Alfred N. Whitehead, who considers Christianity has something to do with the explosion of scientific knowledge in modern Europe, writes: "The sixteenth century of our era saw the disruption of Western Christianity and the rise of modern Science".<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, Ellul, who is incapable of seeing a high proportion of Christianity, Catholic or Protestant, in anything modern, writes:

The West was officially Christian until the fourteenth century; thereafter, Christianity became controversial and was breached by other influences.<sup>24</sup>

#### Self-understanding of Modern India

We may now consider how India looked upon modern Europe when she confronted this giant at a stage of destitution in her life and culture. This consideration has two-fold significance. First, it may provide us with a distant view of modern Europe; secondly, it will be a measure of the quality and extent of European influence on modern India.

Contact with the West started in the sixteenth century, but it did not take a definite shape until the nineteenth century.

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<sup>23</sup> Alfred N. Whitehead, Science and the Modern World (A Mentor Book Publ. The New American Library, 1948; originally Macmillan Co., 1925), p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Jacques Ellul, Technological Society, p. 33.

By the end of the eighteenth century, British rule was established in some parts of India, and the impact of Western religion and culture, mainly through the English language, began to be felt. It took, however, some time for the Indian mind to have a proper appraisal of the substance of modern European culture. So some confusion, some excesses of imitation and repulsion mark this early stage of contact.<sup>25</sup> It is at this period that some people from the upper strata of the society embraced Christianity. For them, it seems, Christianity was inseparable from rationalism, humanism, science, technical skill, physical prowess, and so on. Before long the leadership in thought came from the bosom of orthodoxy. A galaxy of master minds appeared on the scene at different parts of India, largely in Bengal, where Western ideas struck roots first. Ramnohan Roy, Devendranath Tagore, Bankim Chatterjee, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Dayananda Saraswati, Rabindranath Tagore, Gandhi, Tilak, Sri Aurobindo -- these are the people, along with many other minor figures, who represent modern Indian thought at its best. There is a good deal of difference among the particular methods they recommended for the reconciliation of the East and the West; but, as regards their understanding of the East and West, the similarities are remarkable. They had no difficulty in differentiating

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<sup>25</sup>"In the years 1830-1860, before the rise of Hindu revivalism and Indian nationalism, Bengali intellectuals eagerly assimilated, at times without much discrimination or logical consequence, Western values and ideas, either distinctly Christian or Christian in origin and past". Pierre Falton, 'Christianity in Bengal', in Studies in the Bengal Renaissance, A. Gupta ed. (Jadavpur, India: National Council of Education, 1958); p. 457.

Christianity from modern Western culture.<sup>26</sup> They showed great respect for Jesus, some of them recognized him as an Incarnation of God — the highest respect that an Indian can give to a man, but they practically turned their backs on Christianity.<sup>27</sup>

They saw two things in particular in modern European culture. In one respect it was rationalistic, humanistic and individualistic; on the other hand, it was materialistic. They were painfully aware of the sad state of affairs in their own society, they saw how urgently India needed to incorporate some of the rational and human values of European culture, but at the same time they were eager to avoid Western materialism. They had no doubt that the spirit of India was living under the debris of the then social state of affairs, and that with certain changes in outlook and practice the health of the Indian society could be restored. Some of them even hoped that a synthesis between Indian spirituality and Western practicality could set an example

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<sup>26</sup>"Later, a reaction will set in and, while science and various secular ideologies will continue to exert a large influence, religious and philosophical ideas will be less easily accepted".  
Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>"To a generation which was the ardent advocate of European or Christian ethics and rationalism, Rajnarayan Basu, himself a prominent product of the English education, boldly proclaimed the superiority of Hindu religion and culture over European and Christian theology and civilization". R. C. Majumdar, 'The Genesis of Extremism', in Studies in the Bengal Renaissance, op. cit., p. 188.



for the world to emulate.<sup>28</sup> At least they did not see any incompatibility between humanism and rationalism on the one hand, and Indian spirituality on the other.

With this general statement about the Indian approach to modern European thought and culture, we may now try to see how Sri Aurobindo dealt with the matter -- what he has absorbed of the West and in what manner.

We have spoken of the broad features of modern Indian thought in a very summary fashion. The scheme of the present work did not allow us more space. However, we may quote here some remarks of Toynbee, the great historian who is a Christian. His opinion corroborates our view in a general way.

I think it is clear that the Western product that we have exported to the rest of the world is not a liberty born of Christianity but a technology divorced from both Christianity and liberty... We have pushed our way all over the face of the planet and have turned everyone else's life upside down. What kind of revolution has it been that we have been making by our impact? A spiritual revolution of the kind that Saint Paul started in the Roman Empire or that the Buddhist missionaries who were Saint Paul's contemporaries started in China? Unhappily, no! What the modern West has exported to the rest of the world has not been a new vision of God.

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<sup>28</sup> Vivekananda wrote, "When the Oriental wants to learn about machine making, he should sit at the feet of the Occidental and learn from him. When the Occidental wants to learn about the spirit, about God, about the soul, about the meaning and mystery of this universe, he must sit at the feet of the Oriental to learn". Complete Works, Vol. IV (Mayavati Memorial ed.), p. 156.

[italics are mine] it has been the high pressure power that is generated by a combination of autocratic organization with applied science.<sup>29</sup>

We have seen that technology is the outcome of progressivism which, again, is based on secular humanism and rationalism. India's point of contact with the West was primarily power. India fell prostrate at the superior power, born of technology, of the West. Dazzled by the power of the West, India looked seriously at the sources of this power, the roots of her own weakness as well as the points of her potential strength.

#### Sri Aurobindo vis-a-vis the Modern West

Before tracing the specific influence of the modern West on Sri Aurobindo and his concept of the Superman, it is necessary to see how he looked upon Christianity and modern Europe in a general way. Christianity he looked upon as the harbinger of new light at the time when Graeco-Roman civilization was perishing due to attacks from outside and "from within by the loss of its vitality".<sup>30</sup> It brought light especially to the masses who were neglected by the aristocratic cultures of Greece and Rome. Mediaeval Christianity civilized the barbarians, it was great as a

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<sup>29</sup> A. Toynbee, editor and contributor, The Western Tradition (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1951), pp. 108-109.

<sup>30</sup> The Human Cycle, Chapter VIII, p. 83.

religion of love,<sup>31</sup> but it was very dogmatic and did not care to enlighten the intellect of the people. "Distrustful even of the free play of intelligence, Christian ecclesiasticism and monasticism became anti-intellectual".<sup>32</sup>

Sri Aurobindo made a distinction between Jesus and Christianity. He refused to look at Jesus through the eyes of Christianity, he considered Jesus as one of the ways and not the only way to God.<sup>33</sup> He also made a distinction between the true spirit of Christianity and its external manifestation:

We cannot ignore for instance the blood-stained and fiery track which formal external Christianity has left furrowed across the mediaeval history of Europe almost from the days of Constantine.<sup>34</sup>

He has mentioned how churches and creeds "stood violently in the way of philosophy and science",<sup>35</sup> and how wrong it was to confuse the true spirit of religion with the church and the creed. The church, itself supported by power, has very often sided with established power and thus has blocked the way for the realization of larger political ideals; it has forgotten "that the true theocracy

<sup>31</sup>"Christianity gave him [man] some vision of divine love and charity". Sri Aurobindo, Thoughts and Glimpses, p. 29.

<sup>32</sup>The Human Cycle, Chapter VIII, p. 83.

<sup>33</sup>Vide Essays on the Gita, Chapter II, p. 12.

<sup>34</sup>The Human Cycle, Chapter XVII, p. 195.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 196.

is the Kingdom of God in man and not the kingdom of a Pope, a priesthood or a sacerdotal class".<sup>36</sup>

The whole of the modern period of European history, starting from the Renaissance, has been characterized by Sri Aurobindo as "The Age of Individualism and Reason" (Vide Chapter II, The Human Cycle). The age of reason and individualism started, according to him, when the truth behind the conventional order of life ceased to be living, and a strong urge developed in the minds of the people to discover the truth covered up by the lifeless conventions. It does not mean that earlier society was based on falsehood, it means only "the loss of the living sense of the Truth it once held".<sup>37</sup> Attempts are made to oppose the new discovery, to cling to the old beliefs and practices with only a little change here and there, but "the natural conservatism of the social mind is compelled at last to perceive that the Truth is dead in them and that they are living by a lie".<sup>38</sup>

The Protestant movement is vast and complex. It is difficult to say whether Sri Aurobindo looked upon the whole movement as a futile effort to cling to things which had lost their sense and value. He, however, says clearly that "the evolution

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>The Human Cycle, Chapter II, p. 16.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

of Europe was determined less by the Reformation than by the Renaissance",<sup>39</sup> and that the Reformation by "the very force of the secular influences it called to its aid, had missed its way".<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, reason and individualism infused by the Renaissance could not have been pursued by Europe with "a passion, a seriousness, a moral and almost religious ardour" but for the "centuries of Judaeo-Christian discipline".<sup>41</sup> Christianity is thus recognized by him as an undercurrent in the shaping of modern Europe, yet it is only a secondary force. The primary role was assumed by reason and secular humanism. Modern Europe is, therefore, according to Sri Aurobindo, basically a product of reason against conventionalism of belief and practice, of humanism and individualism against the soul-killing oppression of the Church and the state. It is the greatness of modern Europe that it could go ahead passionately with its new inspiration for the rational truth, and for the organization of life on the basis of that truth. This is its real source of strength, and the rest of the world had to pay obeisance to it.

If its rationalistic civilization has swept so triumphantly over the world, it is because it found no deeper and more powerful truth to confront it; for all the rest of mankind was still in the inactivity of the last dark hours of the conventional age.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

Although there was no deeper truth for that moment to confront the rationalist civilization of modern Europe, it does not mean that the rest of the world was bankrupt and it would have nothing to offer to humanity:

Yet the truths which Europe has found by its individualistic age covered only the first more obvious, physical and outward facts of life and only such of their more hidden realities and powers as the habit of analytical reason and the pursuit of practical utility can give to man.<sup>43</sup>

This rationalistic civilization, Sri Aurobindo thinks, carries within itself seeds of its own destruction. Reason fostered by the free thought of the individual leads eventually to the organization of society in ways that go to throttle the freedom of the individual altogether.<sup>44</sup> So, according to him, reason has to be exceeded, rational truth has to be completed by a deeper understanding of life and reality, and he sees the signs of this possibility in the latest tendencies of the rationalist civilization itself. But, in respect to this deeper spiritual understanding, the East, especially India, must have a significant contribution. He did not believe that the Eastern societies would go through a complete process of rational and secular transformation.<sup>45</sup> Only that degree of rational and secular conversion the

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<sup>44</sup>Here State Socialism, Capitalism, autonomous power of Technology are referred to along with such theories and practices as consider men to be entirely conditioned by heredity and environment.

<sup>45</sup>"The signs are that the individualistic period in the East will be neither of long duration nor predominantly rationalistic and secularist in its character". The Human Cycle, Chapter II, p. 24.

East needs as would enable it to give up its old life forms and mental figures so that the underlying truth of its cultures, which is the truth of the spirit and which by definition is constant and eternal, may emerge.

With this general study of Sri Aurobindo's views about the significance of the modern West and the reawakening of the East, India in particular, we may now take up some of the cardinal truths of the modern, rationalistic West and see how far he has been influenced by them in the formulation of his philosophy of the future evolution of mankind.

### Individualism

One of the great outcomes of the Renaissance is a regard for the individual man. In no pre-modern society did the individual receive so much recognition. It is mainly through the revolt of reason against the authority, secular and spiritual, that the sacredness of the individual and the inviolability of his rights and conscience could be established. In this movement the contribution of the Reformation is also noteworthy. The Reformation emphasized the individual's responsibility, and therefore the right to know the truth. "The heightened sense of individuality in Protestantism is expressed theologically in the Reformation-principle of the 'priesthood of all believers'".<sup>46</sup> The Reformation

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Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. I, p. 60.

sought the development of individuality within the terms of Christian religion, but the Renaissance wanted "even further development of individuality beyond the limits set in the Christian religion, that is, the development of the 'autonomous' individual. It is this autonomous individual who really ushers in modern civilization".<sup>47</sup> Individualism thus constituted a great part of the secular rationalistic movement, and it tended to leave the theological view of things behind.

The Indian leaders of thought in the last and the present centuries are almost without exception deeply religious people, and they thought with a strong nationalistic spirit, i.e., with a great love for their religion and culture. They did not see any fundamental conflict between reason and the spirit of their religion. Therefore what they did was to assimilate the modern truths of individualism, humanism, progressivism, etc., in the body of their philosophy in the light of their own religious tradition.

In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of divine life or the race of supermen, the individual occupies a pivotal position. It is through the individual that the collective progress is made. Integral Yoga is meant for the fuller development of the body, life and mind of an individual centering around his psychic being, which is unique in every individual. Thus the core of the individual

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 59.



is considered to be the soul or the central being. It is not a secular view of man, it is based on the Hindu view of the pre-existence of the soul before its human birth and its continued existence after the death of the body.

There is a notion in the West that the individual has no recognition in the Hindu society, and since Advaita Vedanta speaks of the eventual merging of the soul into the Absolute, that Hindu philosophy has no provision for the individual. This issue has been dealt with by, among others, Kalidas Bhattacharya.<sup>48</sup> Bhattacharya has mentioned four factors which "are responsible for this wrong impression" that "the Advaita Vedanta is the quintessence of philosophic speculation in India".<sup>49</sup> It is but one of the important schools of thought, and even in this the individual soul and its journey through births for self-development has been recognized for all practical purposes. However, as regards the status of the individual in Indian philosophy in general Bhattacharya says the following:

If there is anything common to the different Indian views of the individual, it is (1) that every individual has a spiritual side, (2) that his spiritual side is, from the valuational point of view, more essential than his material side, (3) that its autonomy has to be fully realized, and (4) that this realization is possible through

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<sup>48</sup> Vide The Status of the Individual in East and West, ed. C. Moore (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1968).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

progressive detachment (vairagya) from the less essential sides of our being.<sup>50</sup>

Individualism is therefore not opposed to Indian metaphysical thought. Nevertheless, individualism as a modern phenomenon is not to be found in any ancient society, much less in Indian society with its castism and other barriers. The force of individualism was recognized by Sri Aurobindo and it was absorbed into his thought-structure. Even the Scripture, according to him, has to pass through the crucible of individual experience, even as the individual would be guided by the Scripture in his search for the truth.<sup>51</sup> Though he has hewn out a general path for integral self-culture for his followers, every individual has been urged to find out his or her own line of development within the broad framework of Integral Yoga. In social thinking he is in favour of maximum liberty of the individual, and is opposed to all impositions from outside. He looks with disfavour at the traditional codes of ethics which demand the impossible from the individual and do not take cognisance of his nature. In this regard his sympathies are with the relativism of the Hindu concept of ethics which recognizes the pragmatic differences among men and the varying demands of the individual natures.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>51</sup> Vide Chapter I of The Synthesis of Yoga.

The individual is indeed the key of the evolutionary movement; for it is the individual who finds himself, who becomes conscious of the Reality...the individual does not owe his ultimate allegiance either to the State which is a machine or to the community which is a part of life and not the whole of life....So long as he is undeveloped, he has to subordinate in many ways his undeveloped self to whatever is greater than it. As he develops, he moves towards a spiritual freedom, but this freedom is not something entirely separate from all-existence; it has a solidarity with it because that too is the self, the same spirit. As he moves towards spiritual freedom, he moves also towards spiritual oneness.<sup>52</sup>

In the supramental society he conceives the individuals as unique centres of the manifestation of the Divine consciousness. Superhumanhood is the culmination of the individuality of a man or a woman.

### Humanism

Another important feature of modern European thought and culture is its great humanism. Humanism is fundamentally a matter of attitude. To take an interest in man for no other reason than that he is a man is humanism proper. The Greeks, among all ancient nations, have shown the most keen interest in man qua man. Aristotelian tradition of Socratic teaching in particular has embodied this attitude which was revived in the Renaissance. With the Renaissance, man began to be looked upon as man, the finest product of nature, and not as a sinner. This attitude was

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<sup>52</sup>The Life Divine, Chapter XXVIII, p. 930.

reflected in philosophical and social thought as well as artistic creations. A secular bias was there from the very beginning in this attitude, with the Enlightenment it became entirely free from theological and otherworldly associations, and man and all that concerns him in this world became a thing of adoration.

Indian leaders of thought did not give up their religious preoccupations. Consequently, they could not embrace humanism as it manifested itself in the life and thought of modern Europe. But they had one advantage: ancient Indian culture, particularly its literary tradition, was broadly human. Although the presence of an undercurrent of religion is discernible in the great epics, in the works of Kalidasa and other dramatists it is primarily a human story that we find in them. The Indian thinkers and men of letters of the present era could emphasize this human aspect, deal with current problems, even revolt against the oppressive character of the degenerated social structure without having to give up the basic religious outlook on life.

Sri Aurobindo went in some ways to the extremes of the religious, rather spiritual, view of man, and on the other hand, absorbed successfully the quintessence of humanism. As a poet he has evinced a keen interest in human feelings. A large part of his poetical works -- Baji Prabhou, Love and Death, Ilion, etc., -- and all of his plays are the tales of human love and death, sufferings and aspirations, failure and success. His greatest poetical work, Savitri, is an epic story which is intensely human (and metaphysical at the same time). The victory that Savitri,

the heroine, wanted to win over the god of Death is for her human husband, and for that matter, for humanity in this world, for Satyavana represents the human soul "carrying the Divine truth of being with itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance".<sup>53</sup> The immortality she sought for is meant for this world. The weapon she fought with is Will born of Love. She said in answer to her mother's persuasion not to marry Satyavan, who was destined to die exactly after twelve months,:

My heart has sealed its troth to Satyanan:  
Its signature adverse Fate cannot efface,  
Its seal not Fate nor Death nor Time dissolve.

Book IV, Canto I

(We have dealt with Sri Aurobindo's humanism toward the end of the Greek section also, Chapter One.) He has referred to the traditional belief that man is luckier than the gods since, unlike the latter, man has the scope of infinite development. It is for facilitating this development -- earthly fulfilment of human aspiration for power, knowledge, delight -- that he has worked all his life. For this fulfilment in the distant future he was not in favour of giving up the human and the rational. The principles of Integral Yoga suggest broadening, heightening, and purification of the human body and mind, and no sacrifice of them at the altar of any authoritarianism, secular or religious. Unlike most other leaders of Indian thought, he did not engage himself

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<sup>53</sup>Sri Aurobindo, Mother India, June, 1971, p. 312. Taken from Iyenger, op. cit., p. 1205.

in social reforms precisely because his understanding of the human situation and his vision of the future suggested that changes would be coming as a matter of course, but no amount of change at social and political levels could ensure the freedom and dignity of man.

Mention may be made here of his pleading for the "religion of humanity" in his The Ideal of Human Unity. He has shown how great has been the influence of humanism and how fruitful its work has been in ameliorating the condition of life for the common man in the modern period. But he contends that this manifestation of humanism is only sentimental and intellectual. The foundation of humanism is deeper still — "brotherhood exists only in the soul and by the soul".<sup>54</sup> The spiritual foundation of humanism has to be tapped to let it deliver its goods properly — for, according to him, the realization of the unity of man will ultimately depend on this heightening and deepening of humanism, called by him the religion of humanity. His deep humanism made him a divine humanist. He assimilated Western humanism in the Indian fashion.

#### Nationalism, Democracy, Socialism

Social consciousness is another important feature of the modern period of rationalism. In no other period of history has man questioned everything around him, however sacred or inviolable. In India social consciousness took, as a result of the impact of the modern West, first of all, the shape of nationalism

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<sup>54</sup> Chapter XXXIV, p. 315.

together with a spirit of social service and religious reform. This was followed by the struggle for political independence, and along with this struggle the question arose as to how to organize the political and economic life of the nation.

Sri Aurobindo represented the spirit of nationalism in its most intense form in the days of his political leadership. But his deep mind was not satisfied with the instinctual love of one's country; to fight for national self-interest was for him an act of collective egoism — "a larger kind of selfishness".<sup>55</sup> He was concerned with the destiny of the whole of mankind, and he saw India had a role to play in the shaping of this destiny. It was the will of God that "this great nation will rise again"<sup>56</sup> and be the light to the rest of the world. In this way he made a religion of nationalism. "Nationalism is a religion that has come from God".<sup>57</sup> Again, "it is a religion by which we are trying to realize God in the nation, in our fellow countrymen".<sup>58</sup> The secular sentiment that developed from the contact with the modern West turned into a spiritual truth and discipline in Sri Aurobindo.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Sri Aurobindo, Speeches (Pondy: Ashram), p. 27.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>59</sup> In this respect he owes something to Bankim Chatterjee and Vivekananda.

We see the same metamorphosis of democratic and socialistic doctrines in his writings.

The democratic conception of the right of all individuals as members of the society, and as its corollary the socialistic ideal of equitable distribution of wealth, is considered by Sri Aurobindo as a permanent contribution of the modern age to social thinking:

It is no longer possible that we should accept as an ideal any arrangement by which certain classes of society should arrogate development and full social fruition to themselves while assigning a bare and barren function of service alone to others.<sup>60</sup>

In the days of his political leadership, Sri Aurobindo was enthusiastic about democracy. Traces of the impact of Marxism are in his speeches and writings of those days.<sup>61</sup> But with maturity he left these things behind. Of course, he has not given up the truths behind these doctrines, but he has no faith in the external institutional practice of them without attention to the spiritual roots of the doctrines. He thinks that at one moment of exaltation Rousseau gave voice to a profound spiritual truth in the slogan of equality, liberty and fraternity, and that the third one — fraternity — is the basis of the other two, and fraternity is a spiritual truth to be realized in consciousness first before it can be

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<sup>60</sup>The Human Cycle, Chapter II, p. 25.

<sup>61</sup>For example, he wrote in 1893, "With the proletariat resides, whether we like it or not, our sole assurance of hope, our sole chance in the future...the proletariat is the real key". "New Lamp for Old", a series of articles published in Indu Prakash, a periodical of Bombay.



practised properly in the external organization of life. He, however, admits that it is natural for man to seek the realization of the ideals in external machinery first; he has sympathy for the democratic countries and socialistic experiments, and he recognizes a measure of success by these societies. Yet he is sure that the realization of the ideal of equality and liberty cannot be achieved through the mechanism of external organization alone.

The principle of self-determination really means this that within every living human creature, man, woman and child, and equally within every distinct human collectivity growing or grown, half developed or adult, there is a self, a being which has the right to grow in its own way, to find itself, to make its life a full and a satisfied instrument and image of its being. This is the first principle which must contain and overtop all others; the rest is a question of conditions, means, expedients, accommodations, opportunities, capacities, limitations, none of which must be allowed to abrogate the sovereignty of the first essential principle.<sup>62</sup>

### Progressivism

Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future of mankind reflects, undoubtedly, something of the spirit of progressivism. He has held out before men a prospect of endless progression; supermanhood is not the final goal, there is indeed no finality. But his idea of progress is entirely different from that of modern Europe. It has

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<sup>62</sup>Sri Aurobindo, War and Self-Determination (Pondy: Ashram), p. 39.

issued out of his spiritual interpretation of Evolution. By progress he meant advancement in consciousness, not merely in the possession of more scientific knowledge, greater control over nature and better amenities. Even these he looked upon as signs of a general progress of the human consciousness.

Progressivism as a concept of history suffers from certain contradictions. In fact, the hope for an immanent and constant progress entertained by the Enlightenment is not based on a very clear conception of history, although a good deal of theorizing in history took place in the period. H. F. Muller writes:

Altogether the expressed faiths of the Enlightenment are sometimes naïve and never self-evident.<sup>63</sup>

A continuous progress is not possible within a linear, i.e., Christian conception of history. The linear view has to have a beginning and an end. On the other hand, the classical theory of a circular movement makes continuity possible but progress ends up in regress. Löwith has expressed this predicament of progressivism as a doctrine of history beautifully:

The modern mind is not single-minded; it eliminates from its progressive outlook the Christian implication of creation and consummation, while it assimilates from the ancient world view the idea of an endless and continuous movement, discarding its circular structure.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> H. F. Muller, The Uses of the Past (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 285.

<sup>64</sup> K. Löwith, Meaning in History (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1964), p. 207.

Sri Aurobindo's view of history provides a solution to this problem. He speaks of the cycles of history. There is no absolute beginning and no absolute termination. On the other hand, the movement is not exactly circular, nothing comes back exactly to the same place except at the end of Pralaya or Conflagration; each revolution takes the round a little forward, some backward movement is there which gives the impression of a regress, but there is no real regress, this backward movement is only a preparation, through assimilation of the things gained, for a greater movement forward. This view does not involve the natural fatalism of the classical conception of history, it is compatible with the sense of human responsibility to regenerate history through will and righteous effort.<sup>65</sup>

In conclusion, it may be said that Sri Aurobindo received the full impact of the modern West and assimilated the fundamentals of its forces, but he did all these from his own vantage point -- his central vision about man and his future.

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<sup>65</sup>His view of history has been elaborated on in Chapter IV, section V.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE VISION OF REALITY

##### I. Sri Aurobindo vis-a-vis the Vedantic Tradition

###### Is He a Hindu Theologian?

Is Sri Aurobindo a Hindu theologian in the sense that Sankara and Ramanuja are? He is not. For he neither recognized the śruti (scripture) as the final and inviolable authority about Truth, nor did he make the exposition of the scripture his principal concern.

Sankara, Ramanuja, and others, considered that all Truth was in the Vedas, it was only a question of right interpretation of the sacred texts. They were not in favour of free thinking. Sankara wanted only śrutyānukṛta tarka -- arguments governed by the scripture. By implication they denied the authority of non-Hindu scriptures. (Although the spirit of toleration was present in a general way in the Hindu tradition<sup>\*</sup> regarding the pursuit of spiritual disciplines, it is only in modern times that Ramakrishna came out with a statement that all roads lead to the same goal -- yata mat tata path.) Sri Aurobindo has stated his position very clearly:

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<sup>\*</sup>The Gītā, IV.II, for instance.

For the sadhaka of the integral Yoga it is necessary to remember that no written sastra, however great its authority or however large its spirit, can be more than a partial expression of the eternal Knowledge. He will use, but never bind himself even by the greatest scripture.<sup>1</sup>

Obviously for him all the revealed scriptures are "written sastra". He does not deny revelation or divine inspiration, but the fact that such inspired stuff has been put in the form of human language is something undeniable, and this brings them under limitations, under conditions of a particular speech and culture. That is why he considers them as "partial expression of the eternal Knowledge" and not eternal Knowledge itself.

Regarding scripture Sri Aurobindo's attitude is not at all exclusivistic:

His [who follows Integral Yoga] Yoga may be governed for a long time by one Scripture or by several successively, -- if it is in the line of the great Hindu tradition, by the Gita, for example, the Upanisads, the Veda.<sup>2</sup>

Obviously, it may also not be in the line of the Hindu tradition. He places the Eternal Truth above everything and urges the truth-seeker to depend only on that.

But in the end he must take his station, or better still, if he can, always and from the beginning he must live in his own soul beyond the written Truth, -- sabdabrahmativat -- beyond all that he has heard and all that he has yet to hear, -- srotavyasya srutasya ca. For he is not the sadhaka of a book or of many books; he is a sadhaka of the Infinite.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Synthesis of Yoga, Chapter I, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-4.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

One may well consider this to be the truest spirit of the Indian tradition, but undoubtedly this is not the orthodox attitude. This 'dependence on one's own soul' may seem to place Sri Aurobindo in the line of the mystics. But as a mystic he is not anti-intellectual nor does he place one's personal experience above all other testimony.

### The Objective of His Philosophical Inquiry

As regards the objective of his writing, Sri Aurobindo has not left us in doubt:

Such is the scheme of the human understanding upon which the conclusions of the most ancient Vedanta 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.<sup>4</sup>

He is concerned only with the problem of divine life on earth, and not with a new statement of the Truth of Vedanta. Nevertheless, he builds primarily on the foundation of Vedanta, although he claims to add to that structure from new lights gained by himself:

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

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<sup>4</sup>The Life Divine, Book I, Chapter VIII, entitled "The Methods of Vedantic Knowledge", p. 63.

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>5</sup> [italics are mine]

So we see Sri Aurobindo accepts the greatness of the scripture, but does not recognize it as the final authority. He builds mainly in the line of Vedanta, but he is unwilling to stop short at what has come down as the tradition. His main concern is divine life, so he speaks of newer light, obviously referring to his own findings, and he addresses the modern man, the elites of all countries, so he speaks of new expressions. As regards the additions from his personal experience -- superman and divine life with which our dissertation is concerned -- he seems again to deviate from the tradition. In a way, every interpreter brings in something new from his own understanding of the tradition, but Sri Aurobindo is conscious that the ideal of divine life on earth was not consciously entertained by the tradition, and that the Supermind, though known by the Vedic seers, was not realized in its fullness. He does not see any reason why we should not go forward in our search for perfection and why something should be rejected a priori simply because that thing was not known or attempted before.

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<sup>5</sup>  
Ibid.

### Vedantic Truth and Yogic Intuition

Regarding the place of yogic intuition in the determination of truth, again Sri Aurobindo leaves the tradition behind. Vedanta accepts six pramānas or evidences of truth. These are: pratyaksa (sense-perception), anumāna (inference), upamāna (analogy), śabda (scripture), arthāpatti (implication), an-upalabdhi (negation). There is no mention of yogic intuition as one of the evidences of truth. But the highest pramāna, "The Scriptures register the experiences of the seers, they are āpta-vacana, the sayings of the inspired men".<sup>6</sup> Is it not possible that we may have inspired seers even at this day? Radhakrishnan writes, "It is not necessary for us to close the door to future revelations".<sup>7</sup>

Sri Aurobindo certainly accepts yogic intuition as one of the pramānas (evidences), perhaps the highest pramāna. In this age of global existence, when we are confronted with conflicting statements by scriptures of different traditions can we reasonably accept any particular scripture as the repository of all truth? But conflicts are there among experiences of different sages and seers as well! Sri Aurobindo appears to be in favour of a balance between the overriding authority of the scripture and the vagaries of personal experiences. Personal experiences are to be verified,

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<sup>6</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, The Brahma Sūtra (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p. 113.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



tested, compared with the statements in the scripture. A thorough exactitude and a scrupulous analysis aided by the purification of the instruments of knowledge alone can lead us to any certainty. Needless to say, Sri Aurobindo has gone to the scriptures mainly for the verification of his experiences, and in his principal work, The Life Divine, he has obviously sought the support of the scripture, mainly Hindu. As regards that part of his philosophy consisting of divine life, superman, transformation, etc. not developed in the tradition but which, he claims, follows from the fundamentals of Indian spiritual tradition, he says: "I have been testing day and night for years upon years more scrupulously than any scientist his theory or his method on the physical plane".<sup>8</sup> He has thus initiated a kind of empiricism regarding the finding of the Infinite.

It remains, however, a question of what exactly is the place of intuition in Advaita Vedanta, and, for that matter, in other schools of Indian thought. A mere intellectual knowledge of the tenets of Vedanta is not expected to lead one to liberation. Realization would mean some more intimate and direct apprehension of Truth through meditation on the great words (mahāvākya) of the scripture. That it is such yogic intuition that is the goal of Advaita is borne out by a scholar of the eminence of Radhakrishnan and also by an adept in the field of sādhana (spiritual endeavour)

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<sup>8</sup> Sri Aurobindo on Himself (Pondy: Ashram), p. 378.

like Ramakrishna. Gītā II.46 states clearly how important the experience of Brahman is:

As much use as there is in a well with water in flood on every side, so much is there in all the Vedas for the Brahman who has the Knowledge.

### The Cātons

Ever since Sankara it has been customary, with some minor deviations, to comment on the three books — the Upanisads, the Bhagavad Gītā, the Brahma Sūtra (together referred to as Prasthānatraya) — for the establishment of any new point of view. Among the moderns only Sri Aurobindo set out to put his philosophy systematically. He did this mainly in his The Life Divine as an independent discourse on the problems of philosophy. Of course, he has written a commentary side-by-side on the scriptures, but he did not deem it necessary to stick to the three books of the tradition. Brahmasūtra he has completely omitted; whereas Advaita extols the Upanisads in the name of the Vedas, he has gone to the Vedas proper — the Samhitās, without, however, neglecting the Upanisads. This is a significant departure from the Vedānta traditions, and it gives Sri Aurobindo a unique place as a Vedānta commentator.

Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the Vedas is by itself a great work. His going back to the Vedas and finding there the roots of his principal intuitions like the Supermind is significant. In one respect, he founded his philosophy firmly on the earliest

and most sacred base, and, on the other, he moves forward away from the narrow confines of the tradition to build a philosophy which has been designated by Charles A. Moore as world philosophy meant for the elites of all the nations.<sup>9</sup> Has not the Veda considered the sacrifice (understood in the inner sense) a journey, an ongoing process?

To conclude, Sri Aurobindo builds his system of philosophy and yoga (this marriage of theory and practice is again typically Indian) basically on the Indian, particularly the Vedantic, tradition, yet he does not restrict himself to the rigidity of the tradition. He may well claim this to be the real spirit of the Indian tradition and himself the most authentic exponent of it in the context of modern developments in world thought and culture.

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<sup>9</sup> Charles A. Moore, "Sir Aurobindo on East and West", in The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, ed. H. Chaudhury and F. Spiegelberg (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1960).

## II. Integral Non-dualism and the Logic of the Infinite

### The Foundations of Integral Non-dualism

As we have seen, Sri Aurobindo has built his philosophy mainly in the line of Vedanta although he has retained his freedom. This freedom is seen in Sri Aurobindo's unique interpretation of the Vedanta. What the Vedantic schools have accepted as the Vedas are actually the Upanisads. The Upanisads are the most important body of literature for the Vedanta. The other two books — The Bhagavad Gītā and the Brahmasūtra are but gists and developments of the Upanisadic teaching. The Upanisads, even if we consider only the principal ones, are numerous, and were composed at different times. They are not systematic treatises but rather spontaneous expressions, very often in figures and symbols, of spiritual insights and intuitions of sages given to the pursuit of Truth. These expressions are very suggestive, telling and poetic, and so naturally they are open to different interpretations. Each school of thought finds passages supporting its views. For example, Chāndogya Up. VI. 1-2 says that Reality is the Brahman and everything else is only name and form, just as mud is the reality of the pot which is only name and form. The Katha Up. II. 4.11 says that one who sees plurality goes from death to death, and so our mind should know that there is no difference. These verses tend to support the non-dualistic school of thought. On the other hand, Śvetāśvatara Up. (I.9 and 12) postulates three ultimate realities, God, the finite soul, and the world, which together constitute

Brahman. Such verses go to the support of the qualified monistic and the dualistic schools of thought. Now the question is what is the main thrust of the teachings of the Upanisads as a whole. The other two books (The Bhagavad Gītā and the Brahmasūtra) and sometimes some others (e.g., Srīmadbhāgavata) have been used as aids to the discovery of the truth of the Upanisads, but as usual unanimity was not possible. Sri Aurobindo does not reject any of the traditional schools of Vedānta as false. He sees truth in each of them but at the same time considers them partial. He has attempted a synthesis of the different views, and in the discovery of the central truth of Vedānta he is in favour of using other sacred books like the Rg Veda Samhitā and taking the testimony of the entire culture of India that has grown in the wake of the Upanisads.

Of course, synthesis by itself cannot claim any finality. The synthetic view may as well be considered another view. But the integralist view of Sri Aurobindo has this width of compass that it can contain the traditional schools of Vedānta without having to reject any of them as false. Advaita has to push all other views into the category of Ignorance since according to it none but the Nirguna Brahman is real. Sri Aurobindo is, however, conscious that all statements about the ultimate reality are bound to be inadequate. The ultimate has to be realized through identity of the knower and the known (Brahma vid Brahmaiva bhavati). But as an aid to realization, a view which is as comprehensive as possible has to be formed. This is how a bridge can be built

between intellect and intuition. This is why he has attempted a comprehensive and synthetic view of the Vedanta. This system has been characterized by Sri Aurobindo as realistic Advaita and by others as Pūrṇādvaita (Integral Non-dualism). Of course, his non-dualism is very different from the illusionistic non-dualism of Sankara and his followers. In fact, as a philosopher and interpreter of Indian scripture and culture, Sri Aurobindo has challenged the position of Sankara. We have to examine this situation in our attempt at giving Sri Aurobindo's vision of Reality.

#### Sankara's Non-dualism: A Critical Review

Sankara and his followers are famous for the doctrine of Māyā, but the meaning of this doctrine is a real problem. In this respect a confusion is seen not only among the general intelligentsia but also among the people who write about and follow the Advaita. Advaita was established on the criticism, among others, of the ritualistic school of thought. Advaita does not advocate Karma (ritual works) for Karma belongs to the realm of Avidyā and the ideal state according to Advaita is a state of inaction (naiskarmya). But, in fact, we see that those Brahmins are most enthusiastic about Advaita who zealously follow the rituals of Pūrva Mīmāṃsā. Organizations and sects who affiliate themselves with Advaita are seen to follow a daily programme of devotionism, and devotion occupies only a secondary place in Advaita discipline. The confusion has grown more in the modern period when some thinkers accepted Advaita and

yet wanted to say that the world was not unreal.<sup>1</sup> The dialectics of Advaita simply do not allow such a compromise. If we pursue the analogy of rope and snake which was employed by Sankara to explain the relationship (rather, the want of that) between Brahman and the world everything becomes clear. Let us do the same in the words of T. R. V. Murti, a reputed authority on the Advaita.

There are writers on the Vedanta, some modern exponents especially, who declare the world as appearance, and yet contend that it is somehow real and is an integral part of Brahman. Possibly, they are not quite aware of the implications of the notion of appearance. This implies the distinction between what a thing is in itself and what it appears to percipients under certain conditions... To call anything an appearance is to be aware of two aspects of a thing, the essential and the accidental. Again what appears always appears as another. It is significant only in the context of mistake. For this reason the Advaita invariably equates the appearance with the false (dr̥syatvāt mithyā)... Take away the percipient, his ignorance and other auxiliary conditions which engender it, will the appearance still continue to appear? The real, however, will be there without the appearance....

It does not make much sense then to call the world an appearance and at once to plead that it somehow belongs to Brahman and that it cannot be rejected wholly.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Schweitzer has mentioned, among others, Rammohan Roy, Devendranath Tagore, and Vivekananda, in his Indian Thought and its Development (originally written in German; Hodden and Stoughton Ltd., London, 1936). There are others of more recent times, e.g., Kokileswar Sastri and S. Radhakrishnan.

<sup>2</sup> T. R. V. Murti, "The Two Definitions of Brahman in the Advaita", in K. C. Bhattacharya Memorial Volume (Amalner, 1958), pp. 138-139.

In fact, Advaita had to reject the world of Becoming as a superimposition (adhyāsa) on the Real — Brahman. In metaphysical thought reconciliation between Being and Becoming has always been a terrible problem as is evidenced by both Eastern and Western history of philosophy. Advaita has tried to maintain the purity of the Absolute by denying the ultimate existence of everything else including God, soul, physical and subtle worlds, etc. But that which appears as real due to ignorance has a pragmatic reality, the appearance is a fact of experience. How does this pragmatic reality occur? With a view to explaining this situation the mechanism of Māyā has been brought in. Brahman in association with Māyā is called God, Brahman under the delusion of Māyā is the Jīva (soul). The worlds are the creation of Māyā (māyāparināma). Māyā is basically a deluding force because when Māyā is removed, with it goes the entire superstructure of falsity, including even God who is said to be the Lord of Māyā. When someone is freed from delusion he sees only the rope and no snake at all, and he also realizes that there had never been a snake there, nor will the rope ever turn into a snake (traikāla nisedhatva).

Now we have to see two things: one, how far the fact of appearance has been explained consistently, and two, how far the absolute character of the Absolute has been maintained. All the details of the activity of Māyā in the form of creation, destruction, etc. are of no meaning if Māyā itself remains unexplained. In that case we have the process but not the fundamental truth. The last word of Advaita about Māyā is that it is inexplicable (anirvācya).



It cannot have a separate existence from Brahman, for then dualism comes in, but it cannot also properly belong to Brahman for Brahman cannot harbour avidyā -- a force that deludes, that blocks the truth.

Again we have to consider why Māyā should create this world of delusion. In the absence of any satisfactory answer to this question, and the proper explanation of Māyā the Advaita account of the world and creation and appearance fails. As for the absoluteness of the Absolute, questions have been raised as to how the Absolute remains totally unaffected by its connection with Māyā, Devanandan contends:

To connect the world of Becoming with the Absolute Being by the Māyā principle of illusion and to contend that while Māyā affects the world, it leaves no trace at all on the Ultimate is no solution. The issue naturally involves the problem of 'cause' and 'effect'. But causation is a relational concept, and the principle of identity which is the summum bonum as well as the fundamental thesis of the vidyā self-realization denies all ultimate relation.<sup>3</sup>

Advaita speaks of one-sided relationship which is a contradiction in terms. Sri Aurobindo says:

Brahman in time must have some significance for Brahman in timeless eternity, otherwise there could be no self and spirit in things and therefore no basis for the temporal existence.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>P. D. Devanandan, The Concept of Māyā (London: Lutterworth), p. 137.

<sup>4</sup>The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter VI, p. 409.

Secondly, the Absolute posited by Advaita is absolutely colourless, no activity could be assigned to it. Its own nature (svarūpa - lakṣaṇa) has also to be understood in the negative sense. Brahman is said to be the ground of all existence, and at the same time it is deprived of the capacity to produce existences — since all dynamism belongs to Māyā. As a result, Brahman in Advaita turns out to be a mere logical postulate. Now, is this the Absolute that has been spoken of in the Vedas and the Upanisads? All sorts of activities have been ascribed to Brahman. Aitareya Up. (I.1.3) has spoken of him as the creator of the Universe. Bṛhad. Up. (I.4.1-4) and Taittirīya Up. (II.1) have spoken about the emanation of the world out of Brahman. Advaita would say this is only saguna Brahman which has no ultimate reality. Many scholars have expressed their utter dissatisfaction at this picture. They do not consider this to be the right exposition of the teachings of the Upanisads. Let us quote a few scholars. Radhakrishnan says in criticism of the Advaita description of the Absolute:

Like the Taj Mahal, which is unconscious of the admiration it arouses, the Absolute remains indifferent to the fear and love of its worshippers, and for all those who regard the goal of religion as the goal of philosophy — to know God is to know the real — Sankara's view seems to be a finished example of learned error. They feel that it is as unsatisfactory to natural instincts as to trained intelligence. The world is said to be an appearance and God a bloodless Absolute dark with the excess of light.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Indian Philosophy, Vol. II (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1941), p. 659.

R. G. Bhandarkar writes,

The opinion expressed by some eminent scholars that the burden of the Upanisadic teaching is the illusive character of the world...is manifestly wrong.<sup>6</sup>

S. C. Chakrabarty writes,

Let us stop for a moment to consider the nature of the world as explained in the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad....Do we find it stated here that the world is a mirage, a fiction, the mere shadow of something else, or do we 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 of the Brahman, here spoken of, is only relatively true, and that, therefore, the world and everything else that came from the Self or the Brahman are only relatively true. It cannot for a moment be doubted that the world is as true as Brahman itself.<sup>7</sup>

Ananda Coomaraswamy writes,

The conception of the absolute non-entity of the phenomenal World is entirely contrary to many passages in Brhadāranyaka and Chāndogya, as well as to the Brahma Sūtra, 1, 2, which asserts that 'Everything is Brahman'.<sup>8</sup>

It is true that in the Upanisads the fundamental unity of the Reality has been emphasized for to see the multiplicity and miss the underlying unity is a sign of ignorance, but it does not mean

<sup>6</sup>Vaisnavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems (Varanasi: Indological Book House), p. 2 n.

<sup>7</sup>The Philosophy of the Upanisads (Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1935), p. 132.

<sup>8</sup>Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism (New York: Harper Torch-books, 1964; originally published in 1916), p. 209 n.

that multiplicity is mere appearance. Unity and multiplicity taken together give the total picture of Reality as Īsa Up. says, vidyā and avidyā, sambhūti and asambhūti (Knowledge and Ignorance, Birth and Non-birth) are to be taken together (verses 11-14). Regarding the absolute character of the Absolute, A. B. Purani has put the view of Sri Aurobindo's point beautifully:

Absolute would be true absolute if it could become all relativities and yet remain Absolute. It cannot be bound down to its unitarian unity.<sup>9</sup>

#### Contradictions in Sankara's Non-dualism

In all the Indian scriptures the idea of the immanence of God is most common, so much so that many people mistake it for Pantheism. But Advaita cannot truly entertain the idea of immanence of Brahman. Immanence would imply the presence of the Divine in everything. According to Advaita, there is nothing but Brahman, his presence in everything is a concept that does not fit into the scheme of Advaita because there is not really anything. Of the two great words (mahāvākya) of the Scripture:

- i) ekam sat viprah bahudhā vadanti. Rg Veda I.164.46.  
(Truth is one, sages speak of it variously).
- ii) sarvam khalvidam brahma. Chand. Up. III.14.1.  
(All these are Brahman).

Advaita has laid exclusive stress on the former, and by-passed the latter; sarvam (all) has been denied. Brahma satyam jagat mithyā jīvo Brahmaiva nāparam -- Brahman is Real, world false, the soul is

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<sup>9</sup> A. B. Purani, Sri Aurobindo's Life Divine (Pondy: Ashram, 1966), p. 276.

Brahman and nothing else -- this sums up Advaita.

Again, there are certain strong internal contradictions in the Advaita. A complete separation is posited between the phenomenal and the Real. All mental activity belongs to the sphere of avidyā (Ignorance), on the other side of which is the Real. The Real cannot be spoken of in discursive language.<sup>10</sup> Yet we know Advaita speaks a good deal about the Absolute. Whatever they speak about the Absolute, it is by their standard condemned as false. We should give particular attention to this point.

Like all other schools of Indian thought, Advaita also has a discipline attached to it for the realization of Truth. Every discipline is made of certain steps which lead gradually to the culminating point. Advaita has tried to accommodate Work and Devotion as steps towards the final goal. But is such gradual development compatible with the sharp division between avidyā and vidyā (Ignorance and Knowledge)? Someone is either in the realm of avidyā or vidyā. Avidyā does not gradually lead to vidyā, the snake does not gradually give way to the realization of the rope. By the same token the Advaita's claim that it can contain qualified Monism and Dualism within itself whereas the others cannot contain Advaita is not tenable. Advaita can make room for other schools only in the sphere of avidyā. The Advaitist may say that this avidyā is good, it is like that thorn which removes

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<sup>10</sup> Sankara has emphasized the indescribability of the Absolute in his commentary on the Brahmasūtra, III.2.17. "Silence is the Self".

other thorns. But for the Advaitist there is really no good aspect of avidyā. He cannot recognize vidyā-māyā or parā prakṛti (higher divine nature), māyā for him is just a principle of darkness that obscures the self-evident Brahman. That is why Advaita would put Sruti-Knowledge also in the category of avidyā, although to explicate Sruti is the express aim of this school of thought. Unqualified Oneness, according to Advaita, is the only truth and all others are just false.

Advaita shares this dualism of vidyā and avidyā with Sāṅkhya and Buddhism. In Sāṅkhya Purusa and Prakṛti are entirely different, and how mahat or buddhi, a product of Prakṛti can mediate between the two is an insoluble problem. Similarly in Buddhism there exists a complete separation between the realm of suffering and the realm where suffering ceases. Among other internal contradictions Deussen has mentioned the following:

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.<sup>11</sup>

The followers of Advaita say that the reality of the individual soul is only provisional, phenomenal. But the soul has to have a reality distinct from the world and from the Supreme even in the event of illumination or liberation. Otherwise who is going to benefit by its liberation? The supreme Self is always inalienably free, still,

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<sup>11</sup> The Philosophy of the Upanisads, authorized trans. by A. S. Geden (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), pp. 256-257.

pure; the world is condemned to remain in darkness and is not freed by the escape of any individual from the universal illusion. All the travail of an individual for liberation then comes to nothingness, no-one is thereby benefitted.

Therefore we arrive at the escape of an illusory non-existent soul from an illusory non-existent bondage in an illusory non-existent world as the supreme good which that non-existent soul has to pursue; for this is the last word of the knowledge, "There is none bound, none freed, none seeking to be free".<sup>12</sup>

### Integral Non-dualism

We have mentioned earlier the difficulties the metaphysicians have encountered both in the Eastern and Western traditions in reconciling the Being and the Becoming, the static and the Dynamic. In the Indian tradition Sankara has tried to account for Becoming while taking his stand on Being. In the Brahma sūtra Brahman has been defined as the source from which the world proceeds, by which it is maintained and ended -- Janmādy asya yatah I.1.2. But Sankara does not take this verse at its face value. He admits that Brahman is the ground of all existence, but he would not say that the world is a real manifestation (parināma) of Brahman. If Brahman becomes the world then the question arises -- does the Brahman resolve itself into the world? If so, Brahman ceases to be the absolute Reality. If part of Brahman becomes the world

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<sup>12</sup> The Life Divine, Book I, Chapter V, p. 39.

and part retains its transcendence, then again we have to posit division in the indivisible Non-dual. So Sankara would not recognize the world as real. It is only a superimposition, an appearance on Brahman.

How does Sri Aurobindo solve the problem of reconciling the Being and Becoming? He takes both the stasis and the dynamis together. He does not consider them two principles, they are two aspects of the same indeterminable Reality. He considers power inherent in Being, Shakti inherent in Shiva: "There is no reason", he says, "why we should not conceive of the Reality as at once static and dynamic".<sup>13</sup> And he adds, "There is no reason either why they should not be simultaneous; on the contrary, simultaneity is demanded, -- for all energy, all kinetic action has to support itself on status or by status if it is to be effective or creative".<sup>14</sup> Obviously dynamis is related to the stasis. How is the suprarelatational absolute character of the Supreme safeguarded? His answer would be that the Absolute is bound by none. Eternal stasis and eternal dynamis are both true of the Reality which itself surpasses both stasis and dynamis. Similarly, he would say that the indeterminability of Brahman does not signify incapacity of self-determination but its superiority to all determinations.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., Book II, Chapter VI, p. 411.



It is perfectly understandable the Absolute is and must be indeterminable in the sense that it cannot be limited by any determination or any sum of possible determinations, but not in the sense that it is incapable of self-determination.<sup>15</sup>

But why is this self-determination? Why does the Timeless bring itself into names and forms in Time? According to Advaita, there cannot be any reason behind creation, creation would suggest want, presence of incompleteness in the Infinite. So Advaita explains away the creation as an appearance. Sri Aurobindo would say that self-determination is one of the infinite powers inherent in the Indeterminable. He is not obliged to bring this power into play, yet He does:

The Absolute can have no need of anything; but still there can be — not coercive of its freedom, not binding on it, but an expression of its self-force, the result of its Will to become, — an imperative of a supreme self-effectuating force, a necessity of self creation born of the power of the Absolute to see itself in Time.<sup>16</sup>

But this Will of self-expression presupposes some kind of self-consciousness which can hardly be attributed to the Advaita Absolute. But self-consciousness too, like dynamis, is inherent in the Absolute; it emerges as the supermind, the fourth principle in the three-in-One — Sat - Chit - Ananda.

Substance in its utter purity resolves itself into pure conscious being, self-existent.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Book II, Chapter I, p. 284.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., Book II, Chapter VI, pp. 416-417.

inherently self-aware by identity, but not yet turning its consciousness upon itself as object. Supermind preserves this self-awareness by identity as its substance of self-knowledge and its light of self-creation.<sup>17</sup>

This Supermind again as the Divine Gnosis— Knowledge — Will — is presupposed in any self-manifestation on the part of the Infinite.

But infinite Existence, Consciousness and Bliss need not throw themselves out into apparent being at all, or doing so it would not be cosmic being, but simply an infinity of figures without fixed order or relation, if they did not hold or develop and bring out from themselves this fourth term of Supermind, of the Divine Gnosis.<sup>18</sup>

A correspondence between this Supermind and the Īsvara as Lord of Māyā in Advaita is obvious, with this great difference, however, that in Advaita Īsvara and Māyā are considered as contingent and phenomenal and not Real. Sri Aurobindo says:

• This power indeed is nothing else than Sacchidananda Himself; it creates nothing which is not in its own self-existence, and for that reason all cosmic and real Law is a thing not imposed from outside, but from within, all development is self-development, all seed and result are seed of a Truth of things and result of that seed determined out of its potentialities.<sup>19</sup>

#### Māyā as Vidya

Thus, according to Sri Aurobindo, this creative Power and

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., Book I, Chapter XXIV, p. 218.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., Book I, Chapter XXVII, p. 245.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., Book I, Chapter XXVIII, p. 245.

Knowledge-Will of the Supreme is not avidyā like māyā in Advaita. It is an integral aspect of the Supreme. But self-determination or manifestation involves self-alienation, a principle (and a movement) that makes the multiplicity possible. Is not that principle something contrary to the Divine since it obscures the Divine? Sri Aurobindo would say "No". At its root this power that holds back the unity and makes things come up as separate and self-contained is a movement of the divine Knowledge-Will. At a lower stage of particularized forces and beings, where the essential foundation of unity is lost sight of, Ignorance onsets, not, however, in the sense of negation of Knowledge but in the sense of limited Knowledge. Even at the bottom of manifestation where Knowledge turns into Nescience there too Knowledge is involved. So is the recovery of Knowledge possible, so is the journey recommended by the Upanisad from Ignorance to Knowledge -- avidyā to vidyā (Īśa 11).

What we call Ignorance is not really anything else than a power of the one divine Knowledge-Will or Maya; It is the capacity of the One Consciousness similarly to regulate, to hold back, measure, relate in a particular way the action of its Knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

To consider Inconscience and Ignorance originally a movement of Knowledge -- "as powers of an involved consciousness and a self-limited Knowledge"<sup>21</sup> -- may sound paradoxical. But Sri

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Book II, Chapter VII, p. 455.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 443.

Aurobindo says it would not seem paradoxical if we could enlarge our conception of the Infinite. That is what he has done. He has not reduced the Absolute to a logical postulate. Instead the Absolute has been conceived of as possessing infinite power of consciousness, as capable of manifesting the fathomless and illimitable Truth of its being in many aspects and processes, in innumerable expressive forms and movements.

This manifestation being the work of the infinite force, the question of its being illusory in character does not arise. Everything proceeds from the Divine, everything is a movement of the Real; even Ignorance is rooted in Knowledge. Then why is this endeavour for liberation from bondage, from ignorance, etc.? Where exactly lies the bondage?

Bondage lies in the loss of the unitive Knowledge. Our mind and ego are bound by their separateness. Their separate existence is not unreal, it is the result of a particular movement or concentration on the part of the supreme Consciousness, but exclusive awareness of separateness is not the right understanding of reality and this constitutes our ignorance. With the dawning of the awareness of the underlying unity comes right knowledge and liberation.

Liberation is, of course, understood differently by different schools of Vedanta. For Advaita, there is a sharp schism between the Real and the phenomenal. They would naturally look upon phenomenal existence as bondage, to get out of this subjection to Maya is their logical aim, this is liberation for them.

Theistic schools, on the other hand, look upon the manifestation as a play of the Divine. They would, therefore, like to take some part in the play or just have the delight of observing it.

### The Meaning of Lila (Play)

It may be contended by the Advaitists that the player never forgets that he is playing. If there is no oblivion there is no real fall, no ignorance, and no need of liberation. On the other hand, if there is oblivion there is no play. And why should the Divine bring Himself down to this state of wretchedness at all? Sri Aurobindo would say as the actor has a dual consciousness, in one he is aware of his real identity, in the other he is absorbed in the role he has assumed, so also this consciousness of the essential unity and phenomenal diversity is there in the inner being or the superconscient in each of us. It is this indwelling being of delight that makes even mere living a thing of pleasure. If the oblivious parts of our nature — our conscious mind and ego — can also take part in that superconscient Knowledge latent in us then the whole life, and for that matter, the whole world of manifestation is experienced as a play of the eternal Player. Suffering results from oblivion of the play, and this prompts the hasty rejection of the whole existence as suffering.

Sri Aurobindo thus defends the theistic conception of Play or Līlā.<sup>22</sup> But he seems to go beyond that. Theistic schools

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<sup>22</sup>It [the universe] is the delight of a Self-lover, the play of a Chid, the endless self-multiplication of a Poet intoxicated.

long for some kind of eternal communion with the Divine not so much in this world as in some supra-physical world. For Sri Aurobindo the world of physical existence carries a greater significance. It is a movement on the part of the Timeless to realize Itself in Time, for the Ultimate is, paradoxically enough, at one and the same time eternally self-realized and eternally self-realizing. In this realization we can take a conscious part, and this would constitute the fulfilment of our life, provided we can get rid of Ignorance. Liberation is thus an indispensable primary condition for something greater -- for spontaneous action in Knowledge.

Liberation signifies an emergence into the true spiritual nature of being where all action is the automatic self-expression of the truth and there can be nothing else.<sup>23</sup>

#### Logical Problems Involved

However, simultaneous and equal acceptance of the stasis and dynamis has far-reaching effects in all the other aspects of his philosophy and practical programme, namely, reconciliation has been possible between static self and dynamic life, transformation of the lower nature into the higher has been conceivable. We shall deal with them in subsequent sections. But the unity of the stasis and dynamis constitutes his central vision of the Reality. He has

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with the rapture of His own power of endless creation". Sri Aurobindo, Thoughts and Glimpses (Pondy: Ashram), p. 7.

<sup>23</sup>The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter XXVII, p. 885.

argued all along in support of his position. But it seems he is aware of the fact that a logical mind would see paradoxes at many points of his philosophy. The integral vision in which Knowledge-Ignorance, Subject-Object, Stasis-Dynamis lose their opposition into a suprarational Unity is beyond the grasp of the logical mind which is basically an instrument for analysis and differentiation. He states:

It is the intellectual reason that crystallizes and perpetuates an apparent contradiction by creating its opposite and dividing concepts of the Brahman, the Self, the Iswara, the individual being, the supreme consciousness or superconscience and the Mayic world-consciousness. If Brahman alone exists all these must be Brahman, and in Brahman-consciousness the division of these concepts must disappear in a reconciling self-vision; but we can arrive at their true unity only by passing beyond the intellectual Reason and finding out through spiritual experience where they meet and become one and what is the spiritual reality of their apparent divergence.<sup>24</sup>

### The Logic of the Infinite

Sri Aurobindo has, therefore, pointed to another logic, called 'the Logic of the Infinite', and tried to show that it would be logical for the rational mind to accept this new logic as a guide to Truth which by definition transcends all limitations of finitude.

Philosophical statements are made on the basis of some

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., Book II, Chapter VI, p. 415.

logical categories, and it is perfectly legitimate to question the validity of a particular logical category. In the history of philosophy such questions have been raised from time to time. Descartes and Spinoza have built their philosophical systems on the basis of formal logic.<sup>25</sup> Formal logic is based on abstract reason. It formulates certain general principles or laws and sees that no statement violates any of these laws, namely, the Law of Identity, the Law of Contradiction, the Law of the Excluded Middle, and so on. The objective is to attain consistency in thought without any great concern for the fact of experience.<sup>26</sup> Leibniz felt that the world of our experience cannot be brought under the scales of the laws of formal logic; he supplemented the laws of formal logic with another principle — the Principle of Sufficient Reason.<sup>27</sup> Kant went further. He has shown that

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<sup>25</sup> Francis H. Parker, The Story of Western Philosophy (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1967), p. 178. "To use the rigor of mathematical reasoning as a foundation for a philosophical edifice was Descartes' dream and the key to his positive method".

<sup>26</sup> Wallace I. Matson, A History of Philosophy (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1968), p. 341. "No appeal to experience is required for discerning the truth of analytic statements; we need know only what the terms mean".

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 342. "Whenever a contingent statement is true, there is some sufficient reason why it is true; no fact can be simply a brute fact, isolated and unintelligible. This is a fundamental assumption that Leibniz formulates as the Principle of Sufficient Reason".



formal logic can help us only in analytic judgments, but it does not lead us to knowledge of the real. Only a synthetic and a priori judgment can lead us to the real.<sup>28</sup> This new logic of the experience in which thought does not remain aloof but joins itself with the objective world for a fruitful and objective knowledge is known as the Transcendental Logic. Again, Hegel comes in with his dynamic view of thought and shows a new way of reconciling the antinomies and contradictions. Thought is dynamic and it has the power of manifesting itself in its opposites and also the power of reconciling the opposites. Every thought has three moments -- thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. In fact, thesis and anti-thesis are not entirely opposed to each other, one includes something of the other, so synthesis is possible; this is a new light on thought, and it discredits the formal law of Excluded middle very much. However, we are not concerned here about the relative merits of these attempts at reformulation of logic, we have only pointed to some precedents in the history of modern philosophy regarding rethinking about the scale with which to measure the truth.

Now what exactly is the Logic of the Infinite? The Logic of the Infinite means the logic that is natural to infinite

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<sup>28</sup> For example, our knowledge of space is not derived from experience. "Space itself is not something given in experience, but is instead a contribution of the knowing mind. It is a 'pure intuition a priori'. Ibid., p. 403.

consciousness of the Divine. If we have to conceive how the world came into being we should think how it would be natural for the infinite Brahman to bring out the world. Our thought is perforce matter-bound; we think within the space-time complex. Would it not then be arbitrary to attribute the normal ways of our thinking to the Infinite which by definition transcends the limitations of the corporeal finite world? In fact, the mode of temporal conceptualization and the law of contradiction apply only to separated entities within a homogeneous universe of discourse. Sometimes we unthinkingly apply this logic in areas in which it is not appropriate. The rational mind may indeed demand a clear lucid statement about the Infinite and its mode of operation, but this insistence on clarity and repudiation of all 'ambiguities' and 'mysticism' may lead to serious errors.

...the error of making an unbridgeable gulf between the Absolute and the relative, the error of making too simple and rigid and extending too far the law of contradictions, and the error of conceiving in terms of time the genesis of things which have their origin and first habitat in the Eternal.<sup>29</sup>

If we could loosen the tendons of our logic-bound mind a little, Sri Aurobindo argues, we could better understand the facts of our experience. The facts of our experience are not so separated and mutually exclusive as our mental logic tends to make them. For instance, an individual always exists in relation to his total

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<sup>29</sup> The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter III, p. 446.

experience of the world being, he "comes to embrace the whole world and all other beings in a sort of conscious extension" of himself, but he "still individualizes and it is still he who exists and embraces this wider consciousness while he individualizes".<sup>30</sup>

The individual thus at one and the same time contains the world and is contained in it. While explicating the "logic of the infinite" developed in the Life Divine, Beatrice Bruteau writes:

...the great divisions of Being, infinite and finite, unconditioned and conditioned, do not really represent oppositions. We have named the infinite and the unconditioned from the finite and the conditioned by negation, because the latter are more familiar to us. But, in reality that which we call the non-finite contains within itself the whole of the finite; therefore infinite and finite are not even separate, much less opposed. And in the next order of division, where we distinguish transcendent and cosmic, universal and individual, each member of the pair is contained in its contrary.<sup>31</sup>

However, it is common knowledge in the Indian tradition that the highest truth cannot be grasped by the intellect. Tait. Up. has spoken of the infinite as yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasā saha, II.4 (from which words turn away without attaining, and the mind also retires baffled). Katha Up. has categorically said that the infinite cannot be grasped by the intellect — na medhayā na bahunā

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 437, 438.

<sup>31</sup> Beatrice Bruteau, Worthy is the World: The Hindu Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1971), p. 54.

śrutena, I.2.23 (not by intellectual power, nor even through much hearing). For Vedānta also the human mind and intellect belong to the realm of avidyā (Ignorance) and since Brahman is on the other side of avidyā, the attempt is to speak of the Brahman in negative terms. Advaita admits that creation is a mystery, since Māyā is inexplicable (anirvāchya) yet following a mental conception of wholeness, perfection and purity it ultimately rejects the world as a superimposition on the Real. However, to make the Logic of the Infinite clear, let us quote from Sri Aurobindo:

We, human beings, are phenomenally a particular form of consciousness, subject to time and space, and can only be 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 particularized, nor as limited; it can be many things at a time and take more than one enduring poise even for all time.<sup>32</sup>

However, the way of the Infinite implies that many of the laws of our logic do not hold good in regard to the Infinite and its workings. Some of the modern philosophers we have referred to above felt the necessity of deviating from formal logic with a view to accounting for the world of experience.

Modern depth-psychology has shown how insignificant is

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<sup>32</sup> The Life Divine, Book I, Chapter XVI, p. 135.

the conscious rational part of our life compared to the vast reservoir of dark irrational forces that form the unconscious which mould our life from behind the veil. The picture of the rational part of our mind is quite inadequate for a true understanding of a personality or a situation. And again, when we attribute 'consciousness' to the fundamental energy of the universe do we not tend more often than not to conceive that 'consciousness' in terms of our conscious mind? Obviously in our investigation of the most general unity of the world we cannot legitimately be guided by the narrow image of our waking mind. The measure must have relevance to the thing we want to measure.<sup>33</sup> That is why the utterances of mystics all the world over are seen to flout the formal logic most easily. The Upanisad is a body of literature carrying high spiritual experiences about the Infinite. So we come across innumerable statements in them which flout the law of contradiction without the least hesitation. The Infinite is spoken of as:

1. *dūrāt sudūre tad ihāntike ca* (Mu. Up. III.1.7)  
(farther than the far, yet here near at hand).

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<sup>33</sup>"Sri Aurobindo lays down the principle which we find stated also in scholastic philosophy, that the categories and presuppositions of thought and the criterion of rational adequacy that one should adopt must correspond to or reflect the nature or structure of the object that one is trying to understand".  
Jehangir N. Chubb, "Sri Aurobindo as the Fulfillment of Hinduism", *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. XII, No. 2, June, 1972 (New York: Fordham University), p. 240.

2. anoraniyān mahato mahīyān. (Katha. Up. I.II.20)  
(smaller than the atom, bigger than the vast).
3. tad ejati tan naijati tad dure tad vad antike  
tad antarasya sarvasya tad u sarvasyāsya  
bāhyataḥ. (Iśa. Up. 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 that the human intellect give up its categories and try to conceive the Infinite in terms of the Infinite. What is a paradox to the finite consciousness may be natural and no paradox at all to the infinite consciousness.

While speaking about the relativity of all mental concepts, Reyna writes;

In addition, modern relativity theory teaches that outside our universe a system prevails where none of our conceptions apply, where there is no gravitational point, no 'up' and 'down', no 'east' and 'west', no 'right' and 'left', no 'time', no 'space', no 'causality', — and so to all our physical laws.

Thus it is that science posits upon formal grounds, the reality of a cosmic observational point where all our differentiations merge into a unified cosmic Oneness.<sup>34</sup>

### Intellect and the Way of the Infinite

Now if the intellect is discredited like this how would philosophy be possible? The idea is not to discourage the intellect but to make it receptive and attuned to a higher kind of perception.

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<sup>34</sup> Ruth Reyna, The Concept of Maya from the Vedas to the 20th Century (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1962), p. 92.

In fact, in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy there is no sharp division between avidyā and vidyā. The difference is only in degree. Avidyā is not negation of knowledge as the snake negates the rope and vice versa, it is only inadequate Knowledge. Intellect can enhance its capacities by opening itself to higher categories of truth. It can work as a bridge between the superconscient verities and the normal perception of the human mind. This, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the proper role of philosophy in the march of human consciousness toward further evolution. He has indeed given a high place to reason. About reason he says, "Even spiritual truths are likely to gain from it, not a loftier or more penetrating, -- that is with difficulty possible, -- but an ampler and fuller self-expression".<sup>35</sup> Again, "Reason is not the supreme light", although it is "always a necessary light-bringer".<sup>36</sup> The only discipline reason has to follow while transcribing the experiences of the Superconscient is to stop to impose its own categories on them. "It is not by 'thinking out' the entire reality, but by a change of consciousness that one can pass from the Ignorance to the Knowledge -- the Knowledge by which we become what we know".<sup>37</sup> In this attitude towards the intellect and its ways vis-a-vis higher

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<sup>35</sup>Evolution (Pondy: Ashram), p. 27.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>37</sup>On Yoga II, Tome One (Pondy: Ashram), p. 173.

Knowledge, Sri Aurobindo considers that he has the full support of the Eastern, especially Indian, philosophical tradition.

In the East, especially in India, the metaphysical thinkers have tried, as in the West, to determine the nature of the highest Truth by the intellect. But, in the first place, they have not given mental thinking the supreme rank as an instrument in the discovery of Truth, but only a secondary status. The first rank has always been given to spiritual intuition and illumination and spiritual experience; an intellectual conclusion that contradicts this supreme authority is held invalid, . . . Each philosophical founder (as also those who continued his work or school) has been a metaphysical thinker doubled with a yogi. Those who were only philosophic intellectuals were respected for their learning but never took rank as truth-discoverers.<sup>38</sup>

In fact, both Buddhism and Vedanta are theories of experience. Vedanta tries to explain experience on the basis of the reality of the permanent Self, Buddhism tries to explain experience on the basis of the endless flux of the world of becoming and the denial of the reality of a permanent Self.

#### Reality is Multi-dimensional.

Having thus made the ground clear for the acceptance of stasis and dynamis together, Sri Aurobindo would proceed to say that the Reality is multi-dimensional. Transcendence does not exhaust the description of the Real. What proceeds from the Transcendent is also real, a mode of the Real. In the cosmos we see the

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 171-172.



operation of the two eternal terms of existence -- Universal and Individual. These two terms are two modes of the Transcendental. The integral view of Reality would take these three fundamental terms of existence -- Transcendental, Universal, and Individual -- together.

There is an essentiality of things, a commonality of things, an individuality of things; the commonality and individuality are true and eternal powers of the essentiality: that transcends them both, but the three together and not one by itself are the eternal terms of existence.<sup>39</sup>

The Transcendental is the essential truth of everything, the Universal gives the commonality, and the Individual represents the uniqueness of everything -- thought, action, being, movement, etc. If we aspire to the essential truth we must approach the Transcendental, which is the fundamental truth and ground of everything, but the Universal and the Individual are no less true since they are modes of the same Reality.

The Vedas and Upanisads have spoken time and again of these three modes of the same Reality. For example:

ekam va idam vibabhuva sarvam. Rg Veda VIII 58.2  
(The One has become all this.)

Sa Yathornanābhis tantunocaret, yathāgneḥ Ksudrā  
visphulinga vyuccaranti, evaṁ evāsmād ātmanah  
sarve prāṇāḥ, sarve lokāḥ, sarve devāḥ sarvāni  
bhūtāni vyuccaranti. Brhad. Up. II.1.20.

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

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<sup>39</sup> The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter III, p. 344.

Sarvam hy etad brahma, ayam ātmā brahma. Ma. Up. 2.  
(All this Universe is the Eternal Brahman, this  
self is the Eternal.)

Tat tvam asi. Chand. Up. VI.9.4.  
(Thou art That.)

### III. Comprehensive and Synthetic Character of the Vision

Synthesis of the stasis and dynamis is the master key to Sri Aurobindo's integral vision of reality. From this follows the other aspects of his philosophy, and with this he synthesizes most other contraries in many other fields of experience and thought.

It is common knowledge that the opposition between stasis and dynamis has lead philosophers to deny either of the two. The absolutists in the East and the West have been obliged eventually to write off the world of dynamism. On the other hand, realists, mostly in the West, have taken no cognisance of the eternal stasis. A similar opposition is present between subjectivism and objectivism. This also results from the same mental polarization of things and experiences. Sri Aurobindo finds the resolution of this opposition in the rejection of the polarization. He says:

Such a distinction could hardly exist in Brahman-consciousness since here there is either no subject and no object or Brahman itself is the sole possible subject of its consciousness and the sole possible object; there could be nothing externally objective to Brahman, since there is nothing else than Brahman.<sup>1</sup>

We have already shown how Sri Aurobindo has effected a synthesis of Being and Becoming on the basis of his comprehensive spiritual experience and the logic that followed from that experience. We may now see how his vision reconciles the fundamental experiences

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<sup>1</sup>The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter VI, p. 399.

behind most religio-philosophical movements in India.

### Buddhist and Vedantic Absolutism

The core of Buddhism is the experience of a state which cannot be characterized by any positive term or any expression whatsoever. So it has been described as Sūnya. But all schools of Buddhism agree that it is not Nihil. It has a supremely positive content. From the point of view of spiritual experience, this Sūnya and the Brahman of the Advaita are not much different. One uses a negative while the other uses a positive term to describe an experience which is utterly inaffable and indescribable.<sup>2</sup> In one of the Upanisads (Chāndogya VI.2.1-2) it has been said that originally there was only the Non-being, and then a question has been raised as to how Being can be born from Non-being. There is a suggestion in these verses that the opposition between Non-being and Being is not real. Sri Aurobindo says that the impossibility of Being coming out of Non-being disappears "if we take Non-being

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<sup>2</sup>S. N. Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. 4 (Cambridge: University Press, 1961), p. 69: "There is no difference between the qualityless Brahman and the sūnya of the Buddhists. The qualityless Brahman is self-luminous and eternal; the sūnya of the Buddhists is unknowable by mind or speech, and is also differenceless, self-luminous, and eternal....It is not actually a real-positive entity, though it supports all positive appearances".

Edward Conge, Buddhism (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 2nd ed., 1953), pp. 130-131: "What we call emptiness in English is sunyata in Sanskrit....one must not regard the Buddhist emptiness as a mere nought, or a blank. It is a term for the absence of self".

in the sense, not of an inexistent Nihil but of an x which exceeds our idea or experience of existence, -- a sense applicable to the Absolute Brahman of the Advaita as well as the Void or Zero of the Buddhists".<sup>3</sup> He adds, "The Non-being permits the Being even as the Silence permits the Activity".<sup>4</sup> On this basis he explains the life and work of Buddha, "Thus was it possible for the Buddha to attain the state of Nirvana and yet act puissantly in the world, impersonal in his inner consciousness, in his action the most powerful personality that we know of as having lived and produced results upon earth".<sup>5</sup> Almost the same thing may be said about Sankara, the most active monk in the Hindu Tradition. On the philosophical level also we do not see much difference in the conception of the Absolute of the three absolutist schools of Indian thought -- Mādhyamika, Yogācāra, and Advaita Vedānta.

In all these systems, the absolute is transcendent, totally devoid of empirical determinations...the absolute is realized only in a non-empirical intuition called variously, prajna paramita, Lokottarajñāna, and aparokṣanubhūti.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>The Life Divine, Book I, Chapter IV, p. 29 n.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 29-30.

<sup>6</sup>T. R. V. Murti, The Central Philosophy of Buddhism (London: George Allen and Unwin), p. 321.

But, however lofty these experiences are, they are not recognized by Sri Aurobindo as the integral realization of the Truth. He says,

Unless one realizes 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.<sup>7</sup>

These absolutist schools would consider anything dynamic as belonging to the sphere of the phenomenal since the foundation of their thought is an experience of the featureless immutable Silence, "a consciousness that has itself fallen into a status of silence and is immobile".<sup>8</sup> Sri Aurobindo recognizes the profundity of this experience of Silence, he himself has this experience first, "Now to reach Nirvana was the first radical result of my own yoga",<sup>9</sup> and the result was similarly world negating -- "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, materialized shadows without true substance".<sup>10</sup> A philosophy based on such experience cannot accept the world and the dynamics as real, it can only try to give some explanation of

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<sup>7</sup> On Yoga II, Tome One, p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter VI, p. 410.

<sup>9</sup> On Yoga II, Tome One, pp. 51-52.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

this shadowy reality.

The Shakti or Power of the Eternal becomes then a power of illusion only and the World becomes incomprehensible, a mystery of cosmic madness, an eternal delirium of the Eternal. Whatever verbal or ideative logic one may bring to support it, this way of seeing the universe explains nothing; it only erects a mental formula of the inexplicable.<sup>11</sup>

The doctrine of Maya in Advaita is such a formula.

We may see a little further how his experience of Silence led eventually to the experience of the dynamic Divine.

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 Nirvana 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 super-consciousness from above.<sup>12</sup>

The non-dualist may object to the expression this author has underlined, but we know that the Gītā put the Purusottama above the immutable, and Rāmanuja considers impersonality as only an attribute of the Eternal Person. However, to continue this description of the basic experiences of Sri Aurobindo,

But meanwhile realization added itself to realization 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 surface phenomenon with immense Divine Reality

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 39

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

above it and an intense Divine Reality in the heart of everything that had seemed at first only a cinematic shape or shadow.<sup>13</sup>

This experience of the Divine from all perspectives would remind the reader of many passages in the Upanisads. But we would repeat that this positive experience was not the result of any fall from the height of the negativistic experience, rather the contrary is true as Sri Aurobindo testifies,

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>14</sup>

This description gives the core of Sri Aurobindo's vision and the foundation of his synthetic philosophy. As we have already indicated, this vision also resolves the conflict between the impersonalistic stand of Advaita and the personalism of other schools of Vedanta. The negative experience gives rise to the impersonalistic conception and the positive experience results in the personalistic conception of the Divine. But truly the Ultimate is limited by, neither personality nor impersonality, it can appear in either way.

A purely impersonal existence and consciousness is true and possible, but also an entirely personal consciousness and existence; the Impersonal Divine, Nirguna Brahman, and the Personal Divine, Saguna Brahman, are here

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



equal and co-existent 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.<sup>15</sup>

### Other Schools of Hindu Thought

Except for Advaita, no other school of Hindu thought denies the reality of the world. Other schools of Vedanta and different schools of Saivism have conceived the dependence of the phenomenal world to the Supreme in slightly different ways, and they have come to attach some value to this life and world, but it is the Sakta Tantra which had the most positive vision of the dynamic Divine and the creative Will of the Supreme. For Saktism the world, being a self-manifestation of the dynamic Divine (ādya śakti), is a field of experience, of divine work, enjoyment and fulfillment and not a mere state of bondage. It is by the combination and fusion of the Advaita and Śākta Tantric experience that one may reach to a comprehensive picture of the Real, — a picture that can contain the truths of all the different shades of Hindu thought and experience. "The two together, the Vedantic and Tantric truth unified, can arrive at the integral Knowledge".<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>The Life Divine, Book I, Chapter XXVIII, p. 258.

<sup>16</sup>On Yoga II, Tome One, p. 39.

This integral view of Reality can also reconcile theism with absolutism. That is, the personal God is a reality according to this view, and impersonality of eternal Silence is also equally real. Theism accords ill in the Advaita Vedanta and in the Vijnāna or Sūnya doctrines of Mahayana Buddhism. But in practice all three lines of spiritual development have been associated with theism. As a religion, Mahayana is theistic, so also Advaita. The contradiction is all too obvious.

#### Multi-faceted Reality

However, the unity of stasis and dynamis, the Vedantic and Tantric wisdom leads to a comprehensive and synthetic view on all fronts. The Absolute is transcendental, but its transcendence does not exhaust itself; there is no other than itself. It is this cosmos which is made of the interaction of the Universal and the Particular. So it may be said that Reality is multi-dimensional. The Transcendental provides the stable foundation of all existence as the essential unity,, Universality supplies the common ground and Individuality supports the uniqueness of all things.

Again reality may be conceived as encompassing the natural, supernatural and eternal. Every religion has referred to other worlds and ethereal beings like angels, gods, demons, and so on. Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta, for whom the eternal Silence is the only reality, are no exception to this rule. Consequently, convincing philosophical accounts of these supernatural worlds and beings are wanting. Sri Aurobindo's conception of the process of

creation provides us with a fair account of these intermediary worlds and beings. The dynamic divine in his self-manifestation, through a process of gradual self-concentration, has given rise to these worlds. There is a hierarchy in these worlds and the beings inhabiting them -- the most subtle at the top and the grossest at the bottom. There is a graphic description of these worlds and beings in his SaVitrī (an epic of about 25,000 lines in blank verse) where one meets with the quintessence of all beliefs in the supernatural. The Upanisad has spoken of the four states of Being -- Jāgrat (waking), Swapna (dream), Susupti (deep sleep), and Turiya (transcendental). The waking obviously refers to the natural universe that we see with our normal consciousness. The Turiya "is a state of superconscience absorbed in its self-existence, in a self-silence or self-ecstasy, or else it is a status of a free Superconscient containing or basing everything but involved in nothing".<sup>17</sup> The two in the middle refer to the supernatural proper -- deep sleep "is the seed state or causal condition from which emerges the cosmos".<sup>18</sup> The dream state stands for the various subtle worlds emanating from the higher super nature.

It is to be noted that these figures refer both to the Being and the Consciousness, suggesting thereby that Brahman and

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<sup>17</sup> The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter VI, p. 404.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

Its consciousness are not different. The whole cosmos is a body of Brahman or the graded manifestation of eternal Consciousness.

There is no mention in the Upanisads that the Turiya alone is real and that the others are illusory. The suggestion, again, is of a multi-dimensional Reality.

#### IV. Gradation of Reality

Now we can see how Sri Aurobindo works out the idea of a graded manifestation. He shows that "Our existence is a sort of refraction of the divine existence".<sup>1</sup> The triune principle of Sat-Chit-Ananda and the creative Knowledge-Will -- Supermind -- form the four principles of the higher hemisphere; and matter, life, psyche and mind are the corresponding principles in the lower hemisphere. In the inverted order of ascent and descent they can be arranged thus:

Existence	Matter
Consciousness-Force	Life
Bliss	Psyche
Supermind	Mind

The Divine descends from pure existence through play of Consciousness-Force and Bliss and the creative medium of Supermind into cosmic being; we ascend from Matter through a developing life, soul and mind and the illuminating medium of supermind towards the divine being.<sup>2</sup>

The higher hemisphere -- "the worlds of illuminated divine existence"<sup>3</sup> -- are free from Ignorance, whereas the lower hemisphere is governed by the separative Ignorance. "The knot of the two, the

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<sup>1</sup>The Life Divine, Book I, Chapter XXVII, p. 243.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., Chapter XXVI, p. 236.

higher and the lower hemisphere, is where mind and supermind meet with a veil between them".<sup>4</sup> The principles in the lower hemisphere are subordinate powers of those in the higher hemisphere.

Mind is a subordinate power of Supermind which takes its stand in the standpoint of division, ...Life is similarly a subordinate power of the energy aspect of Sachchidananda, ...Matter is the force of substance of being which the existence of Sachchidananda assumes when it subjects itself to this phenomenal action of its own consciousness and force.<sup>5</sup>

The soul or psyche is the subordinate principle of Bliss. It has a double appearance, -- in front the desire-soul, or ego, "behind and either largely or entirely concealed by the desire-soul, the true psychic entity which is the real repository of the experiences of the spirit".<sup>6</sup>

But the scheme is not really that simple. In every principle all the others enter, only they work there in terms of the dominating principle.

The manifestation of the Spirit is a complex web and in the design and pattern of one principle all the others enter as elements of the spiritual whole.<sup>7</sup>

In our material world everything is

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Chapter XXVII, p. 243.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Chapter XXVI, p. 237.

founded upon the formula of material substance. Sense, Life, Thought found themselves upon what the ancients called the Earth-power, start from it, obey its laws, accommodate their workings to this fundamental principle.<sup>8</sup>

In the next higher grade of worlds, the dominating determining principle is the life-force and conscious desire. The physical and mental principles function here in terms of the Conscious-Life. The next in the series is the mental world where the governing principle is the mind. "Substance there must be subtle and flexible enough to assume the shapes directly imposed upon it by Mind, to obey its operations, to subordinate itself to its demand for self-expression and self-fulfilment".<sup>9</sup> At a higher level (there are intermediary worlds between the mental and the Supramental), a purer Conscious Power will replace the Mind as the dominant principle, and so on.

However, we human beings are complex entities. The material body is our foundation, but we have a conscious life-principle and mind functioning in us. Our sense organs, brain, etc. are designed for the function of the higher principles in the mould of the physical body. The brain does not think, it is the mind which uses the brain. We also have the soul, and its projection on the surface — the desire-soul or ego. Not only the psychic principle but every other principle has a number of grades, subtle and gross.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

Indian tradition has classified matter into five categories -- earth, water, heat, wind, sky -- each one more subtle than the other, and has spoken of three bodies -- kāraṇa (causal), sūkṣma (subtle), and sthūla (gross). Each grade of reality is made of a universal principle, and its particular formations in beings belonging primarily to this grade. To put it more concretely, in the mental world where gods are supposed to live, the predominant principle is the universal mind, it is inhabited by beings who are predominantly mental, i.e., their body and life-functions are determined basically by the needs of the mind, even as in the material world our vital and mental functions are initially conditioned by the material body. But we carry something of the vital, psychic and mental worlds within us, since we embody these principles too. There is a constant interaction between the life, mind, etc. embodied here and the worlds properly belonging to these principles.

Evolution comes by the unceasing pressure of the supra-material planes on the material compelling it to deliver out of itself their principles and powers which might conceivably otherwise have slept imprisoned in the rigidity of the material formula.<sup>10</sup>

Again, as the principles in the higher hemisphere, and their emanation in the lower, are one in essence, it is natural that the worlds made of different principles should have a close connection among them.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 237-238.



In fact, the whole series of worlds can be described as a gradation of consciousness, one leads to and merges in the other. Even in our normal experience we do not always distinguish between the vital (pertaining to the life-principle) and the mental. Our basic drives, desires, belong properly to the Life principle, whereas thoughts, ideas, judgment, etc. are purely mental property. But the mental vital physical hardly remain so clearly separate in actual experience. But for a clear self-understanding these distinctions are essential. Sri Aurobindo has always made a clear distinction between the vital and the mental. Life-principle is active in every living thing, but it is the higher development of the mind that has made man different from animals.

The vital mind is kinetic and therefore a great force in the working of evolutionary Nature.

Above this level of mentality...is a mind-plane of pure thought and intelligence...those who are under its influence, the philosopher, thinker, scientist, intellectual creator... the idealist and dreamer are the present mental being at his highest attained summit.<sup>11</sup>

Again,

This mental man has his life-part, his life of passions and desires and ambitions and life-hopes of all kinds and his lower sensational and physical existence.<sup>12</sup>

The Tantrik and Hathayogic traditions in India have explored

<sup>11</sup> The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter XVIII, p. 641.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

these subtle distinctions very thoroughly. They would locate these grades of consciousness in different parts of the subtle body. Of the six centres (chakra), the first is the seat of the physical, second and third, of the lower vital, the fourth of the higher vital, fifth and sixth, of the mental. The Upanisad has referred to these different principles of existence as anna (matter), prāna (life), mana (mind), vijnāna (higher consciousness), ānanda (bliss). All of these principles are present in us. We are only partly aware of them in waking (jāgrat) consciousness; in the dream (svapna) consciousness which is called by Sri Aurobindo subliminal we get to know of their vastness and complexity. In deep sleep (susupti), i.e., Superconscience, we see their roots and origin in the One indeterminable Turiya — the Transcendent.

## V. The Status of the Individual

The nature and status of the soul is a great mystery. All the religious traditions have accepted some kind of life after death, i.e., the existence of the essence of our being beyond the grave, but it is difficult to get a clear idea about this essence and its relation, on the one hand, with the Absolute, and on the other, with embodied life on earth. Buddhism, with its view of no-self and the view that the world, including the human personality, is made of discrete elements in constant flux, leaves us wondering for whose liberation from suffering is the discipline and who is to attain Nirvana. The Hindu tradition, particularly the Upanisadic teachings, are explicit on these issues; despite differences of opinion regarding the exact import of the texts, there is agreement on certain vital points. The soul is distinct from the ego as well as the Supreme. It is the soul which is the real master of our life and it is the soul which survives death and carries over the fruits of our action for the future. The soul is dependent on the Supreme.

Non-dualistic Vedanta, which is based on no-difference between the individual soul and Brahman, denies the existence of the soul ultimately, although on the phenomenal plane it accepts the soul and its functions. Dualistic schools of Vedanta make the soul entirely dependent on and different from the Supreme. The Qualified monistic school recognizes essential oneness yet certain eternal differences between the soul and the Supreme. Sri

Aurobindo wants to say from his integralist point of view that all of these different standpoints are based on particular spiritual experiences -- reflections of the different poises of the Supermind on the tranquil mind of the seeker<sup>1</sup> -- and that they can be reconciled in experience although it is difficult to do so through mental logic.<sup>2</sup>

Paul Deussen, in the sixth chapter of his The Philosophy of the Upanisads, has quoted passages from the Rg Veda, Atharva Veda, Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, etc. pertaining to Creation, and has then observed:

The motive of the conception that dominates all these passages may be described to be the recognition of the first principle of the universe as embodied in nature as a whole, but especially and most of all in the soul (the universal and the individual soul). Hence the idea arose that the primeval being created the universe, and then as the first born of the creation entered into it. This traditional view we shall find appearing frequently even in the Upanisads.<sup>3</sup>

We may quote as an illustration one such passage from the Upanisads.

Taitt. Up. II.6.1 states:

<sup>1</sup>Vide Chapter XVI, Book I of The Live Divine -- "The Triple Status of Supermind".

<sup>2</sup>"The co-existence, difficult of conception to the logical intellect, can be experienced by identity in consciousness with Brahman". Sri Aurobindo, Isa Upanisad (Pondy: Ashram), p. 28.

<sup>3</sup>Paul Deussen, The Philosophy of the Upanisads, op. cit., p. 183.

tat srstvā tad evānuprāvisat, tad anupravisya  
 sac ca tyac ca abhavat, niruktam cāniraktam ca,  
 nilayanam canilayanam ca, vijnānam cāvijnānam  
 ca satyam cānrtam ca, satyam abhavat, yad idam  
 kim 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.)

However, Sri Aurobindo has put the status of the soul philosophically thus: Creation proceeds from an inherent capacity of the Transcendent for multiple self-expression. The cosmos is the work of the interaction of two principles, Universal and Individual, at all the different levels. Both of them are grounded in, and derived from, the Transcendent. The Cosmic Being realizes itself through individual beings, individual beings conform to the universal Being, but the individual being is no mere part of the Universal, it is rooted in the Transcendent. The soul thus comes to have different poises of its own. It has a supracosmic Transcendent poise in which it is One with the Supreme; in its cosmic poise it supports individuation from above, as it were, and in its embodied poise it is very much involved in the play of the multiple forces and beings. Yet even in this state of involvement it is essentially the same cosmic and Transcendent divine shining underneath the coating created by the forces of ignorance. Chāndogya Up. has spoken of this identity very clearly:

atha yad atah, paro divo jyotir dīpyate visvatah  
prsthesv anuttamesuttamesu lokesu, idam vava tad  
yad idam asmin antah puruse 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. The individual being, i.e., the immanent soul, is more shining in human beings because of the thinness of the obscure covering. It has been designated by Sri Aurobindo as the psychic being, about which 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 itself that Whole, except in its frontal appearance, its frontal separative self-experience.<sup>4</sup>

This psychic being is the leader of our life, as Katha. Up. I.3.3-9 made clear with the help of a beautiful image of a chariot, and the Gītā has repeated the same. But this leadership is secret normally because on the surface our life is organized by the ego which is but a pale reflection of the inner being. Even in the subliminal (Dream Consciousness of Upanisads) the psychic being has its Projects — in the subtle physical the physical being (annamaya puruṣa), and so on. The real being is at the deepest recess, so it has been imaged as hiding in a cave — guhāṁ pravīṣṭa tisthantam yo bhūtebhir vyapaśyata: Katha. Up. II.1.6. (who

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<sup>4</sup>The Life Divine, Book I, Chapter XXIII, pp. 209-210.

[inner being] stands, having entered the secret place [of the heart], and looked forth through beings.)

The psychic being proceeds from the Ānanda of the Sachchidānanda. It is the only undefiled light in the darkness of the lower hemisphere. It is the real link between the two hemispheres. Ānanda presupposes and includes Sat and Chit. Thus this inmost being in us carries the quintessence of the Eternal. It is because of this that we have a longing for the supernal light, and it is because of this that any true liberation from Ignorance is possible.

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>5</sup>

#### Further Synthesis on the Basis of the Truth of the Individual

On the basis of this notion of the soul, Sri Aurobindo was able to harmonize certain contrary but very forceful and profound urges in human nature. Man from the earliest day of civilization has betrayed some instinct for religion, for truth, for beauty, and for the good. These urges, Sri Aurobindo would say, are basically longing for the Infinite, i.e., the infinity of Truth, Good, Beauty, etc. They are rooted in the indwelling divine, the soul is the repository of all these values. It is due to the

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<sup>5</sup> Sri Aurobindo, The Problem of Rebirth (Pondy: Ashram), p. 96.

secret prompting of the soul, its will for self-expression that we entertain and strive for these values. Man and society go for these values, rather go for the higher and higher forms of these values, to the extent they are developed psychically. As a result, we see different levels of each of these values. Aesthetic values may take the form of an indulgence in the sensational or the sensuous as it happened in Restoration England, or it may go deeper to the worship of a principle of harmony in every sphere of life and thought as it happened with ancient Athens. It may go still further and discover that the Beauty it is worshipping is no other than the Supreme Himself who is basically one with one's inmost being. Thus the pursuit of the Beauty itself may lead to self-knowledge. Something of this discipline was practised in India. The Supreme has been characterized as the all Delight, raso vai sa, all Beautiful, bhuvana sundarama. Even in modern time, Tagore has vouchsafed that whatever knowledge he has of the Truth has been derived from his poetical experience, i.e., his pursuit for the soul of beauty in things.

My religion is essentially a poet's religion. Its touch comes to me through the same unseen and trackless channels as does the inspiration of my music.<sup>6</sup>

At the human level, the different values lead us to different directions. Beauty leads us to the fine arts; search

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<sup>6</sup>R. N. Tagore, "The Religion of an Artist", in Contemporary Indian Philosophy, ed. S. Radhakrishnan and J. H. Muirhead (London: George Allen and Unwin, 2nd ed., 1952), p. 32.



for Truth gives rise to the sciences and philosophies; longing for the Good produces moral philosophy and inspires self-sacrifice, humanitarian and altruistic activities. All of these different values are necessary for the fullness of life and society. But there are certain dichotomies among them. Moral philosophy would lay stress on will, character, self-discipline, etc., the pursuit of beauty, on the other hand, ~~may~~ not stress these things at all and even encourage certain frivolity and gaiety instead. Science and philosophy may well concern themselves with abstruse theoretical issues; on the other hand, the ethical mind would like to see the attention focussed on more practical things like welfare of the people, social service, etc. Sri Aurobindo would say that at the higher or deeper level these differences melt away, and they converge one into the other since originally they spring from the same Verity. The history of religion testify that this reconciliation between different values is possible. Religion embodies the deepest of human concerns, it is a seeking directly for the Infinite. Religion has incorporated some of the other values without difficulty. Of course, certain religions have stressed the ethical values, while others some other values. For instance, Judaism and Hebraic Christianity have based themselves on solid inviolable moral laws; Greek religion has relied more on the aesthetic culture which includes ceremony, drama, pageantry, etc. Early Buddhism stressed ethics and the quest for the Truth, while later Buddhism incorporated the aesthetic values too. In the Hindu tradition all of these different values have been combined

with religion at different phases and movements of its complex growth and development. In fact, religion, understood in its deepest senses, can not only integrate and harmonize all of these values but also work as a force for heightening and deepening them as well. Sri Aurobindo has dealt with these issues at length in his The Human Cycle. A few short excerpts are given below by way of substantiation of the brief summary we have given of his views.

The ethical imperative comes not from around but from within him and above him.<sup>7</sup>

To find highest beauty is to find God; to reveal, to embody, to create as we say, highest beauty is to bring out of our souls the living image and power of God.<sup>8</sup>

For religion is that instinct, idea, activity, discipline in man which aims directly at the Divine, while all the rest seem to aim at only indirectly and reach it with difficulty after much wandering and stumbling in the pursuit of the outward and imperfect appearances of things.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Human Cycle, Chapter XV, p. 167.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Chapter XIV, p. 160.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Chapter XVII, p. 192.

## VI. The Spirit of Brahmanical Scriptures

### Which is the Representative Philosophy of the Hindu Tradition?

Before closing this chapter on the Vision of Reality, we may raise the question again: Is Advaita Vedanta the representative philosophy of the Indian religious tradition. Murti, a reputed exponent of the Advaita writes,

It does not make much sense then to call the world an appearance and at once to plead that it somehow belongs to Brahman and that it cannot be rejected wholly. Which part of it is rejected and which other part is retained? And of the rejected part too, we cannot plead that it is somehow real, etc. For this would be to reject nothing in the end. And appearance implies, as we have seen, falsity and rejection.<sup>1</sup>

Rejection of the world as appearance -- is this the central message of the Indian religious history? Or is it just the inexorable conclusion of a particular logic? As for the spirit of the tradition, we may quote the opinions of a number of scholars and thinkers who are by no means committed to the views of Sri Aurobindo. V. M. Apte writes about Rg Veda, the starting point of Indian culture and the spring-board of all later developments:

The hymns of the Rg Veda clearly reveal the aspirations, ambitions and the yearnings of the people of those days, in other words, their general optimistic outlook on life. Not that they do not desire Amritatva (Immortality) or the company of the Gods in heaven....But the joys and pleasures of this world interest them deeply....There is no trace of pessimism in the thoughts of the R. V. Rishis....The doctrine that

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<sup>1</sup>"The Two Definitions of Brahman in the Advaita", in K. C. Bhattacharya Memorial Vol. (Amalner, 1958), p. 139.

life is a misery which can be only ended by eradicating desire or Vasana -- the cause of the cycle of birth and death -- a doctrine developed by the Buddhists later -- he for one, does not seem to subscribe to!<sup>2</sup>

A veteran Professor of Sanskrit literature and writer on Indian philosophy observes,

There is no literary work, small poems or longer epics or dramas in Sanskrit literature, where sannyasa or renunciation and the Vedantic ideals are glorified. Practically no ascetic comes on the stage, and if any ascetics are introduced, it is only to engage them in helping active life in the world. Home and married life, duty of the citizens, the aspirations and activities and the disappointments and successes of the individual, are the main themes worked out in all the literary works.<sup>3</sup>

Ananda Coomaraswamy, a reputed exponent of Indian thought and culture, writes, having quoted Verse 2.3.1 of Br. Up.:

The Brahman is not merely nirguna, in no wise, but also sarvaguna, 'in all wise'; and he is saved -- attains Nirvana -- knows the Brahman -- who sees that these are one and the same, that the two worlds are one.

Then he adds,

This position is obscured in Buddhism, and likewise in the system of Sankara, by the emphasis which is laid on Becoming as a state to be avoided; and this hedonistic outlook which finds logical expression in monasticism and puritanism has occupied the

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<sup>2</sup> V. M. Apte, Social and Religious Life in the Grihya Sutras (Bombay: The Popular Book Depot, Reset ed. 1954), p. 260.

<sup>3</sup> C. Kunhan Raja, Some Fundamental Problems in Indian Philosophy (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, Varanasi, Patna, 1960), p. 249.

too exclusive attention of modern students. Too exclusive, for it is not this one-sided view of life, but the doctrine of the identity of this world and that, which can and does afford the key to the historical development of the Indian culture the most remarkable characteristic of which appears in a general apprehension of the indivisibility of the sensuous and the spiritual.<sup>4</sup>

Radhakamal Mukerjee, an exponent of Indian culture and society, writes:

The concept that the world process is a mirage and a snare does not certainly represent the key note of Indian thought. The challenge to the lop-sidedness of the Advaita Vedanta has nowhere been more pronounced than in the Bhāgavata.<sup>5</sup>

Tagore, a great spokesman of the spirit of Indian culture, writes:

Some...maintain that Brahman of India is a mere abstraction, a negation of all that is in the world: In a word, that the Infinite Being is to be found nowhere except in metaphysics. It may be that such a doctrine has been and still is prevalent with a section of our countrymen. But this is certainly not in accord with the pervading spirit of the Indian mind. Instead, it is the practice of realizing and affirming the presence of the Infinite in all things.<sup>6</sup>

The quote from Murti, at the beginning of this sub-section, indicates that within the school of Advaita there is a strong

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<sup>4</sup> Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964, originally pub. 1916 by George G. Harrap & Co., London).

<sup>5</sup> Radhakamal Mukerjee, The Lord of Autumn Moons (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1957), p. vi.

<sup>6</sup> R. N. Tagore, Sadhana (New York: 1916), p. 16.

tendency to safeguard the reality of the world. Logic leads to the rejection of the world, but something else, the weight of the tradition, the religious intuitions, and so on, revolt against this. Consequently, a deep-rooted contradiction has dogged this school from the very beginning.

It is, therefore, questionable if the metaphysical conclusions of Advaita are representative of the Brahmanical tradition. And we have already seen that Advaita metaphysics, and for that matter the doctrine of Māyā, does not solve the problem of the One and the Many. Since Māyā is considered inexplicable, everything remains unexplained. Of course, there is also a strong element of mystery in the Logic of the Infinite. But this has at least the merit of saving the reality of the world without denying the unity of Truth. And, as we have seen, it is able to integrate the whole gamut of human thought, experience and striving. It represents better the catholic spirit of Brahmanical religious thought and experience. Chubb writes:

It is to Sri Aurobindo that one must turn for the full flowering of the Indian genius and for the true principle of reconciliation of the divergent truth-claims in accordance with that sense of Truth which admits in it no denial except the denial of denials.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jehangir N. Chubb, "Sri Aurobindo as the Fulfillment of Hinduism", *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. XII, No. 2, June, 1972 (New York: Fordham University), p. 238.

Logic of the Infinite and the Scriptures.

The logic of the Infinite has been defined by Sri Aurobindo as the way natural to the Divine. We human beings, as a particular form of consciousness subject to time and space, can be only one thing at a time, and whatever our mind tries to grasp it particularizes. On the other hand,

The Divine consciousness is not as particularized, nor as limited; it can be many things at a time and take more than one enduring poise even for all time.<sup>8</sup>

The Scripture is considered to contain something of the Divine mind. So the many-sidedness of the scriptural utterances baffles us. In our attempt at systematizing the content of the Scripture what we do most often is to particularize the meaning which is in essence most diversified in scope. In his interpretation of the Brahmanical scriptures, Sri Aurobindo has demonstrated the many-sided significance of the revealed words. This, again, gives him the credit of representing the catholic spirit of Brahmanism.

The Gita, the Upanisads, and the Vedas are the inspired literature that has shaped Brahmanical thought. Sri Aurobindo has commented elaborately on the Gita. Of the numerous Upanisads translated by him with meaningful footnotes, only two, Īśa and Kena, have been commented upon exhaustively. He has other fragments on the Upanisads in general and some sections of some Upanisads in

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<sup>8</sup>The Life Divine, Book I, Chapter XVI, p. 135.

particular. His most important work of exegesis is, however, the discovery of the psychological or esoteric meaning of the Rg Veda.

The Gita is the most popular book in India. There are numerous commentaries on it. Sri Aurobindo did not use this book to propound his philosophy or yoga. Integral yoga in its synthetic character goes beyond the synthesis attempted in the Gita of the traditional ways of knowledge, devotion, etc. for individual liberation, and the philosophy of the Superman is difficult to trace in the Gita. He has commented upon the Gita in order to bring out the depth and width of vision enshrined in this great book with which he started his spiritual career.

In the exegesis of the Gita, while dwelling on the metaphysical side, some have emphasized the impersonal status of the Divine while others have emphasized the personal aspect. In regard to yoga or self-discipline for liberation, some have capitalized on Devotion, others on Knowledge, and some, especially among the moderns, on Work. Again, some authors consider the book in its historical context and over-emphasize the socio-cultural background in which the teaching sprang, while others emphasize the universal aspect of the teaching and the living character of the book. All of these diverse strands find their justification yet their limitations in the Essays on the Gita of Sri Aurobindo.

In the exegesis of the Upanisads one of the points with which the schools of Vedanta have wrangled is the relationship between the individual soul and the Supreme Self. The positions reached fall into three main categories: non-dualism, qualified



non-dualism, and dualism. Sri Aurobindo has shown:

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>9</sup>

We cannot embark on a discussion of the method followed by Sri Aurobindo in his new interpretation of the Vedas. Our aim here is only to point to the scriptural logic of the Infinite as demonstrated in the exegesis of Sri Aurobindo. The Vedas were understood previously in a very narrow sense. While traditionally the Vedas are supposed to be revealed words (śruti), in practice they were relegated as Karma Kānda (given to ritualism), and the Vedantic authors were commenting only on the Upanisads and other later texts. Sri Aurobindo does not deny the validity of the ritualistic interpretation of the Vedas, nor the naturalistic interpretation mostly of Western scholars. But he says that these are not the only senses, and certainly not the most important sense of the Vedas.

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>10</sup>

The Upanisadic sages refer to the Vedic sages as their source and authority. There are luminous hints in the Upanisads of the

<sup>9</sup> Sri Aurobindo, Īśa Upanisad (Pondy: Ashram), p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> Sri Aurobindo, On the Veda (Pondy: Ashram, 1956), p. 38.

spiritual meaning or symbolic character of the Vedic sacrifices. But how did this deeper sense become overshadowed?<sup>11</sup> Where lies the difficulty to fathom that meaning? It is not the archaic language of the Veda, not even the unique mode of thinking in concrete images that poses as the bar, it is the deliberately symbolic diction in which the true, inner sense is hidden under the veil of an external sense that is the real difficulty.

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.<sup>12</sup>

We are not prepared to examine how this parallelism works. Kapali Sastry has commented (in Sanskrit) on the Rg Veda following the key obtained from Sri Aurobindo. The English translation of the Introduction to this commentary in which he gives the gist of the method and the conclusions arrived at has been acclaimed highly by a number of reputed scholars in India. We give below briefly

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<sup>11</sup>"Already in the Brahmanas they are guessing and speculating about the meaning of the hymns". V. Chandrasekharam, "Sri Aurobindo and the Veda", in Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual, 1942 (Calcutta), p. 182.

<sup>12</sup>On the Veda, p. 38.

the substance of the Veda that comes out as a result of the method of enquiry initiated by Sri Aurobindo.

The central aim, with which accords all the rest in the Veda, is the seeking after the attainment of the Truth, Immortality, Light ....We have to be newborn into the truth, to grow in it, to ascend in spirit into the World of Truth and live in it. Such a realization alone is to pass from mortality to Immortality, to unite with the supreme Godhead.

Here is the second doctrine of the Mystics: there is an inferior truth of this world because it is mixed with much falsehood. There is another higher truth, the Home of Truth — 'The Truth, the Right, the Vast' as described (taught) in the Mantras....

In the world-journey our life is a battle-field of the Devas and the Asuras; the Gods are the powers of Truth, Light and Immortality and the Asuras, the powers of the opposing Darkness ....To them [the gods] offering of whatever is ours is made; receiving all that is given by them in return, we shall be enabled and competent to ascend the path of the goal.<sup>13</sup>

That this substance of the Rg Veda is fundamentally one with those of the Upanisads and the Bhagavad Gita is evident and is, therefore, significant.

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<sup>13</sup> Kapali Sastry, Rig Veda Samhitā, Vol. I, Introduction (Pondy: Ashram, 1952), p. 46.

## Chapter IV

### Eschatological Vision

#### I. The Superman

It is difficult to form a clear idea of the Superman as conceived by Sri Aurobindo. He himself describes the Superman in a tentative manner since Superman is as yet not a reality. None of the great spiritual personages like Buddha, Krishna, Jesus was a Superman in their historical existence. Sri Aurobindo also could not supramentalise himself thoroughly. A complete Superman is expected not only to live in the infinite consciousness inwardly but also to manifest the same in the most external aspects of his life. It is this point that makes a Superman radically different from spiritual men.

The spiritual man is one who has discovered his soul: he has found his self and lives in that, is conscious of it, has the joy of it; he needs nothing external for his completeness of existence.<sup>1</sup>

This has been the goal by and large so far in the history of spiritual effort. Imperfection of the body, and for that matter of phenomenal existence, was taken for granted; realization of truth and liberation was considered an inner affair. This division between the inner and outer, spiritual and phenomenal is what Sri Aurobindo attempted to abolish. The Superman is the realization of this aim. Metaphysically he has shown that the physical is the manifestation of the Divine

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<sup>1</sup> The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter 27, p. 887

and has the potentiality of being a conscious instrument of the Divine. Any spiritual discipline promotes certain purification of the body and mind. But what Sri Aurobindo aims at is complete divinization of the embodied existence -- body, life and mind. In the history of evolution higher development in consciousness has been accompanied by a corresponding higher orientation of the other members of the being. Thus the human being has a finer body and more refined vital life compared to those of animals. Similarly a higher consciousness than the mental needs a better foundation for its fuller manifestation. Purification of the mind or the vital (prāna) removes the obstacles to the inner contact with higher consciousness. But this contact takes place in a state of trance -- Samādhi, or as the Upanisad has put it, in the state of deep sleep -- susupti. It is possible to bring something of this inner realisation to bear upon life on the surface. But this does not amount to any radical change of the surface existence; body life and mind remain basically what they are, subject to the modes of nature, the three gunas of Sankhya. And "so long as an irreducible quantity of imperfection is acknowledged, a tremendous hiatus is caused between the Divine and earth-existence".<sup>2</sup>

#### Transformation of Nature: Psychicisation.

This hiatus could be bridged through a process of transformation. Sri Aurobindo has divided this process into three stages. The first is Psychicisation, which means the organization of the whole life and experience centering round the soul or the psychic being. The soul, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is involved in individual life;

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<sup>2</sup>K. D. Sethna, The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo, (Pondy: Mother India, 1968), p. 66.

it is fundamentally the same as the Transcendent Brahman and retains its basic purity even while in the twilight of the world of becoming. Reality is biune in the whole hierarchy of the manifestation; -- in every level there is a being and becoming, a Purusa and Prakriti, male and female and so on. In the physical there is a physical being and the physical nature, so in the vital and mental levels vital and mental beings and natures. These beings are emanations of the Psychic being in these levels, even as the ego is the shadow of the Psychic being on the surface consciousness. The central truth of an embodied existence is the Psychic being. It has been secretly guiding the life of an individual through all its deputies at different levels of existence and consciousness. For a perfect development of all these levels of existence and their integration to a harmonious whole it is necessary that the psychic being is brought forward and given the overt leadership of the entire individual existence. This would amount to awareness of the Psychic as one's real being; its conscious leadership would mean awareness of, and relative mastery over, the subliminal layers of our consciousness which are the real domain of the physical, vital and mental beings. Complete awareness of the whole complex web of our existence and perfect harmony and integration of it centering round the Psychic being is the aim of Psychicization. Obviously this programme is intended for a richer life on earth and eventual transformation of the whole life. Integral awareness and psychicization of life would inevitably be accompanied by great self-knowledge and creative self-expression. Those whose aim is a release from earthly existence would not go for such a programme. Again transformation presupposes the fundamental unity of the lower grades with those of the higher, and we have seen that the

archetypal realities of the body, life, mind and psyche lie in the Sat, Chit, Supermind and Ananda respectively.

### Spiritualization:

However, Psychicization will have to be followed by Spiritualization. In Psychicization attention is focussed specially on the development and organization of the individual centre of consciousness. Spiritualization results from a further heightening and widening of the consciousness. Psychicization refers more to a vertical development; the inner being turns to the Divine and absorbs as much light and force for internal harmony and integration of the personality as possible. Spiritualization refers more to a horizontal growth. The aspirant comes out, as it were, from the individual centre, realizes identity with the Transcendent and Universal Being, becomes absorbed in the experience of infinity of Bliss, a boundless Light, a boundless Power, a boundless Ecstasy. These experiences as they settle down on the stillness of the ādhāra (receptacle -- body-life-mind-soul) have an effect of enhancing the capacity of the ādhāra; and then conscious and deliberate effort to draw more and more of these high experiences and make them work on the cells of the body, the fibres of the emotional and mental life results in a kind of change of the whole ādhāra. The body-life-mind complex with its different levels is no longer subjected to the modes of nature as before, the play of higher divine forces in its fibres has made it considerably different, many of the potentialities have been released and it is almost ready for a complete transformation which would mean transformation of the ādhāra into divine body-life-mind-soul complex.

### Supramentalization

This radical transformation needs the Descent of the Supramental Truth-consciousness, the sovereign dynamism of the Divine into all the layers of the adhāra and a corresponding release of the same Truth-consciousness involved in Prakriti (nature). Nothing short of supramental descent can complete the process of Transformation. "The Supramental Light-Force can alone handle each element of human nature with a masterful finality".<sup>3</sup> The human nature is very complex. For instance, what we call mind has got three distinct levels -- physical mind, vital mind, mind proper. Physical mind is that aspect of mind which is concerned with the external mechanical activities in daily life, vital mind is that part of the mind which serves the cause of the vital urges. In this way each member of our being has a number of facets. Consequently, the human adhāra is found to be a terribly complex thing. Transformation is therefore bound to be a laborious and tardy process. We shall deal with this in greater detail in the subsequent sections. It suffices here to say that while spiritual men have been satisfied with the inner realization of the Spirit, the gnostic being (one who has known the supermind and has set out on a programme of divinization of his nature) starts from there.

The gnostic being starting from this new basis takes up our ignorant becoming and turns it into a luminous becoming of Knowledge and a realized power of being.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Rishabchand, The Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, part II, (Pondy: Ashram), p. 239.

<sup>4</sup>The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter 27, p. 871.



An accomplished gnostic being would be the superman proper; a supramental transformation would consummate the ascent of man to a higher stage of evolution.

Other cognate concepts:

1) Jīvanmukta

The special feature of the gnostic being or the superman could be brought into relief by comparison with Jīvanmukta in the Vedānta tradition, and with Bodhisattva in the Buddhist tradition. Paul Deussen is of the opinion that the distinction between different types of emancipation (mukti) is a later development, i.e., it is not to be found in the early and major Upanisads.

The comparison (of life) to the potter's wheel which ceases turning when the vessel (deliverance) is finished belongs to a later period, like the distinction between those who are first delivered in the hour of death (videhamukti), and those who are already delivered during their life-time (jīvanmukti).<sup>5</sup>

Emancipation has in fact been discussed in all the Upanisads; it results from the knowledge, rather, the realization of Brahman. In the Gītā we have descriptions (Chapters II and V) of a man who is emancipated while yet living.

Advaita Vedānta has discussed the concept of Jīvanmukta very thoroughly. Here we should attempt a brief résumé following an author who made emancipation in Advaita Vedānta his special field of enquiry.

Jīvanmukta is one who has the realization of the Brahman, but whose body and mind persist for some time, and "in the intervals of his absorption in the beautiful vision he must be aware of the world in

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<sup>5</sup>Paul Deussen, The Philosophy of the Upanisads. New York: Dover Publications, 1966, p. 356.

time also".<sup>6</sup> Even when he comes down "to the attenuated shell of the differentiated ego",<sup>7</sup> the potency of his experience remains. He can never be the normal man he was, his values are changed altogether. In the image of the Gītā (II.69), what is night to the ordinary man is day to him and vice versa. He goes beyond good and evil, goes inwardly beyond the world of multiplicity, the cycle of samsāra. "He realized that worlds are but the waves of the boundless ocean that he is -- their rise and fall do not affect him".<sup>8</sup> For such a man it does not seem to be possible to engage in any meaningful action in the world. But this is a controversial subject in Advaita. Warriar writes, "In numerous contexts, Sankara vehemently argues that action and perfect knowledge are utterly incompatible".<sup>9</sup> But others have interpreted Sankara's "action" differently. According to them, Sankara "takes karma in a technical sense, and understands by it only such actions as are performed with the sense of egoistic agency and claims on the fruits thereof".<sup>10</sup> So according to them desireless action is possible after liberation, rather, liberated people do act in the world out of compassion for others. But even this line of thought would maintain "the mukta has no illusions that he is helping the world. He knows that the world requires no help from him".<sup>11</sup>

From this account what we gather is that even those who favour

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<sup>6</sup> A. G. Krishna Warriar, The Concept of Mukti in Advaita Vedanta. (Madras: University of Madras, 1961), p. 488.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 490.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 491.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 492.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 493.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 496.

action after liberation do not mention any other purpose of action than helping other individuals in getting out of the bondage to the world. Others obviously think that emancipation and action are not compatible. Yet there is another school of thought within Advaita which would not favour the concept of Jīvanmukta at all.

Certain teachers of Advaita do not wholeheartedly uphold the doctrine of Jīvanmukti. For instance Sarvajnatmamuni, the author of the Sāṃkṣepa sārīraka, maintains that after the dawn of the saving Knowledge neither nescience nor its products like the body can ever appear to exist. Sadyomukti alone is in order.<sup>12</sup>

Be that as it may, it may be said that in the conception of Jīvanmukta the basic desire is getting out of the cycle of birth and death, i.e., samsāra; what happens afterwards is insignificant. Secondly, the transformation that takes place in the Jīvanmukta is basically in his consciousness. It has undoubtedly an effect on the external existence. The emancipated becomes altogether a different man, yet no attempt is made to organize his external life systematically for a meaningful action in the world. In the words of Ramakrishna:

He who has seen God roams about, sometimes like a mad man, sometimes like an unclean spirit, feeling no distinction between cleanliness and its opposite.... Sometimes, like a child, he attaches his mind to nothing, and goes about with his clothes bundled in his arms.<sup>13</sup>

Thirdly, the whole thing is individual -- liberation of one person in particular. Even where action in the world is involved the primary motive is to help other individuals to get out of the cycle of birth and death.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 484.

<sup>13</sup>Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math., 1960), p. 300.

In contrast, the conception of superman is basically concerned with the earth-existence, earth-consciousness, earth-life. Spiritual self-knowledge, and for that matter liberation, is not the goal, it is only an indispensable means to a greater life on earth not only for the liberated person but for all others. It is intimately linked with the idea of an evolving life on earth, that is, it is the intention of the Divine to carry the evolution forward and that the stage has been set for it from the very beginning. Divinization starts in this Yoga after plenary realization of the Divine, but from the very beginning the discipline is geared to transformation of the members of the being. Whatever inner light, peace, and knowledge is obtained has to be transferred to the physical and the vital for them to absorb and assimilate. The whole process of transformation is complex and necessarily varied due to the varied nature of individuals; the discipline, i.e., the Integral Yoga, could not be a monolythic thing. It is of necessity broad-based and it has to keep room for wide variations in human need and propensities.

- 2) Bodhisattva ("One who has bodhi or perfect wisdom as his essence"  
-- Monier Williams.)

The concept of Bodhisattva stands, compared to that of Jivanmukta, for a greater concern about the world. Of course the ideal of Bodhisattva developed as a protest against that of arhat. Early Buddhism put up the image of an arhat as the goal for its followers. An arhat was one who

"had laid down his burden. He had lived the holy life. He attained undefiled and final emancipation of mind and heart. He was alone,

secluded, zealous, earnest, master of himself".<sup>14</sup>

In numerous Pali canons arhat has been described in similar vein.

Arhats were individualistic in their aim, indifferent toward other people, they seemed to be preoccupied with their own release.

"The bodhisattva doctrine was promulgated by some Buddhist leaders as a protest against this lack of true spiritual fervour and altruism among the monks of that period [three centuries after Gautama Buddha's death]".<sup>15</sup>

There were other concepts similar to that of arhat; namely, śrāvaka, pratyeka-buddha. All of these were condemned as inferior to that of Bodhisattva "in many passages of Buddhist Sanskrit literature".<sup>16</sup> The concept of Bodhisattva itself has undergone changes, and the numerous facets of this concept and the developments over the centuries and in many lands is an interesting study by itself. However, what is relevant for our present study is that "a bodhisattva strives to become a Buddha by attaining perfect bodhi",<sup>17</sup> not so much for his personal liberation as for helping others. He takes a vow not to enter into nirvāna as long as all others, all sentient beings, are not ready for it. It is a great sacrifice that he attempt to make for others. Later on in

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<sup>14</sup> Har Dayal, The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970, first published in 1932), p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

Mahayana this ideal of sacrifice developed into doctrines of transfer of merit, taking the burden of others, and so on. As Coomaraswamy writes,

A doctrine specially associated with the Bodhisattva ideal is that of the parivarta or turning over of ethical merit to the advantage of others, which amounts very nearly to the doctrine of vicarious atonement.<sup>18</sup>

The image of Bodhisattva -- wise, self-possessed, given to the service of all others -- is noble indeed. But here also the aim is getting out of the world. The world is suffering and there is no hope of any blissful life on earth. And, again, the redemption is individual -- one by one all the millions of people are to be free, no conception of evolution or general elevation can be adduced from this. Some superhuman powers are attributed to the Bodhisattva, but these are more mythical than real. These are not based on any idea of transformation of the human parts of the Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva turned, in popular religious imagination, into so many saviour gods and in this way they came to be attributed with all sorts of superhuman powers and knowledge. The Bodhisattva has, in fact, ceased to be a living concept for want of concrete instantiation in contemporary history.

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<sup>18</sup>Ananda Coomaraswamy, Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964, originally published in 1916), p. 231.

# Other Concepts of the Superman.

## Nietzsche

The very use of the expression 'Superman' brings in Nietzsche into the picture, for it was this German thinker who spoke first of the Superman in the sense of something surpassing humanity. Sri Aurobindo was aware of this and he made it a point to distinguish his conception of the Superman from that of Nietzsche. His reference to Nietzsche's Superman as 'blonde beast',<sup>19</sup> may suggest that he shared with the English-speaking world some misconception about Nietzsche, but we really do not see any lack of understanding on the part of Sri Aurobindo about the core of Nietzsche's inspiration. He acclaimed Nietzsche as "the most vivid, concrete and suggestive of modern thinkers".<sup>20</sup> He had no difficulty to see Nietzsche's affiliation with Heraclitus — "as is Heraclitus among the early Greeks he founded his whole philosophical thought on this conception of existence as a vast Will-to-become and the world as a play of Force".<sup>21</sup> And we may well say that in this he saw his own affinity with Nietzsche and with Heraclitus. The 'mystic fire' of the Vedas which inspired him so much has been conceived by him like this:

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<sup>19</sup>The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter 28, p. 945.

<sup>20</sup>Sri Aurobindo, Heraclitus, (Pondy: Ashram) p. 18.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-19.

By conscious force of the Godhead the worlds have been created and are governed from within by that hidden and inner Control; Agni is the form, the fire, the forceful heat and flaming will of this Divinity..... He is then, the Will, the Knowledge-Force of the Deva; secret inhabitant of Matter and its forms...<sup>22</sup>

Sri Aurobindo also praised Nietzsche for bringing in a spirit of dynamism to European philosophy which the latter had lost due to its separation from religion since the days of later Greek thought.

It is the great distinction of Nietzsche among later European thinkers to have brought back something of the old dynamism and practical force into philosophy.<sup>23</sup>

And we know how forcefully Sri Aurobindo has combined in himself the dynamism of religion and the force of thought, and that Nietzsche, in the stress of this dynamism has "neglected unduly the dialectical and metaphysical side of philosophical thinking"<sup>24</sup> is a fact recognized by Western scholars as well.

However, the causes of misconception about Nietzsche are many: i) inadequate translation, ii) difficulty to understand the meaning of what he wrote, iii) inconsistency in his ideas, iv) exuberant uncontrollable utterances, v) his sister's remark to Hitler that he was the Superman of Nietzsche's vision, and so on. Martin Heidegger, himself a great thinker, represented Nietzsche at his best. About Nietzsche's conception of the Superman he writes,

Nietzsche does not give the name "Superman" to man such as exists until now, only superdimensional. Nor does he mean a type of man who tosses humanity aside

<sup>22</sup>Sri Aurobindo, On the Veda, (Pondy: Ashram, 1956) pp. 400-01.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., Heraclitus, p. 55.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 55.



and makes sheer caprice the law, titanic rage the rule. Rather taking the word quite literally, the superman is the individual who surpasses man as he is up to now, for the sole purpose of bringing man till now into his still unattained nature and there to secure him.<sup>25</sup>

It may be noted that at the first Nietzsche spoke of a 'higher man', and not superman. He designated this type also as 'Free Spirits', 'Good Europeans', 'Oligarchs of the Spirit', etc. In his Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche sought signs and symptoms of the emerging higher type in Europe -- Europe being very much in the vanguard of humanity at that time. The conception of a higher man here is obviously that of a master ruling over and despising the herd, who are "as much in need of a master and commander as of their daily bread".<sup>26</sup>

#### Nietzsche's Superman

Nietzsche developed his conception of the superman with assumptions completely different from those of Sri Aurobindo. By an appeal to the sense of history, he asserted the sole reality of the Becoming. Everything is changing, nothing is static; belief in the eternal is the result of a psychology of fear. Those who face reality in its unstable flux and apparent meaninglessness get terrified and, to escape from that terror, they posit some kind of eternity or permanence behind the flux and movement. In a brilliant exposition of the core of Nietzsche's thought, George Grant writes:

The desire to assert some permanence is particularly pressing among those who have begun to be aware of the abysmal void of its absence,

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<sup>25</sup>Heidegger, Martin, 'Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra' in The Review of Metaphysics April 1967 (Quarterly) (Haverford: Haverford College; Philosophy Education Society) Tr. Brud Magnus, p. 416.

<sup>26</sup>F. Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil (English translation by Kaufmann), Part VIII, Section 242 (New York: A Vintage Original).

And who wish to turn away from such a cause of fright.<sup>27</sup>

The belief in an eternal soul originates, according to Nietzsche, in the same psychological necessity. But once we can see through this psychological mechanism we can no longer stick to the belief in the permanent. So according to Nietzsche, God is dead, that is to say, God was once a living thing in the human mind. It served as a kind of 'horizon', as a means of escape from life, but it no longer exists. Science has demonstrated fairly well that life and nature can be explained without any reference to the Eternal and without any idea of final purpose. What about religion then? In the modern West, at least (and Nietzsche is very conscious of the domination of the rest of the world by Western values), religion survives only in the secularized form of a belief in progress. Naturally Nietzsche has no respect for this seductive belief in progress. All illusions, religious and secular, must be given up to be able to see life as it is and to accept it heroically. Illusions like God and Eternity are inseparably connected with morality, good and evil, heaven and hell, and so on. All these must be thrown out for life to assert itself in its naked fury. Yes, life is a fury, a fire, an urge, an impetuous will for power.

To speak of right and wrong per se makes no sense at all. No act of violence, rape, exploitation, destruction, is intrinsically 'unjust', since life itself is violent, rapacious, exploitative, and destructive and cannot be conceived otherwise.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> George Grant, Time as History (C.B.C., Canada, 1969), p. 27.

<sup>28</sup> The Genealogy of Morals, Second essay, Section XL.

This will to power takes devious courses for self-fulfillment if thwarted in its natural self-expression. Nietzsche sees a kind of perversity, a spirit of revenge, in most of our institutions -- ethical system with its formula of good and evil, virtue and vice; judicial system with its rule of reward and punishment.

The Spirit of revenge: my friends, that, up to now, has been mankind's chief concern... 'Punishment' is what revenge calls itself: it feigns a good conscience for itself with a lie.<sup>29</sup>

Rationality itself has gone to suppress life by ministering to the ideas of truth, virtue and so-called happiness.

It [rationality] identified reason with virtue, and virtue with happiness and grounded this identification in the primacy of the idea of the Good.<sup>30</sup>

Nietzsche wants to see that life is released from all these fetters. Only then can it become truly creative. But what does he mean by the creativity of life? "Life wants to climb and in climbing overcome itself".<sup>31</sup> Man's overcoming himself would thus mean leaving behind all the present values upheld by him. Up till now what has been attained by man is rather insignificant.

I had seen them both naked, the greatest man and the smallest man: all too similar to one another, even the greatest all too human. The greatest all too small....that was my disgust at man.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup>'Of Redemption', Thus Spake Zarathustra.

<sup>30</sup>George Grant, Time as History, p. 28.

<sup>31</sup>'Of the Tarantulas', Thus Spake Zarathustra.

<sup>32</sup>'The Convalescent', 2, Thus Spake Zarathustra.

Thus we see that Nietzsche's conception of the superman is based on the rejection of Being and, for that matter, anything permanent or eternal as well as on the necessity of going beyond Good and Evil. In this respect the differences with Sri Aurobindo are glaring. The foundation of Sri Aurobindo's concept of the superman is a belief in the reality of the Eternal. He accepts the relativity of all codes of ethics, and speaks of the necessity of going beyond, in consciousness, all relativity, but he would not advocate rejection of ethics. It is through the discrimination of good and evil and the rejection of one in favour of the other that one can go, according to him, beyond morality and into the Supreme Good.

However, there are certain strong points of contact between the two concepts of superman. In both, evolution into the higher type is an act of freedom on the part of man, it is not an automatic process in nature as in Darwin's thought. Of course, there is a difference in the source of freedom itself. For Nietzsche it is the immanent will to power, for Sri Aurobindo it is the soul, the immanent Divine. As he says, "Where there is no soul, there can be no freedom".<sup>33</sup>

Both Nietzsche and Sri Aurobindo affirm life. Evolution of the superman has to be here on earth in the physical mould. But for Nietzsche, acceptance of anything eternal means the denial of life. But

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<sup>33</sup> Sri Aurobindo, The Superman (Pondy: Ashram), p. 17.

for Sri Aurobindo Being and Becoming are not incompatible, and a spiritual discipline for overcoming oneself need not involve the suppression of the basic life-urge.

Both of them develop their message in the context of time and history. Nietzsche's appeal to the sense of history has been referred to above. Sri Aurobindo also speaks in historical terms. According to him, the present cycle of human civilization has passed through several stages: symbolic, tribal, conventional, individualistic, and is now on the threshold of the spiritual stage. Only through spiritual evolution can man solve the problems besetting humanity. According to him, history suggests that man must try at this moment to evolve consciously into the superman.

#### The Process of Conscious Evolution

Nietzsche writes:

The Superman is the meaning of the earth  
— Let your will say: The Superman shall be  
the meaning of the earth.<sup>34</sup>

So it is through an act of will that one can escape the lot of the 'last man' and the 'nihilist' and try to fashion his future, i.e., make his life creative. But the predicament is that one may will the future, but one cannot alter the past. "The Will cannot will 'backwards'".<sup>35</sup> It is the past, the stumbles and sufferings that have gone

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<sup>34</sup> 'Zarathustra's Prologue', 3, Thus Spake Zarathustra.

<sup>35</sup> 'Of Redemption, Thus Spake Zarathustra.

before that give rise to the spirit of revenge. "It takes revenge for its inability to go backwards".<sup>36</sup> And this spirit of revenge, as we have seen, leads to all kinds of perversity; in other words, it holds life back to the past. Resentment and the spirit of revenge have to be overcome to make life free and to look forward creatively. This is also possible by a supreme feat of will.

All 'It was' is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful chance...until the creative will says to it: 'But I willed it thus'...<sup>37</sup>

This is what has been called amor fati, love of fate, "held outside any assertion of timelessness".<sup>38</sup>

From the Eastern point of view, it may be said that amor fati is an extraordinary act on the part of consciousness to liberate itself from all bondage, make itself free and self-possessed. It is a kind of tapasyā (askesis), it is yoga in a special sense. The Buddhists as well as Schopenhauer would like to redeem will from bondage to the past by turning willing into not-willing. But this is the way to get out of existence. Nietzsche would liberate will by accepting the fate, saying "But I will it thus! Thus shall I will it".<sup>39</sup> This is how he would embrace existence integrally. This willing the past is a heroic act of consciousness, a tremendous power is needed for that and the result is the identification with Power itself which is Will. Heidegger says, "The word 'willing' here

<sup>37</sup> 'Of Redemption', Thus Spake Zarathustra.

<sup>38</sup> George Grant, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>39</sup> 'Of Redemption', op. cit.

signifies the Being of beings as a whole. It is Will".<sup>40</sup>

Be that as it may, even though we may see some kind of askesis in willing the past, it bears no comparison to the elaborate system of yoga that has been developed by Sri Aurobindo as a means of conscious evolution into supermanhood. In fact, beyond this willing of the 'It was' and conquering the spirit of revenge we do not have much about the superman and his role in the world. His nature, extent of knowledge and creative power, his relationship with others, everything remains controversial, not to speak of many other fundamental questions of metaphysics which he did not care to deal with at all. Ernst Benz says:

But if we expect from Nietzsche an answer to the question of what this higher form of human existence, this coming superhumanity, will look like in concrete terms, we will be greatly disappointed.<sup>41</sup>

Eric Heller, a profound appreciator of Nietzsche has raised the question, "Did Nietzsche himself believe in the truth of his doctrines of the Superman and the Eternal Recurrence?"<sup>42</sup> All of these leave us with the impression that Nietzsche's vision of the superman was incomplete. It is true that he was no mere speculator, he wrote as an inspired man. As Jaspers writes:

Nietzsche speaks out of his states, and none of his thoughts touches a reader who does not unconsciously enter the state in which it was thought by Nietzsche.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra", in The Review of Metaphysics. April 1967.

<sup>41</sup> Evolution and Christian Hope, p. 117.

<sup>42</sup> The Artist's Journey into the Interior, (New York: Random House), p. 193.

<sup>43</sup> Karl Jaspers, Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity, trans. by Wallraff and Schmitz (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1965), p. 339.

His thought did touch Sri Aurobindo very much, otherwise he would not have mentioned him so many times in a number of his books. However, a master yogi like Sri Aurobindo may well question the quality of these 'states' of the first speaker of the superman. Sri Aurobindo's remarks about Nietzsche's inspirations are at once an appreciation and a critical evaluation:

Nietzsche first cast it [the seed of the thought of a higher species on earth], the mystic of Will-worship, the troubled, profound half-luminous Hellenising Slav with his strange clarities, his violent half-ideas, his rare gleaming intuitions that came marked with the stamp of an absolute truth and sovereignty of light.<sup>44</sup>

He adds,

But Nietzsche was an apostle who never entirely understood his own message. His prophetic style was like that of the Delphic oracle which spoke constantly the word of the truth but turned into untruth in the mind of the hearer. Not always indeed; for sometimes he rose beyond his personal temperament and individual mind, his European inheritance and environment, his revolt against the Christ-idea, his war against current moral values, and spoke out the Word as he had heard it, the Truth as he had seen it, bare, luminous, impersonal and therefore flawless and imperishable. But for the most part, this message that had come to his inner hearing vibrating out of a distant infinite like a strain caught from the lyre of far-off Gods, did get in his effort to appropriate and make it nearer to him, mixed up with a somewhat turbulent surge of collateral ideas that drowned much of the pure original note.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The Superman, op. cit., pp. 2-3.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.



Teilhard de Chardin:

The prophesy about the Superman brings to mind another visionary; he is Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest. He was a Paleontologist and was deeply involved in the scientific questions about human evolution. Certain mystical visions came to him persistently, and he was convinced that man was destined to surpass himself and develop into the Superman. He has naturally tried to effect a reconciliation among things received in visions, his scientific findings, and the traditional Catholic theology. How far he has succeeded in this is a matter of controversy to which we need not enter at all. Teilhard is junior to Sri Aurobindo yet he was not acquainted with the latter. It is interesting and in some way significant how the two people with completely different backgrounds came in some vital respects to almost identical ideas. However there are differences too. So a brief comparison may well bring Sri Aurobindo's concept into a greater relief.

Teilhard recognizes a drive for self-exceeding at every level of earthly phenomena. "All matter wants to live, all life wants to become man, and in man, it wants to join man's goal, which is God."<sup>46</sup> This is because of the presence of consciousness in however rudimentary form, even in the tiniest and grossest of material particle. Teilhard writes,

On the one hand we are logically forced to assume the existence in rudimentary form (in a microscopic i.e. an infinitely diffuse, state) of some sort of psyche in every corpuscle, even in those (the megamolecules and below) whose complexity is of such a low or modest order.

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<sup>46</sup>E. Benz, Evolution and Christian Hope, Chapter 12, (New York: Doubleday and Co. Inc. 1966), p. 219.

as to render it (the psyche) imperceptible.<sup>47</sup>

It is evident that the hierarchy of the phenomena as given by Teilhard -- Pre-life, Biosphere (life), Noosphere (Thought), Superlife, and Omega point is basically a hierarchy of consciousness. And this consciousness below is not really different from the Consciousness above which is governing over the entire movement of the earth-life towards a greater fulfillment. While defending himself against the charge of pantheism he has emphasized the point all the more.

A very real 'pantheism' if you like (in the etymological meaning of the word) but an absolutely legitimate pantheism -- for if, in the last resort, the reflective centres of the world are effectively 'one with God' this state is obtained not by identification (God becoming all) but by the differentiating and communicating action of love (God all in everyone). And that is essentially orthodox and Christian.<sup>48</sup>

Again that the highest type of man -- surhomme will mean not only higher consciousness but also a corresponding change in the body has also been indicated by him.

It is a choice depending experimentally on the curiously underestimated fact that, from the threshold of reflection onwards, we are at what is nothing less than a new form of biological existence.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup>The Phenomenon of Man, (Collins: Fontana Books), pp. 329-30.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 338.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 331. There is some scope of disagreement about Teilhard's hope of a higher life in a material body. As a scientist he was bothered, unlike Sri Aurobindo, by the prospect of a cosmic death. Beatrice Bruteau, author of a number of books on Teilhard writes,

"Teilhard foresees the evolving spirit moving right out of the material vehicle, abandoning it altogether to form the super-person, whereas Aurobindo prophesies that the powerful spirit will extend its dominion downward and transform the material infra-structure into a fit instrument for its own purposes."

'Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin on the Problem of Action' in International Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. XII. No. 2, June 1972, p. 199. (New York: Fordham University).

Obviously Teilhard does not think in terms of individual superman, he thinks in terms of a leap toward a higher type of collective existence. Dr. Benz has stated Teilhard's position very clearly,

The perfection of the earth thus corresponds to the 'perfection of God' in the visible world. This means that for Teilhard the genesis of the Kingdom of God, the incarnation, will not occur as the sudden eruption of something supernatural into a degraded world ruled by demons. It will rather be the ascent of the earth and its metamorphosis into a reality which has hitherto hardly been recognized. This is a reality of 'a completely different kind', the point Omega, in which the noosphere will reach its summit-point of uniformity. Uniform humanity will flow into God, while God as the centre and axis, flows onto humanity and will become visible in it.....

The incarnation of God is not a process which exhausts itself in a single and unique historical person. It is a process of transformation which aims at the divinization of man. But, in man, it transforms the entire Universe.<sup>50</sup>

Sri Aurobindo also has used the expression 'fulfillment of God in earth' not in the sense that God needs fulfillment but in the sense of God's greater participation in life on earth, i.e., divinization of earth. The idea of ascent and descent is a key to Sri Aurobindo's thought. In response to the aspiration from the lower nature the descent of the higher nature takes place, the higher descends to take up and integrate the lower. However, Sri Aurobindo is not in favour of uniformity. Even at the summit-point (gnostic community) he envisages infinite diversity, and at a lower level he is definitely against uniformity. He has clearly differentiated between uniformity and unity and has shown that uniformity is something dead, whereas unity is something that admits of endless variety on the foundation of essential Oneness.

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<sup>50</sup> Evolution and Christian Hope, Tr. (Garden City New York: Doubleday & Co. Inc. 1966), p. 218.

Teilhard on the other hand showed some enthusiasm for 'collectivization'.

Sir Julian Huxley has written about this situation apologetically,

However, perhaps because he was (rightly) so deeply concerned with establishing a global unification of human awareness as a necessary prerequisite for any real future progress of mankind, and perhaps also because he was by nature and inclination more interested in rational and scientific thought than in the arts, he did not discuss the evolutionary value of cultural variety in any detail.<sup>51</sup>

Sri Aurobindo was deeply concerned about the unity of mankind, he has written at length about world union; the Gnostic community he visualizes is communistic, all the same he did not lose sight of the fact that unbridled technology and socialization might throttle the freedom of man, and freedom he considered fundamental to any real evolution of men and his society. Of course Teilhard was not unaware of the importance of freedom in man's self-development. Nevertheless it seems he counted more on external forces of unity, like technology, socialism etc., — on "Socialization", "collectivization", to use his expressions, — than on the internal process of heightening and widening of consciousness achieved through yoga. This is also the reason why he thought that the Catholic Church, which had harassed him all through his life and which did not allow the publication in his lifetime of any of his works embodying his unorthodox visions, would bring about the evolutionary progression envisioned by him.

Christianity now appears to me much less a closed and established whole than an axis of progression and assimilation. Apart from this axis, I cannot see any guarantee of any way out for the world.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Introduction to 'The Phenomenon of Man', p. 15.

<sup>52</sup> Teilhard, E. T. Letters to Leontine Zanta, 1969, p. 36, taken from R. C. Zachner's book 'Evolution in Religion: A Study in Sri Aurobindo and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin', (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1971), p. 9.

It seems that Teilhard was wanting not only in literary background and knowledge about Eastern religions,<sup>53</sup> but was also short of, despite his many cosmic experiences, that plenary realization of the Transcendental Truth which makes one see that the scriptures also belong to the realm of the phenomenal, and that utter Freedom is freedom from everything. Creation is an act of Freedom proceeding from the undeniably free One which is God. Had he had this experience he could have better appreciated the role of freedom in individual and collective development.

#### A Résumé of the Field Covered So Far

We have tried to understand superman as a philosophical concept. The metaphysical foundation of this concept has been discussed in the previous chapter. In the present section we have shown that the concept is basically evolutionary, although the triple transformation necessary for the evolution of the superman is not expected to take place automatically as a matter of course, man's conscious participation in it is essential. On the other hand, man's self-effort is not by itself sufficient to bring about the leap forward; man's effort is only a part of the cosmic design. The Descent of the Divine is the primary factor.

The brief comparison that we have made with the two cognate concepts of the East -- Jīvanmukta and Bodhisattva -- has emphasized the mystical basis of the concept and at the same time has brought into

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<sup>53</sup>Zaehner writes, "It is, however, strange that Teilhard never came to hear of Aurobindo -- or perhaps not so strange, for though he had formed his own ideas about Eastern mysticism, he had quite clearly not read even the basic texts in any kind of depth. Had he done so, he would scarcely have dismissed Eastern mysticism out of hand as being perime, dated, how much less Aurobindo whose thought so closely resembled his own". Evolution in Religion: A Study in Sri Aurobindo and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 7.

relief its evolutionary and this-worldly orientation. Comparison with two other concepts of superman developed in the West was also designed to bring out the distinctiveness of the Indian concept, its being intimately linked with a practical programme of Spiritual Discipline -- Yoga.

In the subsequent sections we are going to consider the concept in its practical bearings. Issues such as what would be the character of a supramental society, how the present human society would evolve into the higher types, what kind of freedom a superman is likely to exercise are sure to throw a good deal of light on the concept of the superman.

## II. Supramental Society

Superman is not superior man, but is a different type of being. We have to stretch our imagination a good deal to form an idea of what might be the collective life of the supermen. In fact a full-fledged Superman is not yet a reality. By full-fledged Superman we mean a person who does not merely possess the supramental consciousness but has effected a supramental transformation of all the members of his being -- body, life and mind. Such beings are still a very distant thing so what is considered here as Supramental Society or Divine Life is the anticipated life of a collectivity of people who have the experience of the Supermind and are trying to manifest that Truth-consciousness in the details of their individual and collective life.

A life of gnostic beings carrying the evolution to a higher Supramental status might fitly be characterized as a divine life; for it would be a life in the Divine, a life of the beginnings of a spiritual divine light and power and joy manifested in material Nature.<sup>1</sup>

Gnostic beings are those who have the experience of the Supermind -- that unitive consciousness which takes the unmanifest and the manifest in a global view. Human society is essentially the product of human consciousness. Similarly the Supramental society will be the

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<sup>1</sup>The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter 28, p. 945.

product of the gnostic consciousness of its individuals. A study of the gnostic being is therefore the key to an understanding of the Supramental Society.

Individuality of the Gnostic Beings:

The entire way of thinking, feeling, acting of a gnostic being is expected to be governed by the power of a vast Universal spirituality. He is established in the consciousness of essential identity with all beings, he is one with that Being which presides over the entire movement of Becoming in the cosmos. He may well be considered a 'Cosmic' individual, "since all his action would be in harmony with the Cosmic action".<sup>2</sup> But would that mean that different gnostic beings would be just automatons in the hands of the universal being and his forces? In that case where would be the individuality of the gnostic beings? Does not individuality imply distinctiveness? If the gnostic being cannot act differently from that of the Cosmic Being what would be the purpose of his action then? And if he acts contrary to the will of the Cosmic Being would it not mean his subjection to Ignorance? All these problems are centered round the question of personality or divine individualism. While in ignorance everybody acts from the ego, with the dawn of supreme unitive knowledge the ego goes (except in the frontal organization of the body and mind). With the removal of the separative phenomenal ego does anything remain of the man of Knowledge? In this Buddhism and Non-dualist Vedanta are one. Buddhism from the very beginning denies

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<sup>2</sup>The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter 27, p. 888.



the existence of any Substance in phenomenal existence. Advaita accepts the existence of the soul only provisionally, phenomenally; with the dawn of non-dualistic knowledge the soul drops out. Any state of awareness which is short of non-duality comes in the Advaita scheme in the category of Ignorance. There is no scope, if the Advaita logic is followed faithfully, for individuality in Knowledge. So some Advaita scholars would not consider liberation complete till the physical existence is given up. Ramanuja admits the existence of the individual soul after the realization of God but it can assume a divine personality only after getting rid of the body.

For Ramanuja there is no Jivanmukti... when it [the body] is shattered the soul is said to attain the nature of Brahman and manifest its own true nature.<sup>3</sup>

Saivism and Saktaism accept the idea of Jivanmukti, but even in them there is no real stress on life and action after liberation. Saiva Siddhanta, however, states clearly that the action of the liberated man springs from the divine in him. "All the deeds performed by the freed are due to the impulsion of God within them".<sup>4</sup>

Saivism and Saktaism do not reject the world as illusion nor do they have any contempt for the body. Yet the question remains how the action of the divine within the liberated assumes distinctiveness from the action of the Universal or Cosmic Divine. Here again Sri Aurobindo resorts to what he has called the Logic of the Infinite and says that the supposed opposition is the creation of the mind and its

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<sup>3</sup>S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, (George Allen & Unwin: London), p. 710.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 731.

characteristic way of operation through division.

In the supermind consciousness, personality and impersonality are not opposite principles; they are inseparable aspects of one and the same reality. This reality is not the ego but the being, who is impersonal and universal in his stuff of nature, but forms out of it an expressive personality which is his form of self in the changes of Nature.<sup>5</sup>

Again, according to Sri Aurobindo, the true individual in us is no mere formation of the Universal Being and forces. It is grounded in the Transcendent, it is a poise of the supra-cosmic in the cosmos. "Both individual and universe are simultaneous and inter-related expressions of the same transcendent Being".<sup>6</sup>

For the fullness of the individual it is necessary that it realize its unity with the Universal. "To be fully is to be universally".<sup>7</sup> But for a fuller fullness it is necessary that the individual realizes its transcendent character and goes intrinsically beyond subjection to Universal forces even. "But thus to be universally in the fullness and freedom of one's universality, one must be also transcendentally".<sup>8</sup>

The individual becomes one with the universal, acts in unison with the universal will and force, yet in its inmost essence it transcends everything. This is the image of the divine personality as

<sup>5</sup>The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter 27, p. 881.

<sup>6</sup>The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter 27, p. 865.

<sup>7</sup>The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter 28, p. 909.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 909.

Sri Aurobindo puts up in his 'Life Divine'. Such cosmic individuals with gnostic consciousness will be utterly free within. But so long as they carry a body would they not suffer from certain serious bondages? The question of bondage comes from a deep-rooted sense of separation between body and soul -- one profane, the other sacred. If their essential oneness is recognized, and if the assumption of body is considered as a willful adventure instead of an unfortunate unwilling alienation the question of bondage would cease to figure prominently. Certain limitations will surely be there so long as the body is not divinized. But this may not be conceived as a bondage,

"His [the gnostic beings] universality would embrace even the Ignorance around him in its larger self, but, while intimately aware of it, he would not be affected by it."<sup>9</sup>

the greater is the hold of the inner consciousness over the outer members (body, life and mind), the greater would be the participation consciously in the universal life, and this would culminate in thoroughly conscious divine life with the transformation of the members.

#### Norms of action of a Gnostic Being:

Now, with the personality of the gnostic being accepted, comes the question of his moral responsibility in his actions and the standard he is to follow. Here again we have to clearly distinguish between the mental and the gnostic consciousness. The mind functions with a separatist ego as its pivot. It is always in a state of conflict, it perceives itself as separate from all others, on the other hand it is constantly bothered by conflicting suggestions of its own thoughts

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<sup>9</sup> The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter 27, p. 888.

and ideas and those of the lower members — the body and life-principles. It is no master of its own house. So there is a necessity of an external standard of ethics for the self-development of a mental being and his smooth relationship with other members of the society. But the gnostic consciousness is entirely different. It is established in the experience of oneness with the Divine as well as with other selves; and it is aware of what passes in the lower members. The gnostic consciousness presupposes the harmony and mastery of the Psychic being already established in the individual existence. So the gnostic being acts in unity, mutuality and harmony with the Cosmic self and the divine intention in other beings. There is therefore no necessity of any external standard of ethics for the gnostic being. People in ignorance may not fathom the rationale of his free actions, they may misunderstand or misrepresent him, but he will have no conflict with them, he will deal with them accordingly as his unitive consciousness inspires him to do.

All the mental standards would disappear because all necessity for them would cease; the higher authentic law of identity with the Divine Self and identity with all beings would have replaced them. There would be no question of selfishness or altruism, of oneself and others, since all are seen and felt as the one self and only what the supreme Truth and Good decided would be done.<sup>10</sup>

It is evident that the mode of being and action of the gnostic beings would differ accordingly as their development is, and the cosmic situation they are in. By development is meant the extent of their ability to manifest the gnostic consciousness in the acts of the lower

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<sup>10</sup> The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter 27, pp. 892-93.

members of the being, i.e. the stage of the supramental transformation attained by them. But what about when the transformation is complete? Would they act identically then? Sri Aurobindo warns against any static conception of Becoming. Becoming is in constant travail and the evolution is endless. At present evolution is taking place in the Ignorance -- from half-light to further light. "There would naturally appear in time many grades of the farther ascent of the evolutive supermind to its own summits".<sup>11</sup> Secondly the cosmic situation, i.e., time and place, remains an additional factor of distinctions of activities. But if the factors of time and place are ignored for the sake of argument would the two gnostic beings developed equally act identically? Are both expected to act in perfect harmony with the Cosmic will? Sri Aurobindo's answer is in the negative. He says the association with popular imagination of heaven -- "the incessant repetition of an eternal monotone"<sup>12</sup> -- must be given up in this connection. It is to be realized that the soul -- the eternal individual -- is a poise of the Transcendent for the play of manifestation, of multiplicity and endless variety. The unique status of the soul is the real foundation of variety and distinctiveness, and not so much the stage of development and the factors of time and place.

A Supramental or gnostic race of beings would not be a race made according to a single type, moulded in a single fixed pattern;...each would be different from the other, a unique formation of the Being, although one with all the rest in foundation of self and sense of oneness and in the principle of his being.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 895.

<sup>12</sup> The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter 28, p. 947.

<sup>13</sup> The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter 27, p. 862.

As we have seen supramental gnosis is knowledge, power, and delight, so in supramental society there will be an immense play of power or knowledge-will and a boundless delight of existence. However such would in principle be the Gnostic communal life that the details can hardly be envisaged.

### III. Social Evolution From the Present to the Supramental Stage

The gnostic beings and the mode of their actions as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo appear to be too far away from the man as he is now. The change of one into the other seems extremely difficult if not impossible. The change, however, is to be effected mostly by the Descent of the Supermind which would mean the direct operation of a different and radically puissant principle in the movement of evolution. So far evolution is being governed by the forces of Ignorance; with the release from below and the descent from above of the Supermind evolution itself will evolve, it will come under the governance of the Supermind; what now seems impossible will be quite possible. However, Sri Aurobindo did not think of a sudden and wholesale change of the human mind and of human society.

It will not be a sudden revelation and effectuation of the absolute Supermind and the supramental being as they are in their own place, the swift apocalypse of a truth-conscious existence ever self-fulfilled and complete in self-knowledge; it will be the phenomenon of the supramental being descending into a world of evolutionary becoming and forming itself there, unfolding the powers of the gnosis within the terrestrial nature.

This process of the descended gnosis unfolding its powers in terrestrial nature would be a new creation, something that had never taken place before. Regarding this phase Sri Aurobindo is rather speculative in his writings. And as he grew more in experience with

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<sup>1</sup>The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter 27, p. 858.

the Supermind he slightly changed his conception. He visualized an intermediary race, called by him "The New Humanity", between present humanity and the race of the Supermen. This "new humanity" will be the bridge between the two. In a series of articles written shortly before his passing away in 1950, collected later under the title The Supramental Manifestation he has elaborated the possibility of humanity's evolving into this intermediary stage with the descent of the Supermind.

#### The Mind of Light:

It is to be understood clearly that Mind in its pure form and in its own realm is not how it manifests itself in man. (This is true of any level of consciousness particularly the overhead ones -- Higher mind, Illumined mind, Intuitive mind, Overmind.) Here in an embodied human existence Mind labours with the weight of the physical and the vital. Mind, though belonging to the lower hemisphere, is a subordinate power of the Supermind. It is incapacitated by the two lower levels with which it is tied. One great effect of the descent of the Supermind would be the liberation of the mind, to a large extent, from the burden of the Inconscience. From its present manifestation as an instrument of half-knowledge, mind will turn into a luminous intelligence grasping at truth with an assured ease. This new mind effected out of the operation of the Supermind in the sphere of earthly becoming has been called by Sri Aurobindo the 'Mind of Light'. This 'Mind of Light' is going to be the leader of the new humanity.

The imperfections and the limitations of mind in its present stage is taken for a part of its very nature. Consequently any idea



about its transcending itself is naturally looked upon with scepticism. But Sri Aurobindo says that this is not really the case. "For mind is not in its very nature an inventor of errors,...it is in its origin a principle of light, an instrument put forth from the Supermind"<sup>2</sup> in the play of multiplicity. It has the potentiality to go back to its luminous character of Truth vision. "It is this character of Mind that will reveal itself under the touch of Supermind".<sup>3</sup> This new mind evolved as a result of "the intervention of Supermind in the earth-nature"<sup>4</sup> would reorganize human life and society. If our present mind is considered as an instrument of Ignorance, the present society with its laws and institutions turns out to be the product of Ignorance or half-knowledge. The Mind of Light is, on the contrary, a mind liberated from Ignorance. It is at its highest "capable of passing into the Supermind"<sup>5</sup> although it is certainly not the supramental gnosis itself. Now how exactly would this new mind bring about the new humanity, and what would be the character of the collective life of this new humanity has not been elaborated by Sri Aurobindo. What we gain in this idea of a new race is a link between humanity and super-humanity. Supermind after its descent on some individuals and thus on the earth-nature will initiate a new principle, a new impetus in the forces of evolution. The impact will naturally be universal. It will not be limited to those who open themselves to it, instead it will

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<sup>2</sup>Supramental Manifestation, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

touch everybody, even the subhuman levels will not go unaffected. This new impetus and opening of the gate of higher consciousness will enable a larger number of people to take advantage of the situation and grow into more developed beings. It is these beings who will take the leadership of humanity or the new humanity, as at present the leadership is mainly in the hands of those who are most intelligent and cunning (the leaders of the new humanity would not have to be cunning since new consciousness will have a purifying effect on them, and their relationship with the less developed humans will be of genuine love and benevolence). As there is a hierarchy of intelligence or mental development in the present humanity so also in the new humanity there will be a hierarchy of development and from among the most developed will emerge the real gnostic beings.

At its highest it [the new humanity] would be capable of passing into the supermind and from the new race would be recruited the race of supramental beings who would appear as the leaders of the evolution in earth-nature.<sup>6</sup>

#### New Humanity:

The introduction of this new humanity and a gradation within itself has provided us with a link between humanity and superhumanity, and has also made the whole process gradual and plausible. Of course there is a strong element of 'leap' in the evolution of man into the new man -- the intervention of the Supramental amounts to that; but it is different from the Emergent theory of evolution since here what will emerge is already there latent in man; secondly, this intervention

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<sup>6</sup>Supramental Manifestation, p. 123.

makes the future evolution plausible. Without the intervention of a radically puissant element it is difficult to conceive of a general elevation of the human mind. Thousands of years of human history does not testify very positively to any significant progress of the human consciousness.

As regards the social aspect of the new humanity, Sri Aurobindo has always insisted upon the fact that man's society is the creation of his consciousness. So the society of the new humanity will also be a creation of the Mind of Light, and certainly it will be a different thing from the present society. What is more important is not the picture of the society -- which will never be a static thing -- but the right understanding of the emerging consciousness. Above all, this race of the new humanity is likely to be a transitional stage; humanity is expected to pass through a series of rapid and drastic changes before the new humanity and then the superhumanity may appear on the scene. The focal point of the whole process is the descent of the Supermind and its gradual forging out the emerging consciousness.

Man's elevation and the resulting gap between animals and superman:

This link of a new humanity has another significance. In the march of evolution, with the Emergence of a higher type the previous one is not eliminated. But Sri Aurobindo rules out the possibility of a human race thriving side by side with the race of Superman. The new humanity figures as a hope to man, he can think of his gradual elevation into that and eventually into the superman. This would mean no break between man and superman. In fact after the appearance of the self-conscious man on the scene the forces of evolution would not work so

much on the external shape and organism, it will be operative predominantly in the inner dimension — i.e. in consciousness. The superman is not likely to be different in shape from man although some subtle changes are bound to come in his constitution as a result of the play of a very different consciousness.

A total transformation of the body would demand a sufficient change of the most material part of the organism, its constitution, its process and its set-up of nature.

Again, with the humanity rising into superhumanity would not the gap between the subhuman and the superhuman levels be too wide? Sri Aurobindo contends that Supermind will bring about some kind of elevation even in the subhuman worlds and in consequence the gap would not be that big. He has not, however, made it clear what kind of change he envisages in the subhuman levels. In this he seems to be uncertain and very speculative. The reason seems to be this: What the Supermind will effect on the earth-atmosphere is something entirely novel and dependent on many contingencies, so only the broad outlines can be visualized, the details can never be given.

The Mind of Light further explained:

Now, the concept of the Mind of Light if not apprehended clearly, may give rise to misunderstanding. Mind of Light is a subordinate power of the Supramental gnosis. Though it falls in the lower hemisphere it leads directly to the higher. The new humanity will appear with the realization of the Mind of Light. Does it mean that so far none of the great saints and seers has realized this state

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<sup>7</sup> Supramental Manifestation, p. 64.

which is by no means the highest? No, not at all. The Mind of Light has to be understood in the context of the Descent of the Supermind on the lower members and their transformation as a result of that. Supermind is the sovereign dynamism of the Divine. So far it has acted on the lower nature indirectly. Its descent from above and emergence from below would mean a very direct action of it on the lower members. It will gradually supramentalize the body life and mind. But this transformation has to be largely in terms of the lower members, that is to say, body, life and mind cannot cease to be what they are basically, only they will be purified, and their highest possibilities developed. No startling miracle is expected but a steady relatively faster reorganization is envisaged. In this process of Supramentalization of embodied existence Mind of Light represents an intermediary stage.

Spiritual experience normally takes place in a deep state of concentration with the activity of the body, life and mind coming almost to cessation. These experiences are inner, they touch the active parts of our life but do not transform them. Certain cases of Yogic power, miraculous feats speak of some initial transformation resulting from the impact of the inner experience, but transformation as such is not considered as an aim nor pursued systematically. The aim of transformation is purely evolutionary. The descent of the Supermind is expected to effect a change in the entire human nature; it will work not only on the inner being but on the bodily mind, bodily life, and bodily matter, that is to say the most external and grossest aspects of our life and action. Much of this external life-activity is carried on in the subconscious, without conscious effort and mostly outside the

control of the conscious mind. The action of the Supramental gnosis would remove gradually the veils that separate the conscious and the unconscious parts of our life since it has the power to penetrate and engulf both of them. Is not it the secret origin and governing force behind all things of creation? This penetration of the unenlightened unregenerated parts of our life by the supreme light of the Supermind is bound to be a laborious process, it will involve the rejection of the habits of thousands of years. Do we not carry the entire evolutionary past, within ourselves? And this process has two movements at every step. An individual, however advanced he may be in spiritual knowledge and in the will to change, is interminably linked with all others; every force every movement is universal; changing something would mean changing a world of that thing. So is the great difficulty and complicity of the job. But this change is said to be the intention of the Divine, so it will be achieved through conscious participation of forerunning individuals. So Sri Aurobindo is never given to despair because of the formidability of the task. Only at later days of the experimentation with human nature he came to visualize an intermediary race between the present humanity and the race of gnostic beings, the intermediary gnosis that will govern the life of this new humanity he called the Mind of Light.

In this inevitable ascent the Mind of Light is a gradation, an inevitable stage. As an evolving principle it will mark a stage in the human ascent and evolve a new type of human beings.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>The Supramental Manifestation, pp. 126-27.

#### IV. Freedom of the Individual in the Gnostic Community

As we have dealt with the evolution of the gnostic community, the question arises: "What would be the nature and extent of freedom of a gnostic being in that community?" The problem has been discussed at some length in Section II. (Individuality of the Gnostic Beings) of this chapter. Yet we may consider the issue here for further clarification. Sri Aurobindo looks at every social problem from the point of view of evolution, i.e., the progress in consciousness. It is, therefore, necessary to consider at what stage of the history of evolution freedom appeared as a phenomenon and how it did.

In the world of matter there is no sign of freedom, everything is governed by the inexorable law of physical nature, in the vegetable world hardly any difference is noticed. It is in the animal kingdom that there is a semblance of freedom. Animals choose from a number of alternatives, learn through trial and error. But is it not a fact that in making the choice they are prompted entirely by some instinct? This means that they are guided by natural forces, real freedom they do not actually possess. It is in man, the mental being, that we come across real freedom. It is true that we are also largely guided by instincts and vital needs, yet we can rise above the instinctual drives and utilitarian considerations and act on the basis of our judgment of the right and wrong, ugly and beautiful, perfect and imperfect. We can choose to pursue Truth, Beauty, Good for their own sake. But

from what part in us does this capacity to freedom arise? Sri Aurobindo would say, using the figures of Sankhya, freedom comes from the reflection of the Purusa on Prakriti, of the spirit on nature. That is to say, the source of freedom is the inner being, the soul. In submental creatures the soul can hardly reflect itself, it is in the mental being that the soul succeeds in putting some imprint of itself. From this it follows that the greater the psychic orientation of nature, that is, the greater the body-life-mind complex comes under the guidance of the soul, the greater the realization of freedom by an individual.

In Advaita Vedanta a gulf remains between the spirit and nature. Nature is Avidyā (Ignorance), freedom is possible only in inaction, action perforce belongs to the realm of Ignorance. Sri Aurobindo has shown that nature belongs to spirit, Sakti is inherent in Siva. Ignorance is not an opposite principle of knowledge. It is a limitation of knowledge made willfully for the adventure of creation, nature and all of its laws are self-determination of the spirit itself.<sup>1</sup> In this scheme it is possible for nature to grow in knowledge or consciousness and thus eventually to be a perfect instrument of the spirit. Free action is not only

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<sup>1</sup>"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. There is the whole heart of the debate, the nodus and escape of this perplexed issue". The Problem of Rebirth, pp. 94-95.



possible here, but is the real goal. And freedom consists in obtaining the knowledge of the self as the true master of life. So long as we remain short of self-knowledge we are the target of all sorts of influences, and our exercise of freedom is only tentative. Real freedom comes when we can take our stand on the self, the Archimedian station of leverage "whence he can sovereignly move the world of his being".<sup>2</sup>

We were considering the freedom that a gnostic man is expected to exercise in a gnostic community. In the present society we see a constant conflict between the individual and the community, although one cannot thrive without the other. The reason is that we live in the ego, feel ourselves as separate from others; we see that our life can have no fulfilment outside the collectivity, yet we do not realize our unity with the collectivity sufficiently. All the laws of society reflect this imperfection in our consciousness. A man with supramental gnosis would live in the unitive consciousness of his self. His realization of basic oneness with all others would be flawless. In a community of such people the basis of action would naturally be mutuality, unity, and harmony. Here while someone conforms to the needs of the community he does that out of no external compulsion or obligation but spontaneously as a law of his own being, as it were. Does this constitute freedom? If freedom is understood in the sense of self-assertion

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

as against the assertion of other individuals or the society, then it is not freedom. But is it necessary to limit the connotation of freedom in this way? After all, what is there behind any self-assertion? Is it not some drive of nature supported by the intellect and the ego? If it is a drive of the indwelling soul for self-realization then the chances of conflict will be minimized; the light emitting from within leads to a sober understanding.

Again, this basic unity of all individuals does not mean the losing of the individual self in the collective self. In Buddhism and in Non-dualist Vedanta there is no scope of a distinctive free individual status, i.e., spiritual individuality, there is only a power of individuation in nature. We have seen how Sri Aurobindo differs from these positions. In his system true individuality is a poise of the Transcendent, as Universality is another poise of the Transcendent for self-manifestation. Since the spiritual individual is grounded in the Transcendent he does not simply get merged in the Universal, he retains his individuality while acting in harmony and unity with the universal. However, we have discussed here the ideal state of the Gnostic community. The new humanity and even the first stages of the true Gnostic community would be short of this ideal. But as transitional stages they will embody more and more the ideal of mutuality, harmony and unity.

## V. Sri Aurobindo's View of History

### Inner View of History

Ideals of social evolution lead us directly to the issue of how Sri Aurobindo looks at history. What is history? The kaleidoscope of movements and succession of events that are recorded on the surface of human consciousness is commonly known as history. But one who recognizes the Divine hand and guidance behind life, evolution, mankind, and its future, cannot take history in this limited sense. For him it is the Cosmic being who rules over the whole thing, and the cosmic being is no other than the supreme Reality. "It is this highest Reality which is also the cosmic being".<sup>1</sup>

But how does the cosmic being govern the cosmos? Sri Aurobindo warns against the popular view of divine determination. "Our view of the divine government of the world or of the secret of its action is either incurably anthropomorphic or else incurably mechanical".<sup>2</sup> The process seems to be subtle and inscrutable.

For on one side Nature works according to her limited complex of formulas and is informed and supported in their execution by the Divine Presence, but on the other side there is an overseeing, a higher working and determination, even an intervention, free but not arbitrary.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter XVI, p. 605.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Chapter II, p. 320.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

But what is Nature? Is it just a conglomeration of mechanical, mathematical, automatic laws of things? According to Sri Aurobindo it is much more than that.

Nature here is a limited expression of that Supernature and open to intervention or mutation by its light, its force, its influence.<sup>4</sup>

History is thus determined by the One, but "by the One in all and over all".<sup>5</sup> Here also he refers "to the law and logic of an infinite consciousness".<sup>6</sup>

From what we have gathered from his writings, a parallelism exists between the life of an individual and that of the human collectivity. For much of the conscious life of an individual is determined by the Inconscient below and the Superconscient above and many intermediary planes in between. So is human history, a stage on which many different forms of many different planes can play. On the other hand, as in individual life, the principal determinant is the individual soul which is trying to manifest more and more of itself in the fullness of an embodied life, so in world history the Cosmic Being is the principal determinant, and the objective is to manifest more and more of itself in the many-sided splendour of the life of humanity.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

### Evolution and Progress

What is the rhythm of the progressive manifestation of the Divine in humanity? Is there really a progress? We have seen that Sri Aurobindo equates progress with evolution, unlike some scientific thinkers who consider 'progress' a value-judgment unwarranted by the factual study of the mechanism of evolution. For Sri Aurobindo consciousness is the primary thing. The whole march of evolution is a progressive journey towards higher consciousness, and in human history also he recognizes this progress. From the dawn of human civilization to this day man has progressed a good deal as far as his consciousness or self-awareness is concerned, although there may be question regarding his progress in practical morality, or aesthetic capability.

### Cyclical and Linear View of History

As regards the rhythm of progress there are two traditional notions. The Greek, Indian and Chinese notion of progress<sup>\*</sup> is cyclical whereas the Judaeo-Christian notion of progress is linear. It is, of course, a matter of debate if the Judaeo-Christian tradition does at all advocate progress in history. In Christianity, with the second coming of Christ redemption is expected to be achieved and history transcended. Belief in endless linear progress is basically an outcome of secularized Christianity and the confidence generated by technology in shaping human destiny. In Sri Aurobindo's mind the idea of a linear progress is associated with materialism. The theory of materialistic evolution led naturally to the idea of a

slow and gradual progression in a straight line".<sup>7</sup> But he rejects this view of history. He writes, "Here too, fuller knowledge disturbs the received notions", and adds:

In the history of man everything seems now to point to alternatives of a serious character, ages of progression, ages of recoil, the whole constituting an evolution that is cyclic rather than in one straight line.<sup>8</sup>

Maitra maintained that Sri Aurobindo gave up the view of cyclical evolution, otherwise how would progress be possible?

Sri Aurobindo is definitely of the opinion that the process of history is not cyclical. In fact, in his view, the cyclical view of evolution will make evolution a farce, for if one epoch takes it upward, another epoch will bring it down, and the net result will be a big cipher.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, Sri Aurobindo has not given up the cyclical view, he has only modified it slightly. While speaking about Heraclitus' conception of the upward and downward road, he has shown its affinity with the Indian conception of pravrtti (the moving out) and nivrtti (the moving back and in) -- "an ever-repeated cycle of creation and dissolution".<sup>10</sup> The Indian pralaya (the great periodic destruction) has been equated by him with Heraclitus's 'Conflagration'.

<sup>7</sup> Evolution, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 7-8.

<sup>9</sup> S. K. Maitra, "Sri Aurobindo and Spengler", in The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>10</sup> Heraclitus, p. 38.

Without the idea of destruction the concept of the two movements — upward and downward, ascent and descent, is not complete. He writes,

Otherwise we must suppose that the downward tendency, once in action, has always the upperhand over the upward or that Cosmos is eternally proceeding out of the original substance and eternally returning to it, but never actually returns [*italics are mine*].<sup>11</sup>

~~Sri Aurobindo does not rule out the possibility of the~~ present cycle of human civilization being preceded by many others, rather he accepts this by implication as we shall see shortly.

Pralaya or the destruction comes, according to the tradition, after many cycles of human civilization. The result of one cycle may well be carried over to the other. The history of man and his civilization may not be as short as available records suggest.

However greatly preoccupied Sri Aurobindo might be with the immediate advancement of human evolution, he never gave up the typical Indian regard for the Eternity and the Transcendent beyond time.

#### Spiral View of History

But how is progress possible in the cyclical movement of life? It seems that Sri Aurobindo has differentiated the cyclic from the circular. In the circular everything is repeated as it is,

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

but in the cyclical there is repetition in the broad movement but nothing is exactly the same as it had been in the previous order. The years repeat but no two years are exactly the same. There is a forward movement in the broad round that gives the impression of a circle.

From aeon to aeon, from kalpa to kalpa Narayana manifests himself in an ever-evolving humanity which grows in experience by a series of expansions and contradictions towards its destined self-realization in God.... The wheel of Brahma rotates for ever but it does not turn in the same place; its rotations carry it forward.<sup>12</sup>

But the traditional Indian view of yoga suggests a gradual decline from age to age. Sri Aurobindo views this scheme differently:

That evolution is not denied by the Hindu theory of yoga. Each age in the Hindu system has its own line of moral and spiritual evolution and the decline of the dharma or established law of conduct from the Satya to the Kaliyuga is not in reality a deterioration but a detrition of the outward forms and props of spirituality in order to prepare a deeper spiritual intensity within the heart.<sup>13</sup>

3 The procession of human history as viewed by Sri Aurobindo may well be designated as 'spiral'. In fact, Sri Aurobindo has used this expression in The Life Divine, "a progression which has been cyclic or spiral rather than in a straight line".<sup>14</sup> The

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<sup>12</sup> Sri Aurobindo, Man -- Slave or Free, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter XXVIII, p. 927.



spiral has something of both the circular and linear movements.

#### View of Time

Sri Aurobindo's view of history is further highlighted by his conception of Time. Reality for him is multi-dimensional, multi-tiered. The Transcendent is beyond time, the 'Cosmic' is the simultaneous integrality of time, a stable whole-consciousness of primary relations and forces. The happenings of history and the sequence of activities in Time are but what is thrown out of the eternity of the Cosmic wholeness. a

Time is the great bank of conscious existence turned into values of experience and action: the surface mental being draws upon the past (and the future also) and coins it continually into the present;...Ignorance is a utilization of the Being's self-knowledge in such a way as to make it valuable for Time-experience and valid for Time-activity; ....Behind, all is known and all is ready for use according to the will of the Self in its dealings with Time and Space and Causality.<sup>15</sup>

Spiritual determinism of history is linked with the conception of Time. The individual and collective souls are manifesting themselves in the complexity and many-sided splendour of life on earth. Behind the succession of events on the surface innumerable forces are operating. Life on the surface is full of surprise, adventure, speculation, and wonder. In this adventure of the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Chapter VIII, p. 455.

Spirit, Time has a role.

In all movements, in every great mass of human action it is the Spirit of the Time, that which Europe calls the Zeitgeist and India Kāla, who expresses himself.<sup>16</sup>

Kāla or Time-spirit is recognized in the Vedic as well as the Tantric tradition as a Cosmic force. ("If we go behind Time...we discover that Time observation and Time movement are relative, but Time itself is real and eternal".<sup>17</sup>) Its sanction is felt necessary for what is there in the eternity to take concrete shape in history. It is really "The stress of the hidden Spirit".<sup>18</sup> It precipitates the design of the secret Spirit behind manifestation.

This conception of history and time draws our attention to subliminal factors of unaccountable character. It makes of history a mystery -- a wonder-work of the Cosmic spirit and Time. Sri Aurobindo has almost ridiculed the self-assured attempt of the materialists to account for any great event in history -- for example, the French Revolution -- as the result of some economic or other material forces. Leaders of thought and action, according to him, are forged by the Spirit and Time. The great souls come with a mission when the stage is set for them. Besides

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<sup>16</sup> The Ideal of Karmayogin, p. 56.

<sup>17</sup> The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter II, p. 327.

<sup>18</sup> The Ideal of Karmayogin, p. 54.

being great personalities they are instruments of the dynamic Divine.

This is the greatness of the great men, not that by their own strength they can determine great events but that they are serviceable and specially forged instruments of the Power which determines them.<sup>19</sup>

Some affinity with Hegel may be detected in this idea, but we recognize in it a clear development of the Tantric and epic conceptions of the Indian tradition, particularly the Gita's doctrine of the Avatāra, Bibhūti, and the Instrument (nimittamātram).

#### The Hour of God

In the context of this conception of time and history we can understand the meaning of the declaration of the present moment as 'The Hour of God' by Sri Aurobindo.

The secret truth that emerges in Supermind has been there all the time, but now it manifests itself and the truth in things and the meaning of our existence.<sup>20</sup>

He has characterized the 'Hour of God' as the following:

There are moments when the Spirit moves among men and the breath of the Lord is abroad upon the waters of our being;... when even a little effort produces great results and changes destiny.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>20</sup> The Supramental Manifestation, p. 137.

<sup>21</sup> The Hour of God, p. 3.

He has solemnly invited men and nations to respond to this "hour of the unexpected".<sup>22</sup>

Unhappy is the man or the nation which, when the divine moment arises, is found sleeping or unprepared to use it,....But thrice woe to them who are strong and ready yet waste the force or misuse the moment.<sup>23</sup>

The solemn spirit of the call demands that we go beyond academic consideration of the philosophy and study the practical movement designed to give concrete shape to it. This we propose to do in the next chapter.

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

## CHAPTER FIVE

SUPRAMENTAL MANIFESTATION AS A MOVEMENT

Two other thinkers have spoken of the superman, one (Nietzsche) before Sri Aurobindo and the other (Teilhard de Chardin) after him, but neither launched a practical programme for the realization of the Superman. Sri Aurobindo has given the major part of his life and energy in the practical effort at bringing down the supermind. By 1921 the philosophical presentation of his vision was complete, the rest of his life (he passed away in December, 1950) was entirely devoted to the practical programme. In this he has been a typical Indian, he has combined in himself philosophy and religion in their deeper sense.

The Meaning of the Term Movement

This practical work of Sri Aurobindo and his associates is going to be described by us as a movement. But 'movement' of a religious type refers more to the external apparatus of propagation than to any significant internal achievement. Sri Aurobindo was definitely against any movement of this nature. He wrote on 2-10-34:

A movement in the case of a work like mine means the founding of a school or sect or some other damned nonsense. It means

that hundreds or thousands of useless people join in and corrupt the work or reduce it to a pompous farce from which the Truth that was coming down recedes into secrecy and silence. It is what has happened to the "religions" and is the reason of their failure.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo was keenly and painfully aware of the failure of the religions. He recognized some wave of spiritual truth behind every religious movement and noticed how "the wave after a generation or two or at most a few generations begins to subside; the formation remains".<sup>2</sup> It is one of his convictions that until the physical is taken up and transformed by the higher Truth nothing can have any lasting effect on the life on earth. The foundation of earthly life is the body; the vital, the mind and the spirit function here in the mould of the physical. To build on the granite rock he must therefore transform the physical base. So we have to remember the qualified sense in which the word 'movement' can be used to designate Sri Aurobindo's practical work. Of course, this work has the character of a movement in the external sense of the term also. It is, of all religio-spiritual movements, concerned most with life, individual and collective, and its regeneration; it has to be involved with the matter-of-fact and everyday practicality of life. Because of this, if viewed externally, one may well lose sight of the fact that even the

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<sup>1</sup>Gazette Aurovilienne, Vol. I (Auroville, 1969), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>The Human Cycle, Chapter 24, p. 294.

smallest details of this movement are expected to be inwardly oriented; the whole movement has to be "without from within".\*

### Difficulty of Evaluation

When Zaehner writes,

During the thirty years in which he [Sri Aurobindo] had been engaged in 'bringing down the supramental' nothing much had happened outwardly; the ashram was indeed and still is a going and expanding concern, but its impact on the world has so far been slight and is not yet comparable to that of widely diffused Ramkrishna Mission.<sup>3</sup>

he seems to have missed the point, but at the same time he raises indirectly a puzzling question regarding the measure with which to evaluate a movement. Any great truth brought down by anyone may have impact on people without the latter's knowledge of the source of it, as Nietzsche has pointed out that nothing true and noble dies out. It is due to this knowledge about the dynamics of higher truth that great creative geniuses have by and large avoided putting forth extraordinary effort for self-propagation. The "widely diffused Ramkrishna Mission" may not be the true index of the spiritual influence of Ramkrishna on humanity. But how are we to measure the impact of a wave of truth or a movement connected with a truth? Some phenomenal manifestation may well be

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\* An oft-repeated key expression of Sri Aurobindo to designate the style of Integral Yoga.

<sup>3</sup> R. C. Zaehner, Evolution in Religion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 27.

expected, all the more so when something spectacular like the end of history in early Christianity or the Descent of the Supermind with its transforming influence on earth in Sri Aurobindo's movement is claimed. Regarding earlier movements, there is a scope of controversy about the exact meaning of the claims. The identity of the movement and the original wave of Truth are other points at issue. In regard to the present movement, however, this question does not arise. There is little ambiguity about the meaning of Sri Aurobindo's message, nor is the movement old enough to warrant any doubt about its representing the Truth. However, the force of the Truth should not be considered restricted to the movement.

The Truth is uppermost, the movement is secondary; inner dynamism is the principal thing, outer impact is subordinate. It is in this spirit that Supramental manifestation as a movement has to be studied and assessed. Assessment, however, is terribly difficult, all sorts of subjective preoccupations are likely to come in and spoil the attempt. If the work is still very much in the psychological sphere verification is not possible. Eventually it comes to how you look at it. When someone dismisses Jesus saying 'he could not save himself, he would save the world!', we know how he looks into the phenomenon. But this is no objective assessment of the great spiritual personality or the Truth Jesus stands for.



### Origin of the Movement

With these general observations we may now proceed to look at the movement from its earliest inceptions. At a very early stage of life Sri Aurobindo came to know vaguely about the mission of his life. As he grew in understanding and maturity the exact nature of the mission became more and more clear. He writes about himself:

At the age of eleven Aurobindo had already received a strong impression that a period of general upheaval and great revolutionary changes was coming in the world and he himself was destined to play a part in it.<sup>4</sup>

### Political Phase of the Movement

Before long the mission translated itself into dedication to the political freedom of India. This explains his involvement in a number of political associations in England. When he returned to India at the age of twenty-one he came with very definite notions about the type of agitation and struggle needed for achieving India's political freedom. Without this the series of articles published in Indu Prakash<sup>5</sup> six months after his return to India would not have been possible. His long stay (twelve years) at Baroda in Western India was a period of intense preparation. He

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<sup>4</sup>Sri Aurobindo on Himself, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup>A periodical brought out by his Cambridge friend, K. G. Deshpande from Bombay. The series bore the title "New Lamps for Old".

tried to know India thoroughly; his understanding of the world deepened, so also the nature of his role in it. When he joined the political agitation in 1906 which was triggered by the partition of Bengal he brought in a world of ideas. Fight for mere political gain was for him no better than an act of collective egoism. He saw the Divine hand in the awakening of India. It is the Will of God that India rise with her accumulated spiritual wealth, for the world needs her for its future destiny. Working for India's liberation meant serving the Divine, and this was possible only with a purity of soul and utter self-dedication. So he urged the people to realize the Divine in the country, to recognize the force of the Lord in the charismatic powers of the leaders. Politics was only a part of a global Divine design. "The movement of which the first outbreak was political, will end in a spiritual consummation".<sup>6</sup>

#### Sri Aurobindo's Place in the Renaissance

At this point it is necessary that we note the uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo's position in the modern Renaissance of India. In the section "Modern European" of Chapter Two, we have placed Sri Aurobindo among the leaders of thought in modern India but we did not indicate clearly the speciality of his role in the new

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<sup>6</sup> Sri Aurobindo, "Spirituality and Nationalism", in Bande Mataram, March 28, 1908. Taken from Haridas and Uma Mukherjee's book Sri Aurobindo and the New Thought in Indian Politics (Calcutta: Firma K. C. Mukhopadhyay, 1964) which reproduced these early writings of Sri Aurobindo.

awakening.

### Sri Aurobindo as the Reconciler of the Two Forces

Sri Aurobindo was born in a Reformist family. His maternal grandfather, Rajnarayan Bose, was a prominent leader of the Brahma Samaj. But he seems to have been moved more by the visions of Bankim Chatterjee and the examples of Ramkrishna and Vivekananda (he was, however, against asceticism) than by the zeal of the Reformist leaders. He certainly had a great admiration for Rammohan Roy and Dayananda, founders of Brahma and Arya Samaj respectively. But he did not want to condemn and reject certain things like image worship, Puranic and Tantric practices, and so on. Not that he personally got involved in these practices, but he saw the truth of them in their own place. As regards social reform, he did not take any conservative stand at all, although he did not show any particular enthusiasm also for social reforms. He was aware of a vast rapid change coming over the entire world. In this situation what was most important to him was the right understanding of the spiritual heritage of India and her possible role in the future and not wasting energy on trifles. He saw a replica of the European Renaissance in the nineteenth and twentieth century awakening of modern India; and the Renaissance for him was an attempt on the part of the human mind to get away from conventionalism of the past, from the religio-social forms and figures which had lost their living sense. He immersed himself in the depths of the Indian spiritual tradition, and came out with a new message and a

a discipline. He thus extended the scope of the tradition. Yoga as a spiritual discipline has been made more open to the 'outsiders.' Certain practices considered by him not essential for spiritual development at this age were given up. For example, formal initiation is not part of Integral Yoga. His is the first Ashram in India where men and women have been practising self-culture side by side with perfect equality of status. In the early days of residence at Pondicherry it was some Pariah who cooked for him and his associates. He was in one respect deeply rooted in the orthodox spiritual tradition, and on the other active to make it open and more creative.

#### Culmination of Some Neo-Vedantic Tendencies in Sri Aurobindo

In fact, the attempt made by his predecessors to give a universal character to the Indian spiritual tradition has been culminated in the life and works of Sri Aurobindo. Rammohan Roy, Keshab Sen, Vivekananda, Tagore, Gandhi, everyone has tried to show in slightly different ways that Hindu social practices were not an essential part of Indian spirituality. That is why they could approve of all kinds of social reform and at the same time invite others, the West in particular, to recognize the greatness of the Indian spiritual tradition.

Sri Aurobindo has given a practical demonstration as to how the essence of Indian spirituality can be cultivated by a cosmopolitan group without the least regard to Hindu social forms and practices. Similarly, other tendencies of Neo-Vedanta,

for example, positive approach to life and society, reconciling the East and the West, have taken a very definite shape in the works of Sri Aurobindo. He left behind the preoccupation with individual liberation, and his spiritual interpretation of evolution is a bold attempt to contain Western science within Indian spirituality.

#### Beginning of the Spiritual Phase

Now, to come back to the genealogy of the movement for Supramental transformation, while in the crest of the waves of political movement dedicated entirely to the cause of the nation, and for that matter of the Divine, Sri Aurobindo came to have previsions of the destiny of the human race. It is in Alipore Jail (1908-1909) that he started to have intimations about the Supermind. He was also given to understand that the political liberation of India, an indispensable step towards human progress, was not the most difficult task ahead, spiritualization of the whole human life and consciousness was of more pressing importance and demanded the most concentrated effort.

#### No Real Division between the Two Phases

It should be noted clearly that there is no real division between the two phases, political and spiritual, of the movement. Even while he was in the vortex of the political movement he was basically a yogi, political aim was only a part of a greater spiritual objective. On the other hand, even after leaving active politics he continued to guide in a general way the revolutionary

movement. Only he was giving more and more emphasis to the spiritual perfection of the soldiers of revolution. Eventually, in view of the changing world situation and his greater command over forces that move men and nations, he recommended the rejection of the revolutionary activities.<sup>7</sup> But the rejection of armed revolution or active politics did not mean indifference to India's political fate. He was trying to build the foundation of a spiritual change of the human race; and in this scheme India had a definite place. So he was keeping watch keenly on Indian political movements and aiding them from a distance. At certain crucial moments, however, he acted publicly. At the outbreak of World War II he declared himself to be on the side of the Allies and contributed to the British War Fund. In 1942 when British Cabinet Minister Sir Stafford Cripps came with the proposal of transferring large amounts of power to Indian hands in exchange for India's solid support to the British against the enemy, Sri Aurobindo tried hard to persuade the Indian leaders to accept the offer. It is now a fact of history that the leaders of the Indian Congress did not have the perspective of the world, they had no understanding as to what the phenomenon of Hitler meant, and it is their mistaken

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<sup>7</sup> This chapter of Sri Aurobindo's life and work has been recently revealed through the publication of his twenty-six letters written mostly to Sri Motilal Roy of Chandannagar, Sri Aurobindo's principal instrument in Bengal for working out his ideas during 1912-1921. Vide Light to Superlight, with explanatory notes by A. C. Dutt (Calcutta: Prabartak Publishers, 1972).

rejection of the offer that has belated independence and brought about the partition of the country with all its evil effects. However, independence came, with the passing of the Indian Independence Acts in British Parliament in 1947 on August 15th, the day of Sri Aurobindo's birth. When he was requested to give a message on this great occasion, he wrote, among other things:

As a mystic I take this identification, not as a coincidence or fortuitious accident, but as a sanction and seal of the Divine Power which guides my steps on the work with which I began my life.<sup>8</sup>

#### Pondicherry and 'Arya'

Sri Aurobindo went to Pondicherry in 1910. Four years after that he brought out a philosophical journal, Arya. The first issue appeared on August 15th, 1914, and it continued to come out every month until the middle of the year 1921. In the pages of Arya most of Sri Aurobindo's major works were printed. Giving out his thoughts serially in the pages of Arya constitutes the most important foundational work of the movement. At the close of the fourth year of the publication of Arya, Sri Aurobindo wrote a feature entitled "The Object and Plan of the 'Arya'". He wrote, among other things,

Our idea was the thinking out of a synthetic philosophy which might be a contribution to the thought of the new age

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<sup>8</sup> 15TH August Message (Pondy: Ashram, 1961), p. 1.

that is coming upon us.<sup>9</sup>

Concern for the future is obvious here. "Thinking out", however, does not mean that it was only an intellectual philosophy that he was producing. The thought is based on spiritual illumination, without which any attempt to "enlighten and guide the race" was unthinkable.

The spiritual experience and the general truths on which such an attempt could be based, were already present to us, otherwise we should have no right to make the endeavour at all; but the complete intellectual statement of them and their results and issues had to be found.<sup>10</sup>

One very interesting thing we gather from this essay is that originally his intention was to produce an intellectual statement that would be a synthesis of the Eastern and Western lines of thought. He saw the unity of the two cultures in the deepest level of the spirit and although they are diversified in external modes of expression he deemed a synthesis possible. For some practical reason the idea had to be given up.

Our original intention was to approach the synthesis from the starting point of the two lines of culture which divide human thought and are now meeting at the apex, the knowledge of the West and the knowledge of the East; but owing to the exigencies of the war this could not be fulfilled.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Sri Aurobindo, "The Object and Plan of an Arya", 1918. Reprinted in Sri Aurobindo Circle, No. 15, 1959 (Bombay: Sri Aurobindo Society).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



Consequently, he ended up with

an approach to the highest reconciling truth from the point of view of the Indian mentality and Indian spiritual experience, and Western knowledge has been viewed from that standpoint.<sup>12</sup>

#### The Ashram or the Spiritual Commune

By a natural bond of love and respect a number of associates were living with Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry. Gradually the number increased. This small community is the beginning of that vast collective life known as the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The Ashram grew to its present size gradually and spontaneously. Its extensions in the forms of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Auroville, etc. are the results of the internal dynamism of the movement.

#### The Mother as the Organizer of the Ashram

This movement, however, cannot be studied without some reference to that French woman who, with Sri Aurobindo, has been the leader of this movement. In fact, the Ashram, and for that matter the movement, takes a definitive start from the day (November 24th, 1926) Sri Aurobindo became a recluse, following a profound spiritual realization called by him the Descent of the Overmind, for more concentrated effort for the Descent of the Supermind, and she was given the charge of the Ashram with the declaration

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

that she was the Incarnate Divine Mother. This lady — from now on we shall refer to her as the Mother — was born in Paris in 1878. From her childhood she began to have supernatural experiences. As she grew in age and mystical experiences, the mission of her life became more and more clear. What is significant for our present study is that she followed the same line of spiritual development and conceived the same ideal even before she met Sri Aurobindo. This is evident from her writings prior to 1914, when she met Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry. Rishabchand has made a thorough study of the case in his The Divine Collaborators.<sup>13</sup> Nolinikanta Gupta writes,

The 'Foreword' to her book Words of the Mother is an outline drawn up in 1912, two years before her meeting with Sri Aurobindo in 1914, of her work for "a progressing universal harmony", "for the flowering of the new race, the race of the Sons of God". This is a striking correspondence with Sri Aurobindo's vision of the "Life Divine".<sup>14</sup>

The gist of what she wrote<sup>15</sup> in answer to the queries as to how she became conscious of her mission and how she came to meet Sri Aurobindo have been summed up by Nolini Kanta in the following words:

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<sup>13</sup>Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1955.

<sup>14</sup>Sri Aurobindo and His Ashram (Pondy: Ashram, 1964), p. 66.

<sup>15</sup>Vide p. 181 of The Life of Sri Aurobindo by A. B. Purani.

Repeated mystic visions of a figure whom she regarded as Krishna led her to Pondicherry on 29 March 1914. And at her first glance at Sri Aurobindo, she recognized in him the Krishna of her visions and felt convinced that her place and her work were near him in India.<sup>16</sup>

The meeting of these two people coming from two spheres of culture was obviously providential. Sri Aurobindo has made it clear that without her his visions would remain a theory. About Sri Aurobindo's role in human evolution the Mother declares:

What Sri Aurobindo represents in the world's history is not a teaching, not even a revelation; it is a decisive action direct from the Supreme.<sup>17</sup>

However, from 1926 on she has been the dynamic spirit behind the movement, with Sri Aurobindo supporting the whole thing from the background.

#### The Role of the Ashram in the Movement

What exactly is the role of the Ashram and its mode of operation? The aim of integral yoga is to accelerate consciously and systematically the process of evolution, individual and collective. Integral yoga tries to bring all the aspect of our life — physical, vital, mental — under the influence and guidance of the inmost being, and effect a progressive harmony in them.

But no individual lives in isolation. When I try to purify the

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<sup>16</sup> Sri Aurobindo and His Ashram, p. 69.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

physical parts of my life and activity I try indirectly to purify the entire physical world of which I am a part. Again, unless I have the support of the physical environment immediately linked with me my effort at my self-purification may not go very far.

\* Individuals striving for self-knowledge or universal consciousness do work normally on their own body and mind (ādhāra), and only indirectly on the environment. But those who have attained the Universal and Transcendent consciousness, realized unity with cosmic forces and beings can work directly, if they wish, on the environment in general and on particular individuals. One of the important modes of operation is to transform one's own parts of nature as representing the whole of human nature. Thus Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were trying to transform their own parts of nature as well as giving help to the disciples in their striving for self-culture. There was a kind of division of labour between Sri Aurobindo and the Mother; the former concentrating more on the supramental transformation of his nature, the latter working more on the nature of the disciples, one building the foundation, the other pouring out the forces to help the people. The disciples were not just engaged in individual self-culture. They were building through their divine-oriented collective living a stable environment which supported the Master's self-transformation and their own reception of the Light and Force that were descending, or being brought down.

The life in the Ashram does not appear outwardly very much different from the life of sober people outside. But the real

life there is within, in the consciousness of each individual and the atmosphere they breathe. In fact, the growth of the Ashram has depended on the growth of the inner life, the history of the Ashram is understandable only with reference to this inner progress in consciousness and transformation. Sri Aurobindo gave an intellectual expression of the Truth of his vision during World War I, but he did not care to bring out these writings from the pages of the Arya (1915-1921) before the early forties.\* Obviously he waited for some inner growth and in consequence better receptivity of the people. We come to know of the progress in transformation from the letters Sri Aurobindo wrote to his disciples.

The constitution of man, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is very complex. Mind itself has roughly three layers -- mind free and pure, mind functioning under the conditions of life, and mind cased in and conditioned by the physical organism. Similarly, our body is not a simple thing like earth and metal, it is a living body and it also houses a mind. And all of these layers of body, life and mind interact one on the other; after all, these are constituents of one indivisible personality. So the process of transformation is bound to be a very complex affair. Again the whole thing is beyond our ken. We cannot possibly recognize any transformation of any part of nature until we perceive it concretely. And our concrete perception is possible

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\* The Life Divine was published in two volumes during 1939-1940.

only when the most external part of nature, e.g., the gross physical is transformed. This would, of course, be the culmination of the process of transformation, for the gross physical is the seat of the Inconscient -- the opposite pole of the pure Consciousness. Some of the practical results of this final stage of transformation would be "freedom from disease, duration of life at will and a change in the functionings of the body -- all, of course, as a material expression of the divine nature emerging in the human and not as an outer aggrandisement of an expanding inner egoism".<sup>18</sup>

Passing of Sri Aurobindo as a Means of the Fulfilment of the Movement

It has been claimed by the spokesmen of the movement that at a critical stage of making the Supramental Consciousness work on the physical Sri Aurobindo left his body as a sacrifice as well as a strategy of grappling with the darkest forces of opposition that came from the Inconscient. It is also claimed that the sacrifice of his body produced immediately certain results in the physical parts of his spiritual consort, the Mother, and that the Mother has been carrying on the process of transformation with the active support of Sri Aurobindo. These claims are obviously not verifiable. Certain dates<sup>\*</sup> have also been given as mile-stones

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<sup>18</sup> K. D. Sethna, The Passing of Sri Aurobindo (Pondy: Sri Aurobindo Ashram), p. 13.

<sup>\*</sup> There is no inconsistency in giving the dates. The Supramental force might be timeless, but its action in the dimension of time is possible, and while in time its action must have a moment or date.

of the progress of transformation. For example, February 29th, 1956 is celebrated as the day of the Descent of the Supramental on the earth, i.e., the gross physical. It is said that the Supramental force is operative in the earth's atmosphere; the presence of this radical element is setting everything topsyturvy and the world is in the labour pains of a new creation.<sup>19</sup>

We repeat that these things cannot be proved in the external way. One may well reject them as subjective or wishful thinking. We have only to see how the movement looks upon itself. People expressed impatience at the idea of Sri Aurobindo's occupying himself with a transformation unintelligible and not at all perceptible externally, a thing which even Lord Krishna did not attempt. His answer, in a letter written in 1935, was remarkable:

It is not for personal greatness that I am seeking to bring down the Supermind. I care nothing for greatness or littleness in the human sense....If human reason regards me as a fool for trying to do what Krishna did not try, I do not in the least care. There is no question of X or Y or anybody else in that. It is a question between the Divine and myself — whether it is the Divine will or not, whether I am sent to bring that down or open the way to its descent or at least make it more possible or not. Let all men jeer at me if they will or all Hell fall upon me if it will for my presumption — I go on till I

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<sup>19</sup> One year after this event the Mother delivered a talk about this. A few sentences may well be quoted here: "Last year, when I announced to you the manifestation of the supramental consciousness and light and force, I should have added that it was an event forerunner of the birth of a new world. But at that time the new world was so much engulfed in the ancient that even now there are very few people who are aware of its birth and of the difference it brings into the world....It is not the old that is being transformed, it is quite a new world that has been really concretely born...We are

conquer or perish.<sup>20</sup>

The Mother knows well that the world is not going to believe in the Supermind and the new humanity until it has some concrete proof of them. But this does not mean anything to her. She announces:

The Ashram has been found and is meant to be the cradle of the new world.

The inspiration is from above, the guiding force is from above, the creative power is from above, at work for the descent of the new realization....

The task no doubt is a formidable one, but we received the command to accomplish it and we are upon earth for that purpose alone.

We shall continue up to the end with an unfailing trust in the Will and the Help of the Supreme.

[This is taken from what she said about the Ashram in the early sixties, published in the Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, August, 1964.]

### Bearing of the Movement on Practical Problems of Life in this Age

From our observation about the programme of divinization of human nature it may appear that it is a fancy of a group of people and far removed from the actualities of life. But, on the other hand, one may see the movement intimately linked with the realities of life. Sri Aurobindo started with the problem of

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attending on the birth of a new world, altogether young, altogether weak -- weak not in its essence, but in its external manifestation -- not yet recognized, nor yet felt, denied by most; but it is there, it is there endeavouring to grow and quite sure of the result".  
Auroville: The Cradle of a New Man, pp. 27-28.

<sup>20</sup> Taken from Sri Aurobindo Came to Me, by Dilip K. Roy (Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1964), p. 132.



freedom of nations and individuals, and he worked for the solution of the same all through. This programme of divinization is the direct outcome of his perception of the inefficacy of all other ideals to ensure freedom and happiness for men. He wrote in a letter dated November 18th, 1922, addressed to C. R. Das, the great nationalist;

I see more and more manifestly that man can never get out of the futile circle the race is always treading until he has raised himself on to the new foundation, I believe also that it is the mission of India to make this great victory for the world.<sup>21</sup>

It is the religions which most of all have sought for human perfection, elimination of evil and suffering. Next comes philosophy -- social and political. In which respect do religions and philosophy fail? In which respect are Sri Aurobindo's thoughts an improvement upon them?

#### Evolution of Religion

Sri Aurobindo attaches great value to the essence of religion, "for religion is that instinct, idea, activity, discipline in man which aims directly at the Divine".<sup>22</sup> Religion has, therefore, played a significant role in the history and development of human civilization. In the process, religion has itself evolved

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<sup>21</sup> A. C. Dutt, Light to Superlight (Calcutta: Prabartak Publishers), p. 182.

<sup>22</sup> The Human Cycle, Chapter XVII, p. 192.

a good deal. Sri Aurobindo speaks of the three different stages of its development -- Infra-rational, Rational, and Supra-rational.

The first he describes as

An amalgam of primitive intuitions, occult ritual, religio-social ethics, mystical knowledge or experience symbolized in myth but with their sense preserved by a secret initiation and discipline.<sup>23</sup>

This infra-rational stage of human religion, however, "acquired depth and range and increased in some cultures to a great amplitude and significance".<sup>24</sup> With the development of the intellect the rational stage of religion starts, and this stage again has a number of phases. The first intuitive, instinctive formations are overlaid "with the structures erected by a growing force of reason".<sup>25</sup> As man discovers the secrets and process of Nature "he moves more and more away from his early recourse to occultism"<sup>26</sup> and the presence and influence of gods once felt. But he still feels the need of a spiritual element in his life. As a result, he "keeps for a time the two activities running together".<sup>27</sup> The rational stage culminates in "a complete denial of religion,

<sup>23</sup> The Life Divine, Book II, Chapter XXIV, p. 771.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

occultism and all that is supraphysical".<sup>28</sup> But the religious instinct cannot be killed, and the religious need cannot be suppressed, so religions manage to survive. But when the rational man realizes that science "explains nothing more than the outer process of Nature",<sup>29</sup> he turns his gaze to those things he rejected a priori. This is the early inception of a higher stage of religion. A man who has gone through intellectualization cannot truly go back to the earlier forms of religious experience and practices. Religion, according to Sri Aurobindo,

must in the end follow the upward curve of the human mind and rise more fully at its summits towards its true or greatest field in the sphere of a suprarational consciousness and knowledge.<sup>30</sup>

That is the suprarational stage of religion. He is, therefore, not in favour of the revival of the formal religions, old forms are useless in our march toward the newer heights of the spirit. He writes,

This material world of ours...is peopled by such powerful shadows, ghosts of things dead and the spirit of things yet unborn. The ghosts of things dead are very troublesome actualities and they now abound, ghosts of dead religions, dead arts, dead moralities, dead political theories, which still claim either to keep their rotting bodies or to animate partly the existing body of things.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> The Ideal of Human Unity, Chapter 34, pp. 309.

Nevertheless, Sri Aurobindo is not in favour of total rejection of the past for the sake of the future. He perceives a link between the two. He would like to retain the essence of the past. The essence of religion is spirituality.

True religion is spiritual religion, that which seeks to live in the spirit, in what is beyond the intellect, beyond the aesthetic and ethical and practical being of man, and to inform and govern these members of our being by the higher light and law of the spirit.<sup>32</sup>

To live this life of the spirit we may draw considerably on the inspired books and inspiring personalities of the past, but we must give up religionism which "lays exclusive stress on intellectual dogmas, forms and ceremonies, on some fixed and rigid moral code, on some religio-political or religio-social system".<sup>33</sup>

#### Inadequacy of Secular Ideals

What the modern age of reason and secularism has done involves a total rejection of the spiritual dimension of reality: a semblance of external religion is still in vogue but the essential truth that was at the root of the religions has been denied a place in the modern secularist scheme of life. This, Sri Aurobindo considers a great error, and this, according to him, is at the root of the failure of all social, political and technological programmes to ensure man's freedom and happiness.

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<sup>32</sup>The Human Cycle, Chapter 17, p. 197.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

It is now common knowledge that advancement in scientific knowledge did not bring in a corresponding improvement in man's wisdom and morals, and that the expectations of the believers in progress have not come true. Socialism could give food and shelter to man, but it had to snatch away his liberty. Capitalism has mechanised man's life, and technology has produced a vicious circle. Man has wanted more material possessions, and now he cannot say 'I do not want any more'. He has to go on wanting and producing although it may mean the destruction of his life and environment. Organized labour is against the curtailment of production. Defence production can be maintained only if there is a war. If there is no war one must be fomented. Any excess production of sophisticated material means pollution, disease, death, and the draining of the fast diminishing natural resources of the earth. It is in one world bound in interminable bonds that the peoples live so the less developed nations cannot but try, on pain of death, to catch up with the more advanced nations. But the economists say that with the passage of time, and other things remaining the same, the gap between developing and developed nations is sure to widen. The results might be disastrous. This hopeless situation of man and society is due, according to Sri Aurobindo, to man's, specifically Western man's, partial view of life and reality, and his attempt to ameliorate his condition without taking any account of the indwelling spirit.

The Western recoil from religion, that minimizing of its claim and insistence by

which Europe progressed from the mediaeval religious attitude through the Renaissance and the Reformation to the modern rationalistic attitude, that making of the ordinary earthly life our one preoccupation, that labour to fulfil ourselves by the law of the lower members divorced from all spiritual seeking, was an opposite error, the contrary ignorant extreme, the blind swing of the pendulum from a wrong affirmation to a wrong negation.<sup>34</sup>

This is the criticism of the general Western approach to life and society from one who is not a religionist, who does not harp on the past rather who shares with the moderns a great concern for the future.

#### Dogmatic Scientism

In the modern age physical sciences developed first. They developed and perfected certain methods of enquiry and observation. These methods are appropriate to their own fields. But biological and social sciences which came later began to use the same tools of enquiry without discrimination of the field, so much so that any truth about the life principle in us or the mind could be accepted only if it passes successfully through the tests given to a physical substance. As a result, only those parts of our life and mind are coming to the view of the researchers which are most conditioned by the physical organism. Theories are being developed to explain the deeper aspects of our life and mind.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 199-200.

— longing for Beauty, Justice, Good, Truth, Creative urge, talent, genius, etc: in terms of the physical. These deeper aspects are not really accounted for, they are explained away. This is a kind of dogmatism and exclusivism not less pernicious than the religious dogmatism that prevailed in the West. Body is the foundation of life and mind, but from this it does not follow that the body is the origin of life and mind, the origin may be something more profound. This materialist denial of the Spirit is the source of strength as well as the roots of trouble in the modern West. This denial led to the belief that man is only an economic or political animal, that man could be happy if his material demands were met. This belief has virtually brought in revolution in technology and in political and economic set ups. But it could not make man happy; it is based on insufficient knowledge about man. Its conclusions, to use the language of social science, were based on insufficient, if not wrong, data. The so-called advancement of social sciences is equally matched by the increase in social maladies in the West.

#### Dogmatic Spiritualism

There had been similar extremism in the East, India in particular. Life was looked upon by some schools of thought as suffering, and to eradicate suffering they recommended practically the elimination of life or denial of the very existence of the world. As a result, the best minds were lost to the society. But this denial of the ascetic has a limit. After all, he has to carry a corporeal structure, he has to feed it, clothe it. On the other

hand, the materialist does not see the spirit, he can be more thoroughgoing in his arrogant denial of the spirit.

### Integralism

It may be argued by those who do not like to be materialists and who, on the other hand, are not willing to go all the way with the spiritualist, if something more tangible than the spirit, like, life-principle or mind or thought could be conceived as the fundamental reality. In fact, there have been philosophies which accepted either of these intermediaries -- Life-force, Will, Thought and the ultimate. But these involve the rejection of the spirit which has been a thing of experience of extraordinary minds ever since the early days of human civilization. Again, Spirit can contain everything else, whereas they cannot contain the Spirit, especially in its aspect of utter transcendence and immobility. Body, Life, Will, Thought -- all these are powers of the Spirit, each has a spiritual potency, a spiritual role in the complex structure of reality and existence. Exclusivistic tendency can be developed making any of these as the capital thing. We have considered materialistic exclusivism, similarly an exclusive stress on Will or Life-force tends to minimize the force of thought, and an exclusive stress on thought denegrates the vital will and physical instincts. It tries to conceive a moral and just world and in personal life advocates an uncompromising unrealistic ethical code. Exclusivism is possible even with a partial view of the



spirit — of which illusionism is a particular manifestation. The integralist vision of Sri Aurobindo does not neglect any of these categories of reality.

We were discussing the practical bearings of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of the superman and the difficult programme of divinization of human nature. Is it not possible to solve the problem of man's freedom and happiness without this adventure of transforming human nature? Sri Aurobindo maintains that no lasting solution is possible. He does not, however, minimize the efficacy of Thought and Will. For instance, he has spoken at length of the great force of humanism, and how this "Religion of Humanity", as he calls it, has brought enormous changes in law, administration, social and political set ups, economic distribution, and so on. He does not, however, undermine the needs of external organization, the uses of advanced technology, and so on. In fact, during World War I he made a serious study of the social, political and economic forces and organizations that might contribute to the eventual formation of a World Government, indispensable, according to him, for preventing wars. He has relied considerably on the religion of humanity.

One has only to compare human life and thought and feeling a century or two ago with human life, thought and feeling in the pre-war period to see how great an influence this religion of humanity has exercised and how fruitful a work it has done.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The Ideal of Human Unity, Chapter 34, p. 311.

He thinks that the religion of humanity can lead us further still, but not very far. For until now it has remained only in the intellectual and the sentimental level. On the other hand, "brotherhood exists only in the soul and by the soul";<sup>36</sup> unless man realizes, not sentimentally and intellectually, but through a more concrete and utterly convincing experience his unity with his fellow beings world union would not be possible. Intellectual ideals do not have the strength to withstand the gravitational pulls from the lower members of our being — the interests of our physical and vital selves. So he concludes that series on world unity in the following vein.

While it is possible to construct a precarious and quite mechanical unity by political and administrative means, the unity of the human race, even if achieved, can only be secured and can only be made real if the religion of humanity, which is at present the highest active ideal of mankind, spiritualizes itself and becomes the general inner law of human life.<sup>37</sup>

#### Yoga as the Reversal of the Order of Life, Individual and Collective

Now we come to consider the practical nature of the Yoga advocated for a complete reversal of the values — substitution of the materialist by the spiritual values. Spiritual value would mean:

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., Chapter 35, p. 316.

Man's seeking for the eternal, the divine, the greater self, the source of unity and his attempt to arrive at some equation, some increasing approximation of the values of human life with the eternal and divine values.<sup>38</sup>

Man has to seek, through work, study, contemplation, creative self-expression and opening of the mind and heart to the influence of Silence, the indwelling Spirit in himself and in everything else. For this he need not give up his natural propensities or submit himself to severe discipline. Rather, he would follow the natural bend of his mind and heart, develop through right concentration the capacities latent in him, and in this way eventually come to be aware of a greater self within himself behind the ego and a greater and truer reality behind all that meets his eyes. Even a little progress in this line of self-development is expected to endow a man with greater self-confidence and better understanding of his own nature and that of the world he lives in. In fact, his life would assume a new significance and he would do what he has to do with assured confidence and therefore with utmost sincerity. The Gītā says that yoga is skill in work (yogah karmasu kausalam, II.50). Integral yoga should not in any way block the development of the personality, rather it should hasten this development and make a man accord perfectly with himself and with others. This yoga does not require the suppression of normal human values for some uncertain fulfilment in the distant future. It claims to be.

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<sup>38</sup> The Renaissance in India, p. 44.

an art of living a fruitful life. It has no clash with human dignity and freedom, rather it is supposed to be the best means of assuring these values. Life in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram has been described like this:

The basis of life here is wholly spiritual. An inner discipline is there but on broad lines, each individual having the necessary freedom for his nature and temperament to grow and change spontaneously. Broadly, the sadhana consists of a progressive surrender of oneself to the Divine. Meditation, concentration, work, service — all these are means of self-perception. The Mother gives the guidance, helps each according to his nature and need...<sup>39</sup>

#### The International Centre of Education

A community of a thousand people is too small a fraction of mankind. It may, however, serve as a laboratory. Experiments in the laboratory are made under stipulated conditions. The thing developed in the laboratory has to have application outside it, although not necessarily without restrictive conditions. Something of the application of the principles of a gnostic life developed in the Ashram is exemplified in Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in Pondicherry. This centre is, in fact, an extension of the Ashram, so the application is not without certain conditions. It differs from the Ashram proper in that the students' eventual dedication to the ideal is not taken for granted. As a matter of fact, many students have left the centre for further

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<sup>39</sup> Sri Aurobindo and His Ashram, p. 49.

education, training or work outside and have been living different sorts of lives within and without India.

The centre has grown considerably since its humble inception in the early forties, and it is growing steadily. It has been a meeting place for ideas Eastern and Western, a field of experiment for all sorts of pedagogical methods and projects. Teachers as well as students enjoy maximum freedom here. Freedom seems to be the watchword of the institution. The idea is to grow as a being spontaneously and integrally. The philosophy of Sri Aurobindo is not taught formally except in some courses at the higher level, there is no formal instruction in religion or yoga. All the same, it is an experiment with the ideals of Sri Aurobindo. As regards the principles of education, he wrote:

The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or task master, he is a helper and a guide....The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth.<sup>40</sup>

However, as regards this experiment with education and, for that matter, extension of the evolving Ashram, it is difficult to make any pronouncement, positive or negative.\*

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<sup>40</sup> Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and Education (Pondy: Ashram), p. 12.

\* For a detailed account of this centre, vide the publication of the centre under the title "The International Centre of Education at Sri Aurobindo Ashram". Things, however, are changing there constantly.

### Auroville or the City of Dawn

Another great extension of the Ashram which features very prominently in the movement for divine life on earth is Auroville, a project for an international township near Pondicherry. The town was inaugurated in February, 1968, with a colourful ceremony in which youths representing all the provinces of India and more than a hundred other nations took part. The city is designed to accommodate eventually fifty thousand people. Why Auroville? The Mother writes:

Earth needs...a place where men can live away from national rivalries, social conventions, self-contradictory moralities and contending religions, a place where human beings, freed from all slavery of the past, can develop themselves wholly to the discovery and practice of the divine consciousness that is seeking to manifest itself. Auroville wants to be this place and offers itself to all who aspire to live the Truth of to-morrow.<sup>41</sup>

The Charter of Auroville that was read in sixteen languages while youths were pouring earths carried from their lands into the huge urn kept at the central place is inspiring and gives in a nutshell the aim and meaning of the project:

1. Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to Humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.
2. Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress and a youth that never ages.

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<sup>41</sup> Auroville: The Cradle of a New Man.

3. Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within Auroville will boldly spring towards future realizations.
4. Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity.-- Written by the Mother, taken from Auroville: The Cradle of a New Man, Published by Auroville.

The Government of India and UNESCO are giving support to the project.

The representative for UNESCO present at the inaugural ceremony said:

The world will turn towards Auroville  
-- or rather the Aurovilles, because  
Auroville will have to spread. Auroville  
will not be confined simply to Pondicherry  
it will be a world movement.<sup>42</sup>

There are innumerable practical difficulties in the realization of this project. But things will depend mostly on the consciousness of the people participating in it (participation is, of course, not limited to the people actually living in Auroville). It is only through a higher unitive consciousness that the divisive forces occasioned by the differences in language, religion, race, colour, labour-capital relation could be overcome. It is basically a spiritual adventure, only the field of its operation has been extended from a small group in the Ashram to a community of fifty thousand people coming from all over the world and from all walks of life. The Mother has made the point clear in a number of her

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<sup>42</sup> M. S. Adeshiah, Deputy General of UNESCO, taken from Auroville: The Cradle of a New Man.

messages. To be a true Aurovillian, she says:

The first necessity is the inner discovery by which one learns who one really is behind the social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances.

At our inmost centre there is a free being, wide and knowing, who awaits our discovery and who ought to become the acting centre of our being and our life in Auroville....

The Aurovillian must lose the proprietary sense of possession....

Work, even manual work, is an indispensable thing for the inner discovery. If one does not work, if one does not inject his consciousness into matter, the latter will never develop.

Taken from Auroville: The Cradle of a New Man.

The success of Auroville depends on many factors: progress in transformation of nature carried on by the Mother and other adepts, spiritual orientation of life and activity by those who are consciously participating in the project of Auroville, and last but not the least, cooperation of humanity at large. If the inconstancy and the opposition of the physical environment is stubborn the new creation -- 'a new humanity and a new society' -- would be delayed.

The whole earth must prepare itself for the advent of the new species, and Auroville wants to consciously work towards hastening that advent.

Little by little it will be revealed to us what this new species should be, and meanwhile the best measure to take is to consecrate oneself entirely to the Divine.

The Mother, from Auroville: The Cradle of a New Man.



### Utopianism?

This project will invariably bring to mind numerous utopias conceived over the millenia — from Zeno in ancient Greece to Aldous Huxley in modern America. Reaction to a utopia may be classified as positive and negative. The negative reaction rejects the utopia as something idealistic, fanciful, never-to-be-realized, a detractor of the mind from the real and the urgent. The positive reaction springs from the notion that utopias are so many answers to the problems besetting men and society, they are not unrelated to reality, and that although no utopia has been realized yet no utopia has failed altogether. They have been a source of inspiration for social and cultural movements. There is, however, no correlation between utopias and progress achieved.

Marie Berneri, in her Journey through Utopia, has classified the utopias into two broad categories. One is authoritarian and the other is anarchistic.

One seeks the happiness of mankind through material well-being, the sinking of man's individuality into the group, and the greatness of the state. The other... considers that happiness is the result of the free expression of man's personality and must not be sacrificed to an arbitrary moral code or to the interests of the state.<sup>43</sup>

Both categories are one in this respect: they lay down clearly the method of organization of the contemplated society. The underlying

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<sup>43</sup> M. Berneri, Journey Through Utopia (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1950), p. 2.

idea seems to be this: everything depends on right organization. The Indian utopia we have outlined briefly differs significantly from these Western specimens. Here freedom is emphasized but is not deemed to depend on organization so much as on the development of the inner being and consciousness. In the criticism of utopia the problem of freedom and order features prominently. Freedom and order are found to be antagonistic to each other. The higher consciousness that is supposed to be the basis of Auroville resolves this problem. Sri Aurobindo maintains that in the higher unitive consciousness there is no conflict between law and freedom.

Another indictment against utopia is that it is static (one critic has compared utopia with a corpse).

Once this design is realized in the world  
-- if it ever is -- it will continue indefinitely  
in the form in which it began.<sup>44</sup>

We have seen that Sri Aurobindo's conception of the gnostic community is evolutionary, it is supposed to develop further and further.

The Indian ideal is different in many other respects. The most important point is that it is based on a spiritual philosophy that considers man's evolution into a higher type of being practicable. And on that basis it has developed a practical programme, called Integral Yoga, for the realization of higher consciousness, and the present project of Auroville has been taken after half a

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<sup>44</sup> George Katel, Utopia (New York: Atherton Press, 1971), p. 8.

century of experiment with Integral Yoga and with a dynamic community life of a large number of spiritual aspirants coming from different parts of the world.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### I.

Sri Aurobindo's conception of the Superman results from his evolutionary thought, and that thought, again, springs from his existential concern about man, society, and the future of humanity.

Sciences have established the fact of evolution but available scientific data cannot explain the ultimate rationale of evolution. The last word of the physical sciences about the 'how' and the 'why' of evolution is accident, the last word of the biological sciences regarding the same questions is 'random selection'.

Philosophers, of necessity, had to attempt a coherent answer to the fundamental questions about evolution. Evolutionary thoughts closest to that of Sri Aurobindo come from Hegel, Bergson, and Samuel Alexander. Sri Aurobindo's thought avoids some of the difficulties of these thinkers. But his thought is not just rational and speculative. It crosses the boundary of rational speculation, and relates to Indian religious thought and personal experiences of revelatory character.

Evolution for Sri Aurobindo is the evolution of consciousness, and evolution is preceded logically by involution. The world is the manifestation of the Divine or the Supreme Consciousness.

Consciousness is involved in the apparent Inconscient, that is why evolution is possible. The mechanism of evolution as given by him involves a three-fold movement -- Ascent, Descent, and Integration. It includes and explains the empirical data but goes beyond the scope of empirical verification, since these movements refer to the evolution of the soul (besides that of the form or body) and the action of the archetypal worlds.

Sri Aurobindo considers man's evolution into the superman as inevitable, a thing decreed. Evolution cannot stop in humanity, since the human mind is not the culmination of the evolving consciousness. The evolving higher consciousness is bound to forge a higher type of man and society. In the evolution of this higher type, man has a responsibility. In the pre-human, even in the early human, stage evolution was unconscious, that is to say, it was Nature who worked the thing, individuals did not consciously participate in it. Man is a self-conscious being, he is aware of his limitations, he has longing for the infinity of knowledge, power and joy. Man's conscious collaboration with Nature is sure to expedite the process of evolution.

Again, further evolution of man, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the only means of overcoming the crisis humanity is facing in the form of competition, war, and the possible extermination of life and civilization. Man's society reflects his consciousness; evolution, i.e., heightening and widening of consciousness, is the only means of averting crisis and finding lasting solutions to problems.

## II.

Sri Aurobindo's idea of the superman comes obviously as an answer to the problems he encountered at a historical point of man's culture and civilization. Initially he was concerned with the freedom and dignity of his country, but this could not be considered in isolation, he was inevitably led to the consideration of the situation of the entire world. He was educated in the West, and later, after his return to India, he acquainted himself thoroughly with the Indian tradition. In our search for the roots of the concept of the superman it is pertinent that we look into the Eastern as well as the Western traditions. There is, however, one difficulty in this search. Sri Aurobindo did not write like most other thinkers. Of course he examined other philosophical answers to specific problems and issues, but he seldom referred to any particular thinker, and he claimed to have written from inspiration -- out of the 'silent' mind. All the same, his thought is not a thing in isolation. He has drawn on all sides, and the synthesis he has attempted is grand indeed. We have to look for the sources of his ideas (of superman and other cognate ideas), but at the same time we have to be careful in indicating influence and borrowing since his writings leave an unmistakable impression that they proceeded from a unitive vision, and that he was no eclectic thinker.

## III.

Sri Aurobindo has developed his philosophy in the line of Vedanta. Although the idea of superman is not to be found in any of the older traditions, ideas intimately related to it are obtainable in them, particularly in the Indian tradition.

The superman is one who has realized the supermind or supramental Truth-Consciousness not only in his inner experience but in the most external aspects of his life, thought and action. Sri Aurobindo traces the concept of the Supermind, the dynamic and sovereign Will-Power of the Divine, in the Vedas. The world is the creation of this Seer-Will. That the world is a manifestation of the Divine is corroborated by many passages in the Vedas, the Upanisads, the Gita, and other scriptures. That this manifestation has taken place through a gradual process of descent has been spelled out, among others, by Taitt. Upanisad, Sankhya (although here there is a dualism of purusas and prakriti), Vedanta, Saivism, Saktaism, and the Grammatical school of thought. Of course, each school has developed the concept in its own way; all the same the basic idea is shared by all. In this respect, however, Sri Aurobindo's position is closest to non-dualistic Saivism and Saktaism. They maintain, as he does, that the world is a real manifestation, not just an appearance, and that this manifestation does not imply that the transcendence of the Divine is lost.

The traditional Indian outlook on life and the world is commonly considered to be negativistic. It is possible to reappraise

the position in the light of the Vedic yearning for immortality here on earth, the Tantrik emphasis on liberation (mukti), as well as enjoyment (bhukti), the Gita's doctrine of the Divine's incarnation of Himself at critical junctures of human society, and so on. Only on the basis of a positivistic outlook on life can the concepts of superman and the society of the Gnostic beings be built. The Hindu law and sacraments do not seem to minimize the importance of a vigorous and righteous life on earth; the Indian artistic and literary tradition in particular testify to a love of life and all that it concerns.

Another important aspect of the philosophy of superman is divinization of man's life and consciousness. The Indian religious tradition has laid special emphasis on transformation, since here it is mainly through one's own effort that one has to attain liberation. For the divine life, however, a very special kind of transformation is demanded. Human nature (body, life, mind) has been shown to be a diminutive form of the higher divine nature. It is, therefore, capable of drawing on the higher nature, — the latter's light force knowledge to transmute itself into something which would be human yet divine. Some vague anticipations of this special sense of transformation are found in the Tantric and Hathayogic traditions. By and large, it is a new conception derived from Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary insights.

#### IV.

Sri Aurobindo was introduced to the world of ancient Greece



early in life, and he cherished Greek things all the rest of his life. He studied Greek literature and history thoroughly; he also studied some Greek philosophy, Plato in particular, and he had access to the original works.

Of the early Greek writers, Heraclitus seems to have impressed him a great deal. Heraclitus' concept of Fire as the primal reality and the world of becoming as a field of constant clashes of forces struck a sympathetic chord in Sri Aurobindo's mind.

Next comes Plato. In a number of strands of Sri Aurobindo's thought the echo of Plato can be heard. What is of particular importance is the concept of the soul. In both Plato and Sri Aurobindo the soul is a dynamic entity linking the phenomenal with the archetypal worlds and functioning as the repository of all higher values in man. The idea that the leaders of men should come down after attaining the height of knowledge for sharing the fruits with others and working for perfection of the society is also very similar. Of course there are differences in details, but the similarities are significant.

Sri Aurobindo is one with Plotinus in combining mystical experience with philosophy. In certain other issues also points of agreement may be detected between the two thinkers.

Above all the Greek humanist tradition seems to have left a mark on Sri Aurobindo's mind. In his search for the meaning of man's life and destiny and in his scheme, illustrated best in his epic poem Savitri, of conquering the dark fate of doom and gaining

immortality for man, he seems to have been stimulated by the tragic spirit of the Greek poets and playwrights.

#### V.

Sri Aurobindo passed the most impressionable period of his life in England where Christianity, it may be assumed, was a living force during the last quarter of the previous century. Sri Aurobindo has rejected the core of Christian belief — the unique incarnation of God in Jesus. Yet his philosophy of the 'life divine' reflects something of Christianity. The Christian image of the Kingdom of God he has consciously used in delineating the divine life that he expects to be realized on earth. The hope of fulfilment in the future is also suggestive of Christian influence. It is also possible to see Christian impact, as has been done by Ernst Benz, in Sri Aurobindo's emphasizing the collective development of humanity, and recognizing the truth and value of the human personality even after the mystical vision of identity with the Divine.

#### VI.

All the Indian thinkers of the present era were influenced by modern Europe. What constitutes modern Europe? This itself is a controversial issue. By and large, modern Europe is the creation of the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and such other things as democracy, socialism, science, technology, and progressivism. The Renaissance revived ancient Graeco-Roman values of rationalism and humanism and tended to look at life and society in naturalistic or idealistic ways instead of theological. This

fostered the spirit of science. The Reformation, although at the root a religious movement, helped the crusade of reason against conventionalism. In the Enlightenment the spirit of reason and humanism took a very strong secularist turn, it generated tremendous hope in man and his ability to mould life and society in the most desired way. Progressivism, technology, industrial revolution -- all of these received inspiration from the Enlightenment. Democracy, socialism -- these are some of the offshoots of humanism, rationalism, and man's newly developed sense of power and responsibility. In all of these movements Christian values, e.g., expectation of the Kingdom of Heaven, egalitarianism, loving one's neighbour, etc., have exerted some influence both directly and indirectly.

How did the Indian leaders of thought look upon modern Europe? They seemed to see two things in the dynamic European life and thought. For them Europe was in one respect rationalist and humanist, and, on the other, materialist. They wanted to adopt one aspect and reject the other. Although their religion and society were in a chaotic state they deemed humanism and rationalism perfectly compatible with the true spirit of their religion.

Sri Aurobindo thought in similar ways, except that his perception was keener and his efforts more radical. He was convinced that the values of reason, science, humanism, individualism, egalitarianism, were a permanent contribution of modern Western thought to humanity. But he was concerned about the secular orientation of all of these values. Unless they were strongly

grounded in a spiritual view of life and a destiny they would be self-defeating. The logical culmination of the humanistic and rationalistic movement, according to him, is the centralized organization of life and society supposedly for the best interests of all. Similarly, limitless expansion of technology is the inevitable result of man's attempt at improving the quality of his life by getting things done in the most efficient way. And he has shown how such things as state socialism and uncontrollable technology can ruin the fundamental values of humanism, and jeopardize the very existence of the race. He has, therefore, tried to contain the modern values in a frame of spiritual philosophy and a practical programme of individual and collective development which do not militate intrinsically against any of these values. In fact, he tried to show that these values of humanism, rationalism, and so on are rooted in the spirit of man. If this truth is ignored, things tend to be pursued externally with reliance solely on external organization; the results are self-defeating. This spiritual philosophy has provided a new meaning of progress with its unique interpretation of biological evolution and of the march of civilization through well-defined stages.

## VII.

Sri Aurobindo has built his philosophy in the line of Vedanta, yet he did not want to restrict himself to the tradition. For him all scriptures have value, and no scripture is final. His principal book of philosophy, The Life Divine, has been written

as an independent discourse, and he has spoken of such things as supermind, race of supermen, complete divinization of body and mind which were not properly known or attempted in the tradition before. He has, of course, commented on Hindu scriptures and shown his thought to be grounded in the tradition. In the selection of scriptures, again, he has deviated from the general practice; he has omitted the Brahmasūtra, and taken up Rg Veda Samhitā, the most ancient and sacred book of the tradition (along with the other two, the Upanisads and the Bhagavad Gita). He has drawn considerably on the revelations he had, and he would consider personal mystical experiences as a valid evidence of truth if taken with proper guard.

#### VIII.

The Upanisads, the foundation of Vedanta philosophy, lend themselves easily to different interpretations. Sri Aurobindo maintains that none of the schools of Vedanta are false, but all of them emphasize one or an other aspect of the integral Truth. In the presentation of his integralist view of Vedanta he criticized Sankara's position and the doctrine of Māyā in particular. He tried to show that in maintaining the unity of the Being it is not necessary to posit Māyā as an opposite principle and thereby eventually negating the world as an appearance, a superimposition on Brahman. He proceeds with the assumption that Force is inherent in the Being, Brahman is indeterminable but not incapable of self-determination. The world is thus a real manifestation of

Brahman, and this manifestation does not consume the unity of the Truth. In fact, the integral Truth, according to him, is multi-dimensional, i.e., it is Transcendental, Universal and Individual at the same time. Of course, the fundamental truth is the Transcendental and the other two are grounded in it. This position is exposed to the age-old logical problem of reconciling the One and the Many, Being and Becoming. Sri Aurobindo meets this problem by his doctrine of the supermind and the logic of the infinite. Supermind as the Creative Genius (Real-idea, Seer-Will) emerges out of Saccidananda, and manifests the cosmos. It is the link between the One and the Many, it has the unitive vision of the two hemispheres — the Transcendental and the Phenomenal. Supermind or supramental Gnosis does not function according to the logic of the mind which is a dichotomous consciousness. To appraise how creation takes place, how the One and the Many are harmonized, we have to consider how it is natural for the Supermind to function. This is the logic of the Infinite. This logic does not deny the intellect and its categories their right and role in their proper place, but when the intellect confronts the truth which goes beyond its proper sphere the intellect should be receptive and not impose its own categories.

#### IX.

By taking the Static and the dynamic, Siva and Sakti together as the one indivisible Reality, Sri Aurobindo has been able to integrate the different schools of thought in the Indian

religious tradition. He shows that the Buddhist and Advaita schools of thought are founded on the experience of the indeterminable, impersonal, static aspect of the Reality. Whereas theistic schools of thought are based on some experience of the dynamic Divine. The two together give the comprehensive picture of the Reality which can harmonize the natural and the supernatural with the Transcendental.

✓ The Reality is One and indivisible, but it is multi-dimensional. Since the world is a manifestation of the Divine through a process of self-obscuration a pragmatic distinction can be made between the two hemispheres, one of Light (Vidyā) and the other of light-and-darkness (avidyā). These two may be referred to as the higher and the lower. Sat, Cit and Ananda and Vijnāna or Supermind constitute the higher hemisphere of Reality, whereas mind, life, psyche, and matter constitute the lower hemisphere of the same Reality.

#### X.

The doctrine of the soul has received a good deal of attention in the Hindu tradition. There is, however, some difference of view as regards the relation of the soul with the Supreme. Sri Aurobindo has attempted a synthesis of these views by his idea of the 'Triple status of Supermind'. He maintains that the three views about the soul vis-a-vis Brahman held by the three principal schools of Vedānta originate in the reflection of the three different poises of the supermind respectively on the

tranquil mind of the seekers. The soul, according to him, may again be said to have three stati. In one respect it is one with the Transcendent, in the second, it is the one self in all, and in the third aspect it is the unique individual being embodied in each of us. This last aspect has been designated by Sri Aurobindo as the Psychic Being. This Psychic or inner being, essentially one with the Supreme, is the heavenly light in the world of Ignorance. It is the repository of all higher values -- Good, Truth, Beauty, and so on. On the surface some conflict among these values is quite possible, but they are resolved at a deeper level because they are grounded in the Psyche. Pursuit of these values is necessary for a fuller and more integrated development of the personality and, for that matter, of the society.

## XI.

The synthetic and comprehensive character of Sri Aurobindo's vision makes us reflect on the question of who represents properly the catholic spirit of the Indian tradition -- Sankara or Sri Aurobindo. Sankara is undoubtedly the most renowned exponent of Vedanta, and his impact on Indian thought is great. All the same, a number of modern Indian thinkers are inclined to consider Sankara as representing only a particular, though dominant, strand of thought. This becomes all the more evident if we take in our purview the totality of Indian thought and culture starting from the Vedas, and including art, literature, law, administration, and social life.



In his exegesis of the Vedas, Upanisads, and the Gita, Sri Aurobindo has taken the most catholic stand. Scriptural utterances tend to be most universal having many-sided implications. To particularize their meaning is to limit their scope. In opposition to Sankara Sri Aurobindo has advocated and followed what he has called the Logic of the Infinite, the logic the Divine mind is likely to follow in its self-revelation to the sages.

## XII.

The comprehensive vision of Sri Aurobindo harmonizes diverse strands of thought. It also develops certain insights and ideas that were in seed form in the Indian tradition. As a result, the scope of the tradition was extended; for example, much of the modern scientific findings can now be contained better by the Integralist Vedanta. The most important feature of this attempt at containing science and presenting a complete picture of the Reality is the spiritual interpretation of the fact of biological evolution. The concept of the superman is a part of this interpretation of evolution.

The superman is one who has realized the supermind not only in inner consciousness but also in his body, life and mind. Evidently the superman is yet a thing of the future. Each leap into the higher type of life has been possible by a leap in consciousness reinforced by a corresponding change in the lower members. So, for man to evolve into a superman his body-life-mind need to be transformed into their higher potentialities. This

transformation has three stages: Psychicization, Spiritualization, Supramentalization. Psychicization would mean the discovery of the Psychic being as the dynamic centre of our existence, and organizing and integrating life and experience around that being. Spiritualization would refer to a further growth in the height and depth of spiritual experience. This stage is characterized by the realization of oneness with all others as well as with the Supreme. Such realizations bring into play stupendous calm, force, and light on the members of our being and make them ready for more radical changes. Supermind is the sovereign dynamic force of the Divine. It is only the Descent of this force on our body-life-mind that can bring about that radical transformation which has been called by Sri Aurobindo divinization and supramentalization.

The concept of the superman appears in better relief if compared with similar concepts in the East and the West. The concept of Jīvanmukta in the Hindu tradition stands for profound spiritual experience while one is yet in his body; as a result of such experiences some changes take place in the mode of life of the liberated one. But this change is not deliberate nor directed toward any goal. The concept of superman is, on the other hand, evolutionary, change here is the aim from the very beginning. Knowledge or liberation is only the most important means. The idea of Bodhisattva shows a greater concern for the suffering world, but in the last analysis this also is an other-worldly concept, the aim is to get out of the cycle of birth and death, i.e.,

samsara, and helping other individuals to do the same. It does not look for any great fulfilment on the earth.

In the West it was Nietzsche who spelled out the concept of superman first. The idea is evolutionary, not in the Darwinian automatic sense, but the inspiration is unique. Nietzsche dismisses Being, eternal self, and the conventional norms of good and evil tagged with these. All of these he deems as fetters for the Will in man to express itself freely. The Will to Power is the only truth for him. This Will, free of inhibitions, becomes creative. Man can fulfill this will by letting it take its course, rebuild his life and environment, and thus make him surpass himself. Beyond this possibility of man's surpassing himself, overcoming his destiny, we do not get a clear idea about the superman, and the multitude of issues connected with it. However, it was Nietzsche who spoke about the superman first. Sri Aurobindo acknowledged this and made a point to differentiate his concept from that of Nietzsche.

Another concept of the superman comes from a Jesuit priest, Teilhard de Chardin. He is junior to Sri Aurobindo, he has said very similar things to those of Sri Aurobindo, but of course in a Christian framework. His concept is thoroughly evolution-oriented, higher consciousness coupled with a higher biological existence is the term for the surhomme. He has emphasized the need of external organization to the extent that Sri Aurobindo would not approve. Sri Aurobindo emphasizes the inner dynamism, outflowing of the inner spirit more than the external apparatus of human unity and

collective action.

Above all, unlike the Western thinkers, Sri Aurobindo has chalked out a practical programme of self-overcoming, called by him Integral or Supramental yoga, and he was himself involved in it very actively for the greater part of his life.

### XIII.

What would the supramental society be like? A full-fledged superman is yet a distant thing. People with some experience of the supermind trying to realize that light knowledge and power in collective living may be considered the early beginning of a supramental society. One who has realized his identity with the Transcendent and the Universal need not lose his personality or individuality. He would be capable of distinctive action, although that action would be in accord fundamentally with the Universal Will. This distinctiveness of will and action should not be equated with the residue of imperfection, nor would it rest only on the peculiarity of the situation (time and place) but principally on the fact that individuality is grounded in the Transcendent, and every individual is a unique mode of expression of the Supreme.

### XIV.

In his later writings, published posthumously, Sri Aurobindo has spoken of an intermediary race — the New Humanity — as the link between present humanity and the race of supermen. The new humanity will be forged by the Mind of Light which is mind

transmuted to a measure of purity and force as a result of the Descent of the Supermind on the physical plane. This Mind of Light is a transitional stage in the mind's reaching out to the Supermind, so this New Humanity would be a transitional stage of human collectivity. The Descent of the Supermind would mean the operation of so radical an element in the world that even the subhuman levels would be affected by it. As a result, man's ascension to supermanhood would not create too large a gap between superman and animals.

The issue of humanity's evolution into superhumanity leads to the consideration of the meaning of history and time. For Sri Aurobindo history is not understandable by a mere scrutiny of the external events; there is a Divine determinism behind it. In this respect there is a parallelism between individual and collective life. Much of what takes place on the surface is determined in the deeper subliminal levels, and the real determinant is the individual and cosmic self, respectively. In the march and evolution of time the spirit and master of time, a special form and power of the cosmic Being, called Kāla in India and Zeitgeist in Europe, plays a role. It is the will of Kāla that forges leaders of men, and sets the stage for great changes. Now is the time (such is the Will of the cosmic Spirit or Kāla) for a leap of humanity to the next higher stage of evolution. Sri Aurobindo designates the present era as The Hour of God and urges men and nations to respond to the call of this hour appropriately.

## XV.

Sri Aurobindo's concept of the superman is a philosophy coupled with a practical programme of religious nature. The practical programme adds much to the concept and makes it more than a mere theory. If we call this programme a movement the root of it has to be traced to the early years of the life of Sri Aurobindo (in England) when he vaguely developed a sense of world mission. A long period of preparation intervenes between this early seed-state and the political phase of the movement. The political is really not different from the later spiritual phase of the movement. When Sri Aurobindo entered into the political arena in 1906 he did so with a complete sense of dedication to the cause of the Divine of which Mother India was the most concrete form to him at that time. The spiritual phase from 1910 to 1950 may, again, be divided into two -- pre- and post-1926, i.e., before and after his becoming a recluse. The principal events of the first period are his gift to the world of the philosophy of the divine life in the pages of the Arya, his meeting with his spiritual consort, the Mother, and the latter's joining him with an identical mission. The second period is, on the one hand, an attempt to bring down the supermind to the human body-mind-life, and, on the other, to build up the spiritual commune to be a stable support and means of assimilating the forces coming down. Even the passing away of Sri Aurobindo in 1950 has been looked upon as a strategic move and a great sacrifice toward facilitating the process of the descent of the supermind and

divinization of human nature.

The movement has grown considerably after 1950 with the progress of the Descent and the transmuting effect of the supermind. These claims cannot be objectively verified, and the movement is still not far enough beyond the formative stage for any kind of assessment. However, the latest phase of the movement is the inauguration of Auroville (the city of dawn) near Pondicherry as an international township designed to be the first city of the New Humanity. This project has strong utopian elements. Utopias are not, however, necessarily fanciful. The seriousness with which the project is being pursued, the spiritual need of mankind at the moment, anticipation by some other thinkers of a new glorified future for humanity -- all of these lend a measure of credibility to the movement and the unique concept of the superman.

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