

SRI AUROBINDO
HOMAGE FROM VISVA-BHARATI

SRI AUROBINDO
Homage from Visva-Bharati

Edited by
Santosh Chandra Sengupta



Department of Philosophy & Religion
Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan

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Published by
Department of Philosophy & Religion
Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan
West Bengal, India

March 1977

© Department of Philosophy & Religion
Visva-Bharati

Price: Rs 60.00
\$ 8.00

Printed by
Sadhana Press Private Limited
76 Bipin Behari Ganguly Street
CALCUTTA 700012

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FOREWORD

In the land of Samkhyakaras, Vedantists and Nyayikas, the university system of teaching philosophy continues to be attuned to the primary task of catching up with the successive phases of philosophical thinking in the West. In the writings of Sri Aurobindo we come across in modern India a master thinker who presents a comprehensive system of understanding the nature of spiritual reality. It is only appropriate that in the Department of Philosophy and Religion an All-India Seminar was organised on 'Sri Aurobindo's Conception of Integral Knowledge' on the occasion of his birth centenary in Tagore's Visva-Bharati. Outstanding Indian scholars presented papers on many dimensions of Sri Aurobindo's thinking—nature and meaning of history, integral knowledge, aesthetics, foundations of Indian culture and man's evolution.

I am very pleased that the papers presented in the Seminar have been brought together in a single volume, *Sri Aurobindo: Homage from Visva-Bharati*. I hope students of philosophy and other interested scholars will find this volume useful and stimulating.

Santiniketan
27th March 1977

SURAJIT CHANDRA SINHA
Upacharya
Visva-Bharati

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FOREWORD

In the field of Sanskrit, Vedanta and Yoga, the university system of teaching philosophy continues to be limited to the primary task of catching up with the successive phases of philosophical thinking in the West. In the writings of Sri Aurobindo we come across in modern India a master thinker who presents a comprehensive system of understanding the nature of spiritual reality. It is only appropriate that in the Department of Philosophy and Religion an All-India Seminar was organised on 'Sri Aurobindo's Conception of Integral Knowledge' on the occasion of his birth centenary in Tagore's Vidyasagar College. Many Indian scholars presented papers on many dimensions of Sri Aurobindo's thinking—nature and meaning of history, integral knowledge, aesthetic foundations of Indian culture and man's evolution.

I am very pleased that the papers presented in the Seminar have been brought together in a single volume. Sri Aurobindo's thought from Vidyasagar, I hope students of philosophy and other interested scholars will find this volume useful and stimulating.

Srinivas Chandra Sharma
Vice-Chancellor
Vidyasagar College

Calcutta
27th March 1977

EDITORIAL NOTE

The Department of Philosophy and Religion initiated programmes in 1972 towards the celebration of the birth centenary of Sri Aurobindo. It was planned to organise an All-India Seminar on Some Aspects of Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy and to publish a volume on different aspects of Sri Aurobindo's thought. We had an All-India Seminar on 'Sri Aurobindo's Conception of Integral Knowledge' in April, 1973. Scholars from different parts of India participated in the Seminar. It is only appropriate that our Department initiated the programmes. Sri Aurobindo is recognised as the greatest contemporary philosopher in the East. His philosophy which represents the grand systematization of integral vision embodies significant insights which have made an impact on philosophical thinking in India and abroad. Sri Aurobindo's originality as a philosopher is reflected not merely in these insights but also in the approach to the integration which he (Sri Aurobindo) seeks to achieve. This approach is evolutionary. The adoption of the evolutionary point of view in the understanding of the divine reality demarcates Sri Aurobindo's philosophy from the six traditional systems of Indian philosophy. The exercise in the systematic understanding of spirituality as a process is comparable to what the Jesuit Father, Teilhard De Chardin's (the noted philosopher and paleontologist) mode of philosophising. It is relevant to point out in this connection that what Sir Julian Huxley wrote about Teilhard De Chardin in his introduction to the latter's work entitled the Phenomenon of Man applies to Sri Aurobindo. To quote Huxley "His (Teilhard De Chardin) influence in the world thinking is bound to be important. Through his combination of wide scientific knowledge with deep religious feeling and rigorous sense of value he has forced the theologians to view their ideas in the new perspective of evolution and the scientist to see the spiritual implication of knowledge." Sri Aurobindo made the similar significant experiment in the understanding of the spiritual reality in the new perspective of evolution.

The spiritualistic view of reality which Sri Aurobindo upholds is characterised by totality. This explains his extensive reflections

on the different phenomena and the comprehensiveness of his philosophical thinking. The volume is intended to reflect this comprehensiveness. This is evident from the wide range of the themes of the papers published in the volume. The themes include concepts of Integral Knowledge and Language, Meaning of History, Indian Culture, Yoga and Aesthetics. The treatment of the varied themes evinces plurality in standpoint. Four papers on the Concept of Integral Knowledge which are published were presented at the All-India Seminar on Sri Aurobindo which we had here in 1973. The papers entitled Aurobindo's Conception of the Nature and Meaning of History, Sri Aurobindo and the Subjective and the Objective in History, Aesthetics of Sri Aurobindo and The Relevance of Sri Aurobindo to Modern India are reprinted in this volume.

I am grateful to Dr. Surajit Chandra Sinha, our Vice-Chancellor for having kindly consented to write the foreword. I convey grateful thanks to all the contributors for having made their papers readily available to us and for the ungrudging co-operation. My thanks are due to my colleagues for the assistance in proof-reading.

SANTOSH CHANDRA SENGUPTA

Santiniketan

20 March 1977

SRI AUROBINDO
HOMAGE FROM VISVA-BHARATI

INTEGRAL DIALECTICS

THE PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD DEVELOPED
FROM THE TEACHINGS OF
SRI AUROBINDO

HARIDAS CHAUDHURI

THE METHOD of integral dialectics as briefly outlined in this paper is an outgrowth of some seminal ideas scattered in the writings of Sri Aurobindo. A careful analysis of the movement of his thought and his vision of the true meaning of life gives rise to integral dialectics as an exceedingly valuable philosophical method. It represents a fruitful synthesis of the Western philosophers' concept of the creative union of opposites (thesis and antithesis) integrated into the Eastern sages' intuitive vision of the nondualistic wholeness of reality.

According to the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad,³ the Supreme Being, the One without a second, became many by producing dualities. Herein lies the most hidden secret of all creation and evolution. It is the secret of self-multiplication through polarization of energy. The nondual Being polarizes itself into the fundamental duality of spirit and nature, mind and matter, God and world, light and darkness, heaven and earth, logos and eros. To use eastern terminology, the all-encompassing Brahman or Tao or Tai Chi polarizes itself into the duality of puruṣa and prakṛti, śiva and śakti, yang and yin, hsing and ming, yab and yum.

What is true of the infinite is also true of the infinitesimal, of every little living thing reflecting an image of the infinite. The tiny little germ cell, repeating the supreme mantra of creation, divides itself into two cells; the two cells become four cells; and so on it goes until the humming of over population begins to fill the whole world.

Whereas creation is the division of the One into self-multi-

plying dualities, dialectics is thought's opposite movement trying to resolve all kinds of dualities back into the infinity of the One. It advances from lower to higher organized wholes of polarity, from less inclusive to more inclusive systems of harmonized duality, until the absolutely nondual Reality or Being is attained. Reality's creative urge consists in the movement of energy from the relatively undifferentiated whole toward continuously increasing self-differentiating of the whole. The human mind's quest of truth consists in the movement of consciousness from the dynamic tension between opposites (thesis and antithesis) toward more and more inclusive syntheses embracing the wholeness of being.

In western philosophy Hegel and Marx applied the dialectical method on a grand scale and developed the monumental thought systems of dialectical idealism and dialectical materialism respectively. But on account of their historical limitations imposed by the rationalistic tradition originating in ancient Greece, dialectics remained an incomplete thing in their hands. Even though Marx had the courage to stand Hegel on his head, he had no better success in shaking loose from the ingrained rationalistic commitment. Due to their fundamental rationalistic assumption identifying reality with thought, both of them started with an abstraction of thought, concluded with an abstraction of thought, and left the stage of history with an abstract faith in perfection.

Hegel started with the notion of Being conceived as the most abstract of all universals serving as the highest category of classification. But absolutely featureless Being is indistinguishable from Nonbeing, which is naturally incapable of producing anything.⁴ Thus the Hegelian beginning begins under extremely inauspicious circumstances. But Hegel was a mighty genius. By his extraordinary magic of conceptual jugglery, he produced out of an empty bag the most magnificent philosophy of absolute idealism the world has ever seen. By breathing into emptiness the concentrated breath of metaphysical speculation, he presented to the people a 'marvellous ballet of bloodless categories'. Following the rhythm of this ballet, he brought the whole history

of western philosophy to its crowning fulfillment in his own thought system which he considered to be the last word of philosophic wisdom.

Marx learnt from Hegel the dialectical secret of absolute truth. But having placed Hegel on the pedestal in the head posture (*śirṣāsana*), Marx started with Matter and with the materialistic or economic motivation of man. And he naturally concluded with the absolute truth of a perfectly classless society as the ultimate goal and the last scene of the drama of history. Unfortunately it requires no extraordinary insight to find out that universal matter also is an abstraction of thought. It is an abstract hypothesis to explain the infinitely variegated events, processes and experiences of life. The economic motivation considered by itself is a mere abstraction held in isolation from intellectual, ethical, mythological, religious, magical and supernatural motivations with which it is inextricably bound up. The economic arrangement of society conceived in terms of control of the means of production is another abstraction unduly magnified beyond all proportion in respect of its importance as compared with the emotional, ethical, religious and political aspects of society. The chain of reasoning which begins with an abstraction is bound to end up with an abstraction. Among human individuals there is obviously an unequal distribution of all manner of divergent qualities and talents. Some seem to be born with uncommon leadership qualities, whereas some seem to be endowed with a natural disposition to mind their own business and live peacefully under the protection of the strong. So some kind of class distinction is bound always to remain. This is clearly demonstrated in the emergence of a new dictatorship — the dictatorship of party bureaucrats in a practising communist country. Moreover there is no reason why class distinction should necessarily be an evil thing, so long as equal growth opportunities are justly provided to all. There is no reason why optimum justice cannot be established in a society with a ruling class specially qualified and trained to serve the society on a genuine spirit of dedication to the welfare, not only of the working class, but also of all other legitimate groups in the

country including captains of industry, leaders of agriculture, merchants and tradesmen, and so on.

In the ultimate analysis it is the human factor which counts most. No matter to what extent the economic and political structure of a society be drastically overhauled, until and unless there is a real transformation of inner consciousness—a genuine change of heart as Gandhi would say — exploitation and injustice can hardly be eliminated from society. It is not a change of the economic structure or of the political fabric alone, but a multi-front attack on human problems that is imperatively necessary for establishing ideal human society on earth. And human problems include the psychological, ethical and intellectual problems as well as the economico-political.

There is another wrong assumption which vitiates the dialectics of Hegel and Marx. In perfecting the dialectical method, is there any need to start with a hypothetical beginning and to conclude with a hypothetical end? Is not time a beginningless and endless process? We are never quite absolutely sure exactly what the absolute beginning of creation or evolution was like. Nor can we prescribe an absolutely perfect model to the process of global evolution. Nor can we be sure that the perfect consummation of our present trend of social evolution will not be followed by a new model of perfection with a new beginning. So why speculate on the basis of a determinate beginning and a determinate end? A glimpse of the immeasurable richness of life reveals the cyclical movement as the most appropriate form in which Time can serve as Being's creative medium of self-expression.

So integral dialectics focuses on the most fundamental dualities of life and reality such as matter and mind, nature and spirit, world and God, the phenomenal and the transcendental, cosmos and Being, etc. On the subjective side it focuses on such polarities of the human psyche as the extroverted and introverted tendencies, ascending and descending movements of consciousness, search for the self and search for Being, physical hunger for food and spiritual hunger for truth, thirst for love and quest of power, love of life and fascination with death.

The essence of integral dialectics consists in reconciling such

polarities into the kind of comprehensive unity of which they are seemingly conflicting but really complementary self-expressions. It further consists in harmonising opposite movements of consciousness into integral visions of truth as the divine out-flowering of evolutionary emergence.

In what follows an attempt will be made to illustrate the essential structure of integral dialectics in terms of man's philosophical search for truth as well as his spiritual quest of self-perfection.

SEARCH FOR BEING

The philosophic search for truth always leads us sooner or later towards an encounter with some kind of ultimate reality or Being. As we contemplate the mystery of Being, its two apparently opposite characteristics immediately swim into our field of vision. First, Being must be the creative source of the endless variations of nature and the bewildering diversities of life. In other words it must be creative energy (Śakti). Secondly, Being must be eternally perfect, the unchanging background of the ever-changing world so that it can stand on its own and serve as the ultimate ground of the universe or as the supreme unifying principle of the cosmic manifold.

It is thus immediately evident that contemplation of the nature of ultimate reality discloses two fundamental opposites as its essential structure. A profound mystery instantly challenges our philosophic thinking. How can pure unchanging existence dwell together with ever-changing creative energy in the heart of the same supreme reality?

Being as infinite existence must be void of all determinations, of all qualities, functions, attributes, actions, movements. To have any specific determination means to be finite and limited. To engage in any action or movement implies imperfection. To function as the substratum of qualities, essences, attributes, and energies is to betray its character as an intellectual construction—an offspring of the application to Being of the category of substance-quality.

It is the aforesaid logic of category-transcendence which compels Śaṅkara, the great Hindu philosopher, to declare that

Being is absolutely indeterminable (nirguṇa).⁵ The same logic of the ultimate compelled Buddha to announce that the ground or bedrock of all existence is nonbeing, void or emptiness (śūnyatā), because Being also is an intellectual category. But then Buddha conveniently forgot that nonbeing, void or emptiness also is an intellectual category, a verbal and conceptual determination of the indeterminable. Spinoza in the west encountered the same problem but decided to stay away from it. From his own standpoint he probably arrived at some kind of solution just by looking in the other direction. This gave a hard time to his followers. Some interpreters (Hegel, Erdmann) thought that Spinoza's one infinite reality was absolutely void of all determinations, because 'all determination is negation'. Some again (K. Fischer) believed that Spinoza's Nature-God was one infinite substance endowed with infinite attributes.⁶ But then no matter how you look at it there are problems galore on all sides.

The inevitable sequel to extreme nondualism is the emergence of a new kind of dualism. According to a fundamental law of dialectics, when one member of a polarity is carried to its furthest extreme, it automatically turns into its radical opposites. For instance, indeterminable being turns into nonbeing, and conceptualized nonbeing turns into being, as Hegel brilliantly demonstrated. Likewise, the nondualism of pure being or nonbeing, carried to its furthest extreme, suddenly gets strangely metamorphosed into the absolute dualism of 'the absolute and the relative', ultimate reality and unreal appearance, eternal perfection and the creative energy of time, Brahman and Māyā (Śaṅkara), Śūnyatā and Avidyā (Buddha). So long as one fails to integrate Energy, the dynamic source of the relative world, into the reality of the absolute or the ultimate, one is bound to land upon the dualism of the ultimate and the relative, or the dualism of Being and Energy. It may be said that the energy which is responsible for the projection of the relative and phenomenal world is nothing but primal ignorance or nescience. But on close examination this will be bound to be a subtle form of self-delusion, or a kind of verbal jugglery void of any value. Primal ignorance,

avidyā, nescience, or māyā, also has a right to be explained. Wherefrom does it come? Is it real or unreal, how can it function as the creative source of the cosmic manifold with all their processes of life and death and products of comedy and tragedy? One cannot eat a cake and have it too.

It may be said the realm of relativity or the phenomenal world, the sphere of primal ignorance, seems to be real only from the empirical standpoint. From the ultimate standpoint of supreme knowledge, it is just nothing (tuccha). But this again is only a clever shifting of the focus of the problem, without amounting to any sensible solution at all. The necessity now irrepressibly arises for an honest account of the origin of the empirical standpoint. We are now pushed into the unmitigated dualism of two irreconcilable standpoints, the standpoints of knowledge and ignorance, representing two unbridgeable levels of consciousness. It is this kind of psychological dichotomy which drives people either into pathetic schizophrenia or into extreme self-destruction. The polarization of psychic energy resulting from mystic nondualism produces the euphemism either of holy indifference to the world or of ecstatic self-deification. Such are the terrible consequences of the tyranny of words as illustrated in history.

LOGICAL ABSTRACTIONISM

In our view metaphysical problems are oftener than not traceable to the mind's unconscious tendency to substantialize an abstraction, or to equate an abstracted part with the whole. As a consequence, metaphysicians are frequently inclined to start with logical abstractions such as empty Being or contentless Nothing or structureless Becoming, etc. Since *ex nihilo nihil fit*, naturally they end up by explaining nothing.

Those who try to control this abstractionist tendency, make sure to start with reality in the concrete, with absolute immediacy. This is what extreme empiricism and extreme mysticism vie with each other to accomplish. But unfortunately absolute immediacy invariably proves to be an exceedingly elusive thing—some kind of will o' the wisp. Man as a thinking animal is destined always to live, move and hunger for knowledge within the limits

of the Noosphere (*Vijñānaloka*), the field of operation of his mediating thought.

Karl Marx, determined to have his feet firmly planted on the solid ground of perceptual immediacy, starts with universal matter, with the supremacy of the materialistic desire for food and survival, and with the universal will to power on the part of the capitalists. But universal matter is no less an abstraction of thought than universal life, universal mind, universal spirit, and the like. Similarly, the word capitalist is an abstraction of thought. There are always different types of capitalist, and there are important concrete differences of quality among them. Similarly again, the will to power or to exploit is another abstract universal. In the concrete texture of human consciousness it is always to be found inextricably intertwined with the will to live and love, the will to know and realize the Good, the will to help and serve, to give and share, as well as to take and make profits.

Rationalistic dialecticians are unconsciously influenced by the false methodological postulate of abstractionism or logical atomism. They unreflectingly assume that a sufficiently large number of abstract notions, empty concepts, logical atoms, brought together in a clever combination, will get miraculously metamorphosed into the concrete fullness of reality or into the flesh-and-blood vitality of living evolution. In other words, they are predisposed to think, on the basis of metaphysical faith, that abstract notions are the atoms of absolute truth or undeniable building blocks of ultimate reality. Since this assumption is unconscious, the absurdity of deriving concrete reality from thin abstractions, usually escapes the rationalist's attention. Moreover, intense wishful thinking tends to block the vision of embarrassing facts. In consequence, the system-builder becomes deluded into the flattering conviction that he has somehow received from some anonymous higher authority the honor and privilege of reproducing in his own mind the original mystery of creation. Among the human mind's countless methods of self-kidding this is perhaps the subtlest of all. So this must be the most invincible trick of *Māyā*, the principle of original Ignorance the benign mother of illusions.⁹

The transcendentalist who declares the world unreal starts with the abstraction of indefinable Being or Nonbeing or immutable existence-consciousness-bliss absolute. Mystical abstractionism obstructs his vision of the reality and meaning of the cosmic process. Conceptual abstractionism obstructs the rationalists' vision of the interdependence of mind and matter, spirit and nature, love and logos in the evolutionary flow of history.

REAFFIRMATION OF UPANISADIC WHOLENESS

Integral Dialectics rejects this entire abstractionist way of metaphysical reconstruction of the universe out of conceptual abstractions or bloodless logical atoms. Needless to say that by logical atoms I mean empty abstract notions believed to be reality's ultimate building blocks.

Integral Dialectics starts with the universe as a whole, with reality as concrete multidimensional fullness. It starts with the indivisible totality of human experience, with the whole spectrum of human consciousness, of which sensory experience and *samādhi* or *nirvāṇa* are two inseparable poles. It is the integrated unity of human consciousness — the perfect integration of all the levels of experience — which alone can reveal the wholeness of reality or Being.

Let us therefore reaffirm the reality of the cosmic whole (*pūrṇa sattā*) as both the alpha and the omega of philosophic thinking, as the true beginning and the true end of all spiritual quest and metaphysical speculation. Let us also reaffirm the reality of our human experience-continuum including waking, dream, sleep and *samādhi* as the multi-colored reflection in our human mind of the multi-level Being or cosmic continuum.

As the comprehensive unity of the cosmic manifold, the fullness of reality is called Being (*Brahman*), the ultimate ground of all that exists. As the creative source of the cosmic manifold the same reality is perceived as infinite Energy (*Śakti*).⁷ There is absolutely no justification for separating them in existence. Being equals Energy, and Energy equals Being, just as the existence of fire equals the burning capacity of fire.

Also let us not surreptitiously smuggle into this original whole

our ignorant human categories of substance and attribute, linear cause and linear effect, etc. which are applicable only to finite phenomena and limited structures of energy. In other words, it would be incorrect to think that Being is one infinite spiritual substance (Śaktimān, Śākta, etc.) of which Energy is the essential attribute or power. That would immediately convert Being-Energy into an intellectual construct or imperfect conceptual formulation. In this respect Integral Dialectics differs from the traditional Tantric metaphysics of India. The latter starts with cosmic energy to the ultimate principle but regards it as the power of one ultimate spiritual reality, Śiva.

BEING-ENERGY AS PERFECTION-EVOLUTION

Having started with the all-embracing Existence-Whole (Brahman) which is inseparably one with the all-embracing Energy-Whole (Śakti), there should be no difficulty in deriving matter, life, mind, spirits etc. from the boundless possibilities inherent in Being-Energy via the endless process of emergent or creative evolution. This is what I have tried to show in my book *The Philosophy of Integralism*.

In my view, it is not necessary to think of creative evolution in terms of *nihil fit* (out of nothing), as Henry Bergson does. Bergson was under the necessity of believing in the emergency of absolute novelties from the creative womb of Time because he wrongly equated Time with a determinate mode of Energy, e.g., élan vital or universal life force. Be it noted here that besides being a determinate mode of energy, Bergson's élan vital is also a conceptual abstraction insofar as no living form is ever known to exist except as the mode of behaviour of a specific constellation of physico-chemical forces. Since then Life is a determinate mode of operation of Energy, it is not strictly infinite in the true sense of the term. So Bergson had to wave the magic wand of *ex nihilo* in order to account for the subsequent emergence of mind, intellect, and spirit from the vital impetus.

The infinite Being-Energy with which Integral Dialectics starts holds within itself boundless possibilities. Whatever novelties the evolutionary process may bring into visible form on the

phenomenal level can easily be understood as determinate modes of manifestation of the 'undifferentiated difference' that exist without number in the fathomless depths of Being-Energy from beginningless time.

Integral Dialectics thus gives rise to the integral philosophy of boundless Being-Energy (Brahman-Śakti). Infinite Energy implies the undivided unity and unbroken continuity of being and becoming, of perfection and evolution, of blissful self-existence and creative self-expression.

In order to comprehend fully the concrete fullness of life as the multidimensional expression of Being, the philosophical method must be in the nature of a dynamic synthesis of both the ascending and the descending movements of thought (ārohan and avarohan). Integral Dialectics, the perfect philosophical method, must therefore represent a comprehensive and dynamic unity of both *via negativa* (neti neti) and *via positiva* (iti iti).⁹

First of all, in our search for the essential structure of the universe, we climb up the ladder (or the metaphysical mountain) of *via negativa* and keep transcending the lower levels of matter, life, mind, reason, and spirit, one after another on account of their comparative poverty of content and limitation of form. More and more clearly the light of truth begins to dawn upon our mind that Being is not just matter, or life, or mind or even spirit as known to man at a given time. For Being is without doubt infinitely richer than all these known modalities of finite existence. Then we reach a giddy height a little below the top of Mount Kailasha (the towering mountain of man's inner-evolutionary spiral). With ecstatic joy we behold these at the almost invisible top the indescribable and indeterminable Parabrahman. Although indeterminable, we realize that Parabrahman or Supreme Being is capable of infinite determinations.¹⁰ So we call it Being-Energy (Brahman-Śakti). We know that energy is the ability for both descent and ascent, for creative self-expression as well as peaceful self-absorption, for spiritual reconstruction of life and society as well as the ongoing natural movement of space-time. So in perfect tune with the creative light of Being-Energy, we climb down the ladder of the mystic

fire again (Kundalinī). As we climb down we behold with great amazement that all the lower levels that we had left behind reappear now clothed in a new grandeur and invested with a new divine significance. They reveal their secret potentials for self-transformation into perfect forms of expression of the glory of Being. So we spontaneously feel like saying: "This is it, This is it, . . . (iti iti)." This inspires us to participate in the creative flow of time with a view to manifesting more and more the boundless riches of the eternal.

Thus the dialectical movement of our thought and consciousness—the triadic rhythm of the philosophico-spiritual journey—reaches its crowning fulfillment. Our whole life becomes one overmastering passion to incarnate the eternal in time, to manifest the boundless joy of Being in the limitless flow of becoming.

But we know in our heart that no amount of manifestation can ever exhaust the inexhaustible riches of the eternal. Neither evolution nor history can ever gain victory over the vastness of Being. However much the expansiveness of time may try to take away a whole expanding universe from the infinite richness of Being, the residuum must always remain infinite. Pūrṇameva avaśiṣyate.

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SRI AUROBINDO ON LANGUAGE

J. N. MOHANTY

SRI AUROBINDO'S thoughts on the nature of language are contained in his writings on the Vedas and in the posthumous essay 'The Origins of Aryan Speech'.¹ There are also valuable remarks scattered through out *The Future Poetry*.² One should consult his translations of the Upaniṣads as well as *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*.³ In this brief essay I wish to draw attention to some of the more significant aspects of Sri Aurobindo's thoughts in this area.

There are two contexts in which Sri Aurobindo takes up his reflections on the nature of language. First, of course, there is his interest in finding the true significance of the Vedic hymns. The second, he tells us,⁴ was his attempt to trace out the relations between Sanskrit and Tamil, an interest which must have developed after he settled down in Pondicherry and started learning Tamil.

In his Vedic studies, he was thoroughly dissatisfied with both the classical Indian point of view represented ably in Sāyana's commentary and the point of view of European Indologists. Both Sāyana and the European Indologists agree in principle: namely, that the Vedic hymns are marked by a sort of naturalistic polytheism and by a pervasive ritualistic religion. Where the modern European scholars have differed from Sāyana concerns the details, but in broad principles they have followed Sāyana. 'Agni' means first of all fire, and then the fire-god; 'Sūrya' is the sun, and then the sun-god; 'Uṣas' is the dawn which is then deified. The same applies to 'Mitra', 'Varuṇa', 'Vṛtra', 'Indra' and all the others. The naturalistic interpretation becomes more difficult in the case of the more abstract deities like 'Aditi', 'Viśvakarmā', 'Hiraṇyagarbha' or such a goddess as 'Śraddhā'. Sri Aurobindo rejects the naturalistic, and also consequently, ritualistic interpretation on several grounds. In the first place, he thinks—and in this he certainly raises a question of the utmost

difficulty—that this interpretation creates a gap between the Vedas and the Upanisads that is impossible to account for. How is it that such a naive naturalistic religion could so quickly give rise to a deeply spiritualistic conception of man and his universe? The continuity between the two, which is recognised by the tradition, becomes an inexplicable mystery. Secondly, it is also difficult to explain why if the Vedic religion was what it is made out to be, the tradition accorded to the Vedas the status that it did. That status cannot be due to the fact that they provide the origins of later thought, for the mere origin is what we leave behind, however much we may preserve it in memory. That the tradition cherished it as containing not mere anticipations but also the truths of later thought has to be accounted for, when the Upanisads surely abandoned the apparently polytheistic and ritualistic religion of the hymns. Sri Aurobindo also questions the fundamental assumption on which much of western Vedic scholarship, at least in its beginning, was based: the thought namely that the Vedic literature bears evidence to one of the earliest, and therefore primitive and naive workings of the human mind, so that what we are to expect in the hymns is nothing deep and profound but naive and simplistic, unsystematic and incoherent thoughts reflecting a natural tendency of the primitive man to personify natural phenomena and a pre-scientific belief in the magical efficacy of charmed words and duly performed rituals to protect them from the wrath of natural powers before whom they felt helpless and to acquire for them their favours. Sri Aurobindo rightly questions this assumption about the nature of the early mind, not merely in India but any where else in the world.

In all these points, Sri Aurobindo's dissatisfaction with the traditional as well as the western Indologist's way of understanding the Vedas is well founded. I will particularly, refer to the last-mentioned ground: it is now an established result of modern ethnology that myths are not imaginative fancies of a primitive, naive and unsophisticated mind, nor are they primitive stages of scientific thinking, a sort of proto-science that is far outgrown with the rise of scientific thinking. Levi-Strauss has shown that

the myths are conceptual structures, intellectually well-organised, with an internal coherence and logic of their own, and that they are not primitive *stages* of man's efforts to understand nature but form a system that is parallel to modern science.⁵ I do not think that Levi-Strauss' almost mathematical formalism is adequate to understand myths, but there is no doubt that we cannot return any more to that simplistic manner of understanding myths. The Vedic mind was not simple, childlike, fanciful and imaginative—not any more than ours is today. We need some other hypothesis to operate with.

Just as contemporary ethnological thinking is against the mode of Vedic interpretation that Sri Aurobindo wants to reject, so also we may look to contemporary phenomenology of religion for support. I will only very briefly refer to Mercia Eliade's *Patterns in Comparative Religion*⁶ in which Eliade undertakes a detailed study and interpretation of primitive religious symbolism. His purpose is to bring out the distinctively unique element of religiousness in them, what he calls the element of the sacred, which all attempts to study religious symbolism by means of linguistic, sociology, ethnology, psychology or economics tend to miss. In fact, he comes to look upon apparently very different kinds of phenomena—rites, myths, cosmogonies, magical practices, gods—as symbols of the sacred 'in the mental world of those who believed in it',⁷ quite irrespective of the ontological value to be accorded to such belief. Such a symbol which manifests the sacred, each such piece of evidence which expresses some one modality of the sacred, is called by Eliade a 'hierophany'.⁸ Study of such hierophanies shows, according to Eliade, that symbols 'identify, assimilate, and unify diverse levels and realities that are to all appearances incompatible'.⁹ This is made possible by the fact that a symbol, in this sense, at once signifies many different levels of meanings, points to many different levels of reality (e.g. material, cosmological, social, psychological and spiritual).¹⁰

II

The problem of interpreting the Vedas is really a problem in

hermeneutics. How to go about interpreting an ancient text from which we are far removed not merely in time but also in historical experience and in modes of thought? How are we to avoid that inevitable temptation to impose upon that ancient text our own modes of thinking, our favoured categories? Is there any way of transporting ourselves to the mode of thinking of that mind which lies behind the text? We shall return to this question later in this essay.

For the present, let us return to the second of the two contexts in which Sri Aurobindo's thoughts on language take shape. This second impetus came from his efforts to find the relationship between Tamil and Sanskrit. He rejects the anthropological theory that the Vedas bear evidence to the conflict between the Aryan conquerors and the original Dravidian inhabitants of the land. He also rejects the linguistic theory which sets Tamil apart as a Dravidian language which does not have its genesis in Sanskrit. He comes to question the grounds on which the classification of language families is generally carried out (e.g. possession of a large body of common terms, which proves 'nothing more than contact or cohabitation'¹¹). On the contrary, he tries to show that although Latin *pater*, Greek *patēr* and Sanskrit *pitar* form a family to which Tamil *appā* does not belong, yet Tamil *appā* is the reverse of the Sanskrit *apatyam* so that both may well have their origin from the Sanskrit root 'ap' meaning to produce or create. Just as Tamil *ammā* does not seem to belong to the well known family: *mēter*, *māter*, *mātar*, it may yet be closely related to the high Sanskrit *ambā*. As a philologist, thus, his interest seems to have been to find out the missing links between Tamil and Sanskrit, whereby he thought he could recreate the embryology of what he calls the Aryan speech. Be it noted that his use of 'Aryan' is wide enough to include what the European linguists have called Dravidian.

There are thus elements in Sri Aurobindo's studies on language whose value can be judged by comparative philologists. But since he wants to challenge some of the basic hypotheses of modern philologists, his thesis can be examined with fairness only by not taking those very hypotheses for granted. That may be both

an exciting and fruitful task, to which I would like to draw the attention of competent Indian scholars in the field. Since I am not a philologist, I do not feel competent to pursue that line of investigation.

What I want to do, in this essay, is to briefly expound and give some of my own thoughts on, two other most important contributions of Sri Aurobindo: first, his specific principle of Vedic interpretation, and secondly, his theory of the origin of language. The two in fact happen to be closely related in his mind.

As to the former:

"The hypothesis on which I shall conduct my own enquiry is that the Veda has a double aspect and that the two, though closely related, must be kept apart. The *Rishis* arranged the substance of their thought in a system of parallelism by which the same deities were at once internal and external Powers of universal Nature, and they managed its expression through a system of double values by which the same language served for their worship in both aspects. But the psychological sense predominates and is more pervading, close-knit and coherent than the physical."¹²

The following passage may serve as a brief illustration of how this interpretation has to be carried out:

"Thus *Agni* outwardly is the physical principle of fire, but inwardly the god of the psychic Godward flame, force, will, *Tapas*; *Sūrya* outwardly the solar light, inwardly the god of the illuminating revelatory Knowledge; *Soma* outwardly the moon and the *soma*-wine or nectarous moon-plant, inwardly the god of the spiritual ecstasy, *Ananada*."¹³

As to the question, why did the authors of the hymns use this device of concealing their true meaning, Sri Aurobindo makes use of the hypothesis that in ancient mystic cults mystic knowledge was regarded as sacred and so was communicated to the initiates alone. The hymns therefore were so written that they would have one sort of appeal to the layman and another to the initiate. Thus writes Sri Aurobindo:

"Hence they favoured the existence of an outer worship, effective but imperfect, for the profane, an inner discipline for the

initiate, and clothed their language in words and images which had, equally a spiritual sense for the elect, a concrete sense for the mass or ordinary worshippers."¹⁴

But in doing this, the authors of the Vedas were making use of a certain plasticity that characterised not only Vedic Sanskrit but all ancient languages, if Sri Aurobindo's theory of the origin of language be true. We have to bear in mind that the essay 'The Origins of Aryan Speech' is only a fragment of what was intended to be a much larger work. The fragment by itself does not develop a theory of the origin of language *as such*. The really valuable element in this essay, from the point of view of philosophy of language, then is the contrast that is drawn between ancient languages and modern languages. In the first place, modern speech is 'largely a fixed and almost artificial form, not precisely a fossil, but an organism proceeding towards arrest and fossilisation'.¹⁵ What Sri Aurobindo means is that in modern languages a word and its significance are bound by mere convention, whereas in ancient languages the words still carried the significance of their roots which succeeded in establishing a closer relation between sense and sound. Secondly, modern speech is characterised by fixed parts of speech, whereas in ancient tongues the same word could do the work of a noun, adjective, verb and adverb. The word '*cit*', for example, may equally well mean—in Vedic Sanskrit—to know, knowing, knower, knowledge and knowingly. It is of course well known that the principle 'one word—one meaning', if at all it ever holds good, is true of modern languages in a far greater degree than of the ancient ones where each word had different meanings and each meaning could be expressed by many different words.

Now ever since the discovery of Sanskrit, western linguists have been debating the question, if ever there was a pure root language, and today the consensus seems to be against such a hypothesis. However, what Sri Aurobindo means by the 'root state' of a language¹⁶ is perhaps not a language consisting primarily of roots, but one in which the root-meanings are very much predominant. Sanskrit, itself, compared to many other Indo-European languages, is an example of this. Structurally,

one can analyse any speech to its simplest, discernible *sound* elements, the phonemes (which by themselves are meaningless) and then reconstruct the complex sounds out of them. Similarly, one can analyse the complex *meanings* of formed words to the roots which signify a basic action, movement or function. In ancient speech, this root significance was still on the surface, and since the roots had different meanings, a whole family of them, words carried around them a complex net-work of meanings. But, as should be evident, there would seem to be a limit in this analysis. One can say that '*vrka*' means 'wolf' because the root '*vr*' signified 'tearing down', '*dalmi*' means 'Indra's thunderbolt' because '*dal*' meant to 'split' or 'crush'. But can we take another step backwards and ask, why did '*vr*' mean 'tearing down' and '*dal*' mean 'to split or crush'? Sri Aurobindo raises this question without giving any decisive answer. I do not see how one can come up with any satisfying answer in most cases—excepting cases where the root or the word is 'echoic' ('cuckoo') or where the word-sound tends to reproduce the sound of some movement (e.g. 'splash' in English, '*nirjhara*' in Sanskrit). What I am trying to say is that there seems to be a limit beyond which sound and sense, in most cases, cannot be brought to a *non-conventional* relation. Sri Aurobindo however seems to think¹⁷ that the original association between sense and sound was not conventional but 'natural, governed by simple and definite psychological laws'. If this is so, then—one cannot but wonder—how is it that even in the most ancient tongues the same sense came to be connected with different sounds? Sri Aurobindo makes two assertions about this embryonic state of language, both of which may be acceptable: that in their beginnings, language-sounds 'were rather the vocal equivalents of certain general sensations and emotion-values', and further that 'in the first state of language the word is as living or even a more living force than its idea', so that the 'sound determines sense'. The former assertion may quite well be true of a large class of significant sounds, but of many others it is open to doubt. The latter, in a very important sense, may be true—without entailing the consequence that ever, excepting the sorts of cases mentioned

above—the relation between sound and sense was non-conventional. The truth of the statement that in its embryonic state, the sounds of a language ‘determine sense’ but not *vice versa*, seems to me to lie precisely in what has already been pointed out: namely, that in ancient speech, the root-meanings are on the surface so that the root sounds determine the senses of the formed words. Therefore admitting that ultimately the relation between sound and sense is conventional, one may nevertheless recognise that a word which for the modern speaker relates to its signification entirely by convention, had a closer relation, through the predominance of its root meaning, for the consciousness of the user of the same word in ancient times. From a common ‘mother-root’, as is well known to the philologists, there arise, what Sri Aurobindo calls ‘common word-families’, ‘common word-clans’, ‘kindred word-nations’ (or languages). It requires a long period of development to arrive at even a *nearly* realised principle of one word—one meaning in the modern languages.

By the ‘multi-significance of roots’¹⁸ and so of the formed words as well, Sri Aurobindo means something much more radical and interesting than that words may be used symbolically, allegorically or metaphorically, or that apart from its primary meaning there may be a secondary meaning in use (*lakṣaṇā*) or even a poetic meaning. The radical thesis he is advocating is that words of ancient speech, by virtue of their roots, had several primary meanings related to each other by a sort of ‘family resemblance’ so that the word was not simply equivocal or ambiguous. But it rather signified, by virtue of the plasticity of its root, several interconnected meanings. Thus to take his example, the word ‘*Agni*’ of Vedic speech meant both ‘fire’ and ‘that which purifies’ amongst others. As we have seen, Sri Aurobindo’s Vedic interpretation rests upon this thesis.

There is also another aspect of the development of language to which Sri Aurobindo draws attention. In its early stage, language has at its disposal ‘a remarkably small stock of ideas’ which are ‘the most general notions possible and generally the most concrete, such as light, motion, touch, substance, extension,

force, speed, etc’. From this small stock, there arises gradually a process of differentiation and precision. “The progression”, he writes “is from the general to the particular, from the vague to the precise, from the physical to the mental, from the concrete to the abstract.”¹⁹ Now there is certainly much truth in this last remark, but I would like to modify it considerably. As some of my subsequent remarks will show, I do not think that we can ascribe to any language users physical concepts without also ascribing to them, by contrast, the mental concepts. For, the idea of the physical *quā* physical is defined by way of separating it off from the mental. Now, it seems to me a very plausible view that the ideas at the disposal of the early man were vague, and their vagueness comprehended entire regions of discourse without partitioning them off into distinct areas. The progression from vague ideas to precise ideas has been notably worked out in recent times by Husserl in his *Crisis*. But the opposition vague-precise does not coincide with that between physical and mental, though it does to a large measure coincide with that between concrete and abstract. Abstraction required precision, qualitative and quantitative. The stock of ideas at the disposal of the early mind were vague, but coherent, were prior to the distinction between the physical and the mental, and were concrete.

III

Let us now return to the principle of Vedic interpretation suggested by Sri Aurobindo. There is one objection to this principle, raised by Radhakrishnan,²⁰ which I would set aside at the very outset. Radhakrishnan argues that Sri Aurobindo’s interpretation goes against ‘what is known of the general nature of human development’, for it attributes to the primitive mind perceptions and abilities which could only be results of further growth. To me this argument is untenable. For, in the first place, admitting the general principle of evolution, the exact order, direction and nature of the evolution of the human mind can be fixed only *after* we know what the ancients experienced and thought rather than *vice versa*. In the second place, I tend to agree with

Eliade that 'almost all the religious attitudes man has, he has had from the most primitive times'.²¹ Besides, the evolution, growth and development of human mind as a whole is not from naivety to sophistication (the idea of the primitive man as naive is only a romantic myth), but from one sort of sophistication to another; not from lack of coherence to coherence,²² but from one sort of coherence to another. In other words, the development is not just linear but of an enormously complex pattern.

Against a 'naturalistic' interpretation of the ancient texts, as of any ancient document with its records of myths, rites, and symbolism, I would like to raise the following fundamental objection. Such an interpretation, according to which the ancient mind personifies and deifies what are natural forces or phenomena, is conceived from the point of view of the modern mentality. The so-called 'natural' forces or phenomena (sun, moon, fire, water) are first conceived as 'natural' in accordance with a concept of 'mere nature' that is only a later achievement of the human mind—an achievement which is such that it already implies a separation from its 'correlate', the spirit or the mental. It is only when such an absolute separation has been achieved and conceptually fixed, that one can speak of attributing to a natural entity the properties of spirit. But if—as seems to be the case—the Cartesian dualism was not the conceptual framework of the ancient minds, if nothing was for them merely natural, then it is misconceived and inappropriate to characterise their mode of thinking as a personification of natural phenomena. In fact, it would seem that for them what we call nature was already replete with spirit. To call their religion naturalistic is to try to understand, and then to underrate it in the light of our Cartesian framework. (The Cartesian framework characterises not only modern western thought, but also a large segment of classical Indian thought.) It is only by returning to their life-world that the true operation of ancient thinking (with its own peculiar forms of objectification) can be described.

However, may it not be that the same objection also holds good against Sri Aurobindo's approach? When Sri Aurobindo

says that the Vedic words have a double meaning—a physical and a psychological and that the authors intended both the sets of meanings but for different sorts of audience, isn't he also appealing to the same Cartesian dualism—though combining the two sorts of signification in the unity of a word? I think, there is a point in this objection. The word '*Agni*', Sri Aurobindo tells us, means both physical fire and psychic flame of purified will. If they are two distinct meanings—one physical and the other psychological—we are certainly back with the dualism which, it seems to me, should be overcome if we are to get at the ancient mind. It is perhaps more correct to say that physical fire had not yet acquired the significance of pure physicality, for this latter significance came to be constituted only after all spiritual and symbolic significance had been denuded out of it. If that is so, then '*Agni*' could have meant, not both physical fire *and* the inner purified will, but—in a curiously ambiguous manner—the two in their non-distinction. The 'merely physical' being a concept that was constituted later, the outer fire and the inner spiritual power were not distinguished as belonging to two distinct domains. The outer was a transparent symbol of the inner, the inner visible through the outer. The two formed one domain.

If this is so, we may retain the substance of Sri Aurobindo's Vedic interpretation, recognise the symbolic nature of Vedic speech, myths and rites, but discard the hypothesis that there was a deliberate effort on the part of the authors of the hymns to convey two distinct meanings—one for the initiates and the other for the laymen. The linguistic doctrine of the multiple significance of the roots is one that we accept, but this multiple significance only means that the different possible significations still belonged to one 'family', one ambiguous region within which determinate meanings could come into being—but not that the 'purely physical' and the 'purely psychological' meanings had as such emerged. It is to this region of ambiguity, and not to a deliberate equivocation, that we shall trace the nature of Vedic speech. The first attempts at separating the physical from the psychic is to be found then in the Upaniṣads.

IV

I may now sum up the points where I agree with Sri Aurobindo's views and the points where I have differed from them. I have found his views about the multiple meanings of the words, and the consequent plasticity of ancient speech, as contrasted with modern languages, extremely important and useful. I have tried to give sense to his emphasis on the root meanings, at the same time denying that there ever was a root language. What I have not accepted is his view that we can go back to a point, in the embryology of language, where the relation between sense and sound is natural and non-conventional (excepting a few select groups of cases). I have accepted his view that the progress of language is also the progress from vague ideas to precise ideas, from concrete to the abstract. But I have not accepted that it is also a progress from the physical to the mental ideas.

There is no question about the importance of Sri Aurobindo's Vedic hermeneutics. It is possibly the most significant attempt in modern times to interpret this record of ancient thought. In principle, I have accepted the thesis that Vedic words always carried a multi-layered significance. What seems to me to be not more than an interesting conjecture is that their authors should have used this plasticity deliberately to keep their inner significance secret. It seems to me rather that all the different dimensions of significance belong to the texts in a rather ambiguous unity, such that it would be a matter of different emphasis whether one today fixes upon the one or the other. But the fundamental unity of the concrete and the abstract, the physical and the mental, the inner and the outer was never lost sight of, just because these distinctions had not yet emerge in their present sharpness and antagonism. This also shows that interpretation of an ancient text is not a matter of mere linguistics, philology and grammar, but is inseparable from a phenomenology of religion.

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¹ Both contained in the volume *On the Veda*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1964.

- ² In: *Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Pondicherry, 1971, Vol. 9.
³ *ibid*, Vol. 11.
⁴ *On the Veda*, pp. 39-41.
⁵ e.g. his *The Savage Mind*, University of Chicago Press, 1966.
⁶ Mercia Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, E. Tr. by Rosemary Sheed, Meridian Books, 1963.
⁷ *ibid*, p. 10.
⁸ *ibid*, p. 10.
⁹ *ibid*, p. 455.
¹⁰ *ibid*, pp. 450 ff.
¹¹ *On the Veda*, p. 570.
¹² *On the Veda*, pp. 34-35.
¹³ *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, in: *Works*, Vol. II, pp. 461-467.
¹⁴ *On the Veda*, p. 6.
¹⁵ *On the Veda*, p. 576.
¹⁶ *On the Veda*, p. 589.
¹⁷ *On the Veda*, pp. 54-55.
¹⁸ *ibid*, p. 33.
¹⁹ *ibid*, p. 56.
²⁰ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 70.
²¹ Eliade, *loc. cit.*, p. 463.
²² Thus Sri Aurobindo: "We must recognise that the old religions were organic systems founded on ideas which were at least as coherent as those which constitute our modern systems of belief." (*On the Veda*, p. 30). Referring to ancient 'magical' thought, Levi-Strauss writes: "it is in a sense complete in itself, and as finished and coherent in its immateriality as the substantial being which it precedes . . . It forms a well-articulated system, and in this respect independent of that other system which constitutes science . . ." (*The Savage Mind*, p. 13).

THE CONCEPT OF INTEGRAL KNOWLEDGE: SRI AUROBINDO

S. K. CHATTOPADHYAYA

THE PHILOSOPHY of Sri Aurobindo is called 'Integral non-dualism'. Reality is conceived in it as a non-dual integral unity or 'one'. The knowledge which is appropriate in its regard and can reveal its form and content is integral knowledge. This knowledge is not ordinary sense-knowledge, and no sense-knowledge can apprehend Reality as an integral unity. Nor is it a knowledge which is the work of purely logical reason or understanding. Sri Aurobindo is not a speculative philosopher like Plato, Spinoza, Hegel and Bosanquet. As a man of great erudition, he was acquainted with the latest discoveries in modern science as also with the traditional truths of revelation that the Hindu scriptures, particularly, the Gita and the Upanisads, embody. But the knowledge which he had acquired not only entered into the depths of his mind but it also caused a wholesale transformation of his entire life and being. Knowledge of his conception is not simply *informative* knowledge; it is *transformative* wisdom. To have and to appraise the knowledge of the integral type, mere reading and intellectual comprehension is not enough. The path to integral knowledge runs through the integral Yoga. Now, since we have not trodden that path, our description and interpretation of the different vistas of the integral experience may be compared with the study of Geology and Geography by means of maps and sketches.

It has been a great misfortune for Indian Philosophy that most of the prominent Indian Philosophers have, in spite of their insistence to the contrary, become founders of religious sects, averse to a free and frank discussion, and an objective assessment of the themes and thoughts which the great systems embody. The philosophy of Sri Aurobindo is no exception to this tradition. But whatever heresy or profanation a comparative and critical study of these religious, otherwise called spiritual,

philosophies may involve, their values as philosophies are rather enhanced than diminished by academic discussions. The integral non-dualism of Sri Aurobindo has been given the name '*Pūrṇa advaita*' by its adherents. Consistency with this usage then demands that integral knowledge should be named '*pūrṇa prajñā*' and integral Yoga should be called '*pūrṇa yoga*'. This, to my mind, seems going too far. A spirit of moderation would be more commendable, since the epithet 'purna' like the epithet 'śuddha' used by Vallabhācārya, involves unnecessary disparagement of other systems of nondualism. The concept of integrality, as it has been introduced by Sri Aurobindo in his 'meditative' philosophy, has certain peculiarities. An integral unity is, of course, very much different from pure 'one-ness' which is exclusive of, and repellent to, all differences and multiplicities. But it is neither a mere totality, an 'and-summation', nor again, an organic unity of parts. Nor is it a pure functional unity. Functional differences *are* there. In between stages or spheres of being, these may even seem radical. But no dialectical unity, a synthesis of opposites which are simply complementaries, and lose their individuality or separateness in the whole by physical merger, so to say, is contemplated. *Here, there is no merger and no absolute merging.* In the upper level, called the upper hemisphere, there are different 'poises' of the *identical one* which is *not a whole* at all—the 'poises' which co-exist and through each of which the self-same one is *fully* manifested. The 'poises' are not, therefore, *parts*, nor are they *aspects*, which are complementary to each other;—absurd although it may appear, they supplement each other without transgressing the law of unity and oneness, and dissipating it into two, or any *multiple*. In the lower level, called the lower hemisphere, the integral one becomes self-forgetful as it were; it involves itself in the apparently radical multiplicities, the manifested mundane pluralities which are the objects of ordinary sense-knowledge. These sensible pluralities which are phenomenal are, again, sought to be brought under the supramundane and supramental integral unity or oneness by what is called a 'spiritual' regeneration and *material* transformation of the existential pluralities in course of a process of

evolution, which though *gradual*, is, at the same time, *emergent*. The distinction of the hemispheres, again, is not completely obliterated, nor are the two hemispheres kept completely apart from one another. As before, they are reconciled as two 'poises' of the Infinite Reality which is 'integral' and *One*.

This 'integrality' was revealed in the Yogic vision of Sri Aurobindo as, at once, the Reality and the Truth, and this, again, is an integral unity, an 'one'. Knowledge may be conceived in two ways. It may be the *goal* itself, the truth in which a gradual process of discovery terminates or consummates. It may, again, be regarded as the *process* itself which can only be understood in terms of a movement *in time*. The goal itself, the 'perfected' knowledge, need not be conceived in relation to time in terms of any temporal process; it may be regarded simply as the 'truth', and in so far as it becomes indistinguishable from reality or 'fact', whatever may be its metaphysical status, it can be, and should be taken as something *non-temporal*. An integral knowledge, if there be such a thing, cannot, however, be a 'knowledge' before the goal is reached. It is to consummate in an integral unity, it is to attain an indivisible one-ness, and it is only when this is achieved, can it pass for an integral knowledge. And this is not all. It cannot be a 'many'; although knowledges and facts can be, and *are*, a 'many'. The very notion of *integration*, of an 'integral unity' or one-ness is repellant to exclusion, any unachieved oneness or divisibility, needing further relation of cohesion. Does it admit of *degrees*? Can there be a greater or lesser integration just as there can be a greater or lesser comprehension, or a more intensive or less intensive union? It seems that the very notion of *integral* or *integrated* unity, union, or one-ness, is repellant to the notion of degrees, or gradation. Nothing is an integral unity if it lacks cohesiveness in *any* degree or proportion, if it has not achieved an indivisible oneness, an unbreakable unity. But this is not enough as far as Sri Aurobindo is concerned. An Indivisible unity or one may be unbreakable or indivisible without losing self-identity in several ways:— (a) as a 'pure' and simple *one*,—which loses itself in any attempted division; (b) as an organic whole or functional unity—an orga-

nismic whole; (c) as a dialectical unity or synthesis which loses itself if analysed into the pair or opposites; (d) an integral unity, if reduced to *parts* or even to *aspects*, fails to express its entirety,—its infinitude being reduced to a plurality of forms which lack their *essential identity*, their identity of reference. This identity of reference on behalf of the *parts, components, functions* or *aspects* is not present in the simple one, in the dialectical unity, in the organic or the so-called organismic whole. This is present in the integral unity or one-ness of Sri Aurobindo's conception. And this, to my mind, is the most vital point which has been overlooked by those, who, so rashly and readily, have taken the integral unity that Sri Aurobindo speaks of, in the sense of a dialectical synthesis, an organic or even an organismic unity.

A sense of identity, or what we have otherwise called an identity of reference may be one of two forms—pure or absolute sameness, and the sense of 'being-same-as'. The first is pure identity which although spoken of as a relation is no relation at all. The word, in this context, is calculated to express a *pseudo*-relation, and this is clearly brought out by its negative equivalent, viz. absolute 'non-other-ness' (*ananyatvam*). This may be called *exclusive* identity. Identity in the sense of 'being-same-as' is a *relational* concept. It expresses *essential* identity which is non-exclusive of physical separateness or manifestational many-ness. This may be called *inclusive* identity, and this is not merely an identity-in-difference, nor, again, simply an identity in spite of difference—and these are the expressions which are in common use in the traditional philosophies, both Eastern and Western,—this is an identity of a very unique kind. This can be called *spiritual identity* or identity *in the spirit*. All writings of Sri Aurobindo abound with the usage of the word 'spirit'. This is an English word which, I am sure, has been used in a unique and peculiar Aurobindonian sense. The idea of a disembodied soul, elemental or non-elemental, ghostly or otherwise, does not come in. The spirit is the 'self', provided you do not isolate or abstract it from the seat of its manifestations. The 'spirit' is the identity-principle itself. We are *one in spirit*. The spirit is the principle of integral oneness or unity. It is the very principle of integration. This meaning

becomes quite clear and evident when we remember that, according to Sri Aurobindo, the mundane pluralities will be divinised and spiritualised (also immortalised) when their self identity will be discovered and their integral unity *with* and *in* the 'spirit' will emerge as a fact through evolution. If the cosmic evolution has only one object, a single purpose, then, that consists in the refinding of the 'self', which means the principle, or the sense, of identity, and *this is spirit*.

Integral unity or oneness implies *essential* identity or *spiritual* identity. This is 'inclusive' identity and not 'exclusive' identity. This other conception is Śaṅkarite or Advaitic. In exclusive, otherwise called, pure or absolute identity, the very fact of relatedness is known to be as much a false appearance as the fact of distinctness or separation. In inclusive identity, the fact of distinctness or separation (in spite of the fact that there may be plural manifestations) is known to be false, a distortion caused by *avidyā*; but the fact of relatedness is known to be true, and also known to be intrinsic and integral. The plural manifestations are neither parts (since the partless can have no parts) nor aspects (since aspects are incomplete in themselves and will have to be taken as complementaries) but are different 'poises' of the indivisible one. This is not the place to assess the relative merits or defects of the two rival formulations of the identity principle. It may be more important to decide by what method or means this identity-principle in either formulation can be *known* as the defining character of Reality and Truth.

This knowledge, according to both Śaṅkar and Sri Aurobindo, is not our ordinary knowledge by sense or understanding, or by both at once. "The integral knowledge", says Sri Aurobindo, "is something that is already there in the integral Reality; it is not a new or still non-existent thing that has to be created, acquired, learned, invented or built up by the mind; it must rather be discovered or uncovered; it is a truth that is self-revealed to a spiritual endeavour; for it is there veiled in our deeper and greater self; it is the very stuff of our own spiritual consciousness, and it is by awaking to it even in our surface self that we have to possess it. There is an integral self knowledge that we have to

recover and, because the world-self also is our self, an integral world-knowledge. A knowledge that can be learned or constructed by the mind exists and has its value, but that is not what is meant when we speak of the 'Knowledge' and the 'Ignorance'.¹ After this long quotation from Śri Aurobindo we need not add another from Śri Śaṅkarācārya himself. Be it only remembered and noted that that great Ācārya goes to the extent of condemning all our conventional methods or sources of knowledge, including the scriptural authority, as vitiated by ignorance and falsity. H. P. Sullivan² finds the distinction drawn by Śri Aurobindo between the 'true truths of things' and the 'practical truths of things', and he notes that the former kind of knowledge is knowledge by identity which is very much different from sense knowledge or ratiocination. But what Śaṅkar or Śri Aurobindo seems to insist is not simply that different ways or modes of knowing will have to be admitted with regard to different *kinds* of truths, but what is more fundamental, our ordinary conception of knowledge-situation will have to be radically revised. Knowledge is not *generated* or newly caused in the mind which is originally a *tabula rasa*. Nor does the mind possess knowledge as *innate ideas*. Knowledge consists in 'opening' our minds and other sense-organs to Reality or Truth which *is* there already. Reality or Truth is hidden or veiled by ignorance which as a power not only *covers* up Reality or Truth but frequently *distorts* them also. By attending to, concentrating, contemplating, overcoming Samskāras which impede, and by 'opening' the mind to Reality or truth, we become 'bearers' of Truth or truths which are already there. Knowledge thus involves in being in a *special state*, not only of the mind, but of the entire mechanism which is supposed to have any connection with knowledge. This basic contention of the intuitionists, mystics and revelationists has been very forcefully repudiated by the present day logical empiricists, analysts, and positivists. It is, therefore, necessary to reply to the objections of these critics before developing Śri Aurobindo's concepts of integral knowledge and integral Reality any further.

Prof. Ayer³ in his analysis of knowledge-situation, has raised

certain objections against the view that to know one is required to be in a *special state* of the mind which is clearly distinguishable from the states which are involved in believing, guessing, doubting etc. He does not, however, dispute the fact that knowledge involves an *assurance*, a right to be sure and a claim that what is known must be the case. The three characteristics which taken together cover both the *necessary* and the *sufficient* conditions of knowledge are, according to him: (a) what is known must be the case, (b) one must be sure about it and (c) one must have the *right* to be sure. The first two may in themselves provide for the 'necessary' conditions but the third must be there to guarantee that the conditions are both 'sufficient' and 'necessary'. Ayer is of the opinion that the admission of these conditions does not involve the supposition that in knowledge one must be in a peculiar or a special state of the mind which is unique and very much different from other mental states such as believing etc. The assumption of such a special state, Ayer continues, has created certain pseudo-problems of epistemology. The Rationalists' advocacy for *pure reason*, the theologians' advocacy for revelation, the mystics' claim for *intuition*, and even the submission made by some empiricists, like Hume, that some sort of a special *sentiment* accompanies a cognitive state, have vitiated all enquiries in traditional epistemology and given rise to all sorts of metaphysical non-sense—thus Ayer sums up. The *grounds* which may help dispelling such 'transcendental illusions' (Kant), and ridding the mind of idiosyncrasies of the most vicious type, are the following; (1) The verb 'to know' is, as Mr. Ryle would say, a capacity-word; 'knowing', which may be either 'knowing what' or 'knowing how' very often stands for a *dis-position* and *not* for any *conscious* state or *conscious* activity at all. (2) The *right* to be sure is *extraneous* to the mental state; it is, as a matter of fact, attached to the state itself or detached from it in the presence or absence of some external evidence. (3) The truth-claim, or the subjective feeling of being sure about the truth, which a knowledge situation involves, is purely *attitudinal*, not *final*; it does not give any *infallibility* to the feeling. All modes of knowing have certain family resemblance but no special

warrant, no special claim to infallibility is admissible in respect of knowing of a particular kind, such as, intuition, revelation, reason or experience. To sum up, knowing does not enjoy any *special* character, such as, *consciousness*; the assurance it involves is purely attitudinal and this does not have any special character, such as infallibility; the *right to be sure* which it involves is nothing intrinsic to it;—it is extrinsic, since knowledge can enjoy this trait in the presence of evidence, and forfeits it in its absence. Ergo, to know does not mean to be in a very special kind of mental state.

The first objection does not seem to have any force; it is also somewhat beside the point. That knowing is very often dispositional, and is a form of capacity, does not disprove the fact that, as the disposition or capacity continues to function or 'open up', some new development takes place, such as, a thing or theme becomes *revealed* in its entirety, or an accomplished work is progressively *enjoyed* in consciousness. Instead of calling the disposition or capacity by the name 'knowing' why not call the state of realization or execution, the end-product, by the same name? It is beside the point since no mental state as such is 'consciousness' any more than an opening of eye is colour-perception. The mental state becomes a conscious state by terminating in knowledge which means by 'opening up' to consciousness or conscious realisation. The so-called dispositional mental state or the latent capacity is not 'knowing' or 'knowledge'. It is a peculiar functional development of the disposition or capacity that opens up to knowledge or conscious ascertainment. The second objection that no knowledge is infallible and so the subjective assurance which knowledge involves is attitudinal and not final involves drawing a wrong conclusion from a true premise. It may be a fact that no determinate knowledge has finality or absolute infallibility. But this does not disprove the fact that every knowledge, as and when it occurs, has or makes an absolute claim to infallibility and that this feeling of absolute certainty or infallibility is an essential characteristic of all knowledge, although this claim may subsequently prove to be false. (4) It is not true that its ultimate falsifiability is felt *simultaneously with*

its claim to absolute infallibility. So the first characteristic does not disprove the second. Nor is it a fact that ultimate falsifiability is *known* before *actual* falsification. So, we *do not know* that such and such knowledge is not infallible or final before it is falsified by some 'other' knowledge which, in its own turn, claims to be infallible and final unless it is also falsified then and there. The position is: truth-sense and reality-sense admit of no vacuum. *Some* knowledge or some *other* knowledge, some fact or some other fact continues to lay claim to absolute unrejectability till it is rejected or sublated by some other truth or some other reality, advancing and defending the very *same claim*.

The third objection is grotesque. It seems to imply that nothing can be known or accepted as knowledge unless it is proved to be true. We can not be sure about the truth of a knowledge unless we have the right to be sure. And what is knowledge if it is not known to be true? But this is not all. It is also necessary that there must exist the *right* to be sure about its truth. This is the objection. Now, the question is: what does ensure this right? It must be, according to this view, some condition *extrinsic* to the knowledge itself. But this leads to difficulties. It may be a fact that knowledge involves an objective reference, and that this object is believed to be somehow independent of knowledge, and that the mental situation we call 'knowledge' is believed to conform to the object in some way. But all these seem to be *formal claims* intrinsic to knowledge, and these cannot be proved, materially or finally, by any *extraneous* reference.⁵ Ayer also seems to be aware of this difficulty when he says that the right to be sure is attitudinal, not *final*, and what we *know* to be true is not infallibly true. He further admits that there may be a truth although we may not know it,⁶ and what we know as true may prove to be false subsequently, and we may come to realise that what we once claimed to know, we did not really know.⁷ It is not, therefore, quite understandable why after so much of admission, he should still insist that the right to be sure is no characteristic of the mental state and that it depends on some extraneous factor or condition, possibly on verification. And it is not also understandable, if he were so

very sure about the criterion of true knowledge, and believed it to be objective, why he should adopt a subjective criterion, such as, absolute immunity from doubt, or indubitability,⁸ and come to conclude through application of that criterion that no factual statements, other than what he call 'degenerate' statements or mere 'ejaculations', such as, 'I think', and 'I exist', can be immune from doubt and so true.

The fact is: a state of knowledge is very much different from a provisional supposition, an opinion, or a state of doubt. Knowledge does not involve an initial doubt as to the legitimacy of its truth-claim. That claim to truth is taken for granted, nay, it is upheld absolutely and unconditionally. This does not mean that what is believed to be true, and, therefore, to be a knowledge, remains so for ever. In spite of its initial and intrinsic claim to absolute infallibility, it may perish and may be replaced by another knowledge having exactly the same sort of claim. So an argument based on non-ultimacy or fallibility of a knowledge or a truth does not disprove the fact that knowledge or truth has or makes a claim to ultimacy and infallibility and that this is intrinsic to all knowledges. Thus, knowledge seems to involve not only a *special* but also a peculiar state of the mind.

If the right to be sure be not a part of what we may call 'intrinsic' character of knowledge, can it be better enforced by any extraneous circumstances, such as, objective evidence or test? Is not that evidence or test itself a subjective device, since it is left to the mind to certify what can be an evidence or test in the given case and what cannot be so? Without that certificate from the mind the so-called evidence being itself an 'experience' will need another experience to serve for its own evidence and this will involve an infinite regress. If again, as the view maintains, knowledge requires fulfilment of the condition, such as, our right to be sure in term of certain extra and extraneous evidence, then it can be held that we do not have any knowledge before that condition is fulfilled, and so, the *condition is itself included in the developmental formation of knowledge*, and it is neither additional nor extraneous. For the manifestation of knowledge or truth-experience, quite a large number of conditions, both subjective

and objective, may have to be fulfilled as preliminaries. Such conditions taken together constitute the knowledge-situation and do not fall outside of it. What is noteworthy is only this that nothing can fulfil the mission of knowledge if it is not 'revelatory' of a content in being sure of it, and 'self-revelatory' in being sure of its own truth.⁹ This gives certain special qualities to knowledge, be that knowledge understood as a conscious mental state or an alert physiological 'set-up', or a form of conscious intelligence, or simply, consciousness in an objective formation which is limited and temporal.¹⁰ Sense-knowledge and intellect, intuition or revelation—each has a claim to knowledge of this kind, although their sphere or province may differ. Experiences are all varied, both qualitatively and quantitatively, but each and every experience expresses some truth whatever may be its volume or trade-mark.

A more formidable objection has been raised by some and it is this: how are we to decide which intuition or revelation can be credited with truth in the event of there being conflicting claims in them? There is claim of revelation in almost all religions, and the so-called spiritual intuitions of seers and prophets vary. Under this circumstance, how is it possible to take a decision in favour of a particular view of Reality and truth by preference? One reply may be that the different intuitive views are *but alternative formulations of the same Reality or truth in terms of attitudinal adjustments in the mental set-up or receptivity of the individual which is also a part of the very same Truth and Reality.* Variety in revelation can also be explained in the same way. Our personal decision in favour of any one of them is determined by our personal choice.¹¹

The integral knowledge of Sri Aurobindo is not an intellectual concept, not a speculative ideal. It is a progressive discovery from the human angle, and a progressive manifestation from the divine angle, of a truth which is eternally complete and 'is already there in the 'integral Reality', as Sri Aurobindo regards it. Truth is not *made*; truth is found or discovered. The *discovery*, which also is *manifestation in human psyche* of the divine truth-consciousness, is conditioned by two movements, or processes picture-

quely described as 'ascent' and 'descent'. The 'discovery' and 'manifestation' are parts of the same evolutionary movement, the ultimate purpose of which is realised in the removal of the veil of lower Māyā, called Avidyā or ignorance, and in divinizing and thus transforming a nature which was mundane and mortal. As a truth of realisation through temporal process, it does not, however, abolish completely the speciality of the erstwhile distinction between the upper hemisphere and the lower hemisphere. *It only makes the one the realisation of the other*, and, in this way, the hemispheres become two 'poises' of the same integral Reality or Truth-experience, — one eternally complete, and the other completing itself in eternal time. Avidyā or Ignorance which standing as a veil between the upper and the lower hemispheres caused an apparent separation and distinction between the two is not completely negated or abolished in the development of this integral knowledge. It under goes transformation and becomes a form of Vidyā, and forges the missing 'link' between the Divine Truth and the divinized mundane truth, and expresses them as integral parts of the same truth.

With a view to clarifying the meaning of what he means by integral knowledge Sri Aurobindo distinguishes four characteristically different 'Theories of Existence'.¹² These are the supra-cosmic, the cosmic-terrestrial the supraterrrestrial or other-worldly, and the integral theory. The supra-cosmic takes the transcendent reality or the Absolute alone as real, and all else as illusion. This he identifies with the Advaita view of Śaṅkar. The second, the cosmic-terrestrial is its radical opposite, since it does not believe in anything transcendent but takes the world alone as real and the so-called supracosmic or divine as a fiction. The Supraterrrestrial admits the notion of a 'beyond,' but fails to establish any *living link* between this world and the world of the Divine Being. It believes in the pure temporality and instability of this world, and, in this sense, it is other-worldly. His own views, he calls the integral or the synthetic view. It not only admits the reality of the Supracosmic and the cosmic, what is a more important characteristic of his view is, as Śri Aurobindo thinks, it establishes harmony between the two apparently polar

religions of existence. It not only admits the reality of the evolving individual and the evolving cosmic order or the world, but what is more important, it reconciles the reality of these two orders with the supreme order of the supracosmic Reality by viewing the Reality as an integral unity both transcendent of, and immanent in them. The integral knowledge, in this context, stands for the knowledge of the integral Reality, both *immanent* and *transcendent*.

From the stand-point of evolving consciousness or spirituality in the phenomenal, limited and finitised individual, the integral knowledge of Śrī Aurobindo's conception can be described as a process of *re-finding or reclaiming* the original unity or integrality in the spirit or the gnostic being which was progressively engrossed or veiled in Ignorance as a part of the *normal* process of *involution* of the spirit in Matter, but never lost completely. This engrossing or veiling, otherwise called *involution*, happened in course of the normal play of delight, figuratively described in the scriptures as *Māyā* or *Lilā*. The process of gradual integration of knowledge has been described by Śrī Aurobindo as a transition 'out of the seven-fold Ignorance towards the seven-fold knowledge'.¹³ This development has also been described as the triple process of 'heightening, widening and integration' of the lower principles in the higher. From inconscience in the physical existence to infra-conscience in the vital, from infra-conscience to conscience in the mental life and, there-after in course of progressive widening and unfolding through the different layers of the subliminal consciousness, such as, sub-conscience, circum-conscience and super-conscience, there may be a final passage through the supramental into the gnostic being or existence. Śrī Aurobindo is opposed to any wholesale condemnation of the *Avidyā* or Ignorance. *Avidyā* has a natural tendency to reform itself gradually in order to terminate in the immortal consciousness called *vidyā*—*avidyayā mrtyum tīrtā vidyayāmṛtamaśnute*. This *vidyā* which is the realm of supra-mental consciousness in the supermind is the consummation of knowledge as an evolving process in time. It has *three* forms corresponding to the *three* types of conscious self-

realisation or truths of the supermind, otherwise called the Truth-consciousness, as the Transcendent spirit, as the cosmic spirit and as the spiritual individual called *Jivātman*. In this progressive development of integral experience the lower principles are not completely lost; they are only transformed or *reformed* in a higher, wider and more unified experience. There is no complete marging or disappearance, negation or sublation at any stage. And this distinguishes Śrī Aurobindo's conception of *Vidyā* from Śrī Śāṅkar's conception.

This integral knowledge or experience, which, according to Śrī Aurobindo, is the Truth-experience or *Satya-darśana* is not a human manipulation. This integral knowledge or truth is 'something that is already there in the integral Reality'. So, now, the question comes: What is this integral Reality of Śrī Aurobindo's conception. Śrī Aurobindo is best understood by contrast with Śrī Śāṅkarāchārya. Both are non-dualists, both adhere to the identity-principle, but their formulation, nay, let me say, their intuitions of the ultimate Reality, *Brahman*, that is, their *brahmāvagati*, are different. Both regard Reality *as itself* absolutely ineffable, beyond all powers of thought and speech—*avāṅgmanaso-goçara*. Both again, speak of its essence or essential nature as *Saccidānanda*. Both, again, bring in the concepts of *Māyā* and *Avidyā* to explain differentiation of the One into Many and to explain the transition from the lower, the ignorant and the given stratum of existence, to the Life Eternal, the Immortality. Both, again, have their foot in the self-same revealed truths of the scriptures. But, in addition, Śrī Aurobindo received an orientation? in the advanced knowledge of modern science, and to that extent, his view may be said to be a synthesis of science and philosophy, of the Western Tradition through recasting and remoulding in the hoary spiritual tradition of India and the East. But, in spite of these points of similarity, their visions of Reality and Truth as also their attitudes towards the life as it is ordinarily lived, are very much different. Śrī Śāṅkar's *Brahman*, although immanent in the cosmic appearance which consists of an apparent plurality of *Jivas* and their integrated totality called the phenomenal Uni-verse, is, as itself, absolutely transcendent.

Brahman is the 'true self' of both the world and the *Jivas*. It is not their integral unity or one-ness, and in that sense, their identity, as Śri Aurobindo would have expressed; it is their *pure* identity, their relation is non-otherness (*ananyatā*) which is *not* a relation although expressed as that. The cosmic appearances, including the *Jivas*, disappear in, or merge in, the pure consciousness which is Brahman, as soon as the cosmic nescience which covers it up, and distorts (apparently) it into the world of plurality—a floating appearance like the snake in the rope experienced in illusion, can be got over or penetrated. This cosmic principle of nescience or its individual edition called *avidyā* is not a fact in addition to, or a *śakti* or power inherent in the Absolute, as many anti-śāṅkarites including Śri Aurobindo himself, would suppose. It is a principle of indeterminability, neither real nor unreal. So long as it is not understood or grasped in its true complexion, that is, as a cosmic illusion, the world of phenomenal pluralities which it *projects* is not only taken to be real, but even as *absolutely* real, and this principle instead of being understood as Ignorance or *ajñāna* is readily and unreservedly taken as *vidyā* or *jñāna* is readily and unreservedly taken as *vidyā* or *Jñāna*. But when this *māyā* or *avidyā* is discovered as the dark veil shrouding the mystery of the spirit from its own manipulation, —the ignorant *jivas*, the veil is known to be unsubstantial, and it automatically melts away, and the cosmic pluralities of *jivas* previously taken to be the absolute realities regain their apparently lost pure identity in the boundless, self-shining, blissful consciousness which is their reality. *Sat*, *Cit* and *ānanda* are not component qualities determining the essence of the Indeterminate, nor are they the speakable representations or, to use an Aurobindonian term, the 'ideation' of the ineffable and the inconceivable. These are, no doubt, taken as *svarūpa-lakṣaṇas* of Brahman, but these are to be taken negatively for the exigency of the complete transcendence of Brahman as other than the *asat*, other than the *jada* and other than the bounded and crippled. Thus, the transcendental one, the Brahman, is the reality of all, since the collective pluralities called *Jagat* as a false appearance is neither real nor unreal, and the *Jivas*, in

their true essence, are absolutely one with Brahman which is their pure identity.

To Śri Aurobindo, on the other hand, Brahman as the integral unity is really both immanent and transcendent. They are only distinguishable 'poises' of the same Reality integrated as the one. *Sat*, *cit* and *ānanda* are similarly different 'poises' of the integral Reality which is both expressed through them, and again, in their aspect of unity or one-ness, is ineffable, indeterminate and mysterious. *Sat* is pure formless existence, the quiescent, the tranquil and this is the *nirguṇa* 'poise' of the Param Brahman, the Puruṣottama. *Cit* is conceived in a somewhat non-traditional sense.¹⁴ It is not pure consciousness, it is consciousness—Energy. *Ānanda* is free quiescent *sat*, coupled with the free delight called Bliss, expresses itself as the order of Becoming, the free creation in the exigency of the delight of *līlā*. This expresses Brahman as *saḡuṇa*, the Truth-consciousness, the supermind, the Creator, sustainer and the destroyer of the world in exhibition of his diverse 'poises' in free play. This supermind has three phases or 'poises', as the creator etc. of the world of pluralities, *nature naturans*, as the cosmic whole (*nature*) and as the totality of the spiritual individuals (*nature naturata?*). This is the realm of Truth, the upper hemisphere of Śri Aurobindo's conception. Although differentiated into the spiritual individuals (*Jivātman*) there is no abrogation of the aspect of one-ness or unity—so the integration is not dissipated.¹⁵ But an apparent dissipation begins down the realm of *avidyā*. The upper realm of the diverse manifestation of the spirit, the realm of individuation in the exigency of the delight of free-play in which the sense of unity is not lost is called *Māyā*. In the lower hemisphere, the spirit, to enjoy the play as a serious affair of life, as it were, gets itself engrossed in Ignorance or *avidyā*, and in being rendered self-forgetful, accept the phenomenal division as real separation in which the relation of integration is completely dissipated and lost in consciousness. The spirit, then, gets itself involved in the diverse products of creation—in mind, Psyche, Life and Matter. But this separatist-movement only represents one 'poise' of the play. This is involution in which the spirit conceals itself

in various sheaths—mental, vital and physical. Evolution and the consequent emergence of integral knowledge or truth through gradual ascent of the lower orders of being into higher till the supramental consciousness or the supermind descends down into the reformed and purified, disentangled and widening mundane form, particularly, in the super-consciousness of the aspirant Man, gives the other side of the picture. A thorough divinization of the earthly and the mundane takes place, and ultimately, there emerges a whole race of supramental individuals, turning the earth itself into the emergent Divine. But this development does not end in the absolute merging of the two hemispheres. They, again, form an integral unity of the Truth-consciousness which is non-temporal and the truth-realisation which shapes itself through temporal process. Thus Śrī Aurobindo retains the reality of the individual both in the lower and the higher aspects or 'poises' of the spirit Divine which is the integral identity of the plural, not their absolute and unqualified oneness. This spirit is the Bhargodeva of the *gāyatri mantra* who is the light of all the seven world-orders, *bhu, bhūva, sva, maha, jana, tapas* and *satyam*, and who inspires us all to rise up and realise His integral one-ness by involving His own intelligence or consciousness in us in varied proportions (*dhiyo yoh nah procodayāt*). *Om Tat Sat OM*.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- ¹ *Life Divine* Bk II, part II, Ch. XV pp. 633-34.
- ² See his paper in
- ³ Ayer—*The problem of knowledge* Ch. I Sec. (iii)
- ⁴ Cp. The svatahprāmānya Theory of the Mimāṃsā and the Vedānta.
- ⁵ All the theories of Truth, pragmatic theory not excluded, ultimately leads up to the criterion of *non-contradictedness so far*, which cannot serve as any ultimate guarantee of truth. Cp. also the criticism of the paratahprāmānya theories.
- ⁶ So, truth may be independent of our knowledge of it. Such unknown truths can only be metaphysical.
- ⁷ So, knowledge may turn out to be an error, a false knowledge.
- ⁸ Ayer—*The problem of knowledge*—Ch. I and II.
- ⁹ This svatah-prakāśatā of cognition is accepted by both Prābhākar Mimāṃsā and the Vedānta.

- ¹⁰ Cp. Vṛttiçaitanya of the Advaitists in the Vedānta Paribhāṣā, Ch. I.
- ¹¹ Sri Aurobindo does not accept this view since he speaks of one intuition being corrected by a more perfect intuition. *L. D.* p. 66. But even this can be possible if both intuitions belong to the *same* person. So the personal factor remains.
- ¹² *Life Divine* Bk II part II Ch. XVI pp. 667-682.
- ¹³ *Life Divine* Bk II part I p. 584. In the present essay, Transition from Ignorance to knowledge has been explained independently on the lines of gradual 'ascent' or evolution, terminating in the final 'descent' of the super-mind.
- ¹⁴ Prof. Aurobindo Basu could not share this view. The view of 'çit' as a 'śakti' is not peculiar to Śrī Aurobindo. Schools of Vedānta who repudiate the Śāṅkarite concept of Māyā speak of various śaktis in the Lord including 'çit'. But the point of contention is if the Upaniṣads themselves take 'çit' in the sense of śakti, energy or force.
- ¹⁵ An excellent exposition of the nature of the super-mind which is the most crucial concept of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy can be found in Dr. S. C. Chatterjee's essay.

SRI AUROBINDO'S CONCEPTION OF INTEGRAL KNOWLEDGE

NIROD BARAN CHAKRAVORTI

SRI AUROBINDO'S Conception of Integral Knowledge relates to his conception of Integral Reality for the attainment of which he prescribes an elaborate process of integral yoga. Our task in this paper is to explicate the concept of Integral Knowledge.

I

'An integral knowledge', holds Sri Aurobindo, 'presupposes an integral Reality; for it is the power of Truth-Consciousness which is itself the consciousness of the Reality'.¹ This shows that for understanding integral knowledge an understanding of integral Reality is a necessary pre-requisite. So we shall begin with the concept of integral Reality.

Sri Aurobindo admits three possible conceptions of Reality from three possible angles of vision and speaks of them as (1) intensive, (2) extensive and (3) inclusive and comprehensive. To quote Sri Aurobindo himself, 'our idea and sense of Reality vary with our status and movement of consciousness, its sight, its stress, its intakes of things; that sight or stress can be intensive and exclusive or extensive, inclusive and comprehensive.'²

The intensive and exclusive Reality refers to the Indeterminate Brahman of Samkara. It is intensive as only an intense search into the depth of oneself can reveal It. It is exclusive as withdrawal from externality or objectivity paves the way for the inwardisation and deepening of the spirit. The admission of the sole reality of Brahman as the Inmost Self (Pratyagatman) implies the rejection of the world and even the rejection of rejection as false. So the Reality which is positively intensive is negatively exclusive. This conception of Reality holds up the ascetic ideal in which, Sri Aurobindo opines, "the great vedantic formula, 'one without a second' has not been read sufficiently in the light of that

other formula equally imperative, 'All this is the Brahman'.³ In order to stress on the unity of our experience, plurality here has been sacrificed. Justice to unity here leads to injustice to plurality. To Sri Aurobindo, this conception of Reality is obviously one-sided.

The extensive view of Reality leads to the conception of extensive Reality. The view is extensive when we do not dive deep into the self, but extend our view to the vast wide universe. Multiplicity, dynamicity and width are emphasized in this view at the cost of unity, staticity and depth. Reality is grasped here as wide, immanent and dynamic. The conception of extensive Reality can do justice to multiplicity, change and becoming. But Being in silence and eternality here is neglected. This conception of Reality also may be considered as exclusive as the other one. The first conception excludes multiplicity and the second one unity of Reality.

The concept of inclusive and comprehensive Reality includes and comprehends both these aspects of Reality and even transcends them. Sri Aurobindo traces this idea of Reality to the Upanisads, the inspired scriptures of the most ancient Vedanta where "we find the affirmation of the Absolute, the experience-concept of the utter and Ineffable Transcendence; but we find also, not in contradiction to it but as its corollary, an affirmation of the cosmic Divinity, an experience-concept of the Cosmic self and the Becoming of Brahman in the universe."⁴

To Sri Aurobindo the Being and the Becoming of Brahman are equally real. He takes the clue of this concept from the Isha Upanisad.* To quote him: "The Isha Upanisad insists on the unity and reality of all the manifestations of the Absolute; it refuses to confine truth to any one aspect. Brahman is the stable and the mobile, the internal and the external, all that is near and all that is far whether spiritually or in the extension of Time and Space; it is the Being and all becomings, the Pure and Silent who is without feature or action and the Seer and Thinker who organises the world and its objects; it is the one who becomes

* The Gita and the Tantras offer further lights.

all that we are sensible of in the universe, the Immanent and that in which he takes up his dwelling.”⁵

To Sri Aurobindo, Brahman, the supreme Reality, is “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.”⁶ The capacity of self-determination even on the part of Brahman has been denied in Advaita Vedanta and this denial has set a limit to the Absolute.⁷ The fuller view which Sri Aurobindo represents comprehends in one integral concept the transcendent, indeterminate Reality and also its finite, changing self-expression in this universe. The Absolute of Sri Aurobindo is not a mere sum of the indeterminate static, the infinite aspect and the determinate, dynamic and the finite aspect, but It exceeds both as it unifies both and is thus ‘Ineffable’⁸ also. This is Sri Aurobindo’s concept of Integral Reality which unifies the infinite and the finite, the static and the dynamic, the being and the becoming and exceeds all as ‘Ineffable’. This concept implies that ‘all is in each and each is in all radically and integrally’⁹ and ‘the spiritual realisation of the unity of all.’¹⁰

The concept of Integral Reality appears to violate the logic of contradiction. Respect for this logic perhaps persuaded Samkara to accept the indeterminate Brahman as real and everything determinate and finite as false. Sri Aurobindo is conscious of this and speaks of the law of contradiction as the law of our finite reason and asks us to comprehend the Integral Reality from the standpoint of ‘the Logic of the Infinite’. The fuller experiences of the Infinite supersede the logic of the discrete finites, but this supersession does not mean the negation of all logic. It draws our attention to a superior logic which is the ‘Logic of the Infinite’. “There is”, to quote Sri Aurobindo, “a greater reason in all the operating of the Infinite, but it is not a mental or intellectual, it is a spiritual and supramental reason: there is a logic in it, because there are relations and connections infallibly seen and executed; what is magic to our finite reason is the logic of the Infinite. It is a greater reason, a greater logic because it is more vast, subtle, complex in its operations: it

comprehends all the data which our observation fails to seize, it deducted from them results which neither our deduction nor induction can anticipate, because our conclusions and inferences have a meagre foundation and are fallible and brittle.”¹¹

This superior logic, Sri Aurobindo goes on to say, relates to intuition which is different from intellect or finite reason. ‘Intuition is born of a direct awareness while intellect is an indirect action of a knowledge which constructs itself with difficulty out of the unknown from signs and indications and gathered data. But what is not evident to our reason and senses, is self-evident to the Infinite consciousness, and, if there is a will of the Infinite, it must be a will that acts in this full knowledge and is the perfect spontaneous result of a total self-evidence’.¹² This full knowledge to which Sri Aurobindo refers is his ‘integral knowledge’. We may now turn to its explication.

II

We have seen how Sri Aurobindo follows the ancient Vedantic tradition to derive the concept of integral Reality. He follows the same tradition to enunciate the principles of integral knowledge. He takes experience in the widest possible sense and recognises different methods of knowledge relating to the different aspects of experience.¹³ He believes that ‘an integral knowledge demands an exploration, unveiling of all the possible domains of Consciousness and experience, for there are subjective domains of our being which lie behind the obvious surface; these have to be fathomed and whatever is ascertained must be admitted with the scope of total reality.’¹⁴ The empiricists confine experience to sense-experience and to Sri Aurobindo this is arbitrary. The ordinary sense-experience really belongs to the middle part of our existence which has a ‘subconscient’ sphere below and a ‘superconscient’ one above. In sleep we retire into the subconscious experience which forms even the back ground of our waking life. The glimpses from the superconscient sphere we receive in intuitions of our spiritual life. Sri Aurobindo believes that ‘an inner range of spiritual experience is one very

great domain of human consciousness; it has to be entered into upto its deepest depths and its vastest reaches'.

The subconscious, the waking and the super conscient constitute an integral whole where-in lies the complete truth. The Negation or neglect of any of the parts paves the way for the loss of completeness, integrality or the whole. The highest knowledge comprehending all the different aspects of experience is integral knowledge which alone can fully satisfy the demand of our integral being.

Sri Aurobindo starts with the three kinds of instruments of knowledge, the five outer senses, the sense-mind (manas) and reason (budhi) which can normally give us separative knowledge and then he proceeds on to the knowledge by identity or intuitive knowledge, the foundation of the cosmic consciousness of things. To quote Sri Aurobindo: "The cosmic consciousness of things is founded upon knowledge by identity; for the universal spirit knows itself as the self of all, knows all as itself and in itself, knows all nature as part of its nature. It is one with all that it contains and knows it by that identity and by a containing nearness; for there is at the same time an identity and an exceeding, and, while from the point of view of the identification there is a oneness and complete knowledge, so from the point of view of the exceeding there is an inclusion and a penetration, an enveloping cognition of each thing and all things, a penetrating sense and vision of each thing and all things.¹⁵ Of course mind-sense and reason in their pure activities can also give us knowledge by identity.

To Sri Aurobindo all our experience is psychological since even what we obtain by the senses is meaningless to us if it is not translated into the terms of the sense-mind. Sense-mind or manas is to many Indian Philosophers the sixth sense. But Sri Aurobindo says—"it is the only sense and the others, vision, hearing, touch, smell, taste are merely specialisations of the sense-mind which . . . normally uses the sense-organs for the basis of its experience, yet exceeds them and is capable of direct experience proper to its own inherent action.¹⁶ Sense-mind is capable in man of a double action, mixed or dependent, pure

or sovereign. Its mixed action usually takes place when the mind seeks to become aware of the external world of objects through the sense-organs; the pure action where it is aware of its own states or itself. The mind's capacity to know even outer objects without any aid of the senses, is seen 'in experiments of hypnosis and cognate psychological phenomena'¹⁷ in which the usual sense-habits are checked by 'throwing the waking mind into sleep which liberates the true or subliminal mind. Mind is then able to assert its true character as the one and all-sufficient sense.⁹ Moreover, the mind can, by suitable training, develop other senses to know those things which are not grasped by the five senses. For instance, it is possible to develop the power of appreciating accurately without physical means the weight of an object which we hold in our hands.

All these go to show that the powers of the mind exceed those of the senses. But Sri Aurobindo is more interested in those truths which are 'beyond perception by sense but seizable by the perceptions of reason (buddigrahayamatindiriyam)',¹⁸ Entering into the nature of reason (Buddhi) he finds its two functions—mixed and pure. In the mixed activity, it takes data from sense-experience to interpret and inter relate them and also to draw inferences from them. This is how reason works in sciences dealing with the phenomenal world. Reason in its pure activity goes beyond the phenomena and 'strives to arrive at general and unalterable concepts which attach themselves not to the appearances of things but to that which stands behind the appearances'.¹⁹ Man alone with his superior gift can use reason in its pure form to transcend the limited sphere of sense-mind. 'The complete use of pure reason brings us finally from physical to metaphysical knowledge.' But the concepts of metaphysical knowledge do not in themselves fully satisfy the demands of our integral being. The concepts require verification in some immediate and non-sensuous experience. Such experience is really present in us in an obscure way and it can be developed by culture. It is the basis of all separative activities of mind and reason. We are aware of our basic self through it. Here knowledge is by identity, knowledge just by being. Sri Aurobindo

calls it intuition. As we are aware of our basic existence so we are aware of the reality underlying the phenomenal world. 'Ancient vedanta seized this message of the intuition and formulated it in the three great declarations of the upanisads, 'I am He', 'Thou art That, O Swetaketu', 'All this is the Brahman; this self is the Brahman'.²⁰ The highest intuition, to Sri Aurobindo, is integral knowledge where all these declarations are found integrated and we have the grasp of integral reality.

The truths grasped in intuition are analysed, interrelated and expressed in terms of reason. Thus we construct systems of metaphysics on the basis of intuitions and differences arise due to our different constructions.

Sri Aurobindo admits that the intuitions also may vary and conflict with one another. But they have the self-corrective capacity also. As an erroneous perception is corrected by a valid perception, so when intuitions conflict 'the less luminous gives place to the more luminous, the narrower, faultier or less essential to the more comprehensive, more perfect, more essential'.²¹ Intuition must be corrected by a more perfect intuition, logical reasoning cannot be its judge. The most comprehensive and the most perfect intuition, to Sri Aurobindo, is integral knowledge which reveals integral reality. This is knowledge in the sense of a realisation and no thinking. This is a sphere of immediate knowing and being, realisation and existence, wisdom and life divine. Nothing is rejected or excluded, everything is accepted, included and integrated. Herein lies the fulfilment of human aspiration.

Sri Aurobindo believes in the four cognitive methods of nature—knowledge by identity, knowledge by intimate direct contact, knowledge by separative direct contact and wholly separative knowledge by indirect contact.²² Knowledge by identity is gained when we are immediately aware of our basic self. Knowledge by intimate direct contact is exemplified in our observation of the mental states when they are continuing. When we separate ourselves from the mental states and witness them, we have knowledge by separative direct contact. Wholly separative knowledge by indirect contact arises as we observe external

objects through the senses. Sri Aurobindo conceives of an ascent from wholly separative knowledge by indirect contact to knowledge by identity through knowledge by separative direct contact and knowledge by intimate direct contact. As we can ascend from separative knowledge to knowledge by identity, so Sri Aurobindo holds, we may descend from knowledge by identity to separative knowledge.²³ Metaphysics and science are the products of the descending process. Knowledge by identity enters into the depth of reality and integral knowledge is its paradigm.

By gradually overcoming our illusory sense of confinement to the limited body, vital powers and consciousness provided by the senses to the surface and mind and reason, we gain the feeling of unity of our total being with the total reality. This realisation is integral knowledge at which the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo aims and in which all human aspirations are fulfilled.

"An integral knowledge then": to Sri Aurobindo, is "a knowledge of the truth of all sides of existence both separately and in the relation of each to all and the relation of all to the truth of the Spirit."²⁴ This knowledge transforms the finite being to the integral being, ordinary life to the life divine and this 'Can be gained by a process in which our will and endeavour have a part, in which they can discover and apply their own steps and method; its growth in us can proceed by a conscious self-transformation'.²⁵ This is really an experience, a becoming, a change of consciousness a change of being. This brings in the evolutionary character of the Becoming and the fact that our mental ignorance is only a stage in our evolution.

Integral knowledge, to Sri Aurobindo, 'means the cancelling of the sevenfold ignorance by the discovery of what it misses and ignores, a sevenfold self-revelation within our consciousness'.²⁶ This point requires elaboration.

Since we proceed from ignorance to knowledge, the secret nature and full extent of the Ignorance is to be discovered first. Sri Aurobindo conceives of seven fold ignorance corresponding to which a scheme of seven fold self-revelation has also been presented.

To quote Sri Aurobindo: "We are ignorant of the Absolute which is the source of all being and becoming; we take partial facts of being, temporal relations of the becoming for the whole truth of existence,—that is the first, the original ignorance. We are ignorant of the spaceless, timeless, immobile and immutable Self; We take the constant mobility and mutation of the cosmic becoming in Time and Space for the whole truth of existence,—that is the second, the cosmic ignorance. We are ignorant of our universal self, the cosmic existence, the cosmic consciousness, our infinite unity with all being and becoming; we take our limited egoistic mentality, vitality, corporeality for our true self and regard everything other than that as not-self,—that is the third, the egoistic ignorance. We are ignorant of our eternal becoming in Time; we take this little life in a small span of Time, in a petty field of space, for our beginning our middle and our end, —that is the fourth, the temporal ignorance, Even within this brief temporal becoming we are ignorant of our large and complex being, of that in us which is superconscious, subconscious, intracconscious, circumconscious to our surface becoming; we take that surface becoming with its small selection of overtly mentalised experience for our whole existence—that is the fifth, the psychological ignorance. We are ignorant of the true constitution of our becoming; we take the mind or life or body or any two of these or all three for our true principle or the whole account of what we are, losing sight of that which constitutes them and determines by its occult, presence and is meant to determine sovereignly by its emergence their operations, that is the sixth, the constitutional ignorance. As a result of all these ignorances, we miss the true knowledge . . . wander in a maze of errors and desires . . . that is the seventh, the practical ignorance."²⁷

Corresponding to this sevenfold ignorance, there is a sevenfold self-revelation which means the knowledge of the Absolute as the source of all things; the knowledge of the self as the Being and of the universe as the self's becoming, the becoming of the being; the knowledge of the world as one with us in the consciousness of our true self, thus cancelling our separation from it; the

knowledge of our psychic entity and its immortality; the knowledge of our greater and inner existence behind the surface; the knowledge of our mind, life and body in its true relation to the self within and the supramental being above them; the knowledge, finally, of the true harmony and true use of our thought, will and action and a transformation of our nature into a conscious expression of the truth of the self, the Divinity, the integral spiritual Reality.

The integral knowledge can only come to us by an evolution of our being and nature.* This evolution, according to Sri Aurobindo, is inevitable but we can hasten it by our own spiritual quest or sadhana which he calls integral yoga and this falls beyond the purview of the present paper.

III

Sri Aurobindo's conception of integral knowledge is said to be associated with mysticism and occultism and occultism has been banned as a superstition. In self-defence Sri Aurobindo says: 'Science itself is in its own way an occultism; for it brings to light the formulas which Nature has hidden and it uses its knowledge to set free operations of her energies which she has not included in her ordinary operations.'²⁸ If occultism is no vice in the case of science, it can be no defect in Sri Aurobindo's conception of integral knowledge. A mystic Sri Aurobindo is, but where reason fails, mysticism is the only rescue. Mysticism is not anti-rational, but it is supra-logical.

Sri Aurobindo's conception of integral Reality, his logic of identity in difference may remind one of Hegel's philosophy. But there are some basic differences too. The integral Reality is not only a harmony of the static and the dynamic, unity and multiplicity as in Hegel, it is also beyond them and is therefore Ineffable too. Hegelian synthetic reason with its dialectic of

* "But Sri Aurobindo also holds that the integral knowledge is something that is already there in the integral Reality; it is not a new thing to be created or invented by the mind, it must rather be discovered or uncovered 'it is the very stuff of our own spiritual consciousness and it is by awakening to it even in our surface self that we have to possess it.'"

unification of opposites is not the method of knowing the integral Reality. Reason, to Sri Aurobindo, is only a transitional instrument leading towards the final realization of the integral Reality by immediate intuitive identity which is integral knowledge. Moreover Sri Aurobindo's ultimate Reality is not Thought as in Hegel, it is an inseparable unity of Thought, Feeling and will (Sat-chit-ananda).

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- ¹ *The Life Divine in one* Volume, p. 566.
- ² *Ibid.*
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 567.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 567.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 284.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 302.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 340, 530.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 291.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 289.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 298.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 299.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, Book I, Ch. VIII
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 581.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 485.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59-60.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62; Gita, VI, 21.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- ²² *Ibid.*, Book Two-Part I, Ch. X
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 470.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 583.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 585.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 584.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 584.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 581.

SRI AUROBINDO'S CONCEPT OF INTEGRAL KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIAL REALITY

S. GOPALAN

AMONG THE contemporary Indian philosophers who have emphasized the significance of the empirical as well as the transcendental aspects of human life Sri Aurobindo stands out as a beacon light inasmuch as he spells out a philosophy which is as much original as is reflective of Indian culture so much defined and defended by him by way of suggesting precise lines of interpretation. Sri Aurobindo, true to the tradition of Indian culture, did not believe that 'doing philosophy' was 'searching for a black cat in a dark room where it was not', yet his was not the alternative extreme of empiricalizing in the name of taking an optimistic and positive view of life and the world in which it is lived. If the aspect of synthesis of the positivistic and the metaphysical aspects of Indian culture is not always and fully appreciated,—and Sri Aurobindo was one of those who took utmost pains to 'reinstate' Indian culture in this sense—Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of Integralism has equally well been subjected to the criticism that it is too abstract to be comprehensible. In this paper we shall attempt to argue that the situation of man's life is such that a serious reflection about it cannot but result in a type of analysis which does not ignore either the empirical or the transcendental aspects of human life and that Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is a clear case in point. With the aim of high-lighting this aspect in Sri Aurobindo's thought we shall show how his theory of Integral knowledge embodies a definite view of social reality which in turn sustains the positive aspects of his philosophy of society.

It is a truism to state that knowledge implies consciousness, but that knowledge itself becomes a subject of consciousness when the latter evolves is probably not so apparent. Yet, the study of man—incomplete as it is in the absence of an understanding of the preceding as well as the following members of

the series—increasingly brings out the fact that consciousness as it is cannot truly characterize the stage of his evolution. Man as a product of evolution is a standing testimony to the fact that consciousness is a characteristic possessed by the lower evolute as well, the characteristic which is worked upon by Nature in the course of its further evolution. Sri Aurobindo writes: “The higher animal is not the somnambulist,—as the very lowest animal forms still mainly or almost are,—but it has only a limited waking mind, capable of just what is necessary for its vital existence: in man the conscious mentality enlarges its wakefulness and, though not at first fully self-conscious, though still conscious only on the surface, can open more and more to his inner and integral being. As in the two lower ascents, there is a heightening of the force of conscious existence to a new power and a new range of subtle activities; there is a transition from vital mind to reflecting and thinking mind, there is developed a higher power of observation and invention, taking up and connecting data, conscious of process and result, a force of imagination and aesthetic creation, a higher more plastic sensibility, the co-ordinating and interpreting reason, the values no longer of a reflex or reactive but of a mastering, understanding, self-detaching intelligence.”¹ Thus the human stage, according to Sri Aurobindo is the stage where consciousness is itself reflected about and this transforms consciousness into self-consciousness. Consciousness as a *fact of existence* then becomes a *problem of knowledge*. By and large it may be said that though the animal *is* conscious, it is not self-reflectively aware of its possession of consciousness; but in man we find consciousness to be the basis of life no doubt, but human nature is such that it cannot remain content with just what *is*, it impels man to ponder over, reflect about, probe into and reformulate ideas on consciousness, —thus arriving at the *problem* of unravelling the nature of consciousness itself. Reflection about the problem results in knowledge which in turn is reflected about.

Thus to introduce Sri Aurobindo’s concept of Integral knowledge might evoke the reaction that it is mere intellection—to refer to consciousness as a subject-matter for thought and to

probe into the resulting knowledge to find out its soundness or otherwise. But Sri Aurobindo—both in his interpretation of Indian culture and in formulating his own philosophy—exhibits clear awareness of the limitations of the intellectualistic approach and explicitly denies its exclusive importance. He writes: “Indian religion never considered intellectual or theological conceptions . . . to be the one thing of central importance. To pursue that Truth under whatever conception or whatever form, to attain to it by inner experience, to live in it in consciousness, that it held to be the sole thing needful.”² Furthermore, Sri Aurobindo’s analysis of man as tri-dimensional is evidence enough to argue that his enumerating the basic differences between man and animal does not preclude the extra-mental or extra-intellectualistic aspects of the human personality. No doubt what strikes anyone as the distinctive significance of man as one of the products of evolution is his amphibious character—his sharing the animal propensities,—physically and psychologically and of having made rapid strides in the purely conceptual or logical plane, but a careful analysis of man brings out the higher and deeper dimensions of his personality. “Man”, writes Sri Aurobindo “has in him not a single mentality, but a double and triple, the mind material and nervous, the pure intellectual mind which liberates itself from the illusions of the body and the senses and a divine mind above intellect which in its turn liberates itself from the imperfect modes of the logically discriminative and imaginative reason.”³

Striking a note of caution, he argues in the hypothetical about the two types of analysis of the human situation—considering man *merely* as a highly evolved rational being and looking at him not as a finished product of evolution but as indicating possibilities of a still higher evolution which does not contradict but contain element in it, the rational-imaginative, the reflective-superconscious aspects of his being. The important aspect of Sri Aurobindo’s analysis of man is that it is not just a presupposition in his philosophy the acceptance of which alone would validate its structure but that it is cogently argued out against the back-ground of empirically accepted data concerning the

evolutionary process as a whole. In support of our contention it is worth quoting his own words at some length here: "If mind is indeed Nature's highest term, then the entire development of the rational and imaginative intellect and the harmonious satisfaction of the emotions and sensibilities must be to themselves sufficient. But if, on the contrary, man is more than a reasoning and emotional animal, if beyond that which is evolved, there is something that has to be evolved, then it may well be that the fullness of the mental life, the suppleness, flexibility and wide capacity of the intellect, the ordered richness of emotion and sensibility may be only a passage towards the development of a higher life and of more powerful faculties which are yet to manifest and to take possession of the lower instrument, just as mind itself has so taken possession of the body that the physical being no longer lives only for its own satisfaction but provides the foundation and the materials for a superior activity."⁴

All the same he concedes that approaches to Reality are results of intellection. He has in mind the Advaitic, the Vivistadvaitic and the Duaitic analyses of Reality when he writes: "One school or sect might consider the real self of man to be indivisibly one with the universal Self or the supreme Spirit. Another might regard man as one with the Divine in essence but different from him in Nature. A third might hold God, Nature and the individual soul in man to be three eternally different powers of being."⁵ But his appreciating the fact that the common core of all the three approaches is the acceptance, by them, of the truth of the Self and, more important than this, their admission of the discovery of the inner spiritual self in man as having a practical significance for human life offers us an insight into his own philosophy of integral knowledge, for he maintains that irrespective of the 'descriptions' of Reality, ultimately they point to one fact—the undeniable fact that the existent Reality can be comprehended by an act of self-appropriation. His finding a common element in the three important traditions, to emphasize his own view is unambiguously worded, for he maintains: "It is open to us to conceive and have experience of the Divine as an impersonal Absolute and Infinite or to approach and know and feel Him as a

transcendent and universal sempiternal Person: but whatever be our way of reaching him, the one important truth of spiritual experience is that he is in the heart and centre of all existence and all existence is in him and to find him is the great self-finding."⁶

The concluding part of the last sentence is to us extremely significant, for we find in it Sri Aurobindo's emphasis that the true significance of human life consists in its becoming aware of itself, and finding the inner significance of its own self-awareness. It seems to us that this passage holds the key to his philosophy of consciousness and integral knowledge, for (1) consciousness in man has 'become aware of itself', otherwise, there would have been no attempts at coordinating the reflections about Reality with one's own state of existence and aiming at attaining a state where Reality and existence of the reflecting self are not concepts merely (2) the epistemological approach to Reality is not considered an end in itself, it is at best a means by which the knowing self and the known Reality are integrated not in thought-patterns but through a living experience in which there is an act of 'great self-finding'. Whether the description of integrated existence is in terms of reaching the inner depths of man's being or in terms of projecting one's true being, only to get one-self integrated to the Divine,—the net result—as far as the individual is concerned—is that there is a transformation of the seemingly limited, apparently into the truly unlimited, really perfect Being.

It is the emphasis laid by Sri Aurobindo on the transforming influence of integral knowledge that is highly significant in the context of our present discussion, for real integration, *ex hypothesi*, means that none of those which experience integration gets negated, nor becomes insignificant. If there is an act of assertion, it is not by denying the other or others, but by emphasizing the significance of the transformation undergone by the latter. In the concluding passage in his Introduction to Yoga he writes: "We perceive, then, these three steps in Nature, a bodily life which is the basis of our existence here in the material world, a mental life into which we emerge and by which we raise the bodily to higher uses and enlarge it into greater completeness, and a divine existence which is at once the goal of the other two

and returns upon them to liberate them into their highest possibilities. Regarding none of them as either beyond our reach or below our nature and the destruction of none of them as essential to the ultimate attainment, we accept this liberation and fulfilment as part at least and a large and important part of the aim of yoga."⁷

Since Yoga involves integration according to Sri Aurobindo the usage of the term 'ascent towards' needs to be understood in the context of the reciprocal involvement of the 'higher' and the 'lower' both in the physical evolution and in the psycho-spiritual evolution. The 'higher' simply stands for the actualization of a potentiality and the lower, for the potential stage—just being symptomatic of the possibility of actualization of certain propensities present, but dormant—needing conditions conducive to its emerging out and lighting up the significance of the whole range of phenomena evolved. The significance of the phenomenon of integration is clearly stated in the *Life Divine* wherein Sri Aurobindo emphatically maintains: "But it must be observed that this ascent, this successive fixing in higher and higher principles,—does not acarry with it the abandonment of the lower grades, any more than a status of existence in the lower grades means the entire absence of the higher principles. This heals the objection against the evolutionary theory created by these sharp lines of difference; for if the rudiments of the higher are present in the lower creation and the lower characters are taken up into the higher evolved being, that of itself constitutes an indubitable evolutionary process. What is necessary is a working that brings the lower gradation of being to a point at which the higher can manifest in it . . ."⁸

Since the scope of our paper is limited to considering the implications of the concept of integral knowledge for a theory of social reality, we deem it necessary to leave aside even a sketchy reference to the theory of Reality we find inherent in the concept of Integral knowledge. However, we must make mention of the cryptic statement of Sri Aurobindo wherein he states: "An integral presupposes an integral Reality for it is the power of a Truth-Consciousness which is itself the consciousness of Reality."⁹

Since the term Reality is comprehensive and inclusive of social reality it is easy to discern Sri Aurobindo's idea on the latter from his theory of Integral knowledge sketched above. Our task becomes all the more easy since Sri Aurobindo has specifically given us his reflections on the problem of man and society in his conceptions of human unity and in his inquiries concerning the necessary conditions which alone can conduce to the development of social consciousness in man.

The short-comings of societies everywhere and the limitations of the individuals constituting them are clearly implied when Sri Aurobindo points out: "Our idea and sense of Reality vary with our status and movement of consciousness, its sight, its stress, its intake of things; that sight or stress can be intensive and exclusive or extensive, inclusive and comprehensive."¹⁰ The words are also suggestive of the experience of helplessness felt by individuals and societies when they encounter the problem of social unity—whether in terms of their own positive contributions to its development or in terms of their inability to understand the social malaise.

The ideal of human unity which was so dear to Sri Aurobindo's heart thus provides us guide-lines for formulating what we consider to be his theory of social reality. To elucidate our view-point we need lay emphasis on only one aspect of his theory of social unity, viz., his emphasizing the responsibility—the *individual responsibility*—of all those who constitute the society under consideration. He writes: "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 movement of the Collectivity is a largely subconscious mass movement; it has to formulate and express itself through the individuals to become conscious: its general mass consciousness is always less evolved than the consciousness of its most developed individuals, and it progresses in so far as it accepts their impress or develops what they develop."¹¹

The logic of social unity he stresses is clearly stated. A perfect society can be realized only in and through the perfection of individuals who constitute it—the perfection which is developed

from within and not imposed from without. To ever imagine that a perfect society can evolve even from imperfect individuals is only a fond hope not founded either on the logic or on the psychology of the situation. He baldly states: "A perfected community also can exist only by the perfection of its individuals, and perfection can come only by the discovery and affirmation in life by each of his own spiritual being and the discovery by all of their spiritual unity and a resultant life unity. There can be no real perfection for us except by our inner self and truth of spiritual existence taking up all truth of the instrumental existence into itself and giving to it oneness, integration, harmony."¹²

This brings out the exact significance of Sri Aurobindo's critical comments on the way social unity is sought to be achieved which ought to be understood not as an isolated theory of society or social organisation but as an integral aspect of his theory of human nature itself which ultimately provides the base for his theory of integral knowledge and Reality. Considering man as a tri-dimensional being he has not accepted intellectualism as the hall-mark of man's living since mental evolution is only a stage to be transcended.

Application of this theory of man to an analysis and understanding of human society has resulted in a theory of social reality which is not critical of the materialistic modes and mental approaches to social living but is only emphatic about the necessity to go beyond the traditionally accepted organization-technique while dealing with the problem of man and society. The emphasis on going beyond the vigorous attempts at 'constructing' and 'reconstructing' institutions for bringing in harmony, coherence and unity in the social life of man is synonymous with the exhortations made to man to 'find himself', to go deeper into the problem of his relationship with the 'others',—with society and humanity.

We may point out that Sri Aurobindo's theory of social reality thus stated may be considered either as a circumscribed reference-point while considering the relatively empirical world and reactions to the resultant changes that come about in the social structure or as offering us one other angle of view from which we can

have clearer perceptions and deeper understanding of the situation of man-in-society. The latter point needs to be elaborated a little.

That there is a deep dissatisfaction the world over regarding the failure to achieve a coherent life and a happy society is an indisputably accepted fact. Sri Aurobindo, far from being critical of what has been achieved is caustic about what has not been accomplished. Taking stock of the situation, he writes: "Man has harmonised life in the past by organised ideation and limitation; he has created societies based on fixed ideas or fixed customs, a fixed cultural system or an organic life-system, each with its own order; the throwing of all these into the melting-pot of a more and more intermingling life and a pouring in of ever new ideas and motives and facts and possibilities call for a new, a greater consciousness to meet and master the increasing potentialities of existence and harmonise them."¹³

Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the situation is that the sheer volume of ideas and ideals and the studies that have been made regarding them call for a calmer appraisal of their failure, for only then can we ever hope to find a solution which will obliterate the defeatist tendencies that past failures have been cumulatively creating on our present attempts to build a grand future for ourselves. Since the procedure of standardization, by assigning fixed responsibility by artificially contrived mechanisms of social change aimed at achieving unity have failed, an approach characterized by a concern for the comprehensive and the integral is necessary, may, inevitable, opines Sri Aurobindo. He writes: "A life of unity, mutuality and harmony born of a deeper and wider truth of our being is the only truth of life that can successfully replace the imperfect mental constructions of the past which were a combination of association and regulated conflict, an accommodation of egos and interests grouped or dovetailed into each other to form a society, a consolidation by common general life-motives, a unification by need and the pressure of struggle with outside forces."¹⁴

The implication of the view is that a segmental approach which goes hand in hand with the separatist approach, the main

causal factor of man's failure in the past—or more accurately—upto the present, is symptomatic of man constantly looking outward only to find signs of conflicts and disunity and not looking inward to find the symbol of equanimity and integration within his own consciousness. The comprehensive and integrated approach can thus result by the individual turning inward and *finding* the seeds of unity within his own consciousness and *realizing* human unity which can come as a necessary corollary by his consciously working out the principle in his own individual life and eventually to effectuate it in the larger humanity of which he is an inseparable, integral part. The rationale behind this procedure of looking within, of the principle of inwardization in order to exteriorize by an expansive attitude, is stated succinctly by Sri Aurobindo. He argues: "For the awakened individual the realization of his truth of being and his inner liberation and perfection must be his primary seeking,—first, because that is the call of the Spirit within him, but also because it is only by liberation and perfection and realization of the truth of being that man can arrive at truth of living."¹⁵

The idealistic note that is struck by Sri Aurobindo and the seemingly impossible task that humanity is set to achieve cannot be set aside without committing a 'psychological contradiction'—if the term may be used—for, the *human situation* is such that nothing short of a conscious continuous and careful attempt at 'further evolution' can assure even the *survival* of humanity, not to speak of the ascent into integration. May be, the ideal set is difficult to achieve, but it is not impossible, Sri Aurobindo points out. We have endeavoured to maintain that the prophecy of a new humanity we find in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of society was based on his positive approach to comprehending man's *being* so as to bring out the true meaning of human existence, and not on his normative emphasis merely.

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- ¹ *The Life Divine* (Calcutta: Arya Publishing House, 1940), Vol. II p. 639.
² *The Foundation of Indian Culture* (New York: The Sri Aurobindo Library Inc. 1953, p. 143.

- ³ *On Yoga I* (Pondichery: Sri Aurobindo Asram, 1957), p. 11.
⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.
⁵ *The Foundation of Indian Culture*, p. 143.
⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.
⁷ *On Yoga I*, p. 19.
⁸ *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, pp. 635-636.
⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 519.
¹⁰ *Ibid.*
¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1154.
¹² *Ibid.*, p. 1156.
¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 1162.
²⁴ *Ibid.*
¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1156.

REALITY, REASON AND INTEGRAL KNOWLEDGE

R. S. MISRA

THE WORD 'integral' carries deep meaning and significance in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. It reveals in a most characteristic and effective way Sri Aurobindo's approach to Reality, thought and the problems of life. The integral approach takes into account all the dimensions of man's experience and the different orders of existence. It comprehends Reality as a whole and in entirety. In this respect it is opposed to all the limited and one-sided approaches which succeed in developing only partial views of Reality. This deep-rooted tendency of the philosophers to make partial approaches to Reality and present fragmentary accounts of it constitutes, according to Sri Aurobindo, the bane of their philosophies as they fail to comprehend the real nature of man, the world and the ultimate reality. Philosophy, according to Sri Aurobindo, is an enquiry into the nature and structure of reality. The fullest comprehension of reality is possible neither by sense-experience, nor reason, nor intuition, whether they are taken individually or collectively. It is possible, according to Sri Aurobindo, only by integral knowledge.

Here I propose to discuss the nature of integral knowledge in relation to Sri Aurobindo's views concerning reality and reason. This treatment is meant to show that Sri Aurobindo's formulation of the concept of integral knowledge is not merely a speculative venture on his part, but it has been necessitated by the integral character of reality itself and the limitations of reason and of the other sources of man's knowledge.

REALITY AND INTEGRAL KNOWLEDGE

An integral knowledge, according to Sri Aurobindo, presupposes an integral Reality. "The integral knowledge is something that is already there in the integral Reality: it is not a new or still

non-existent thing that has to be created, acquired, learned, invented or built up by the mind; it must rather be discovered or uncovered, it is a Truth that is self-revealed to a spiritual endeavour: for it is there veiled in our deeper and greater self; it is the very stuff of our own spiritual consciousness, and it is by awaking to it even in our surface self that we have to possess it. There is an integral self-knowledge that we have to recover and, because the world-self also is our self, an integral world-knowledge."¹ Thus in order to have a correct understanding and appreciation of the nature of integral knowledge one has to know the nature of the individual self, the world and the ultimate Reality.

Sri Aurobindo's view of Reality is mainly derived from the Upaniṣads. Following the Upaniṣadic seers and philosophers, he characterises the ultimate Reality as Brahman or Saccidānanda. That is the fundamental reality. The world and the individual are the manifestations of Brahman and they are real. Sri Aurobindo admits the reality of Being as well as of Becoming. Being is the fundamental reality, whereas Becoming is an effectual reality. Being and Becoming are the two poles of Brahman or Saccidānanda. Brahman, ultimately speaking, is beyond all categories, beyond all determinations. It is indeterminable, *nirguṇa*. But Brahman is called indeterminable and differenceless not in the sense that it is devoid of all determinations and differences, but that it exceeds them. It cannot be taken as incapable of manifesting determinations and differences out of its being. "Necessarily, when we say it is without them, we mean that it exceeds them, that it is something into which they pass in such a way as to cease to be what we call form, quality, quantity and out of which they emerge as form, quality and quantity in the movement."² Thus Brahman is indeterminable in the sense that it cannot be limited or conditioned by any determination or any possible sum of determinations; it is not incapable of self-determination. It is indeterminable and at the same time it is the source of all true self-determinations. The indeterminability of Brahman or the Absolute is the natural, the necessary condition both of its infinity of being and its infinity of power of

being; it can be infinitely all things because it is nothing in particular and exceeds any definable totality."³ The Absolute is thus "not limitable or definable by any one determination or by any sum of determinations; on the other side, it is not bound down to an indeterminable vacancy of pure existence."⁴ Brahman or the Absolute is thus both indeterminate, *nirguna*, as well as determinate, *saguna*. These fundamental aspects of Brahman are realised in spiritual experience. The indeterminable aspect is characterised negatively as "the immobile, immutable Self, the Nirguna Brahman, the Eternal without qualities, the pure featureless one. Existence, the Impersonal, the silence void of activities, the Non-Being, the Ineffable and the Unknowable."⁵ Similarly, the Absolute is also described positively as "the Self that becomes all things, the Saguna Brahman, the Eternal with infinite qualities, the One who is the Many, the infinite Person who is the source and foundation of all persons and personalities, the Lord of creation, the Word, the Master of all works and action; it is that which being known all is known; these affirmatives correspond to those negatives."⁶ The impersonal, *nirguna* and the personal, *saguna*, are the fundamental aspects of Brahman. The Absolute is *nirguna* as well as *saguna* and at the same time it is beyond both of them. In the same way the Absolute is One and the many, the Infinite and the finite, Being and Becoming and at the same time it is beyond them all. Sri Aurobindo conceives the different orders of existence and the different realms of experience as the various aspects and poises of the Absolute. Thus he takes an all-embracing view of Reality, of Reality as a whole and does not identify it exclusively with any particular aspect of it. This is called the integral view of Reality. Reality is integral in the sense that it includes all the different orders of existence within it and does not negate or reject any of them. Sri Aurobindo's conception of integral Reality has also been characterised as Integral Advaitism. This Integral Advaitism affirms the fundamental reality of Brahman and at the same time admits the reality of the world as well as the individual. The world and the individual are real as they are the manifestations of Brahman. Brahman by its consciousness-force, *Cit-*

Shakti manifests itself in the form of the world and the individual. The individual, the universal and the Transcendent constitute the different poises of Brahman. In order to have an integral knowledge of Reality, one has to know it in all these aspects or poises. "The Infinite is at once an essentiality, a boundless totality and a multitude; all these have to be known in order to know truly the Infinite. To see the parts alone and the totality not at all or only as a sum of the parts is a knowledge but also at the same time an ignorance; to see the totality alone and ignore the part is also a knowledge and at the same time an ignorance, for a part may be greater than the whole because it belongs to the transcendence; to see the essence alone because it takes us back straight towards the transcendence and negate the totality and the parts is a penultimate knowledge but here too there is a capital ignorance. A whole knowledge must be there and the reason must become plastic enough to look at all sides, all aspects and seek through them for that in which they are one."⁷

The integral knowledge is thus all-inclusive. It is the knowledge of Reality as a whole, of all its aspects and poises. "An integral spiritual consciousness carries in it a knowledge of all the terms of being; it links the highest to the lowest through all the mediating terms and achieves an indivisible whole. At the highest summit of things it opens to the reality, ineffable because superconscious to all but its own self-awareness, of the Absolute. At the lowest end of our being it perceives the Inconscience from which our evolution begins; but at the same time it is aware of the One and the All self-involved in those depths, it unveils the secret Consciousness in the Inconscience. Interpretative, revelatory, moving between these two extremes, its vision discovers the manifestation of the One in the Many, the identity of the Infinite in the disparity of things Finite, the presence of the timeless Eternal in eternal Time; it is this seeing that illumines for it the meaning of the universe. This consciousness does not abolish the universe, it takes it up and transforms it by giving to it its hidden significance. It does not abolish the individual existence; it transforms the individual being and nature

by revealing to them their true significance and enabling them to overcome their separateness from the Divine Reality and the Divine Nature."⁸ Thus the integral reality, according to Sri Aurobindo, can be comprehended fully and in entirety only by the integral knowledge and not by any other sources of knowledge, namely, sense-experience, reason or intuition. Due to his conception of the integral knowledge, Sri Aurobindo does not find any incompatibility or contradiction between the spaceless and timeless Reality, the Transcendent and the spatio-temporal world. His integral view of Reality or integral Advaitism is not based on the denial of the reality of the world. In this respect it differs in a radical way from the Advaitism of Śaṅkara and the Śaṅkarites which does not give any ontological status to the world and the individual. "The real Monism, the true Advaita is that which admits all things as the one Brahman and does not seek to bisect its existence into two incompatible entities, an eternal Truth and an eternal Falsehood, Brahman and not-Brahman, Self and not-Self, a real Self and an unreal, yet perpetual Māyā. If it be true that the Self alone exists, it must be also true that all is the Self."⁹ Thus Sri Aurobindo rejects the contention of Śaṅkara and the Śaṅkarites concerning the incompatibility between the empirical and the transcendent Reality. The main reason of their belief in the incompatibility of Brahman and the world is that they try to determine their relationship from the point of view of abstract or finite reason. Sri Aurobindo makes a critical analysis of the formal or dialectical reason and shows its incapacity and inadequacy in ascertaining the relationship between the Absolute and the world. This relationship can be determined and comprehended not by the finite reason of man but by the higher reason or what Sri Aurobindo calls the Logic of the Infinite or the Integral Knowledge.

REASON AND INTEGRAL KNOWLEDGE

Sri Aurobindo contends that the finite reason of man can neither grasp the ultimate or transcendent Reality nor it can determine the nature of the world and its relationship with Brahman. Reason not only falls short of the ultimate Reality but it cannot also comprehend adequately the world-process. The main

defect in the approach of Śaṅkara and his followers lies in the fact that though they have fully realised the limitation or inadequacy of reason in comprehending the Absolute, yet they put full reliance on it in determining the nature of the world and its relationship with the Absolute. Their dialectical reasoning operates strictly on the basis of the Law of Contradiction. It makes a critical examination of the concepts and categories which are supposed to constitute the different structures of reality and shows their self-contradictory nature. All the concepts and categories are shown to be self-contradictory and false. Thus they prove the reality of *nirguṇa* Brahman and reject the reality of the world, the individual and even of *Isvara*.

The main shortcoming of the Advaita Dialectic according to us is that it makes an abstract and *a priori* application of the Law of Contradiction to reality. But no abstract and *a priori* application of this law can determine the nature and structure of Brahman and the world and the relationship between them. The Advaita dialectic operates in the belief that the law of contradiction can be applied freely and unconditionally to the facts of experience or reality. But this is a false assumption and constitutes its main defect. Sri Aurobindo does not question the validity of the law of contradiction itself. What he questions is its unconditional application to experience or reality. This law, according to him, cannot be applied freely and unconditionally to the different orders of reality. "That law is necessary to us in order that we may point partial and practical truths, think out things clearly, decisively and usefully, classify, act, deal with them effectively for particular purposes in our divisions of space, distinctions of form and property, moments of Time. It represents a formal and strongly dynamic truth of existence in its practical workings which is strongest in the most outward term of things, the material, but becomes less and less rigidly binding as we go upward in the scale, mount on the more subtle rungs of the ladder of being."¹⁰ The law of contradiction may be conceived as independent of experience but our contention is that it cannot be applied unconditionally to experience or reality.

This truth is not realised and appreciated by the Advaita Vedantins. They have not taken any pains to turn the searchlight of their criticism on the law of contradiction itself and discover the nature and the implications of this law. They seem to be quite aware of the limitations of the law of excluded middle. It cannot, according to them, be unconditionally applied to the facts of experience or reality. But they show no consciousness or appreciation of the limitations of the law of contradiction. It constitutes the main defect of their dialectical reasoning. This law, according to our view, can be applied freely and unconditionally only in the fields of mathematics and formal logic but not in the realm of experience or reality. Thus the dialectical reason cannot determine the nature of the ultimate Reality and the world or the relation between them. The dialectical intellect "is not a sufficient judge of essential or spiritual truths; moreover, very often, by its propensity to deal with words and abstract ideas as if they were binding realities, it wears them as chains and does not look freely beyond them to the essential and total facts of our existence."¹¹ The dialectical intellect "is to be used only so far as it helps to clarify our arrangement and justify our expression of the vision and knowledge, but it cannot be allowed to govern our conception and exclude truth that does not fall within the rigid frame of its logic."¹²

There seems to exist a tension between reason and intuition in the Advaita Vedanta. Reason, according to the Advaitin, is competent to determine the nature of the world and its relation to the Absolute, though it cannot comprehend the Absolute itself. Intuition can have the non-dual experience of the Absolute but this experience completely excludes the world. Intuition cannot have an all-inclusive and all-embracing view of Brahman as well as of the world. Thus the Advaitin finds no way to effect reconciliation or synthesis between reason and intuition. The all-embracing view of reality is possible only to the supramental consciousness or integral knowledge. This consciousness is free from the limitations of reason as well as intuition. The intuitive knowledge, *aprosanubhuti* of the Advaita Vedanta can be characterised only as a penultimate knowledge of the Absolute

as it comprehends it only in its transcendent and non-dual aspect and fails to realise it in its universal and individual aspects. This realisation of the Absolute as a whole and in entirety is possible only by the integral knowledge.

The integral knowledge, as has been stated above, is inherent in Brahman. It is the knowledge of the Supermind which constitutes the creative aspect of Brahman. Man is possessed of this integral consciousness or knowledge in the deepest dimension of his existence, namely, the Self; it constitutes the very stuff of his spiritual consciousness. So this knowledge is not to be produced or created. It has simply to be discovered. But the fullest revelation of integral or supramental knowledge is not possible to man under the conditions of his finitude. It can be attained by him only in the course of evolution when there takes place the descent of the Supermind and man is completely freed from ignorance, the seven-fold ignorance¹³ and is transformed into superman or gnostic being. The integral knowledge "is not an intellectual knowledge which can be learned and completed in our present mould of consciousness; it must be an experience, a becoming, a change of consciousness, a change of being. This brings in the evolutionary character of the Becoming and the fact that our mental ignorance is only a stage in our evolution. The integral knowledge, then, can only come by an evolution of our being and our nature . . ."¹⁴

Sri Aurobindo believes that the structure of man is dynamic and it can undergo wholesale transformation in the course of the individual and cosmic evolution. The present stage of man's existence does not mark the apex of his evolution according to Sri Aurobindo. And if it does, "then his perennial aspiration to have integral knowledge of the Divine and attain *complete* unity with Him will ever remain an ideal and a happy dream. It will never be realised by him."¹⁵

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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² *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 96-97.

- ³ *Ibid.*, Vol II, Part 1, p. 27.
⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.
⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.
⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.
⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.
⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, Part 2, p. 416.
⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 39.
¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol II, Pt. 1, p. 104.
¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 241.
¹² *Ibid.*, p. 242.
¹³ The original, the cosmic, the egoistic, the temporal, the psychological, the constitutional and the practical.
¹⁴ *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part 2, pp. 442-43.
¹⁵ R. S. Misra, *Studies in Philosophy and Religion*, Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, Varanasi, Introduction, p. xxxii.

AUROBINDO'S CONCEPTION OF THE NATURE AND MEANING OF HISTORY

GRACE E. CAIRNS

THE METAPHYSICAL CONTEXT

THE PHILOSOPHY of Aurobindo is so eminently an integrated one that the general pattern of cosmic and human history cannot be discussed apart from his metaphysical system described at length in *The Life Divine*. In this system the Sevenfold Chord of Being is the central concept and provides the framework for the meaning and pattern of history. There are three higher and three lower hemispheres of Being in the Sevenfold Chord, and mediating between the two is the Supermind. The three that belong to the higher hemisphere are aspects of the Eternal Reality or Absolute; they are the *Sat*, the *Cit*, and the *Ananda* of Upanishadic thought. As Aurobindo interprets them, *Sat* is the Pure Existent, *Cit* is Consciousness-Force and *Ananda* Delight-in Existence. Although this is Brahman in its eternal, changeless, infinite aspect—the impersonal Nirguṇa Brahman—Brahman is pregnant with all creation. Creation is manifested in the three evolutes of the lower hemisphere—Matter, Life and Mind.

Supermind mediates between the two hemispheres. Its major function is creative activity; it is the manifestation of the Saguṇa Brahman aspect of the Divine and thus the primal cause of the progressive evolutionary development that is cosmic and human history. The Absolute is infinite, perfect and eternal; why does it choose to manifest itself in creative activity? This activity belongs to the very nature of the Divine; it is the *līlā* (spontaneous play) of Brahman, a familiar view in Indian philosophy. The Saguṇa Brahman or Supermind, the force behind history, creates in an evolutionary pattern. There is first the involution of the Divine, the descent into Matter, then the ascent to the Life (or Vital) evolute, then to the stage of Mind. The next and final stage to be evolved, the goal towards which all creation aspires,