

Indira Gandhi National Open University

MPYE – 016

School of Interdisciplinary and

Trans-disciplinary Studies



Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo

Block 1



INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY OF AUROBINDO

UNIT 1



Personality, Vision and Work of Aurobindo

UNIT 2

Sri Aurobindo on Indian Scripture



UNIT 3

Spiritual Thought in Indian Philosophy

UNIT 4



Integral Worldview

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Sri Aurobindo was an extraordinary genius, mystic and activist. It was when India lay prostrate at the feet of the British that Sri Aurobindo was born. What India then required was a strong political awakening, a cultural consciousness and a spiritual rebirth. Born to a highly anglicised and denationalised father Sri Aurobindo had become one among the great patriots of India. Aurobindo was essentially a seer and a great mystic poet. In order to focus on the spiritual thought in Indian philosophy, we study the spiritual adventure of Sri Aurobindo.

In the **unit 1**, we are making a humble attempt to describe the person, vision and works of Sri Aurobindo. It opens up the world and vision of Aurobindo to the students, with his life story, literary and political background.

Unit 2 exposes the students to the spiritual depth of Aurobindo with the study of the impact of Indian scripture on his thought and his own understanding and interpretation of them. Stephen H. Philips describes Aurobindo as “mystic empiricist” who has high regard for Indian scriptures. Aurobindo had a “metaphorical understanding” of the Indian Scriptures and interpreted creatively to make them relevant for the Indian context.

Unit 3 brings to the forefront the spiritual journey of Aurobindo. It is interesting to note how Aurobindo’s spiritual thought coexists with the needs of the country. Aurobindo drew strength from the rich Indian tradition, while remaining open to other philosophies.

Unit 4 allows the students to know the basic insight of Aurobindo that we are all related to each other. In order to appreciate the integral nature of reality, the unit makes us realize the differences at the levels of beings and to know that these beings with their individual differences are evolving towards the Supermind. The term “Integral” is applied to a wide-ranging set of developments in philosophy, psychology, religious thought, and other areas that seek interdisciplinary and comprehensive frameworks. In the world-view of Aurobindo, the whole of reality, including physical, psychological and spiritual, is integral.

COURSE INTRODUCTION

The problem of one and many is a major point of discussion in Indian philosophy. Classical Indian philosophy has its culmination in the Vedantic thought. Once the Transcendent, Infinite, and Immutable Brahman is accepted as the Absolute it naturally raises the question of the reality of the phenomenal world. Aurobindo maintains a synthetic approach to reality, the unity of Reality giving adequate space for the multiplicities of the universe. There is a basic unity between the finite and the Infinite, matter and Spirit. Here in this unit our objective is a detailed analysis of the unity of Matter and Spirit. Aurobindo synthesizes both matter and spirit by transcending the partial views of both the materialist and the idealist in his integral Advaita. This takes us to the understanding of Aurobindo's integral approach to reality. For Aurobindo, the "revolt of Spirit against Matter" has dominated human thought for two thousand years. The central problem, therefore, is the problem of harmony. Our immediate task is to develop this synthetic vision of Matter and Spirit.

Block 1 gives a general introduction to Aurobindo's thought in order to appreciate the integral nature of reality. In order to understand the integral world-view developed by Aurobindo, we first try to clarify the terms. Then we approach integral psychology and aspect of being. Finally, we speak of the relevance of an integral world-view for our contemporary times. The originality of Aurobindo's thought is most clearly exemplified in his finding a way out to the age-old problem of one and many in which he establishes the basic unity of reality. Aurobindo maintains the unity of Reality giving adequate space for the multiplicities of the universe.

Block 2 unfolds the integral vision of Aurobindo. One of the fundamental presuppositions of Indian philosophy is its explicit adherence to the idea that the Reality is one in essence. This problem itself stems from another presupposition and avowed acceptance of Brahman as the single substratum of the universe. Once the Transcendent, Infinite, and Immutable Brahman is accepted as the Absolute it naturally raises the question of the reality of the phenomenal world. Aurobindo maintains a synthetic approach to reality. Aurobindo maintains the unity of Reality giving adequate space for the multiplicities of the universe.

Blocks 3 and 4 enumerate and clarify the contemporary significance of Aurobindo's philosophy. Aurobindo made it clear spiritual transformation of humanity had nothing to do with religion. Aurobindo summed up the nature of Man in the ideal of a united human society. Integral unity could not take place unless Man's vital and mental nature was uplifted by a spiritual Super-nature. the Divine descends into Cosmic being, while Man ascends through the medium of a Super-mind towards the Divine. Therefore, there is a double movement at work here. Man is eternally seeking the ultimate Reality, 'Saccidananda.' For Aurobindo the evolutionary process of human unity is possible not through rationality, but through Yogic experience. The way that leads to the life divine is "integral yoga."

UNIT 1 PERSONALITY, VISION AND WORK OF AUROBINDO

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

- To lead the students to the world and vision of Aurobindo.
- To familiarize them with the history of Sri Aurobindo.
- To give them a sense of the literary and political background of Sri Aurobindo.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The year was 1907. The freedom movement in India was gathering momentum. Its leader was detained by the police. The poet Rabindranath Tagore paid him a visit and wrote the now famous lines: "Rabindranath, O Aurobindo, bows to thee! O friend, my country's friend, O Voice incarnate, free, Of India's soul...The fiery messenger that with the lamp of God Hath come...Rabindranath, O Aurobindo, bows to thee." The year was 1928. The leader had now left politics and had gone to Pondicherry where he had plunged himself into the practice of yoga. The poet Tagore once again paid him a visit and declared: "You have the Word and we are waiting to accept it from you. India will speak through your voice to the world, `Hearken to me!' Years ago I saw Aurobindo in the atmosphere of his earlier heroic youth and I sang to him: "Aurobindo, accept the salutations from Rabindranath." Today I saw him in a deeper atmosphere of a reticent richness of wisdom and again sang to him in silence: "Aurobindo, accept the salutations from Rabindranath!"

How does one describe or speak about such a personality? Sri Aurobindo has been called a scholar, a literary critic, a philosopher, a revolutionary, a poet, a Yogi and a 'Rishi'. He was all these and much more. To have even a glimpse of the true Sri Aurobindo we have to turn to the Mother: "What Sri Aurobindo represents in the world's history is not a teaching, not even a revelation; it is a decisive action direct from the Supreme."

Because of it Sri Aurobindo declared, in no uncertain terms that nobody could write his biography: "Neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all of my life; it has not been on the surface for men to see." But he was not altogether averse to this effort and even made corrections when some biographers made the attempt. So in this unit, we are making a humble attempt to describe the person, vision and works of Sri Aurobindo. For this section we base ourselves primarily on the Aurobindo Ashram's official writings (SAL 2011).

1.2 BEGINNING OF AUROBINDO'S LIFE IN CALCUTTA

Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta. The day was August 15, 1872, the time - 5.00 a.m., the hour of dawn. The date is doubly important. Seventy-five years later, exactly on that date - August 15 - India attained her freedom. In a message given on that day Sri Aurobindo, who had played a leading role in the freedom struggle, said: "I take this coincidence, not as a fortuitous accident, but as the sanction and seal of the Divine Force that guides my steps on the work with which I began life, the beginning of its full fruition."

The date has an even greater and deeper significance. Sri Aurobindo has explained it thus: "The 15th August is the day of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary; it implies that the physical nature is raised to the divine Nature..." And this was in a way the goal of Sri Aurobindo's life. To divinise the earth, "to make matter the Spirit's willing bride."

The name given to Sri Aurobindo at birth was quaintly Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghose! His father Dr. K. D. Ghose had returned from England with a completely Western outlook. He was enamoured of everything Western and, because a British lady Miss Annette Ackroyd happened to be present, her name was also added to Aurobindo's name. Later Sri Aurobindo was to say in a humorous tone about his father: "Everyone makes the forefathers of a great man very religious-minded, pious etc. It is not true in my case at any rate. My father was a tremendous atheist."

But Dr. Ghose was also 'generous to a fault'. Nobody went empty-handed from his door. And the mother of Sri Aurobindo, Swarnalata Devi, was so beautiful and gracious that she was known as the "Rose of Rangpur". Sri Aurobindo was the third among five children. The two elder brothers were Benoy Bhushan and Monomohan and the younger sister was Sarojini followed by the youngest brother, Barindranath (SAL 2011).

1.3 THE ENGLISH INFLUENCE (1869-1893)

When Sri Aurobindo was five years old, he was sent to Loretto Convent School at Darjeeling. Two years later, in 1879, Dr. Ghose sent his sons, including Aurobindo who was then only seven,

to England, with strict instructions that the young Aurobindo should have a completely Western education and should not even come into the slightest contact with anything Indian. A new chapter in his life had begun (Prema 1972).

Sri Aurobindo lived at Manchester with the Rev. and Mrs. Drewett. While his brothers studied at school, he was taught at home by the Rev. Drewett. He developed, very early, a love for poetry, which was to last him throughout his life. Even at that young age of eleven he contributed a few poems to the local Magazine.

Mastering Western Culture

In 1884 Sri Aurobindo shifted to London and was admitted to St. Paul's. The headmaster was so pleased with his mastery of Latin that he took it upon himself to teach him Greek. It is here that Sri Aurobindo plunged into the literature of the Western world and studied several languages - French, Italian, Spanish, Greek and Latin, and absorbed the best that Western culture had to offer him.

But these were also difficult times. The generosity of his father Dr. Ghose, had brought succour to many an unknown person in need in Khulna, where he was posted. But it had also made the stipend he sent to his own sons very irregular. Sri Aurobindo was then in his early teens. He describes how he spent several years in the bitter cold of London: "During a whole year a slice or two of bread and butter and a cup of tea in the morning and in the evening a penny saveloy (a kind of sausage) formed the food."

For nearly two years he had to go practically without dinner at that young age. He had no overcoat to protect him from the rigours of the London winter and there was no heating arrangement in the office where he slept, nor had he a proper bedroom. But Sri Aurobindo was immersed in his books and was feasting on the thoughts of the great. He got the Butterworth Prize for literature, the Bedford Prize for history and a scholarship to Cambridge (SAL 2011).

Cambridge

In 1890, at the age of eighteen, Sri Aurobindo got admission into Cambridge with a senior classical scholarship. He studied the classics brilliantly and passed high in the First class. The famous Oscar Browning had examined Sri Aurobindo's classical papers at the scholarship examination. He remarked to Sri Aurobindo: "I suppose you know you passed an extraordinarily high examination. I have examined papers at thirteen examinations and I have never during that time seen such excellent papers as yours. As for your essay, it was wonderful." It was thus that Sri Aurobindo grew, away from his family, away from his motherland, away from his roots and his culture. He knew seven foreign languages but could not speak his own tongue, Bengali. He would not have been able to speak fluently with his own mother.

The ICS

To comply with the wish of his father, Sri Aurobindo also applied for the Indian Civil Services (ICS) Exams while at Cambridge. Here too he did brilliantly. But Sri Aurobindo was not meant

to be an ICS officer, serving Her Majesty's Government as one more cog in a giant bureaucratic machine. Dr. K.D. Ghose had by now become aware of the atrocities being committed by the British on Indians and began to send paper clippings of these to Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo also felt that a period of great upheaval for his motherland was coming in which he was destined to play a leading role. He began to learn Bengali and joined a secret society, with the romantic name of 'Lotus and Dagger', where the members took an oath to work for India's freedom.

Sri Aurobindo now looked for a way to disqualify himself from the ICS and did not appear for the horse-riding test. In normal circumstances this would have been a very minor lapse but the British Government, too, was aware of his political views and activities, and found this a good opportunity to reject him. Wrote Lord Kimberly, the Secretary of State for India, on his file: "I should much doubt whether Mr. Ghose would be a desirable addition to the Service." Although he had done brilliantly in the ICS - a most sought-after vocation - Sri Aurobindo now, because of his own choice, found himself in London without a job. But destiny intervened. The Gaekwad of Baroda happened to be in London and offered him a place in his service. For long after, the Gaekwad boasted to his friends that he had got an ICS man for Rs.200/- per month (SAL 2011).

1.4 BACK IN BARODA (1893-1907)

Thus Sri Aurobindo sailed back to his country in 1893, at the age of twenty-one, having spent the most important and formative fourteen years of his life, in a foreign land. He had grown up in England but did not feel any attachment to it. Now India beckoned him. He wrote in his poem called "Envoi".

"Me from her lotus heaven Saraswati

Has called to regions of eternal snow

And Ganges pacing to the southern sea,

Ganges upon whose shores the flowers of Eden blow."

And how did Mother India receive her son after fourteen years of exile? With her unique and priceless gift - a spiritual experience. The moment Sri Aurobindo put his foot down on Indian soil, at Apollo Bunder in (Mumbai) Bombay, a vast peace and calm descended upon him, never to leave him. Unknowingly and unasked the spiritual life had also begun, which was later to become his sole preoccupation.

But for the moment what occupied him was service in the Baroda State. He started by working in the survey and settlement dept., then in the department of revenue and finally in the Secretariat. He also drafted the speeches of the Gaekwad, who once remarked to Sri Aurobindo that nobody would believe that the Gaekwad could have written such speeches. But his interests lay elsewhere. The Gaekwad, in a report, praised his ability and intelligence but also commented on his lack of punctuality and regularity. After some time Sri Aurobindo was, therefore, transferred to the Baroda College, first as a teacher of French, and then as Vice-Principal, where he was very popular with the students for his unconventional way of teaching (Heehs 1989).

In 1894 Sri Aurobindo was 22 years old. He wrote humorously in a letter to his sister Sarojini in Bengal: "I am quite well. I have brought a fund of health with me from Bengal, which, I hope it will take me some time to exhaust; but I have just passed my twenty-second milestone, August 15 last, since my birthday and am beginning to get dreadfully old." And this is how Sarojini describes him: "a very delicate face, long hair cut in English fashion; Sejda (older brother) was a very shy person." (SAL 2011)

The Study of Indian Culture

In Baroda Sri Aurobindo plunged himself into a study of Indian culture, as if to make up for all the years he had lost. He learnt Hindustani, Marathi, Bengali, Gujarati, and Sanskrit. He was a voracious reader, and two bookshops in Bombay kept him regularly supplied with books sent in crates. Sitting by a kerosene lamp he would read late into the night, unmindful of the swarming mosquitoes and often quite unaware of the waiting food. His cousin Basanti Devi wrote about him in a letter: "Auro Dada used to arrive with two or three trunks and we always thought it would contain costly suits and other luxury items like scents etc. When he opened them I used to look at them and wonder. What is this? A few ordinary clothes and all the rest books and nothing but books! Does Auro Dada like to read all these? We all want to chat and enjoy ourselves in vacations. Does he want to spend even this time in reading these books?" Sri Aurobindo read the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Bankim as well as Homer, Dante, Horace and many others. He also wrote a lot of poetry and his first collection of poems was published from Baroda (Heehs 1989).

A New Future

But another future was preparing itself for Sri Aurobindo at the same time. It began in a most unobtrusive way soon after he came to Baroda. K.G. Deshpande, a friend from his Cambridge days, was in charge of a weekly, "*Induprakash*", published from Bombay. He requested Sri Aurobindo to write upon the current political situation. Sri Aurobindo began writing a series of fiery articles under the title "New Lamps for Old", strongly criticising the Congress for its moderate policy. Wrote Sri Aurobindo: "Our actual enemy is not any force exterior to ourselves, but our own crying weaknesses, our cowardice, our selfishness, our hypocrisy, our purblind sentimentalism."

And he added, "I say, of the Congress, then, this, - that its aims are mistaken, that the spirit in which it proceeds towards their accomplishment is not a spirit of sincerity and whole-heartedness, and that the methods it has chosen are not the right methods, and the leaders in whom it trusts, not the right sort of men to be leaders; - in brief, that we are at present the blind led, if not by the blind, at any rate by the one-eyed." (SAL 2011) It would be interesting to remember that, when Sri Aurobindo wrote these scathing words with such insight he was merely 21 years old. The editors were frightened and requested Sri Aurobindo to write on cultural rather than political themes. Sri Aurobindo lost interest and the series stopped.

Mrinalini Devi

In 1901 Sri Aurobindo married Mrinalini Devi. Mrinalini had to go through all the joys and sorrows which are the lot of one who marries a genius and someone so much out of the ordinary as Sri Aurobindo.

Revolutionary Activity

The period of stay in Baroda, from 1894 to 1906, was significant in several ways for Sri Aurobindo. It was here that he started working for India's freedom, behind the scenes. He perceived the need for broadening the base of the movement and for creating a mass awakening. He went to Bengal and Madhya Pradesh, contacted the secret groups working in this direction, and became a link between many of them. He established close contact with Lokmanya Tilak and Sister Nivedita. He arranged for the military training of Jatin Banerjee in the Baroda army and then sent him to organise the revolutionary work in Bengal.

Cripp's Mission

At the same time he remained in touch with the world events and movements, shaping and moulding them with a purely inner spiritual force and action. When the Second World War broke out, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother came out openly on the side of the Allies because Hitler represented the forces of darkness. He who had fought the British earlier now put his full support and spiritual help behind them for their victory. Though Sri Aurobindo had retired from the political scene, when the Cripps Mission came, he broke his silence and sent an emissary to ask the Indian leaders to accept the proposals. But the country was not yet ready. Sri Aurobindo knew his efforts would not succeed and yet made the attempt as "disinterested work". As he said in his usual impersonal manner: "Well, I have done a bit of Kartavya Karma."

The passage of time revealed the great truth of what Sri Aurobindo had proposed. The late K.M. Munshi, then a senior cabinet minister in the Indian Government remarked about Sri Aurobindo: "He saw into the heart of things.... His perception of the political situation in India was always unerring. When the World War came in 1939...it was he of the unerring eye who said that the triumph of England and France was the triumph of the divine forces over the demoniac forces.... He spoke again when Sir Stafford Cripps came with his first proposal: He said, 'India should accept it.' We rejected the advice... but today we realise that if the first proposal had been accepted, there would have been no partition, no refugees, and no Kashmir problem."

1.5 SRI AUROBINDO'S VISION

August 15th 1947 saw the dawn of India's freedom. In a very significant message given on that day Sri Aurobindo spoke of his five dreams, which is his vision: "Indeed, on this day I can watch almost all the world movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my life time, though then they looked like impracticable dreams, arriving at fruition or on their way to achievement" (SAL 2011).

- The first of these dreams was a revolutionary movement which would create a free and united India. India today is free but she has not achieved unity.... But by whatever means,

in whatever way, the division must go; unity must and will be achieved, for it is necessary for the greatness of India's future.

- Another dream was for the resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and her return to her great role in the progress of human civilisation. Asia has arisen; large parts are now quite free or are at this moment being liberated: its other parts are still moving through whatever struggles towards freedom....
- The third dream was a world-union forming the outer basis of a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind.... A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race.
- Another dream, the spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. India's spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever-increasing measure....
- The final dream was a step in evolution which would raise man to a higher and larger consciousness and begin to solve the problems which have perplexed and vexed him since he first began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society.

In fact, one of the things that made Sri Aurobindo's vision most appealing was his belief that in all activities, situations, circumstances in life one could bring in a spiritual force to uplift those acts, and evoke the infinite, the miraculous in them. Whether you were a businessman, a writer, a sportsman, a politician, it didn't matter. Everyone and everything was included in this evolutionary movement upward (Posner 2011).

In his view, one does not experience the Divine by retreating from the world to some hermitage or otherwise separate ourselves from the daily activities of life. Spirituality is to be brought into and expressed through life; through every act, circumstance, and situation, evoking the Infinite, the infinite potential in it.

For him every thing is part of this upward world movement and evolution; everything is part of an inner unfolding of consciousness, which from the perspective of the Supreme is a Divine unfolding.

The main problem of course was that humans did not comprehend this evolutionary movement in life. So Sri Aurobindo came along to reveal to us what was not known, to give us a vision of what was possible. That is the great purpose of the Avatar; to bring the world a vision of a new possibility so that it can evolve to a higher plane. In his case, to bring a vision of the possibility of our ultimate possibility, culminating in a Divine life on earth (Posner 2011). He suggested that if we were to come to understand the Spirit that is embedded, hidden, involved within us, and that exists as a Force to tap into about us, we would actively participate in our own personal evolution; in the evolution of our society; even the evolution of the universe itself! That is, we could actively participate in the destiny of the human race.

He repeatedly indicated that we could infuse the spiritual dimension into all planes of our lives -- physical, vital, and mental, in order to uplift all activities and circumstances, whether in our work, our families, our business, or the social institutions we partake in. So everything in life was to be included in this upward, evolutionary movement! Nothing and no one was to be left out, denied. Even the murderer, the dictator, and the promiscuous lover played a role in the universal unfolding. That is because everyone and every thing can go one step further than its

current conditions to grow, develop, and evolve. The consciousness and spirit can be evoked in each thing so that its infinite potential involved, hidden in that thing could come out.

In this way, we move beyond the boundaries of what we perceive as possible. We overcome the boundaries and difficulties of life. Now we understood that the final frontier is not outside ourselves, but is within. That changed the whole dynamic of life; the equation of existence. That opened the doors to infinite possibilities; to a new frontier, a new world, a new future possibility (Posner 2011).

The rest of his life-journey will be taken up in the next Unit.

1.6 MAIN WORKS OF AUROBINDO

To read Sri Aurobindo is to experience the consciousness that lies at the heart of the Truth of existence. Nobel Laureate Roman Rolland said: “Sri Aurobindo (is) the foremost of thinkers, who has realized the most complete synthesis between the genius of the West and the East...” Here are a few enlightening books that can help bridge the gap between life and the spirit.

Sri Aurobindo, who had started writing at an early age, even during his study at Manchester (1879–84), had continued with his creativity through all the turbulent phases of his life, even during his imprisonment. His first book, a collection of poems, entitled *Songs to Myrtilla*, was published in 1895. Between that and the last work to be published during his lifetime, *Savitri* (1950), he had written extensively on Yoga, culture, sociology, in addition to his poetry and plays—contributions of far-reaching and multi-faceted importance to human thought and action. He has given a new cosmology and a new metaphysics in his *Life Divine* “considered as the philosophical masterpiece of the century” (Raina 2000). It has revolutionized our very concept of psychology and education, giving them a new basis in *The Life Divine* and in his letters. He formulated a profoundly new approach to sociology in *The Human Cycle* and showed through a searching analysis of past and current systems of social and political thought how a truly spiritual attitude is essential as a foundation of a new and lasting social order. He extended the application of this very approach to the sphere of international politics in *The Ideal of Human Unity* (Raina 2000).

In his writings on education, he formulated a theory that could, with some variations, be adapted to all the nations of the world, fostering the growth of the integral consciousness in every pupil and bringing back to legitimate authority of the Spirit over a matter. He showed in *The Synthesis of Yoga* how all the systems of Yoga combine and converge on the path to Supermind. Further, in *The Secret of the Vedas*, *The Essays on the Gita* and *Writings on Upanishads*, he opened up new and epoch-making ways of studying the ancient Indian texts, throwing new light on philosophy and reducing both anthropology and anthropomorphism to their proper place in a balanced scheme of knowledge. He offered an illuminating interpretation of Indian culture down the centuries in *The foundations of Indian culture*.

Sri Aurobindo’s elaborated epic, *Savitri* reveals the consummation of the many poetic styles that he attempted in all his works. Written in nearly 24,000 lines in blank verse, Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* has been estimated to be the largest poem in the English language. In *The Future Poetry*, Sri Aurobindo worked out a literary theory considered as an original contribution to aesthetics in

its concept of poetry (Raina 2000). All this and his translations, letters and minor works were compiled and published in a systematic manner after his passing away on 5th December 1950. We present a selection of his writings with our comments.

The Life Divine: "The most vital issue of the age is whether the future progress of humanity is to be governed by the modern economic and materialistic mind of the West or by a nobler pragmatism guided, uplifted and enlightened by spiritual culture and knowledge." This book resolves this question by reconciling the truths behind the metaphysical and the modern with a synthesis of the idea of divine life on Earth.

Savitri: A Legend & A Symbol: A major work, this is a long poem of over 23000 lines based on the ancient Hindu legend of Savitri and Satyavan. Didactic yet inspiring, it depicts myriad aspects of his views and explanation of the ancient Vedic-Yogic path. A unique specimen of spiritual literature, it is, in his own words, "A nectar of honey in the combs of gold" encompassing all human experience in 700 pages.

Arya: Arya was a 64-page monthly review written by Sri Aurobindo. It ran for six and a half years and constituted the appearance in serialised form almost all of his major works except his epic poem *Savitri*. These included *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on The Gita*, *The Secret of The Veda*, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, *The Upanishads*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, *War and Self-determination*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, and *The Future Poetry*.

The first issue of the Arya appeared on Sri Aurobindo's 42nd birthday (15 August 1914), the last came out in January 1921.

Gems from Sri Aurobindo: This is a gleaning of Aurobindo's statements on subjects of interest from his vast body of works. Aphoristic in style, his sentences illumine the truths within. He packs each sentence with the depth and intensity of the inner meaning, and provides inspiration, themes for meditation and ideas for reflection on a wide array of topics.

The Essential Aurobindo: Writings of Sri Aurobindo: Amassed from over two dozen volumes of Aurobindo's works, this book is essential to an understanding of one of the greatest minds of the 20th century, who combines "the alacrity of the West with the illuminations of the East." Edited with an introduction and an afterword by Dr. Robert McDermott, professor of philosophy and religion at the California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco.

Collected Works: The Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo (Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library) were published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1972, on the occasion of Sri Aurobindo's centenary. The compilation has 30 volumes, or close to 16,000 pages.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What are the principle works of Aurobindo?

2) Explain the intellectual influences that Aurobindo had.

1.7 LET US SUM UP

Sri Aurobindo was an extraordinary genius, mystic and activist. We have seen the first part of his biography, and his vision and writings in this unit. It is very clear that his English influence has been complemented by his devotion to both Indian politics and philosophy.

1.8 KEY WORDS

Saraswati: The *sakti* or wife of God Brahma; the goddess of learning, music, and poetry.

Sister Nivedita (1867–1911), born as Margaret Elizabeth Noble, was an Anglo-Irish social worker, author, teacher and disciple of Swami Vivekananda. She was a spiritual leader and a true friend of India.

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UNIT 2 SRI AUROBINDO ON INDIAN SCRIPTURES

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

- To expose the students to the spiritual depth of Sri Aurobindo.
- To encourage them to appreciate his appreciation and interpretation of Indian Scriptures.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to study the impact of Indian scriptures on Aurobindo we first trace his spiritual journey. Then we see his own experience of the Divine which is reflection in his study and interpretation of the Indian Scriptures. For this section we base ourselves primarily on the Aurobindo Ashram website (SAL 2011).

2.2 THE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES OF AUROBINDO

After his return to India, the Divine too, Aurobindo continued to work unseen, within, revealing himself only on certain occasions. In his very first year at Baroda, Sri Aurobindo was going in a horse carriage and there was the possibility of a major accident. Suddenly he felt a Being of Light emerge from him and avert the accident. He described it in a sonnet written later on: "Above my head a mighty head was seen, a face with the calm of immortality and an omnipotent gaze that held the scene in the vast circle of its sovereignty. His hair was mingled with the sun and breeze; The world was in His heart and He was I: I housed in me the Everlasting's peace, the strength of One whose substance cannot die." (SAL 2011).

In 1903 Sri Aurobindo went to Kashmir with the Maharaja. There on the Hills of Shankaracharya he had a revelatory spiritual experience. In another context, he described a similar experience thus: "One stands upon a mountain ridge and glimpses or mentally feels a wideness, a pervasiveness, a nameless Vast in Nature; then suddenly there comes the touch, a revelation, a flooding, the mental loses itself in the spiritual, one bears the first invasion of the Infinite."

Once Sri Aurobindo visited a Kali Temple on the bank of the Narmada. He said: "With my Europeanised mind I had no faith in image-worship and I hardly believed in the presence of God." But he was compelled to do so when he looked at the image and saw a living Divine Presence. As he wrote afterwards: "You stand before a temple of Kali beside a sacred river and see what? - a sculpture, a gracious piece of architecture, but in a moment mysteriously, unexpectedly there is instead a Presence, a Power, a Face that looks into yours, an inner sight in you has regarded the World-Mother."

The fourth experience has an interesting background. His younger brother Barin fell seriously ill with mountain fever. When the doctors were helpless, a Naga Sannyasi happened to come there. He took a cup of water, cut it into four by making a cross with a knife while chanting a mantra and asked Barin to drink it. The next day Barin was completely cured. Sri Aurobindo was greatly impressed and this also proved to be his conscious entry into the field of Yoga. He says. "I thought that a yoga which requires me to give up the world was not for me. I had to liberate my country. I took it up seriously when I learnt that the same tapasya which one does to get away from the world can be turned to action. I learnt that yoga gives power and thought: why should I not get the power and use it to liberate my country?"

Backdoor entry into Yoga

Sri Aurobindo said humorously that he had a backdoor entry into yoga. But the immediate result was that he took up the practice of pranayama. Soon there were some startling physical and psychological results. His mind and memory worked with a greater illumination and power. His skin also became smooth and fair. But it ended with that and when Sri Aurobindo fell seriously ill he stopped, and began to look for another way. This new way opened up much later on but for the moment, the important outer event was that the scene shifted from Baroda to Calcutta.

Calcutta

We may perhaps end the Baroda period with a comment of A. B. Clark, the principal of Baroda College: "So you met Aurobindo Ghosh. Did you notice his eyes? There is a mystic fire and light in them. They penetrate into the beyond." And he added, "If Joan of Arc heard heavenly voices, Aurobindo probably sees heavenly visions".

2.3 NATIONALISM BEGINNING IN BENGAL (1906-1910)

The freedom movement was given a big impetus by the decision of Lord Curzon to partition Bengal. Protest meetings were held all over the country and a mass agitation was launched in Bengal. In June 1906 Sri Aurobindo took one year's leave without pay and went to Bengal to participate in the movement. In 1907 Sri Aurobindo left Baroda College and joined the newly established Bengal National College, as its principal. His salary of Rs.150/- per month was only one fifth of what he was getting in Baroda (SAL 2011).

He had already been contributing articles to the Bengali weekly "Yugantar". Now Bipin Chandra Pal started the daily "Bande Mataram" and Sri Aurobindo soon became its chief editor, though his name was not printed, to avoid prosecution. Overnight, the paper became the organ of the Nationalist Movement and a mighty force in Indian Politics. *The London Times* complained that its articles reeked of sedition but were so cleverly worded that no action could be taken. Mr. Radcliff, editor of *The Statesman*, said about the *Bande Mataram*:

"It had a full-size sheet, was clearly printed on green paper, and was full of leading and special articles written in English with a brilliance and pungency not hitherto attained in the Indian press. It was the most effective voice of what we then called nationalist extremism".

Bipin Chandra Pal described the role of Sri Aurobindo in the *Bande Mataram*: "Morning after morning, not only Calcutta but the educated community almost in every part of the country eagerly awaited its vigorous pronouncements on the stirring questions of the day.... It was a force in the country which none dared to ignore, however much they might fear or hate it; and Aravinda was the leading spirit, the central figure, in the new journal!" (SAL 2011).

An attempt was made to prosecute Sri Aurobindo for sedition in July 1907, but the charges could not be proved, and he was acquitted. In the meantime differences of policy and approach were building up between the moderates and the nationalists. A historic session of the Indian National Congress was held in Surat where it split into two and the nationalists led by Sri Aurobindo and Tilak held a separate meeting. Henry Nevinston, a member of Parliament from England who happened to be present, describes his impressions of Sri Aurobindo and the scene after the split (SAL 2011):

"...a youngish man, I should think still under thirty. Intent dark eyes looked from his thin, clear-cut face with a gravity that seemed immovable.... Grave with intensity, careless of fate or opinion, and one of the most silent men I have known, he was of the stuff that dreamers are made of, but dreamers who will act their dreams, indifferent to means....".

"Grave and silent - I think without saying a single word - Mr. Aravinda Ghosh took the chair, and sat unmoved, with far-off eyes, as one who gazes at futurity. In clear, short sentences, without eloquence or passion, Mr. Tilak spoke till the stars shone out and someone kindled a lantern at his side.

"Sri Aurobindo, who always liked to work from behind the scene, had been pushed into the forefront of the freedom movement. He was its acknowledged leader. The whole country rang with the cry of *Bande Mataram* and a new spirit swept across the country. People had awakened to the need of Swaraj - complete independence- and were willing to give their lives to attain it."

In the midst of this turmoil Sri Aurobindo met in Baroda a Maharashtrian Yogi called Vishnu Bhaskar Lele. Lele asked Sri Aurobindo to remain in seclusion for three days. He told him to sit in meditation and not to think. He would find that thoughts were not his own but came from outside and should be thrown away. Sri Aurobindo describes his experience: "I did not think either of questioning the truth or the possibility, I simply sat down and did it. In a moment my mind became silent as a windless air on a high mountain summit and then I saw one thought and then another coming in a concrete way from outside; I flung them away before they could enter and take hold of the brain and in three days I was free." (SAL 2011)

2.4 THE BRAHMAN CONSCIOUSNESS

In three days Sri Aurobindo had achieved the silent mind which deepened into an experience of the Brahman Consciousness. He asserts: "When I was in Bombay, from the balcony of a friend's house I saw the whole busy movement of Bombay as a picture in a cinema show, all unreal and shadowy." (SAL 2011)

But there was a problem. Sri Aurobindo had to address a national meeting after three days. His mind had become calm and blank. How was he to give a speech? Lele told him that it did not matter. He had only to bow down to the audience as Narayana and everything would be all right. As usual Sri Aurobindo followed the directions without questioning and he found that something else spoke through him. And thus it was for the rest of his life. Everything was done from the silent Brahman Consciousness, writing, speaking or the most intense political activity.

This was another great turning point in Sri Aurobindo's spiritual life. He began listening to a Voice within and Lele told him to follow it and that he now had no need for any further instructions or an external Guru. But the Divine had a very different setting for the next major spiritual experience of Sri Aurobindo - the prison-cell of Alipore in Calcutta.

The Prison-Cell of Alipore

The atmosphere in Bengal was tense. The British Government had let loose repressive measures to crush all resistance. In this charged atmosphere an unsuccessful attempt was made on the life of Magistrate Kingsford. Two Bengali youths threw a bomb at his horse carriage. Immediately the police carried out raids on the Manicktolla Gardens, a family property of Sri Aurobindo, where many revolutionaries were undergoing training. Sri Aurobindo was also arrested from his house. He was imprisoned and, for a long time, kept in a small cell in solitary confinement (Srinivasa Iyengar 1985).

Thus began one of the historic trials of the Indian freedom movement. There were 49 accused and 206 witnesses. 400 documents were filed and 5000 exhibits were produced consisting of bombs, revolvers, acid, etc. The judge C.B. Beechcroft had been a student with Sri Aurobindo at Cambridge. The Chief Prosecutor Eardley Norton kept a loaded revolver on his briefcase throughout the trial. The case for Sri Aurobindo was taken up by C. R. Das. The trial lasted for one full year. At the end C. R. Das addressed the court in these ringing words: "My appeal to you is this, that long after the controversy will be hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, the agitation will have ceased, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone, his words will be echoed and re-echoed, not only in India but across distant seas and lands. Therefore, I say that the man in his position is not only standing before the bar of this Court, but before the bar of the High Court of History." (SAL 2011)

Sri Aurobindo was found not guilty and acquitted. But this period of one year was a very important period in Sri Aurobindo's life. It was a period of intense sadhana when he had the experience of Krishna as the Immanent Divine. This is how he described the experience in a speech in Uttarpara: "I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Sri Krishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover."

Sri Aurobindo saw the same smiling Krishna in the magistrate and even the prosecuting counsel. Where was there any place for fear? When Sri Aurobindo had entered the prison he had said:

"The agnostic was in me, the atheist was in me, the sceptic was in me and I was not absolutely sure that there was a God at all."

But now all was changed. As Sri Aurobindo said afterwards: "I have spoken of a year's imprisonment. It would have been more appropriate to speak of a year's living in an ashram or a hermitage. The only result of the wrath of the British Government was that I found God." (SAL 2011)

India's New Mission

After his release Sri Aurobindo re-entered the political field with a new vision and purpose. India's freedom was necessary if she had to rise and be great and he declared: "India does not rise as other countries do, for self or when she is strong, to trample on the weak. She is rising to shed the eternal light entrusted to her over the world. India has always existed for humanity and not for herself and it is for humanity and not for herself that she must be great." (SAL 2011)

Sri Aurobindo also started two weeklies: the 'Karmayogin' in English and the 'Dharma' in Bengali. But the air was full of rumours of an impending arrest. The view of the British Government was clearly expressed in what Lord Minto wrote about Sri Aurobindo: "I can only repeat that he is the most dangerous man we have to reckon with."

Aadesh: The Inner Command

One day when Sri Aurobindo was sitting in the Karmayogin office, news was received that the Government intended to arrest him. Immediately, there was an agitated discussion all around. Sri Aurobindo sat calm and unmoving and heard a distinct voice tell him, "Go to Chandernagore". Sri Aurobindo went straight to the Ganga and boarded a boat for Chandernagore which was then a French settlement. Soon he received another 'adesh' to go to Pondicherry. Sri Aurobindo remarked later: "I could not question. It was Sri Krishna's adesh. I had to obey. Later I found it was for the Ashram, for the Yogic work." (SAL 2011)

Sri Aurobindo's work in the political field had come to an end. The country had awakened to the call of the Mother and freedom was assured. It was more important to see what India would do with that freedom and what man would do with his future. It was for this work that Sri Aurobindo sailed for Pondicherry to start the most important chapter of his earthly life.

2.5 MYSTIC IN PONDICHERRY (1910-1950)

Sri Aurobindo reached Pondicherry on 4th April 1910. He was then 38 years old. He was received by several revolutionaries of Pondicherry. In fact some of them had been waiting for an Uttarayogi, a yogi from the north. They had heard the prophecy that he would come as a fugitive and practise the Poorna Yoga. He would be recognised by three statements. These statements were made by Sri Aurobindo in a letter he wrote from Baroda to his wife Mrinalini Devi on August 30, 1905 where he spoke about his "three madnesses." This letter was later found by the police and produced in court during the Alipore Bomb trial (Srinivasa Iyengar 1985).

Three Madnesses

"I have three madnesses," accepts our Master. He elaborates as follows (SAL 2011).

The first one is this. I firmly believe that the accomplishments, genius, higher education and learning and wealth that God has given me are His. I have a right to spend for my own purposes only what is needed for the maintenance of the family and if otherwise absolutely essential...

The second folly has recently taken hold of me: It is this. By whatever means I must get the direct realisation of the Lord. The religion of today consists in repeating the name of God every now and then, in praying to Him in the presence of everybody and in showing people how religious one is; I do not want it. If the Divine is there, then there must be a way of experiencing His existence, of realising His presence; however hard the path, I have taken a firm resolution to follow it. Hindu dharma asserts that the path is to be found in one's own self, in one's mind. The rule that enables one to follow the path is also given to me...

The third folly is this: whereas others regard the country as an inert object, and know it as the plains, the fields, the forests, the mountains and rivers, I look upon my country as the mother, I worship her and adore her as the mother. What would a son do when a demon sitting on the breast of his mother is drinking her blood? Would he sit down content to take his meals, and go on enjoying himself in the company of his wife and children, or would he, rather, run to the rescue of his mother? I know I have the strength to uplift this fallen race; it is not physical strength, I am not going to fight with the sword or with the gun, but with the power of knowledge. The power of the warrior is not the only kind of force, there is also the power of Brahman which is founded on knowledge. This is not a new feeling within me, it is not of a recent origin, I was born with it, it is in my very marrow. God sent me to the earth to accomplish this great mission."

Mrinalini passed away on December 17, 1918 in Calcutta, before she could come to Pondicherry. From 1910 for several years Sri Aurobindo lived with a few followers depending entirely on donations to maintain them. Outwardly and financially these were very difficult times. Sri Aurobindo pointed out the precarious nature of their position in a letter to Motilal Roy written half humorously but also half seriously: "The situation just now is that we have Rs. 1 1/2 or so in hand. Srinivasa is also without money... No doubt, God will provide, but He has contracted a bad habit of waiting till the last moment. I only hope He does not wish us to learn how to live on a minus quantity like Bharati."

The Mother arrives

But the inner yoga, intense and unwavering went on unaffected by outward circumstances. For four years it was a lonely and solitary journey. His sadhana and work were still waiting for the coming of the one who was to be his true collaborator, the Mother. And she came from France in 1914. On March 29th a young French woman, Mirra Richard, came to Pondicherry with her husband Paul Richard and met Sri Aurobindo for the first time on the physical plane. One has to say on the physical plane because Mirra was far on the path of spirituality and had already been inwardly in contact with a person whom she called Krishna, and who had been helping her and guiding her.

When Mirra saw Sri Aurobindo she recognised in him the Krishna of her vision and knew that her place and work were with him in India. She wrote in her diary the next morning:

"It matters little that there are thousands of beings plunged in the densest ignorance, He whom we saw yesterday is on earth; His presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, and Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth."

Immediately there was a greater impetus to the movement. On August 15th 1914, the monthly *Arya* was launched. The *Arya* continued for seven years and through it Sri Aurobindo presented to the world his great spiritual vision and the path to attain it. Nearly all the major works of Sri Aurobindo which were published later in book form - *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *On the Veda*, *The Upanishads*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, *The Future Poetry* - all of them first came out serially in the *Arya*. It was a veritable torrent which flowed, month after month, on a variety of subjects, words of surpassing depth and beauty. And none of it was thought out; it did not even pass through his mind, but flowed straight from the silent consciousness into his pen.

In 1915, with the outbreak of the First World War, the Richards had to go back to France. Mirra went to Japan in 1916 and returned to Pondicherry in 1920, never to leave.

The Descent of the 'Overmind' Consciousness

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother believe that evolution is primarily a process of the manifestation of higher and higher levels of consciousness upon earth. As life descended into inert matter, and mind into unconscious life, so too higher levels are waiting to descend. The highest of these is the Supermind and it was the constant endeavour of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to bring it down for a radical and permanent transformation of the earth. But before the Supermind could descend, other planes had to manifest to build the proper base.

It was a momentous day. It also brought about many outward changes. Sri Aurobindo now installed Mirra as the Mother of his spiritual endeavour, his collaborator and equal, and handed over to her the responsibility of the inner and outer life of the small group of sadhaks who had gathered around him. He then withdrew into seclusion, to concentrate on the next step of his Yoga.

The Ashram Grows

This was also the beginning of what has now grown into a spiritual community of nearly fifteen hundred persons, known as the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The Ashram grew and expanded under the Mother's guidance. Though Sri Aurobindo had withdrawn physically he continued to guide the disciples inwardly and through letters. Day after day, he sat late into the night answering their smallest queries, apparently even the most trivial, and pouring out his love and light.

2.6 SRI AUROBINDO LEAVES HIS BODY

On December 5, 1950, at the age of 78, Sri Aurobindo left his physical body. His body was kept in State for four days and given Samadhi on December 9, 1950. Dr. P. K. Sanyal, who had attended on Sri Aurobindo during his last illness, was surprised to find that the body had not decomposed. He asked the Mother about this phenomenon (Navajata 1972). He described what happened:

"The Mother and I had a look at Him; how wonderful, how beautiful He looked, with a golden hue. There were no signs of death as science had taught me, no evidence of the slightest discoloration, or decomposition. The Mother whispered, 'As long as the supramental light does not pass away, the body will not show any signs of decomposition, and it may be a day or it may take many more days.' I whispered to Her, 'Where is the light you speak of - can I not see it?' I was then kneeling by Sri Aurobindo's bed, by the Mother's feet. She smiled at me and with infinite compassion put her hand on my head. There He was - with a luminous mantle of bluish golden hue around him."

But the dreams of Sri Aurobindo continue to become a reality. The world moves forward on the destined way. Sri Aurobindo was first and foremost a poet. And his greatest work, on which he spent his maximum love and care, was his Epic "*Savitri*." What he wrote there is very well applicable to himself: "One yet may come armoured, invincible; His will immobile meets the mobile hour; The world's blows cannot bend that victor head; Calm and sure are his steps in the growing Night; The goal recedes, he hurries not his pace, He turns not to high voices in the Night. He asks no aid from the inferior gods; His eyes are fixed on the immutable aim."

There is perhaps no better way to end this narration of Sri Aurobindo's life than to quote the message given by the Mother, which is engraved on his Samadhi: "To Thee who hast been the material envelope of our Master, to Thee our infinite gratitude. Before Thee who hast done so much for us, who hast worked, struggled, suffered, hoped, endured so much, before Thee who hast willed all, attempted all, prepared, achieved all for us, before Thee we bow down and implore that we may never forget, even for a moment, all we owe to Thee."

2.7 SRI AUROBINDO ON INDIAN SCRIPTURES

Obviously our Master was enamoured and fascinated by the Indian scriptures. He studied them thoroughly and personalised them, so that they became part of his existence. But he was not a slave even to the Sacred Scriptures. Stephen H. Phillips (1986) who has written a very illuminating book on Aurobindo, thinks of Aurobindo as a "mystic empiricist" who has high regard for Indian scriptures. He says that Aurobindo had a "metaphorical understanding" of the Indian Scriptures and so he could interpret them creatively to make them relevant for the Indian context. In order to see how Aurobindo creatively interprets the Indian Scriptures, we take one specific case of The Upanishads. Written in between May and September 1920, in Arya, the following gives us an idea of how Aurobindo appreciates the Indian Scripture.

2.8 SRI AUROBINDO ON THE UPANISHADS

[To give an idea of his view on Indian Scriptures, we have some extracts from his writings on the Upanishads, written by Aurobindo himself, in Arya between May and September 1920.]

"The Upanishads are the supreme work of the Indian mind, and that it should be so, that the highest self-expression of its genius, its sublimest poetry, its greatest creation of the thought and word should be not a literary or poetical masterpiece of the ordinary kind, but a large flood of spiritual revelation of this direct and profound character, is a significant fact, evidence of a

unique mentality and unusual turn of spirit. The Upanishads are at once profound religious scriptures, - for they are a record of the deepest spiritual experiences, - documents of revelatory and intuitive philosophy of an inexhaustible light, power and largeness and, whether written in verse or cadenced prose, spiritual poems of an absolute, an unfailing inspiration inevitable in phrase, wonderful in rhythm and expression. It is the expression of a mind in which philosophy and religion and poetry are made one, because this religion does not end with a cult nor is limited to a religio-ethical aspiration, but rises to an infinite discovery of God, of Self, of our highest and whole reality of spirit and being and speaks out of an ecstasy of luminous knowledge and an ecstasy of moved and fulfilled experience, this philosophy is not an abstract intellectual speculation about Truth or a structure of the logical intelligence, but Truth seen, felt, lived, held by the inmost mind and soul in the joy of utterance of an assured discovery and possession, and this poetry is the work of the aesthetic mind lifted up beyond its ordinary field to express the wonder and beauty of the rarest spiritual self-vision and the profoundest illumined truth of self and God and universe. Here the intuitive mind and intimate psychological experience of the Vedic seers passes into a supreme culmination in which the Spirit, as is said in a phrase of the Katha Upanishad, discloses its own very body, reveals the very word of its self-expression and discovers to the mind the vibration of rhythms which repeating themselves within in the spiritual hearing seem to build up the soul and set it satisfied and complete on the heights of self-knowledge.

“This character of the Upanishads needs to be insisted upon with a strong emphasis, because it is ignored by foreign translators who seek to bring out the intellectual sense without feeling the life of thought vision and the ecstasy of spiritual experience which made the ancient verses appear then and still make them to those who can enter into the element in which these utterances move, a revelation not to the intellect alone, but to the soul and the whole being, make of them in the old expressive word not intellectual thought and phrase, but Sruti, spiritual audience, an inspired Scripture. The philosophical substance of the Upanishads demands at this day no farther stress of appreciation of its value; for even if the amplest acknowledgement by the greatest minds were wanting, the whole history of philosophy would be there to offer its evidence.

“The Upanishads have been the acknowledged source of numerous profound philosophies and religions that flowed from it in India like her great rivers from their Himalayan cradle fertilising the mind and life of the people and kept its soul alive through the long procession of the centuries, constantly returned to for light, never failing to give fresh illumination, a fountain of inexhaustible life-giving waters. Buddhism with all its developments was only a restatement, although from a new standpoint and with fresh terms of intellectual definition and reasoning, of one side of its experience and it carried it thus changed in form but hardly in substance over all Asia and westward towards Europe. The ideas of the Upanishads can be rediscovered in much of the thought of Pythagoras and Plato and form the profoundest part of Neo-platonism and Gnosticism with all their considerable consequences to the philosophical thinking of the West, and Sufism only repeats them in another religious language.

“There is hardly a main philosophical idea which cannot find an authority or a seed or indication in these antique writings - the speculations, according to a certain view, of thinkers who had no better past or background to their thought than a crude, barbaric, naturalistic and animistic ignorance. And even the larger generalisations of Science are constantly found to apply to the

truth of physical Nature formulas already discovered by the Indian sages in their original, their largest meaning in the deeper truth of the spirit.

“And yet these works are not philosophical speculations of the intellectual kind, a metaphysical analysis which labours to define notions, to select ideas and discriminate those that are true, to logicise truth or else to support the mind in its intellectual preferences by dialectical reasoning and is content to put forward an exclusive solution of existence in the light of this or that idea of the reason and see all things from that viewpoint, in that focus and determining perspective. The Upanishads could not have had so undying a vitality, exercised so unfailing an influence, produced such results or seen now their affirmations independently justified in other spheres of inquiry and by quite opposite methods, if they had been of that character. It is because these seers saw Truth rather than merely thought it, clothed it indeed with a strong body of intuitive idea and disclosing image, but a body of ideal transparency through which we look into the illimitable, because they fathomed things in the light of self-existence and saw them with the eye of the Infinite, that their words remain always alive and immortal, of an inexhaustible significance, an inevitable authenticity, a satisfying finality that is at the same time an infinite commencement of truth, to which all our lines of investigation when they go through to their end arrive again and to which humanity constantly returns in its minds and its ages of greatest vision. The Upanishads are Vedanta, a book of knowledge in a higher degree even than the Vedas, but knowledge in the profounder Indian sense of the word, Jnana. Not a mere thinking and considering by the intelligence, the pursuit and grasping of a mental form of truth by the intellectual mind, but a seeing of it with the soul and a total living in it with the power of the inner being, a spiritual seizing by a kind of identification with the object of knowledge is Jnana. And because it is only by an integral knowing of the self that this kind of direct knowledge can be made complete, it was the self that the Vedantic sages sought to know, to live in and to be one with it by identity. And through this endeavour they came easily to see that the self in us is one with the universal self of all things and that this self again is the same as God and Brahman, a transcendent Being or Existence, and they beheld, felt, lived in the inmost truth of all things in the universe and the inmost truth of man's inner and outer existence by the light of this one and unifying vision. The Upanishads are epic hymns of self-knowledge and world-knowledge and God-knowledge.

“The great formulations of philosophic truth with which they abound are not abstract intellectual generalisations, things that may shine and enlighten the mind, but do not live and move the soul to ascension, but are ardours as well as lights of an intuitive and revelatory illumination, reachings as well as seeings of the one Existence, the transcendent Godhead, the divine and universal Self and discoveries of his relation with things and creatures in this great cosmic manifestation. Chants of inspired knowledge, they breathe like all hymns a tone of religious aspiration and ecstasy, not of the narrowly intense kind proper to a lesser religious feeling, but raised beyond cult and special forms of devotion to the universal Ananda of the Divine which comes to us by approach to and oneness with the self-existent and universal spirit.

“The Upanishads are the creation of a revelatory and intuitive mind and its illumined experience, and all their substance, structure, phrase, imagery, movement are determined by and stamped with this original character. These supreme and all-embracing truths, these visions of oneness and self and a universal divine being are cast into brief and monumental phrases which bring them at once before the soul's eye and make them real and imperative to its aspiration and

experience or are couched in poetic sentences full of revealing power and suggestive thought-colour that discover a whole infinite through a finite image. The One is there revealed, but also disclosed the many aspects, and each is given its whole significance by the amplitude of the expression and finds as if in a spontaneous self-discovery its place and its connection by the illumining justness of each word and all the phrase. The largest metaphysical truths and the subtlest subtleties of psychological experience are taken up into the inspired movement and made at once precise to the seeing mind and loaded with unending suggestion to the discovering spirit. There are separate phrases, single couplets, brief passages which contain each in itself the substance of a vast philosophy and yet each is only thrown out as a side, an aspect, a portion of the infinite self-knowledge. All here is a packed and pregnant and yet perfectly lucid and luminous brevity and an immeasurable completeness. A thought of this kind cannot follow the tardy, careful and diffuse development of the logical intelligence. The passage, the sentence, the couplet, the line, even the half line follows the one that precedes with a certain interval full of an unexpressed thought, an echoing silence between them, a thought which is carried in the total suggestion and implied in the step itself, but which the mind is left to work out for its own profit, and these intervals of pregnant silence are large, the steps of this thought are like the paces of a Titan striding from rock to distant rock across infinite waters. There is a perfect totality, a comprehensive connection of harmonious parts in the structure of each Upanishad; but it is done in the way of a mind that sees masses of truth at a time and stops to bring only the needed word out of a filled silence. The rhythm in verse or cadenced prose corresponds to the sculpture of the thought and the phrase. The metrical forms of the Upanishads are made up of four half lines each clearly cut, the lines mostly complete in themselves and integral in sense, the half lines presenting two thoughts or distinct parts of a thought that are wedded to and complete each other, and the sound movement follows a corresponding principle, each step brief and marked off by the distinctness of its pause, full of echoing cadences that remain long vibrating in the inner hearing: each is as if a wave of the infinite that carries in it the whole voice and rumour of the ocean. It is a kind of poetry - word of vision, rhythm of the spirit, - that has not been written before or after.” (Aurobindo)

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Narrate the spiritual experiences of Aurobindo.

2) How does Aurobindo view Indian Scriptures?

2.9 LET US SUM UP

After focussing on his deep spiritual experience, we saw how Aurobindo accepts, affirms and interprets the Indian scriptures, making them relevant for his context.

2.10 KEY WORDS

Adesh: The inner (divine?) commandment, which must be followed. Similar to the voice of the conscience.

Sadhak: A spiritual aspirant, generally a devotee, a student, who is following a spiritual teaching or tradition or guru in order to attain realisation.

Tapasya: Tapasya in Sanskrit means "heat". In Hinduism, it is used figuratively, denoting spiritual suffering, mortification or austerity, and also the spiritual ecstasy of a yogi.

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UNIT 3 SPIRITUAL THOUGHT IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

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- 3.0 Objectives
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3.0 OBJECTIVES

- To study the spiritual journey of Aurobindo.
- To see how Aurobindo's spiritual thought coexists with the needs of the country.
- To see how Aurobindo drew strength from the rich Indian tradition, while remaining open to other philosophies.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to focus on the spiritual thought in Indian philosophy, we study the spiritual adventure of Sri Aurobindo. Basing on Indian traditions, he has perfected the art of blending mysticism with practical needs of the nation.

3.2 SRI AUROBINDO, THE SPIRITUAL ADVENTURER

It was when India lay prostrate at the feet of the British that Sri Aurobindo was born. India had almost lost its ancient glory and attained the peace of the desert. The shadow of British rule in India was so thick and dark that people had almost been blinded of its past glory. A certain systematic impoverishment in various fields pervaded the country. Macaulay's efforts in establishing English in India could create a new class of intellectuals who lost their faith in India's traditional background and cultural heritage. It was to this class of people that Dr Krishna Dhan Ghose, the father of Sri Aurobindo, belonged. This class of people, no doubt, had a new activity which was crudely and confusedly imitative of the foreign culture. It was a crucial moment and an ordeal of perilous severity. What India then required was a strong political awakening, a cultural consciousness and a spiritual rebirth. In fact it required a common stream of creative inspiration, progressive contemplation and a peaceful and powerful reaction. Of this dire need for India Sri Aurobindo was one of the leading spirits (Venkataratnam1978).

Born to a highly anglicised and denationalised father, Sri Aurobindo had become one among the great patriots of India. He got the seeds of this feeling from the very letters of his father when he stayed and was educated in England. At the same time he sucked the Western culture to its core. Though Sri Aurobindo was essentially a seer, he was a great mystic poet. He shed light and warmth on his age, revitalised the spiritual soil of his land, revealed unknown horizons of Yoga and created new hope in bridging the gulf between the East and the West. When he defined India's decline as the ebb-movement of a creative spirit which can only be understood by seeing it in the full tide of its greatness he had a unique type of patriotism. He further explained India's decline as a momentary helplessness which can be overcome by an original dealing with modern problems in the light of Indian spirit and the endeavour to formulate a greater synthesis of a spiritual society. To know him fully well it is not enough to read his works or to study the system of his Yoga; one has to dig deep into India's ancient lore-Upanishads and Gita—to practise the system of his Yoga and to drown deep in his inexhaustible mystic layers of thought and poetry. The whole aroma of Upanishads and Gita, is infused into what Sri Aurobindo said and did (Venkataratnam1978). The sharp razor-edged road to spirituality appeared widened and smoothed in his Yogic-Sadhana and man had become elated in admiring him. He who is unsurpassed as a mystic poet, as a scholar of ancient languages, both Indian and European, "as the propounder of Integral Yoga, as a prophet of Life Divine, and as an exponent of a new progress for humanity on the basis of Indian tradition, is really a superman!" (Venkataratnam1978).

3.3 POWER OVER POETRY

According to Sri Aurobindo, poetry comes by inspiration but not by reading. Everything he wrote came from his Yogic experience, knowledge and inspiration. His greater power over poetry and perfect expression was from the heightening of his consciousness. It was Yoga that had developed his poetic style by the development of consciousness, fineness and accuracy of thought and vision, increasing inspiration and an increasing intuitive discrimination of right thought, word-form, just image and figure. The poetic word is a vehicle of the spirit and the chosen medium of the soul's self-expression. The deeper layers of intense personal experience can never be explained unless there is the mere suggestiveness of words and hence 'some kind of figure or symbol more than a direct language.' "Poetry should be half as a prayer from below, half as a whisper from above."

3.4 PERMEATED BY THE SPIRITUAL

If Sri Aurobindo had been nothing more than a mere Indian mystic poet in English, a great patriot and prophet he would still be remembered as one of the world's immortals. But he was something more. Whatever he touched—politics, literature, education—was permeated with his highly spiritual outlook. To omit spirituality from Sri Aurobindo's life and thought would be to miss the very essence of his being. He knew that spirituality was not something to be attained by mere intellect. He saw that the world is almost at the end of the material swing. It is getting exhausted and fatigued with its own material exertions and with tears in eyes, despair writ large on her face! It is now looking up to the East for solace and peace. Tagore saw that Sri Aurobindo had been seeking for the soul and had gained it and through this long process of realisation had accumulated within him a silent power of inspiration. Early in life, significantly enough, he had a

dream in which a mass of darkness came rapidly towards him, encircled him, entered into him and repeated the same experience while in England. But it was dispelled only when he returned to India.

This notable spiritual experience of infinite calm descending upon him had the climax when he stayed in Alipore Jail and this historic experience leads him to Pondicherry, a centre and sanctuary from which radiated the new gospel of Integral Yoga and evolved a new life and light. He lived here mostly in the inner world, probing into its innumerable mysteries, taking measure of the depths and heights of consciousness. The inner promptings and the decisive urges of his heart were always there as revealed in his early mystic experiences and ultimately they drove him to the exclusive domain of the spirit (Venkataratnam1978). His life in Pondicherry represented one continuous, great and epic struggle against all the retrograde forces of life. It was the result of that strenuous struggle, that Sri Aurobindo evolved his philosophy of the Life Divine, discovered the unique path of Integral Yoga. This laid the foundation for human life on a higher plane – the supramental plane – which is at once subtler, purer, nobler and intrinsically harmonious and evolutionary.

3.5 THE LILA OF CONSCIOUSNESS

It is said that life is a mighty stream of intangible force pushing forward and upward, ever evolving, ever organising matter for its own purpose, and ever making its way through the encircling inert mass in which it lies involved. Sri Aurobindo felt that a stage in the evolutionary movement had been reached when man himself has to launch on the adventure of contributing to the process by his own efforts. Hence he has an irrepressible aspiration to be master of himself, a deepening of his self-consciousness, an ability to meditate on himself and an understanding of the laws of his own evolution. Consequently his intense search for Life Divine led him to the discovery—the aspiration of man to ascend to Life Divine and the downward descent of the Supermind to lift the spirit of man to the divine level. “He sees the cosmic drama of involution and evolution, the Lila of God descending into clay and clay aspiring to godhead; and the mystery of world-existence is a mystery no more”. The supramental consciousness will enable the evolved man to live simultaneously in the transcendent and immanent dimensions of existence (Ghose 1949).

What then is this cult of the new world he promised? Is man to continue to be a prey to the limitations of unavoidable death, unrealizable desire and inflicting incapacity even in this new world? We can aspire an optimistic approach of this great seer to answer the questions. For the heavy task he had undertaken the never ending sources of energy for him are the immortal expressions of the Upanishads and the Gita. He promised a new world surely inhabited by a new race of man. This new man will have ‘a golden body’ or the body beautiful, strong and healthy (Venkataratnam1978). His emotions will well up, not from the muddy unconscious or subconscious, but from the depths of the pure spirit. His arts and crafts, his music and song will be an expression of spiritual realities. His sensual and intellectual faculties will be in an integral subservience to the spiritual, the home of Truth, Beauty, Power and Bliss.

From such an experience, Aurobindo was able to support and nourish himself from the rich spiritual resources of India's religious experience and philosophy. Let us see how history has been preparing him for such an adventure.

3.6 SPIRITUAL THOUGHT AND INDIAN HISTORY

From 1910 onwards the emphasis of Sri Aurobindo's life changed from an outer political quest to the inner spiritual quest which is a significantly more difficult undertaking, because whereas politics is on the surface and can be easily described, the inner spiritual quest does not lend itself as readily to verbalization (Singh 2008).

Right from 1893 when Sri Aurobindo returned from England, along with his political interests he began having a series of spiritual experiences. On his first contact with Indian soil at Apollo Bunder in Bombay after 14 years abroad he had an experience of what he described as a vast calm which descended on him and remained with him for a long time. Then, after he had joined service in Baroda, in 1894 there was a near accident to the carriage in which he was travelling, and on that occasion also he seemed to feel that there was some sort of benign intervention beyond intellectual explanation; he felt he was under some kind of higher protection. In 1901 when he visited Kashmir along with Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwad and went to the ancient Sankaracharya Temple in the city of Srinagar, he had another experience of what he called the vacant infinite, and he also wrote a poem about this. From 1906 onwards, he was initiated into into several meditational techniques including Pranayama.

This resulted in a series of tremendously powerful experiences which surprised not only Sri Aurobindo but also his yoga master (Singh 2008). It is clear from reading the description of what happened that Sri Aurobindo had very strong sanskaras, as it were, a very strong background and predilection for spiritual experience, and it required only a touch for the flame to burst forth into tangible experience.

The partition of Bengal in 1905 led to a tremendous upsurge of political aspirations in India, and in 1907 at Surat the Congress party split. The Moderates continued the meeting, while the Extremists had a separate meeting under the Chairmanship of Sri Aurobindo. Next year there was the famous Alipore Bomb Conspiracy Case, and on the 2nd May 1908, Sri Aurobindo was arrested and sent to the Alipore jail. The case itself is fascinating. This is a most enthralling story - high drama with 42 accused, 4,000 documents, 422 witnesses, the approver murdered in jail - all sorts of peculiar things happened. But the point of importance for our present purpose is that this one year in jail had a very significant impact upon Sri Aurobindo's inner spiritual development.

He had been interested in religion, he had been interested in yoga, but so far his predominant interest was the political freedom of the country, the awakening of the masses to a realization of the glory that could be India, the evocation of Bhawani Bharati, the description of India as the Mother and of nationalism as a yajna. When he was sent into jail it was a sort of enforced rest. During the year he remained in the cell in the Alipore Jail he had a number of decisive experiences. Even in the middle of such pain he looked around seeing Krishna in everything.

He shares his experience: "I looked at the jail that secluded me from men, and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned - no it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell, but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door, and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given to me for a couch I felt the arm of Sri Krishna around me the arms of my Friend and Lover" (cited in Singh 2008).

In addition, he has recorded that for fifteen days continuously when he was in jail he heard the voice of Swami Vivekananda speaking to him on certain aspects of Yoga and the supramental. The result of all this was that in the year that he was in jail Sri Aurobindo was transformed. He was finally released after being acquitted, and it was again a dramatic thing how his lawyer C.R. Das gave up every other work in order to defend him and how ultimately in the final peroration, he said: "My appeal to you is this, that long after the controversy will be hushed in silence, long after this turmoil and agitation will have ceased, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone, his words will have echoed and re-echoed, not only in India but across distant seas and lands. Therefore I say that the man in his position is not only standing before the bar of this court, but before the bar of the High Court of history" (Singh 2008).

After his release, although for another year or two Aurobindo did continue to take an active part in politics, he started the Karmayogin and began writing regularly in it but the emphasis changed. I think he realised that his political role was over and in 'An open letter to my countrymen', published in 1909 he wrote, "All great movements wait for their God-sent leader, the willing channel of His force, and only when he comes move forward triumphantly to their fulfilment. Therefore the nationalist party, custodians of the future, must wait for the man who is to come." He wrote this a full decade before Gandhiji emerged on the scene, but I think he realised that he had done his bit for the awakening of the nation and could now turn to the deeper things which really interested him. Soon after that, in 1910 he abruptly left for Chandernagore in response to what he called an Adesh, an over-riding divine command, and after a short while there he moved on to Pondicherry (Singh 2008).

For forty years he was in Pondicherry. His interest in Indian politics continued right up to the end, and you will recall his historic message on the day of Independence which, by a very strange coincidence, was his birthday also - the 15th of August - in which he pointed out how the great movements that he had envisaged, including the movement for India's freedom, had succeeded. In these forty years he wrote on a large variety of subjects, particularly philosophy. His work were published in thirty volumes in the centenary edition, and they are unique as a corpus of thinking and writing on almost every subject which concerns human development. The facility with which he wielded his pen, the tremendous depth and range of his thought, is really quite staggering. According to Karan Singh (Singh 2008) his best work is his Essays on the Gita, where you find the full luminosity of his spirit. The Gita itself is a tremendous document, but when you look at it through the vision of Sri Aurobindo the whole thing comes alive and vibrant as if it is being explained by Sri Krishna himself.

Thus in Aurobindo we see someone who has the highest mystical experience by involving himself in the politics of his day. This has enabled him to have a renewed understanding of Indian thought and philosophy.

3.7 'WHO?' - HIS POEM

So from his forty years of intense spiritual experience and engagement with Indian thought (philosophy) we can trace Aurobindo's own spiritual journey. In a fine poem called "Who", Aurobindo has expressed more dramatically, with more immediacy than in his longer and more complex words, his vision of the Divine which is very important for an understanding of his philosophy and spiritual thought.

In the blue of the sky, in the green of the forest;
Whose is the hand that has painted the glow?
When the winds were asleep in the womb of the ether,
Who was it roused them and bade them to blow?

He is lost in the heart, in the cavern of Nature,
He is found in the brain where He builds up the thought:
In the pattern and bloom of the flowers He is woven,
In the luminous net of the stars He is caught.

In the strength of a man, in the beauty of woman,
In the laugh of a boy, in the blush of a girl;
The hand that sent Jupiter spinning through heaven,
Spends all its cunning to fashion a curl.

These are His works and His veils and His shadows;
But where is He then? by what name is He known?
Is He Brahma or Vishnu? a man or a woman?
Bodied or bodiless? twin or alone?

We have love for a boy who is dark and resplendent,
A woman is lord of us, naked and fierce.
We have seen Him a-muse on the snow of the mountains,
We have watched Him at work in the heart of the spheres.

We will tell the whole world of His ways and His cunning
He has rapture of torture and passion and pain:
He delights in our sorrow and drives us to weeping,
Then lures with His joy and His beauty again.

All music is only the sound of His laughter,
All beauty the smile of His passionate bliss;
Our lives are His heart-beats, our rapture the bridal
Of Radha and Krishna, our love is their kiss.

He is strength that is loud in the blare of the trumpets,
And He rides in the car and He strikes in the spears;
He slays without stint and is full of compassion;
He wars for the world and its ultimate years.

In the sweep of the worlds, in the surge of the ages,
Ineffable, mighty, majestic and pure,
Beyond the List pinnacle seized by the thinker
He is throned in His seats that for ever endure.

The Master of man and his infinite Lover,
He is close to our hearts, had we vision to see,
We are blind with our pride and the pomp of our passions,
We are bound in our thoughts where we hold ourselves free.

It is He in the sun who is ageless and deathless,
And into the midnight His shadow is thrown;
When darkness was blind and engulfed within darkness,
He was seated within it immense and alone.

3.8 THE SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

This poem beautifully expresses the basic feature of Sri Aurobindo's thought that he has derived from Indian philosophy. The first point is that he accepted the primacy of the supreme, all-pervading reality-Vedantic concept of the spirit pervading not only the manifested cosmos but also the unmanifested cosmos and that of the Gita, even transcending both in the concept of the Purushottama who is both the manifested cosmos and the unmanifested cosmos and something beyond. This basic reality Sri Aurobindo accepted.

From there we go to the second point and that is cosmogenesis - the creation (Singh 2008). How does all this come into being at all? Of course, this is essentially something impossible to conceive in verbal terms. Today when we study the cosmos and realize the way in which billions of galaxies spring into being and disappear the mind finds it impossible to comprehend. But the basic point that Sri Aurobindo makes is that this all-pervasive reality plunges into the opposite pole that is the very densest and darkest matter.

There is a process of involution whereby this supreme reality by descending stages - the Brahmanda, the supermind, the over-mind, mind with life and matter - ultimately plunges into the opposite pole, the most inconscient, the deepest and the densest matter. That is the process of creation. Why that happens is a question which I do not think can be answered. Some people say it is *lila*, some people say it is in the very nature of the cosmos. But whatever it is the creation must be in some manner a reality otherwise we will not be there at all.

After the involution, after the downward spiral, the upward spiral begins, and here Sri Aurobindo has in very great detail developed the whole concept of spiritual evolution. If his political thought can be defined as spiritual nationalism, his philosophical thought can be defined as

spiritual evolution. He points out how from the densest matter, from mineral life, life gradually begins to develop. This is now a well-known scientific fact. From the densest matter the early forms of life - mineral, then vegetable, then animal - and after billions of years finally the stage comes when man appears on the scene - anthropogenesis. In Sri Aurobindo's view man is not a being who suddenly descends upon the earth; man is a being who has evolved out of this very matter, and with the coming of man a new dimension is added to the history of evolution. For the first time a being has come into existence who is conscious of being - in other words, who can look inwards and understand himself (Singh 2008).

The next step in evolution is going to be a quantum leap in consciousness. Before man there was the animal - the ape, let us say. Now the ape developed into man - this is something we accept. But Sri Aurobindo puts forward a further point that now man is going to develop into superman, and he holds that the difference between the conscious level of the animal and man is much less than the level of man and superman. Take for example, a dog. Dogs are very intelligent creatures. Let us say you have a dog, howsoever intelligent the dog may be it would not be able to understand what you are saying because while it is intelligent at its own level; it has limitations, it cannot understand abstract concepts, it cannot understand the sort of things that we are talking about. Similarly Sri Aurobindo says that with the advent of superman, instead of the imperfect human reasoning that we now have - we do not know what is happening on the other side of that wall, we have got to reason, we have got to consider, all sorts of conflicting thoughts vie with each other in our mind, we are in an area of indeterminates - at the supramental level there would be direct cognition.

Hints of this are already found in intuition, for example. It has happened to many people that suddenly you get a feeling that something is going to happen somewhere, and you find that it is in fact happening. Now that is just a small spark of the intuitive faculty, and Sri Aurobindo says that the supramental level is a level of direct cognition, of the direct wording of the intuitive faculty rather than the imperfect, complicated and confused consciousness of present man (Singh 2008).

So from the mental you move to the supramental, from man you move to superman, and this whole process, according to him, is the true destiny of mankind. The destiny of mankind is to evolve but of course not everybody will evolve at the same time. All the rocks did not become fish, and all the fish did not become animals, and all the animals did not become men. Some people will evolve, they will be the pathfinders, as it were, into the new consciousness. Thus the theory of spiritual evolution, according to Sri Aurobindo, does not end with man. Above us there are other spheres, and he has analyzed them in great detail - the overmind and the supermind and perhaps spheres beyond. That being so, the question arises as to how this supramental sphere is to be achieved, how does man rise to it? Now in politics, Sri Aurobindo did not only put forward an ideal but also a method for its attainment. Similarly in his philosophical thought he did not only rest at describing the supramental possibility, he also developed an extremely interesting process whereby this supramental can be achieved, which he called the Integral Yoga.

There are three main points which need to be made, there are three great movements in this yoga. The first is a surrender to the divine power that is within us and around us - a surrender not only mental, not only psychological but a total surrender of all parts of our being. It has not been well

established that the conscious mind is only a very small part of human consciousness, there are vast depths below and above the waking mind. Therefore the surrender to be effective has got to be an integral surrender, in all parts of one's mind, one's being, one's emotions (Singh 2008).

Then follows the ascent to the supramental sphere. Through the divine grace, aided by certain yogic practices, there is the ascent of consciousness to the supramental sphere. There the power and the light and the glory of the supramental is absorbed. Then comes the third movement, and this is a very important part of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy which must be clearly understood. The third movement is the return to terrestrial consciousness along with the light and power of the supramental. We have had in our culture many different expressions of people rising into higher spheres of consciousness. The difference with Sri Aurobindo is there is no question of going out in a wave of bliss leaving behind a world as wretched as it was before. That power has got to be brought to bear upon this terrestrial consciousness through this triple movement - the movement of surrender, the movement of rising to the supramental sphere and absorbing its light and power and the third movement of returning to the terrestrial consciousness.

These are the three movements of the integral yoga. It is also integral because it integrates the four major strands of yoga; *Bhaktiyoga*, the devotional input; *Karmayoga*, constant and ceaseless action divine-inspired and divine-dedicated; *Jnanayoga*, the aspect of discrimination, and certain aspects of the *Rajyoga*, the psychophysical dimension. It is integral in yet another way because it does not compartmentalize life. There is no rule to practise integral yoga for a few minutes or for an hour or so a day and then for the remaining 23 hours forget about the path. It is supposed to comprehend and inform the total activity of the human being whether it is work or art or literature or music or whatever it is something which must integrate one's entire being. Sri Aurobindo writes a great deal of the difficulties in the way of the yoga, the forces which help and the hostile forces (Singh 2008).

The important point to remember in all this is that his goal is not individual salvation, his goal is not even racial salvation, his goal is nothing less than a terrestrial transformation itself. This very world is to be transformed into a supramentalized world.

As Karan Singh says Sri Aurobindo was a "born revolutionary" (Singh 2008). Not only did he revolt against the Moderate Congress leadership, not only did he revolt against the British rule, he ultimately revolted against the very texture of human consciousness itself, he revolted against the fact that man should be stuck at an intermediate level and should not be able to go ahead on the evolutionary path.

Our author finally came to the conclusion that it was only when consciousness itself was transmuted that it would be possible to solve the problems of the world. He writes about this: "It is impossible for a man to understand the ultimate secret of this creation unless one enters the Supermind. Nor can the problem of the world be solved unless and until this is done. It is only there on the supramental level that ignorance about the duality of matter and spirit can be dispelled." Ultimately, according to Sri Aurobindo, the final reconciliation between matter and spirit, between thinking and feeling, between being and doing, between two halves of the human psyche the kinetic and the quietistic, can only be attained at the supramental level, and it is only then that the destiny of the human race will be fulfilled and man will grow to his full stature.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How does Indian tradition view Reality?

2) Explain influences of Indian Scriptures on Aurobindo.

3.9 LET US SUM UP

We have broadly outlined Aurobindo's approach to the spiritual quest, and it is quite astounding the masterly manner in which he evolved spiritually, basing on Indian tradition. In the course of forty years he left for the world a corpus of literature and experience which are unique and unparalleled in modern times.

3.10 KEY WORDS

Lila: *Lila* or *Leela* is a concept within Hinduism literally meaning "pastime", "sport" or "play". It is common to both non-dualistic and dualistic philosophical schools, but has a markedly different significance in each. Within non-dualism, Lila is a way of describing all reality, including the cosmos, as the outcome of creative play by the divine absolute (Brahman). In the dualistic schools of Vaishnavism, Lila more simply refers to the activities of God and his devotees, as distinct from the common activities of karma.

Sanskaras: In Hinduism *sanskaras* (singular: *sanskara*) (Sanskrit for impression; under the impulse of previous impressions) are the imprints left on the subconscious mind by experience in this or previous lives, which then color all of life, one's nature, responses, states of mind, etc.

Supermind: Supermind in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy refers to the infinite unitary truth-consciousness or truth-idea simultaneously transcendent and immanent to planes of matter, life, and mind.

Yajna: Hindu sacrifice with particular purpose: a sacrifice, often a substantial one, offered to a Hindu deity or deities.

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UNIT 4 INTEGRAL WORLD-VIEW

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- 4.2 The Term: Integral
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- 4.5 Aspects Of Being According To Integral World-View
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4.0 OBJECTIVES

- To appreciate the integral nature of reality according to Aurobindo.
- To realize the differences at the levels of beings and to know that these beings with their individual differences are evolving towards the Supermind.
- To know the basic insight of Aurobindo that we are all related to each other and still one.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the integral world-view developed by Aurobindo, we first try to clarify the terms. Then we approach integral psychology and aspect of being. Finally, we speak of the relevance of an integral world-view for our contemporary times.

4.2 THE TERM: INTEGRAL

The term “Integral” is applied to a wide-ranging set of developments in philosophy, psychology, religious thought, and other areas that seek interdisciplinary and comprehensive frameworks. The term is often combined with others such as approach, consciousness, culture, paradigm, philosophy, society, theory, and worldview. Major themes of this range of philosophies and teachings include a synthesis of science and religion, evolutionary spirituality, and holistic programs of development for the body, mind, soul, and spirit. In some versions of integral spirituality, integration is seen to necessarily include the three domains of self, culture, and nature (IP 2011).

Integral thinkers draw inspiration from the work of Sri Aurobindo, Teilhard De Chardin and others (Pandikattu 2006). Some individuals affiliated with integral spirituality have claimed that there exists a loosely-defined "Integral movement". The adjective integral was first used in a spiritual context by Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) from 1914 onwards to describe his own spiritual teachings, which he referred to as Purna ("Full") Yoga. It appeared in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, a book that was first published in serial form in the journal *Arya* and was revised several times since. Sri Aurobindo's work has been described as Integral Vedanta, Integral Psychology (a term coined by Indra Sen) and Psychotherapy that emerges from it. His writings influenced others who used the term "integral" in more philosophical or psychological contexts (IP 2011).

As described by Sri Aurobindo and his co-worker The Mother (1878–1973), this spiritual teaching involves an integral divine transformation of the entire being, rather than the liberation of only a single faculty such as the intellect or the emotions or the body. According to Sri Aurobindo, “the Divine is in his essence infinite and his manifestation too is multitudinously infinite. If that is so, it is not likely that our true integral perfection in being and in nature can come by one kind of realisation alone; it must combine many different strands of divine experience. It cannot be reached by the exclusive pursuit of a single line of identity till that is raised to its absolute; it must harmonise many aspects of the Infinite. An integral consciousness with a multiform dynamic experience is essential for the complete transformation of our nature.” (Ghose 1992)

4.3 INTEGRALITY OF LIFE

To understand the “integrality” of wholeness of life, let us start with knowledge. Knowledge gathers by observation and experience. It becomes practically useful knowledge when a process of a thing is known, e.g. climbing a tree, drawing water from a well, speaking the first few words, art of writing, etc. At this stage, we see our practically useful knowledge is in proportion to our experience as the topography of a locality. A time comes when this partial knowledge becomes perfect knowledge or complete knowledge when the field of observation can be organised into a subject or a branch of science. At this time, the field reveals the laws governing it, not before and we become integral (Karmayogi 2001).

Random knowledge, however great the volume, will not allow itself to be reduced to laws. For the laws of a field to be extracted as the essence of the field, the observation must be complete or exhaustive. When a field exists in more than one plane, the laws cannot be perfectly known until the observation is exhausted in all the planes of existence. Life exists in the mental, vital, physical fields and their respective subtle planes. The spiritual plane cannot be fully excluded if one desires mastery, but as far as physical work is concerned, the direct involvement of the spiritual plane may be excluded, if it is represented by the work values that are spiritual. The Laws of Life Response cannot be seen unless and until life is seen functioning at those points. The greatness of life and its integrality lies in the fact that those great touches are there in ALL acts, small or great, however crudely they reveal themselves. The crudeness is in our perception, not in their revelation. From this point of view, a few conclusions are drawn.

General observation of life, however wide, can only give a random knowledge of Life Response. It can be interesting, cannot be final, cannot conclusively reveal the laws and confirm them. An observation of life, an analysis of events in all planes of its existence is a sine qua non for one who endeavours to lay his hands on these laws. The clue, the key, lies in those subtle points where energy spills over from one field to another, often appearing to be an unconnected vagary, occasionally contradicting the laws. To see such points of contradiction as confirmation is the index for complete understanding. A further point, maybe the most important one, is to render this knowledge useful for evoking life response or to make Life Respond as we intend. Should we do so, he who does it gains mastery over life.

As Sri Aurobindo has detailed in The Life Divine the theory of creation and its process, all these laws are pronounced there abundantly. Over thirty years they have been ‘documented’ after a fashion enough to confirm the understanding. As this is a minor version of the Master’s philosophy, it may not evoke a great response from His disciples. For the layman, it has a

twofold advantage of mastering one's own life and being introduced to His philosophy. A painstaking analysis of events of life, coupled with a study of historical events and events in literature that reveal these laws will be of great interest to the general reader. Obviously there is no use for detailing the laws which may offer a good theoretical knowledge which may not go beyond the first reading (Karmayogi 2001).

The integral view

According to the integral view, there is the Divine Reality which manifests itself as the universe. The universe is a system of planes or worlds, supra-terrestrial and terrestrial. The earth-life is the scene of the evolutionary unfolding of the Divine Reality. There is an all-seeing purpose in the terrestrial creation; a divine plan is working itself out through contradictions and perplexities. To discover the Divine Reality and to work for its full manifestation in physical life is the integral aim of life. All life must be accepted, but all life must be transformed by the highest divine light and power.

4.4 INTEGRAL PSYCHOLOGY

Sri Aurobindo never used the term "Integral Psychology"; the term was coined in the 1940s by Indra Sen, a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, who established the field of Integral Psychology, based on Sri Aurobindo's teachings, as referred earlier (IP 2011). A further interpretation of Integral Psychology was developed, although not in detail, in the 1970s by Haridas Chaudhuri, a student of Sri Aurobindo, who postulated a triadic principle of uniqueness, relatedness and transcendence, corresponding to the personal, interpersonal and transpersonal domains of human existence. According to Brant Cortright, of the California Institute of Integral Studies, Integral Psychology is born through the synthesis of Sri Aurobindo's teachings with the findings of depth psychology. He presents Integral Psychology as a synthesis of the two major streams of depth psychology – the humanistic-existential and contemporary-psychoanalytic – within an integrating east-west framework.

4.5 ASPECTS OF BEING ACCORDING TO INTEGRAL WORLD-VIEW

Sri Aurobindo conceives of human psychology, indeed, of the entire cosmos, as having two major types of distinctions or dimensions. The faculties ascend in a "vertical" fashion, from the subconscious to the higher, transpersonal realms. At the same time, he distinguishes between the Outer being, the Inner being, and the other similarly "concentric" dimensions. The terms vertical and concentric are metaphors for the purpose of visualization and are not meant to be taken literally (IP 2011).

Subconscious

On Aurobindo's psychology, the subconscious is part of our inner consciousness. We are not conscious of its workings. It is influenced by the matter of which our bodies are composed. It is the support of our fear, pessimism, fixed habits, illness, decay and death.

Physical

The Physical faculty or part of the being, refers not just to the physical body, but the body's consciousness as well. The body is just as conscious as the vital and mental parts of the being,

only it is a different type of consciousness. As with the other faculties or principles of the being, in Sri Aurobindo's psychology, the Physical can be subdivided into finer sub-grades, such as the mental physical, the vital physical, and so on. One does not find the distinction of non-conscious body and conscious mind that characterises Western thought.

In Sri Aurobindo's reading of the Taittiriya Upanishad, the physical being (or perhaps just the Physical Purusha) is the *anna-maya-atma* - the self made of food.

- The Inner physical - the physical component of the inner being, which is wider and more plastic than the outer physical body. This is also called the subtle physical
- The True physical being is the Purusha of the physical level, which is like the Inner Physical larger than the surface body consciousness and in touch with the a larger spiritual consciousness.
- The Mental Physical (similar to the Physical Mind - see "Mental")
- The Vital Physical or Nervous Being (which seems to be equivalent to the Etheric body of western esotericism, and hence pertains to one of the subtle bodies)
- The Physical Proper or pure body consciousness, which represents the consciousness of the external physical body itself.

Like the other principles of man, the Physical not only shades upwards to higher ontological levels, but also downwards into the Subconscious, which equates to the Subconscious or Lower Unconscious, although Sri Aurobindo asserts that the Subconscious includes much more than the unconscious of (Freudian) psychology. And like all the faculties of the being, the Physical in all its aspects has to be transformed and spiritualised through the practice of Integral Yoga.

Subtle physical

The Subtle physical is Sri Aurobindo's term for a subtler aspect of the physical nature. This has many qualities not found in the gross physical nature. In *The Agenda*, Mother often refers to it. It might be compared to the etheric body and plane, or even the astral body and plane. The term "subtle physical" to distinguish from gross (*sthula*) or outer material physical (IP 2011). So Aurobindo says: "By the gross physical is meant the earthly and bodily physical - as experienced by the outward sense-mind and senses. But that is not the whole of Matter. There is a subtle physical also with a subtler consciousness in it which can, for instance, go to a distance from the body and yet feel and be aware of things in a not merely mental or vital way." He adds: "...the subtle physical has a freedom, plasticity, intensity, power, colour, wide and manifold play (there are thousands of things there that are not here) of which, as yet, we have no possibility on earth" (Ghose 1969).

Vital

The Vital or Life faculty or part of the being, refers not simply to the life force as to the various passions, desires, feelings, emotions, affects, compulsions, and likes and dislikes that strongly determine human motivation and action through desire and enthusiasm. Unlike Western psychology, in which mind, emotions, instincts, and consciousness are all lumped together, Sri

Aurobindo strongly distinguishes between the "Vital" and the "Mental" faculties (IP 2011). In addition to the individual Vital faculty, Sri Aurobindo refers to a Vital Plane or Vital world.

Mental

The Mental faculty or part of the being, is the conceptual and cognitive mind. Unlike Western psychology, in which mind and consciousness are considered the same, Sri Aurobindo strongly distinguishes between the "Mental" and the "Vital" (emotional) faculties, as well as between Mind and pure Consciousness. Sri Aurobindo in part bases his concept of the Mental on his reading of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, the mental being (or perhaps just the Mental *Purusha*) is the *mano-maya-atma* - the self made of mind or *manas*. For Sri Aurobindo, Mind or the Mental being is not simple and uniform, but consists itself of various strata and subdivisions, the whole contributing to an elaborate integral theory of psychology. These various faculties are described or variously referred to, usually in obliquely or in passing, in some of his books, including *Savitri*, which has poetic references to many types of Mind. In his letters answering questions from disciples, Sri Aurobindo summarises the characteristics of the various levels of Mind (Ghose 1969). These various Minds and Mental principles of being include:

- Higher Mind - the first and lowest of the spiritual mental grades, lying above the normal mental level.
- Spiritual Mind - either the spiritualised mind, or a general term for levels of mind above the normal mental level (the "Mind Proper").
- Inner mind - the mental component of the Inner Being, which lies behind the surface mind or ordinary consciousness and can only be directly experienced by *sadhana*.
- True mental being - is the *Purusha* of the mental level freed from the error and ignorance of the lower *Prakriti* and open to the knowledge and guidance above.
- Psychic Mind - a movement of the mind in which the Psychic Being predominates; the mind turned towards the Divine.
- Mind Proper - is threefold, consisting of Thinking Mind, dynamic Mind and externalising Mind. It constitutes the sum of one's thoughts, opinions, ideas, and values, which guide conscious thinking, conceptualizing and decision-making processes, and is transformed, widened, and spiritualised through the practice of Integral Yoga.
- Thinking Mind - the highest aspect of the mind proper, concerned with ideas and knowledge in their own right. It is equated with the *Ajna Chakra*.
- Dynamic Mind - that aspect of the ordinary mind that puts out of mental forces for realisation, acting by the idea and by reason. It is also equated with the *Ajna* or Brow center.
- Externalising Mind - the most "external" part of the mind proper, concerned with the expression of ideas in speech, in life, or in any form it can give.

- Vital Mind - a mediator between the vital emotions, desires, and so on the mental proper. It is limited by the vital view and feeling of things, and expresses the desires, feelings, ambitions, and other active tendencies of the vital in mental forms, such as daydreams and imaginations of greatness, happiness, and so on. As with the Externalising Mind, Sri Aurobindo associates it with the *Vishuddha* or Throat *Chakra*.
- Physical Mind - refers to either or both the Externalising Mind and the Mental in the Physical; it is limited to a physical or materialistic perspective, and cannot go beyond that, unless enlightened from above.
- Mind in the physical or mental physicalmentalises the experiences of outward life and things, sometimes very cleverly, but it does not go beyond that, unlike the externalising mind which deals with these things from the perspective of reason and its own higher intelligence.
- The Mechanical Mind is a much lower action of the mental physical which when left to itself can only repeat the same ideas and record the reflexes of the physical consciousness in its contact with outward life and things.
- Mind of Light, according to The Mother, is the Physical Mind receiving the supramental light and thus being able to act directly in the Physical. (IP 2011)

Higher levels of Mind

There are still higher levels of Mind, which includes Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, and Intuitive Mind. But we can refer to Overmind and Supermind here.

Overmind

Overmind is the plane of God. Overmental plane is the highest consciousness one can achieve without transcending the mental system. Beyond overmind are the planes of Supermind or unity-consciousness. A detailed description of the Overmind is provided in Book I ch.28, and Book II ch.26, of Sri Aurobindo's philosophical opus *The Life Divine* (IP 2011 & Ghose 1949).

Supermind

Supermind refers to the infinite unitary Truth Consciousness or Truth-Idea beyond the three lower planes of Matter, Life, and Mind. Supermind is the dynamic form of *Sachchidananda* (Being-Consciousness-Bliss), and the necessary mediator or link between the transcendent Sachchidananda and the creation. (Ghose 1949)

4.6 TYPES OF BEING

There are different types of being or "concentric" divisions in Aurobindo's integral vision of philosophy.

The Outer Being

The Outer Being refers to the superficial and limited surface existence which characterises our everyday consciousness and experience. It includes a physical, vital, and mental aspect, and is also the location of the desire soul. In Integral Yoga it is necessary to go beyond the surface

consciousness to the larger life of the Inner Being, which is more open to spiritual realisation. Outer, Inner, and Innermost Being form a "concentric" sequence or hierarchy, which is a counterpart to the "vertical" hierarchy of Physical, Vital and Mental.

The Inner Being

The Inner Being is the wider and more plastic subliminal faculty of one's being, that lies behind the narrow surface consciousness. As with many contemporary thinkers, Sri Aurobindo speaks of larger and deeper potentials of human nature which can be contacted through spiritual discipline and higher states of consciousness (IP 2011). This Inner Being includes the inner realms or aspects of the physical, vital, and mental being, which here have a larger, subtler, freer consciousness than in the small outer mental, vital, and physical nature of everyday consciousness and experience, and its realisation is essential for any higher spiritual realisation. The Inner Being is also transitional between the surface or Outer Being and the Psychic Being, which is also for this reason known as the "Innmost Being". Outer, Inner, and Innermost Being form a "concentric" sequence or hierarchy, which is a counterpart to the "vertical" hierarchy of Physical, Vital, and Mental (IP 2011).

In the Master's own words: "There are always two different consciousnesses in the human being, one outward in which he ordinarily lives, the other inward and concealed of which he knows nothing. When one does *sadhana*, the inner consciousness begins to open and one is able to go inside and have all kinds of experiences there. As the *sadhana* progresses, one begins to live more and more in this inner being and the outer becomes more and more superficial. At first the inner consciousness seems to be the dream and the outer the waking reality. Afterwards the inner consciousness becomes the reality and the outer is felt by many as a dream or delusion, or else as something superficial and external. The inner consciousness begins to be a place of deep peace, light, happiness, love, closeness to the Divine or the presence of the Divine, the Mother. One is then aware of two consciousnesses, the inner one and the outer which has to be changed into its counterpart and instrument-that also must become full of peace, light, union with the Divine. At present you are moving between the two and in this period all the feelings you have are quite natural. You must not be at all anxious about that, but wait for the full development of the inner consciousness in which you will be able to live." (Ghose 1969).

Psychic Being

The Psychic Being is Sri Aurobindo's term for the Personal Evolving Soul, the principle of Divine spirit in every individual. The Psychic is the "Innermost Being" and is the permanent being in us that stands behind and supports the physical, vital and mental principles. It takes the essence of experience in the Ignorance to form a nucleus of growth in the nature; it "puts forth and uses mind, life and body as its instruments, undergoes the envelopment of their conditions, but it is other and greater than its members" (Ghose 1949).

Sri Aurobindo is careful to distinguish between the Psychic Being as defined in the Yoga and the ordinary meaning of "psychic" which refers more to the desire soul, or to psychological or paranormal phenomena which are connected with the inner mind, inner vital, or subtle physical subliminal nature rather than the true Soul. The Psychic begins its evolution completely veiled and hidden, but as it grows through successive lifetimes it gradually exerts a greater influence, organising the elements of the being, and taking on the role of spiritual Guide (Ghose 1949).

In Integral Yoga the goal is to move inward and discover the Psychic Being, which then can bring about a transformation of the outer nature. This transformation of the outer being or ego by the Psychic is possible and called Psychicisation; it is one of the three necessary stages in the realisation of the Supramental consciousness. This Psychic transformation is the decisive movement that enables a never-ending progress in life through the power of connecting to one's inner spirit or Divine Essence (IP 2011).

Sri Aurobindo asserts that both Psychicisation and Spiritualisation are equally necessary, and complementary prerequisites in the drawing down of the Supermind. So he affirms that “the psychic entity in us persists and is fundamentally the same always: it contains all essential possibilities of our manifestation but is not constituted by them; it is not limited by what it manifests, not contained by the incomplete forms of the manifestation, not tarnished by the imperfections and impurities, the defects and deprivations of the surface being. It is an ever-pure flame of the divinity in things and nothing that comes to it, nothing that enters into our experience can pollute its purity or extinguish the flame.” – (Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, 891.) In this context he further says, “Everything is dangerous in the *sadhana* or can be, except the psychic change” (Ghose 1969).

Central being

Central Being is a technical term used by Sri Aurobindo to designate the transcendent and eternal spirit, as opposed to the incarnate and evolving Soul, which he calls the Psychic Being, although sometimes it refers to both of them together as the essential spiritual core of the being (IP 2011). These definitions are found in Letters on Yoga, Vol.I under "Planes and Parts of Being" (pp. 265ff in the 3rd ed). The Central Being "presides over the different births one after the other but is itself unborn". This transcendent Central Being or Spirit is also designated the *Jiva* or *Jivatman*, although the meaning of these terms in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy differs greatly from that of much of conventional Vedanta. This in the perspective of Aurobindo the whole reality, including being at different levels are inter-connected, inter-related and form an integral whole. Such a worldview, where things may be different in our world (physical, mental and spiritual), but they are connected and evolving to the final fullness. This is the integral worldview of Aurobindo, which is both appealing and relevant for the contemporary world. This we take up in the next section.

4.7 RELEVANCE OF INTEGRAL WORLD-VIEW

The Integral worldview has emerged in the age of global world where the totality of every knowledge, discipline and the wisdom of all existing and previous cultures is readily available. It is very relevant for this age. As noted by Lawrence Wollersheim (2011), for the modern men and women, the new Integral worldview has the following features: It provides a deeper and broader map of the evolution of known reality that embraces an inclusive, multiple perspective way of looking at and understanding personal, cultural and biologic evolutionary development. It excludes nothing needed for balanced understanding and/or growth or wholeness in any area.

It anticipates what more appropriate solution comes next in the unfolding of the evolutionary process. These new solutions are shifted away from today's polarizing and marginalizing, right or wrong, either/or, left or right partial choices toward more inclusive, comprehensive both/and solutions. That's because its new solutions embrace the entire evolutionary developmental

spectrum of life and humanity, allowing the lessons of previously exclusive and competitive worldviews to be systematically meshed, layered and harmoniously integrated to serve the well-being of the whole spiral of life. It is based upon the integral method of inclusion, transcendence and synthesis. It includes the most useful perspectives and values from all previous worldviews where contextually appropriate, while simultaneously pruning away contextually inappropriate perspectives and values.

It unites all things in a coherent and structured matrix of relationship. It combines inner (subjective), outer (objective,) and the inter-subjective (relational) perspectives on any phenomena, whether singular or collective. It re-embraces new forms of non-pathological, integral religion and integral personal spirituality that is congenial to science, philosophy and art and, more universal in its perspectives. Given the contemporary context, its relevance can be seen by its following features. It creates more effective and life-affirming solutions for every challenge or dream we have, whether your interests are culture, politics, religion, science or the environment. It can do this more effectively than ever before because of its new perspectives and understandings relating to personal, cultural and biologic evolutionary development. Armed with this vital new information we now can more wisely participate in actively co-evolving any area of your own life and future. It heals and rebalances the subtle cynicism that results from the fragmentation and complexity of 21st century living by creating a new holism as well as a revitalized sense of achievable purpose. It releases vast untapped personal growth potentials by dramatically expanding who or what you conceive of self, nature and culture to be. (Wollersheim 2011)

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How do you understand the term 'Integral'?

2) Explain the world view of Aurobindo as integral.

4.8 LET US SUM UP

In the worldview of our Master, the whole of reality, including physical, psychological and spiritual, is integral. In the ever evolving process of reality, the whole reality is made of different levels of being. But without losing their individual identities, they are all part of one journey to the Supermind. Such a philosophy is relevant to our times.

4.9 KEY WORDS

Overmind: In Integral Psychology, it is the adaptation of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual teachings, referring to the understanding of the various planes and parts of being, which is essential to the practice of integral yoga. The highest, single, non-material consciousness composed of the consciousnesses of a large number of beings,

Integrality: The state of being total and complete

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Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo

Block 2



INTEGRAL VISION OF REALITY



UNIT 1

Basic Unity of Reality



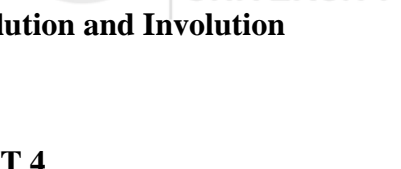
UNIT 2

Synthesis of Spirit and Matter



UNIT 3

Evolution and Involution



UNIT 4

Integral Vedanta



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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

The adjective 'integral' was first used in a spiritual context by Sri Aurobindo from 1914 onward to describe his own spiritual teachings, which he referred to as *Purna Yoga*. Sri Aurobindo's work has been described as Integral Vedanta. Integral thinkers Teilhard De Chardin, drew inspiration from the work of Sri Aurobindo. Aurobindo's realism with regard to the nature of reality would further mean the acceptance of Reality having two poles: Matter and Spirit. For Aurobindo, Matter expresses itself as the formulation of some unknown Force. It is the ground for the reality of the world. Aurobindo maintains, that the reception of both spirit and matter and the thesis that matter as also Brahman can be unacceptable to a rational mind unless we admit a series of ascending terms (Life, Mind, Supermind, and the grades that link mind to Supermind) between Spirit and Matter.

Unit 1 discusses elaborately the problem of one and many in Indian philosophy, initiating a serious discussion of this crucial issue in philosophical discourse. We discuss basic unity of existence as advocated by Aurobindo as a solution offered to the above said philosophical issue. The condition of possibility for such an understanding is the realization that the ultimate source of the world is a single reality, namely Brahman. Absolute manifests itself in multiplicity, in matter and form, as the basic substratum of existence.

Unit 2 briefly explains Aurobindo's philosophical position on basic unity between the finite and the Infinite, matter and Spirit. The unit has a detailed analysis of the unity of Matter and Spirit. How the two constitute a synthetic whole. Aurobindo synthesizes both matter and spirit by transcending the partial views of both the materialist and the idealist in his integral Advaita. A pre-requisite for appreciating the reality of both Spirit and Matter is a correct understanding of the relation between the two.

Unit 3 speaks of the concepts of Involution and evolution which are not new to Indian philosophy. However the merit of Aurobindo is that he has rediscovered these concepts and presented it also in the light of contemporary understanding of evolution. Moreover, by doing so he has succeeded in finding a viable solution for the problem of matter and spirit and established his realism on a strong rational foundation. In his theory of the involution of the Absolute into the material world we also have Aurobindo's novel response to the problem of the one and the many. In and through these two concepts Aurobindo makes it clear that the world is real (not mere illusion), and the nature of this world is becoming and this becoming is also true in the case of the Absolute.

Unit 4 is to introduce the integral vision of life and reality by Aurobindo, with a discussion on the fundamental presuppositions of Aurobindo's Philosophy and how the name Integral Advaita is applied to it. One cannot discuss the question of one and many in Indian philosophy in isolation of Vedanta; it calls us to delve into the genius of the masters of Vedanta philosophy. His system is known as integral Vedanta as different from Absolute monism of Sankara,

Absolute dualism of Madhva and Qualified monism of Ramanuja. Though he is rooted in Vedantic tradition he presented his thought applying western categories and thus making it intelligible for people from other philosophical tradition.



UNIT 1 **BASIC UNITY OF REALITY**

Contents

- 1.0 Objectives
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1.0 OBJECTIVES

The problem of the one and the many is a major point of discussion in Indian philosophy. In fact the whole of classical Indian philosophy revolves on this point. Therefore, the major objective of this section is to initiate a serious discussion of this crucial issue in philosophical discourse.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The problem of the One and the Many is a fundamental question in Indian philosophy as it is in the West. One of the fundamental presuppositions of Indian philosophy is its explicit adherence to the idea that the Reality is one in essence. But the moment one asserts that reality is 'One' he is perplexed by the riddle of the 'Many' that encompasses him with its enigmatic flux. How are we to reconcile the Vedantic formula that Reality is one with the apparent many which are constantly changing? This problem itself stems from another presupposition and avowed acceptance of Brahman as the single substratum of the universe.

It has to be made clear at the outset that the realisation or the acceptance of Brahman as the fundamental and sole reality by the Indian thinkers was not the result of a moment. It was the outcome of the age-old search of the Indian Sages to find the ultimate substratum of the universe from the beginning of the history of human thought. It has also undergone various stages of development. Classical Indian philosophy has its culmination in the Vedantic thought. It was Vedanta that identified Brahman as the ultimate substratum of the universe.

Once the Transcendent, Infinite, and Immutable Brahman is accepted as the Absolute it naturally raises the question of the reality of the phenomenal world. A number of questions are possible here: what does one mean by saying that the Brahman is the Absolute? What relation has it to the phenomenal world? If Brahman is the only Reality, what is the nature and status of the universe? These questions themselves take one directly to the problem of the one and the many. Therefore, we come back to the above statement: how can one substantiate the claim that the whole problem of Indian philosophy is the problem of the one and the many? To put it differently, the question

of the one and the many has a dual dimension, i.e., the whole development of Indian philosophy originates from this centrifugal question and at the end of all our search and analysis we come back to this centripetal point. Thus, the one and the many become the pivot for our discussion of Aurobindo's metaphysics of integral advaita as well. Aurobindo maintains a synthetic approach to reality. How has he come to such a conclusion?

1.2 REALITY IS ONE

The originality of Aurobindo's thought is most clearly exemplified in his finding a way out to the age-old problem of one and many in which he establishes the basic unity of reality. Aurobindo maintains the unity of Reality giving adequate space for the multiplicities of the universe. Aurobindo develops his theory of the Oneness of Reality (i) through a re-interpretation of the theory of Maya, for in Sankara's absolute non-dualism, the theory of Maya played a key role in maintaining the unity of Reality, through its negation of the external world; (ii) through developing the co-existence of Matter and Spirit; (iii) through a re-construction of the question of the one and the many; (iv) through his theory of Cosmic Consciousness; and finally (v) through his theory of Involution and Evolution or by presenting reality in its dual dimensions: being and becoming. Thus, some of these points constitute the subject matter of the present discussion.

The Integral Advaitic View of Existence

After evaluating the extant theories of existence, namely the Supracosmic, the Cosmic-terrestrial, and the Supraterrestrial, Aurobindo developed his own system in the light of the Vedantic tradition. This approach tries to reconcile the elements of the above approaches, which themselves "tend to isolate." The fundamental tenet of this perspective is that it perceives human existence as a "Becoming with the Divine Being for its origin and its object, a progressive manifestation, a spiritual evolution with the supracosmic for its source and support, the other-worldly for a condition and connecting link and the cosmic and terrestrial for its field, and with human mind and life for its *nodus* and turning-point of release towards a higher and a highest perfection." (LD 667)

This citation of Aurobindo very well manifests how he has incorporated and integrated elements of the above theories. He admits them as a means and part of the self-manifestation of the Spirit in human life, but considers them as partial. Nevertheless, the integration of the first two theories, to a great extent, was already effected in the third by his predecessors. For Aurobindo, the fundamental flaw of the third approach, which attempted integration of the previous two was that in it, he maintained, the temporal as having no permanent value. What the realism of Aurobindo aims at is a richer unity and integrity of all the elements of existence.

For Aurobindo existence basically manifests two aspects: (i) Existence is integral: one and many, transcendence and immanence, spirit and matter, etc are different facets of it; and (ii) the nature of this Existence is dynamic or becoming: Being includes becoming as well. In other words, it is a progressive ascent.

1.3 AUROBINDO'S INTERPRETATION OF THE CONCEPT OF MAYA

A general and the often expressed impression of a Westerner about Indian philosophy is that it is a world negating philosophy or that it teaches that the world is mere illusion or Maya. However,

the truth is that no teacher of *Advaita* holds the view that the phenomenal world is absolutely unreal or illusory. It is real as far as it is a manifestation of being but unreal as a self-subsisting entity. Therefore, it can be rightly observed that the over emphasis that the Advaitins gave to one aspect of the reality was only a means to substantiate the Absoluteness of Brahman and was not a denial of the reality of the world.

The question emerges is how has such a negative impression come about? It maybe the result of two mistakes or two factors that occurred in the history of Indian philosophy: (i) the Western world knew about Indian philosophy, at first, through the interpretation of the Western scholars themselves for whom Indian philosophy meant nothing but the Advaita philosophy of Sankara; and (ii) in Sankara's philosophy, which advocated an absolute non-dualism (monism), the notion of Maya was wrongly interpreted as pure illusion, which was taken to be the truth in subsequent ages. Therefore, in the Western world, and even in India, what prevailed was this wrong interpretation of the theory of Maya. Thus, it may not be wrong to say that history has done much damage to the philosophy of Sankara by interpreting the notion of Maya as mere illusion and that he advocated and perceived that the world has only an illusory existence.

1.4 MAYA: THE POWER OF BECOMING

Indian philosophy understands the notion of Maya in a number of ways. The introduction of the concept of Maya by the Indian sages has to do with the explanation of Brahman's relation to the world. For the Vedic sages, the "directing power" was known as Maya. For them, Maya was the "power of the infinite consciousness to comprehend, contain in itself and measure out" and also the power to form, name, and shape entities out of the vast illimitable Truth of infinite existence. It is by the power of Maya that the static being of infinite existence becomes the ordered being of active existence (LD 115). In the Vedic understanding Maya is also a mysterious, deceptive power of the gods (RV III 53. 8). Its deception lies in its ability to hide the Truth about reality. For the Advaitin, metaphysically conceived, Maya is the power of Brahman by which the world of multiplicity comes into existence. Therefore, it is right to say that metaphysically Maya is the mysterious power of Brahman that deludes one to take the empirical world as real, and epistemologically Maya is ignorance (*avidya*) with the power to conceal reality (*avarana Sakti*) and with the capacity of misrepresenting reality (*viksepa sakti*). Ontologically Maya considered as the creative power of Brahman that accounts for the variety and multiplicity of the phenomenal world. From an epistemological point of view, Maya is our ignorance about the difference between reality and appearance. And from a psychological point of view, Maya is the expression of human tendency to regard the real as the apparent, and vice versa. Thus, Maya is not only a negative designation, that is, a privation of vision, it is also a positive designation as far as it is capable of producing an illusion.

In the Advaitic interpretation in the state of Maya limitations (*upadhis*) are imposed upon reality. Thus, all attachments, aversions, fears, dreams are touched by Maya and one fails to recognise the oneness of the Real. Here it is appropriate to add that the Sanskrit word "*upadhi*" has another meaning as well, namely, "condition." In this sense Maya is a necessary condition for the manifestation of the world. Moreover, in this sense the Vedic understanding of Maya as the creative power seems more reasonable. In the light of this interpretation of Maya, the Advaitic explanation of Brahman-world relation makes more sense. As the world is the manifestation of Brahman, Maya, the creative power, becomes the power of becoming.

The world's reality is unreal only in the light of an ontological Reality. In contrast with the pure existence of the Absolute, Maya has existence as the power of limitation. In this respect, the description of Maya as *anadi* (beginningless), *acintya* (unthinkable) and *anirvacaniya* (indescribable) are reasonable. Indian philosophy understands Maya in its dual meaning: in its positive and in its negative meanings. In the positive sense it is the creative power, which also accounts for becoming and in the negative sense it is power of limitation. The world, being understood as the manifestation of the Absolute, would imply that there emerges the need for a mediator, for infinite action of the infinite Being would produce only an infinite world. Therefore, a world with order and unity demands "a selective faculty of knowledge commissioned to shape finite appearances out of the infinite Reality" (LD 115). It is in this sense, Aurobindo observes, that the Vedic seers understood the concept of Maya as the power of limitation (LD 115).

1.5 MAYA: THE SELF'S EXPERIENCE OF ITS BEING

Aurobindo undertakes a re-search into the meaning of "Maya" with a twofold purpose: (i) To establish the reality of the world, in contrast to the illusionism advocated by Advaita and (ii) thereby to establish the reality and relevance of matter in the cosmic process. Aurobindo speaks of two kinds of Maya: first, a lower Maya or mental Maya, which is the cause of illusion and, second, that which symbolises God's play of the infinities of existence, the splendors of knowledge and the glories of force. The remarkable point Aurobindo brings to light is that the pessimistic and the illusionist philosophies either failed to identify or ignored this distinction between the higher Maya and the lower Maya. The problem is that those who recognise the mental Maya as truth consider it as the creatrix of the world. The fact is only an instrument in the descending creative process but not the secret creatrix, and it is a transitional stage in the ascent but not the supreme goal of cosmic existence.

For Aurobindo, Maya is said to be real only in the sense that it is the self's experience of the Self. What does it mean to say that Maya is the self's experience of the Self? This has to be seen in the context of the Vedic implication of Maya. At one point Aurobindo interprets Maya as integrally united with the Absolute. He writes that in its transcendent nature Brahman, the Reality, is the self-existent Absolute, and Maya is the Consciousness and Force of this self-existence. What is evident here is that it is an avowed acceptance by Aurobindo of the Vedic notion of Maya as the creative power of Brahman. In relation to the world or in its immanent dimension this Brahman is the Self of all existence, Atman, the cosmic self. Moreover, due to its Infinite powers it is the supreme self-transcendent of its own cosmicity as well as it is the individual-universal in each being. In its cosmic dimension Maya is the self-power, *Atma-Shakti*, of the Atman.

Aurobindo holds that in a higher status of consciousness all illusions will vanish and one becomes aware of the relation between the temporal and the eternal. What is temporal is not absolute illusion or no-thing. It was already established at the outset that Aurobindo embarked on a re-search into the meaning of the notion of Maya with double purposes, which themselves are interrelated. Thus, the positive outcome of Aurobindo's interpretation of Maya is the vindication of the reality of the world. Aurobindo proves the reality of the world or the finite existence in contrast to Advaitins by emphasizing the following two points: (i) the finite is the self-manifestation of the Absolute. What is from the real cannot be unreal and (ii) Aurobindo attests

to the reality of the external world by pointing to the human capacity to enter into union with the Absolute. The point is that the finite must be real since what is unreal cannot enter into a relation with the Real. For Aurobindo, the only reality that can be described as unreal is the independent objective human existence. Thus, unlike his predecessors, Aurobindo maintains the Reality of both Brahman and the World without endangering the Absoluteness of Brahman.

1.6 THE ONE AND THE MANY: THE WAY OF BEING IN BECOMING

We have started with the presupposition that the whole problem of Indian philosophy is inter-related to the question of the one and the many. Now it is time to take up this question as the focal point of our discussion. Aurobindo's Integral Advaitism invariably points to the doctrine of Sankara which establishes the oneness of the Supreme Reality or Brahman by denying the true reality of the world. Aurobindo challenges this contention and seems to suggest that Advaitism is true even when accepting the reality of the world. Therefore, Aurobindo is a Vedantin who has attempted to explain the unity of the one and the many in a unique way. He has insisted on the absoluteness of the Absolute, who is limited neither by unity nor by multiplicity. In fact, one and the many are at the service of each other. Aurobindo affirms the unity as a basis for the manifestation of the multiplicity and the multiplicity as the basis for the return to oneness and the enjoyment of unity in the divine manifestation. Our remaining task is to vindicate the veracity of Aurobindo's presumption that Advaitism is true even when accepting the reality of the world.

1.7 THE ABSOLUTE: UNITY MANIFESTING MULTIPLICITY

According to Aurobindo, the apparent contradictions that exist between Brahman and the world seem to be irreconcilable only to a finite or abstract reason. It can be solved by a higher reason, which he names as the Logic of the Infinite, that reconciles the opposites, including the one and the many, being and becoming, infinite and finite, and knowledge and ignorance. 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.

For Aurobindo, it was a later impatience of human heart and mind and a vehement attraction to high masterfulness that sought a univocal approach to reality and denied the many. *Sat* and *Asat* (Being and Non-Being) are not opposites, destructive of each other, but are the "last antinomy through which we look up to the Unknowable." To know God truly is to "know him everywhere equally and without distinction". What is necessary is to put aside the trenchant distinctions. The many appear as absurd because of our inability to perceive one in the many. It is because of the partial logic that one employs that one declares many an illusion or the Absolute is *Sat* and the relative is *Asat*, etc. If one is able to pursue insistently the One, it is to return with the benediction and the revelation of the One confirming itself in the Many. Therefore, the core of integral Advaita is identity in difference as opposed to Absolute identity advocated by Advaita of Sankara. The Infinite would not be the infinite Oneness if it was not capable of an infinite multiplicity. This does not mean that the Infinite One is plural or that it can be described as the sum of the Many. On the contrary, it can be the infinite many in the sense that it exceeds all the limitations or descriptions by multiplicity as well as all the limitations by finite conceptual oneness.

Here we have Aurobindo's central argument for the claim that Advaitism is true even when accepting the reality of the world. It is not mere infinite multiplicity, rather all multiplicity finds

its place in the One, where the singularity of the many is kept and recognised. Therefore, the “One” is not the Hegelian “Whole” where the singularity is muffled up in the whole. Substantiating the co-existence of One and the Many Aurobindo argues that there would be no place for reason and logic if there is only a “rigid monotone of limited oneness and sameness”. The essence of logic is nothing but the right perception of the relations, and the highest work of reason is to find the one substance, the one law, the cementing latent reality connecting and unifying the many, the different, the discordant and disparate. Moreover, he writes the Being is one, but this oneness is infinite and contains in itself an infinite plurality or multiplicity of itself: the One is the All; it is not only an essential Existence, but an All-Existence. The infinite multiplicity of the One and the eternal unity of the Many are the two realities or aspects of one reality on which the manifestation is founded.

The core of the problem of One and the Many consists in identifying the right relation between the individual and the Divine Being, between Soul and *Ishvara*. Aurobindo has his own distinctive way of understanding this relation. In the normal theistic understanding the many are the creations of the Divine as a potter makes the vessel. There is a total dependence of the creatures on the creator. In Aurobindonian understanding, the many are themselves divine in their inmost reality. They are the individual selves of the Self-existence, eternal but eternal in his being. Here the material existence is the creation of Nature, but the soul is an immortal portion of the Divine being. In other words, Divine is responsible for the individual self of the natural creatures. However, the fundamental Truth of existence is one and the many for their existence depends on the One. Thus the dependence of the entire created world on *Ishvara* is all the more kept intact. It is human ego that conceals this dependent nature, for it strives to stand on its own right. Thus, for Aurobindo, multiplicity is not something that broaches the unity of the One, but rather the existential diversity enriches the Being of the One. Therefore, the one and the many become the way of being the Absolute. And what makes it possible is the nature of becoming.

1.8 THE INFINITE: THE LOCUS OF UNITY

The statement that ‘the one and the many is the way of being the Absolute’ takes us to a more fundamental truth of Being, namely that the Infinite is the locus of unity. Here, the question regarding the identity of the individual self is natural: if it is a total surrender that is demanded how does one account for the identity of the creatures? For Aurobindo, this dependence is not contradictory to the identity but is “itself the door to the realisation of the Identity.” Once again we meet with the phenomenon of duality expressing unity, “proceeding from unity and opening back into unity” which is the fundamental principle of the operation of the universe. The core of the relation between the One and the Many is the consciousness of the fundamental unity with the Infinite. The duality is a position taken up, a double status accepted for the operation of the self-manifestation of being; but there is no eternal and fundamental separateness and dualism of Being and its Consciousness-Force, of the Soul and Nature. Manifestation of the one Absolute in many forms can also be understood as an expression of the immense possibilities of the Infinite Consciousness. The Infinite existence can at once be individual, universal, and transcendent. It is the supracosmic being which is conscious of itself as All-Being. It is possible in the sense that the single underlying principle in all these states or positions is the same triune Consciousness in a triple status. The *conditio sine qua non* for our human intellect to understand this contradictory existence is to accept that there can be different real statuses of consciousness of One Being, and it is completely logical and intelligible for the Existence which is free and infinite. One corollary

of accepting the manifold statuses of one consciousness is that no limit can be put to the variation of status on the condition that the One existence is conscious of its simultaneous presence in all of them. There is nothing irrational in this understanding because the very nature of the pure Existence is to be universally conscious. One has to admit and promote both the unity and multiplicity of the One. For Aurobindo *unity is not unanimity, rather unity is a unity in multiplicity*. This is the core of his theory of the One and the Many. This is the way of being in becoming.

The cosmic consciousness is the source of reconciliation between matter and spirit, and so too of the One and the Many. A question emerges here as to, what is the relation that this reconciliatory principle has to the transcendent consciousness, the final assertion of all its negations? The “Unknowable” becomes the source of all affirmations and all negations and freedom becomes the ultimate source of both. Brahman is not an omnipresent cause of persistent illusions rather it is the omnipresent Reality. Thus, Brahman as the positive basis is the principle of harmony. If one admits that self alone exists, it must be also true that all is the self. If all is one self there must be some reason and inherent principle in it as the source of manifestation. To find that, Aurobindo observes, we must proceed with the hypothesis of potency. “There is one Lord and Self and the many are only His representations and becomings.” Therefore, in Aurobindonian perspective, there is only one Omnipresent Reality as the source of the World and the many are its manifestations. Human beings arrive at a perfect liberation and an infinite equality. It is this consummation of which the Upanishad speaks when it says: ‘He in whom the self has become all existences, how shall he have delusion, whence shall he have grief who knows entirely and sees in all things oneness.’ In fact, it is in and through a metaphysics of becoming that Aurobindo establishes both the fundamental unity of Reality amidst the multiplicity in the universe. Moreover, his metaphysics of becoming positively establishes the Absolute as its Alpha and Omega.

The matrix for the whole development of Indian philosophy was the Brahma-world relation. If the Absolute is One how do we account for the multiplicity of the universe? What status has it? What is the truth of our phenomenal experience? It indeed is the question of the Reality itself.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How does Aurobindo view unit of existence?

2) Explain the unity in multiplicity.

1.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we discussed the basic unity of existence as advocated by Aurobindo. The condition of possibility for such an understanding is the realization that the ultimate source of the world is a single reality, namely Brahman. We have also seen that this Absolute manifests itself in multiplicity, in matter and form. Therefore one can say the basic substratum of existence is matter and spirit which is the subject matter of our discussion in the next unit.

1.10 KEY WORDS

Maya in Advaita: In contrast with the pure existence of the Absolute, Maya has existence as the power of limitation. In this respect, the description of Maya as *anadi* (beginningless), *acintya* (unthinkable) and *anirvacaniya* (indescribable) are reasonable.

1.11 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 2 SYNTHESIS OF SPIRIT AND MATTER

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous section we have seen that Aurobindo maintains a synthetic approach to life and reality. There is a basic unity between the finite and the Infinite, Matter and Spirit. Here in this unit our objective is a detailed analysis of the unity of Matter and Spirit. How the two constitute a synthetic whole.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Aurobindo synthesizes both matter and spirit by transcending the partial views of both the materialist and the idealist in his integral Advaita. A pre-requisite for appreciating the reality of both Spirit and Matter is a correct understanding of the relation between the two. This takes us to the understanding of Aurobindo's integral approach to reality. Aurobindo, in the light of his basic presuppositions, which we have seen in unit one of this block, as well as in the light of the three great Vedantic schools of thought, develops his metaphysics. For Aurobindo, the "revolt of Spirit against Matter" has dominated human thought for two thousand years. Problems stem from "an unsolved discord," from "an undiscovered agreement or unity". Therefore, he attempted to formulate a "larger and complete affirmation" of both Matter and Spirit. This acceptance is demanded by the Upanishadic teaching that "Matter is also Brahman." The central problem, therefore, is the problem of harmony. In fact it is his synthetic conception of Matter and Spirit as the two poles of the single Reality that made possible his integral vision. Our immediate task is to develop this synthetic vision of Matter and Spirit.

2.2 DIPOLAR NATURE OF THE REALITY

Aurobindo's realism with regard to the nature of reality would further mean the acceptance of Reality having two poles: Matter and Spirit. In the classical Western (eg. Aristotelian) philosophy the basic substratum of every existence is named substance. According to Aurobindo, in Vedantic thought this substance has two poles. This calls to mind Whitehead's description of actual entity having two poles. In his *Life Divine* Aurobindo writes: "[...] if Matter is one end, Spirit is the other. The two are one: Spirit is the soul and reality of that which we sense as Matter; Matter is a form and body of that which we realise as Spirit ... Therefore it is a purely conceptive – a spiritually, not a mentally conceptive difference ending in a practical distinction,

which creates the series descending from Spirit through Mind to Matter and ascending again from Matter through Mind to Spirit.” (LD 241).

We have seen above that the fundamental problem for Aurobindo was the problem of unity. Thus, having realized its importance, Aurobindo built the whole edifice of his metaphysics on the sublime truth that both Matter and Spirit are real and are essential part of Reality. He established the oneness of Reality through a holistic vision of Matter and Spirit. Any sort of reductionism is shortsighted. In his search, however, the guiding light is the ancient scriptures, especially the Upanishads. In *Brihadaranyaka* Upanishad it is stated: “As all spokes are contained in the axle and in the felly of a wheel, thus also all beings and gods, all worlds and organs are contained in that Self” (2.5.15). Moreover, *Chandogya* Upanishad states, “it is that is below and is above, that is to the West and to the East, that is to the South and to the North. Brahman, indeed, is this whole universe” (7.25.2). A monistic idealism is very clear in it.

How does Aurobindo clarify that Matter and Spirit are two poles of the same Reality? For Aurobindo, Matter expresses itself as the formulation of some unknown Force. Moreover, a second move in the same direction would clarify that life itself is “an obscure energy of sensibility imprisoned in its material formulation.” In the light of this integral knowledge, however, Matter itself is found to be a result of something other than itself, of an Energy, which cannot be something self-existent and acting in the Void. Matter can turn out and, when deeply scrutinised, it is likely to turn out to be the action of a secret Consciousness and Being. The Energy that creates the world can be nothing else than a Will, and the Will is only consciousness applying itself to a work and a result. “Work and result” mean here nothing but a self-involution of Consciousness in form and a self-evolution out of form in order to actualize a tremendous possibility in the universe. One is able to transcend all the contradictions of the world existence once it is viewed in the light of the triune principle of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. “The world of which we are a part is in its most obvious view, a movement of Force; but that Force, when we penetrate its appearances, proves to be a constant and yet always mutable rhythm of creative consciousness casting up, projecting in itself phenomenal truths of its own infinite and eternal being; and this rhythm is in its essence, cause and purpose, a play of the infinite delight of being ever busy with its own innumerable self-representations.” (LD 103).

Thus, as one transcends the dividing ignorance, that gives us a sense of the apparent gulf between matter and life, Mind, Life, and Matter will reveal itself as one energy triply formulated, the triple world of the Vedic seers. Therefore, for Aurobindo, both matter and spirit are nothing but the result of the self-involution of the Absolute. It is the ground for the reality of the world. It is the manifestation of the Consciousness-Force and not mere illusion.

2.3 MATTER AS THE FOUNDATIONAL SUBSTRATUM OF EXISTENCE

Aurobindo maintains that the whole structure of Life is founded on the principle of Matter and upon it life stands as upon a pedestal or out of it evolves like the form of a many-branching tree out of its encasing seed. This material principle is the basis on which the mind, life and body of human beings depend. In spite of the development of life from consciousness emerging into Mind, the foundational substratum is the material principle. In other words, Life and its functioning are conditioned by matter which constitutes its external body. Both mind and body are important for human existence. Actually it is only because man possesses a body capable of receiving and serving a progressive mental illumination that human beings are able to transcend above the level of animals.

Matter is the foundation and the apparent beginning; to use the language of the Upanishads, “*Prithivi*, the Earth-principle is our foundation”. Aurobindo views that Matter is the substance of the one Conscious-Being phenomenally divided within itself by the action of a universal mind, a division which the universal mind repeats and dwells in, but which not at all abrogates or diminishes the unity of spirit or the unity of Energy or the real unity of Matter. It is also noted that without the creation of matter, the spirit is only potent, but actionless and hence a deep sleep. Its Energy is only implicit and as good as nil. But the potent must be actual, the implicit cannot but be explicit, else its mission is not fulfilled. These facts recall again Aurobindo’s holistic vision of both matter and Spirit. Matter and Spirit are complementary to each other. The “Spirit is the soul of matter and matter is the body of the spirit.” However each has their own specific features and characteristics. Matter, in contrast with Spirit, is the culmination of the principle of ignorance. It is also the principle which held us to the mechanical law. Moreover, matter is the culmination of the principle of division and struggle. Nonetheless, the relationship between matter and spirit needs further clarification.

2.4 THE RELATION BETWEEN MATTER AND SPIRIT

It is true that Spirit and Matter are not the same, but they are not contradictory, rather contrary. In fact, they work together as two sides of the same coin. The philosophical credo of Aurobindo was that matter and consciousness (spirit) are inseparably connected as two aspects of a single whole. For Aurobindo if one asserts only pure Spirit and a mechanical unintelligent substance or energy, calling one God or Soul and the other Nature, the inevitable end will be that we shall either deny God or else turn from Nature.

The question here is, how has the general trend of opposition between the two come to be? Answering this question demands a clear understanding of the opposition between the two. What causes this division is the individual ego consciousness. In the Indian perspective the first fundamental opposition that matter presents to Spirit is that it constitutes the culmination of the principle of Ignorance. Human beings, in their finitude, misconstrue things and realities. They are often misled by the illusion of quality and quantity so that often they perceive reality in comparison with something else. However, when we transcend beyond the differences of quality and quantity and look only for the intensity of the movement one will realise that Brahman dwells equally in all forms of existence. Nevertheless, the question remains, how are we to transcend these differences? The consciousness of this infinite energy is different from our mental consciousness and only by the knowledge informed by intuition and culminated in knowledge by identity can we realize the full truth of it. Each thing may differ in quality and quantity but the self is equal.

The second fundamental opposition that matter brings forth to Spirit is that it is the culmination of bondage to mechanical Law, and matter is in opposition to all that tries to liberate itself from the colossal inertia. A third fundamental opposition of matter to spirit is that matter is the culmination of the principle of division and struggle. Again, by the principle of matter Mind’s wings are clipped, its feet are tied to a narrow perch and are held back from the vastness and freedom above of which it is conscious. Fourthly, perhaps the most fatal division that Matter imposes on the vital and mental existence is the law of pain and suffering and the unrest of dissatisfaction with its status of division, inertia and ignorance. In this sense, for Aurobindo, the crux of all that is problematic lies in Matter.

Aurobindo clarifies further how the consciousness of the dichotomy between matter and mind has occurred. For Aurobindo, the practical divisions and differences that one experiences in the phenomenal world is due to the dividing action of Mind. Indeed there is difference and a series of ever ascending degrees in the world of existence. Substance is nothing but the conscious existence presenting itself to the senses as an object. Depending on the relation that the senses establish with the substance there can be various fundamental principles of relation. Thus, it is true that the substance with which the pure mind works and the substance with which human physical senses work have different foundations. In the same way, one can speak of the substance of pure dynamic life-energy as different from the subtlest forms of material substance. From the same principle it is also true to say that spirit itself is a pure substance which presents itself as an object to the light of a pure spiritual perspective knowledge where the subject becomes its own object. In other words, that which is beyond spatio-temporality becomes conscious of itself in a pure spiritually self-conceptive self-extension as the foundation or the primal material of all existence. Here the spirit objectifies itself neither to the physical senses nor to the vital or mental senses but to what is purely spiritual. Once one possesses this experience of the pure substance of being, all sorts of differences disappear and reach the absolute unity of subject and object, and the very existence of various substances has no more meaning now. Aurobindo's statement that the difference between matter and spirit is purely a conceptual one is better understood in this light. All through the descending of Spirit -through mind to matter- and ascending matter -through mind to spirit- the oneness of the pure Existence is never abrogated. "Brahman is not only the cause and supporting power and indwelling principle of the universe, he is also its material and its sole material. Matter is also Brahman and it is nothing other than or different from Brahman". It is only by having a body that is attuned to the functioning of the spirit and higher illumination that man can attain the divine manhood. Otherwise either the promise of life is cancelled, its meaning annulled or earthly being can only realise Sachchidananda by abolishing itself, by shedding from it mind, life and body and returning to the pure infinite.

As a final point to this section what we can say is that in the integral Advaitism what is aimed at is not a compromise but a true reconciliation between matter and spirit because compromise is always characterised by bargains or transactions of interests between two opposing powers, while reconciliation "proceeds always by a mutual comprehension leading to some sort of intimate oneness" which would assign each its "due portion in life and their due justification in thought" that never overlooks their rights or truth claims. "Matter itself cannot be the original and ultimate reality. At the same time, the view that divorces Matter and Spirit and puts them as opposites is unacceptable; Matter is a form of Spirit, a habitation of Spirit, and here in Matter itself there can be a realisation of Spirit". The suggestive ideal is the acceptance of both matter and spirit as two aspects of the same Reality. This calls for a further discussion on how the two actually make an integral unity.

2.5 DIPOLARITY: NOT DICHOTOMY

The dual existence, namely, of matter and spirit, does not mean any dichotomy between the two. What went wrong, Aurobindo states, is our perception of the material world or what one names as the undivine element in the world. There is nothing undivine in existence. What one conceives as undivine is nothing but created in the divine existence; namely, pure-existence, consciousness-force and bliss. Therefore, to conceive them as pure contradictories is a mistake of human mental consciousness. Truth is that mind, life, and body are found in their true forms in the Divine itself.

They function as they do, as conveyed to human consciousness, because they are by some means separated in consciousness from the divine Truth. Once it is possible to abrogate this separation by the expansion of divine energy in humanity, it would be possible that the working of these lower forms be converted to a supreme evolution and progression. Thus it is possible to manifest divine being in the lower forms of existence, namely mind, life and body. *Taittiriya* Upanishad amply substantiates this claim with its statement that matter is Brahman (III. 2).

The primordial characteristic of the world is a differentiated unity, a manifold oneness rather than the constant attempt to reach unity in uniformity. The world is not characterised by the everlasting struggle between the irreconcilable opposites.

Therefore, emphasizing categorically his integral perspective, Aurobindo states that “the real Advaita does not make the least scission in the one eternal Existence. On the contrary, the “undividing Monism sees the one as the one even in the multiplicities of Nature,” in all aspects of life, such as in the reality of self and of cosmos, “as in that greatest reality of the supracosmic which is the source of self and the truth of the cosmos and is not bound either by any affirmation of universal becoming or by any universal or absolute negation”.

The remaining questions are: How are we to reach the unity of the two, even though the division is apparent? How can it be reasonably substantiated? Aurobindo calls up different possibilities. One among them would be to abandon the phenomenal world as having no real reality, the way the Advaitins and all other world negating philosophies followed. However, that would lead to further problems, and would entail that one abandons this earthly existence in its entirety for something beyond. Also it would mean that perfection of humanity is not in humanity itself but in something else abiding in another world. If that is the case, the whole project we have been trying to develop collapses, for it would lead to a supracosmic view, which we already repudiated to be a partial view of existence. Then the question is, how are we to achieve the unity of Spirit and Matter? How does Aurobindo escape the dilemma?

The solution offered by Aurobindo to overcome the apparent dichotomy between Matter and Spirit is that there must be a universal Mind which is subconscious to us in the form of the universe or superconscious to its spirit. It is this superconscient Mind which through the instrumentality of universal sense establishes in itself the relation between different forms and that which establishes the rhythm of the material universe. However, this does not explain the whole truth about the material world. In other words, it only explains that the material world is a creation of consciousness, but we are yet to clarify the how of this creation. One has to reasonably clarify how matter can be Brahman and how the Absolute can assume the material form. Apparently it is a contradiction. Here we recognise the importance of Aurobindo’s presupposition that the whole of Reality is based on the involution of the Spirit into the lower principles of matter, and a corresponding evolution of this material principle to the higher state of the Spirit, passing through various stages, in both processes. It is the greatness of Aurobindo that he clearly stated that unless we identify a series of ascending terms (Life, Mind, Supermind, and the grades that link mind to Supermind) between Spirit and Matter or without the reception of the intermediary grades in the identification of Spirit and Matter, representing each in terms of the other, it will not be intelligible, rather will be an artificial creation of the thought. Only this thought pattern would enable one to overcome the apparent dichotomy. This inevitably takes us to the discussion of Aurobindo’s concept of evolution, a means to overcome the dichotomy between matter and spirit. We referred previously to the involution of the Spirit and the different

stages it passes through. Their explication would constitute the heart of Aurobindonian metaphysics of becoming. However, we will keep their discussion for the next unit. For the moment we turn to his understanding of Cosmic Consciousness.

2.6 COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS: THE SOURCE OF RECONCILIATION

Here our primary objective is to articulate our arguments for conceiving Cosmic Consciousness as a principle of reconciliation. The contradictory nature of matter and spirit can be reconciled in two ways. On the one hand, one has to understand matter as the lowest level of existence which ought to be transcended to the spiritual; on the other hand, matter and spirit are to be taken as equally real and valuable because they are essential components of the one divine reality, Sachchidananda. The material and the spiritual realities are phases of the earthly processes. It is only from within the limitations of matter or spirit, supported by the diverse functions of the intellect, that one or another of these phases is affirmed or denied. In this regard, what Aurobindo suggests both to the “materialist” as well as to the “ascetic” to escape one sided perspective of Reality is to make resort to “an extension of the field of our consciousness” which is “an inner enlargement from the individual into the cosmic existence”. However, the question of ‘how’ remains. Here again what comes to our aid is the cosmic consciousness by which we become aware of our fundamental unity with the whole of cosmic existence. As one grows in this Consciousness, he or she becomes aware of the “Supermind, whose universal operation is the key to all lesser activities.” With the help of this new awareness one is able to transcend his past ego-sense, that is responsible for the sense of division, and live in the Universal Consciousness. However, this realisation is possible only when one accepts an ascending process in life. In cosmic consciousness, mind and matter are considered intermediaries and not agents of separation or “fomenters of artificial quarrel” between the two aspects of the same Reality.

From another perspective cosmic consciousness is a logical necessity for Aurobindo in the sense that if we reject the existence of consciousness in the matter it becomes difficult to explain the process of evolution. For Aurobindo, everything in the world is conscious; “consciousness remains concealed, unmanifest and veiled in the material, vital and mental realities.” This is an ineluctable corollary of Aurobindo’s claim that the divine involution or manifestation is the condition of possibility for the beingness of the universe and everything in it. The Vedic sages identified five degrees of being: the material, the vital, the mental, the ideal, the spiritual or beatific and to each of these grades of our soul there corresponds a grade of our substance, a sheath as it was called in the ancient figurative language. Taking into account the wisdom of the Vedic sages as well as the findings of the modern scientific developments, Aurobindo points out that there exists a sort of “obscure beginning of life and perhaps a sort of inert or suppressed consciousness in the metal and in the earth and in other “inanimate forms”, or at least the first stuff of what becomes consciousness in us maybe there”.

Finally, cosmic consciousness leads one to cosmic love, which is the “non-attached love of the world as the visible manifestation of the Divine”. Only a cosmic love can enable one to accept both matter and spirit as dual dimensions of the single Reality. Cosmic love does not demand a self-annihilation in the Absolute, but rather a joyful co-operation with the dynamic world spirit at the integral existential experience of the indefinable unity of God and the world. Cosmic love originates from the “vision of the spiritual unity of all existence”. It is a participation in the divine *lila* itself, the latter understood in the sense of God’s creative love for the cosmos. It is both the sense of “oneness” of matter and spirit, that helps to overcome the “artificial quarrel”

aforementioned. It is the place (*locus*) wherein the individual being becomes aware of its own inherent nature of becoming or the progressive ascent.

2.7 A SYNTHETIC APPROACH TO MATTER AND SPIRIT

A major point of divergence between the East and the West is in the understanding of fundamental truth of existence. To be precise, the emphasis the West and the East give to Matter and Spirit respectively can be seen only as an ineluctable corollary of their approach towards the Reality. In general what we have in the West is a dualistic approach to nature and reality. For, the West has generally laid its emphasis on the truth of matter, in contrast to the East, either by denying the existence of spirit or by relegating it to the domain of the unknowable or what is secondary. What Indian culture and philosophy aims at, as Aurobindo rightly observes is the harmony of matter and spirit; “Spiritual and temporal have indeed to be perfectly harmonised, for the spirit works through mind and body. But the purely intellectual or heavily material culture of the kind that Europe now favours, bears in its heart the seed of death; for the living aim of culture is the realisation on earth of the kingdom of heaven. India, though its urge is towards the Eternal, since that is always the highest, the entirely real, still contains in her own culture and her own philosophy a supreme reconciliation of the eternal and the temporal and she need not seek it from outside” (RI 60).

The East generally maintains a synthetic approach. Nevertheless, it is not free of the taint of dualism. Aurobindo recalls: The idea by which the East “has been governed is the firm knowledge that truth of the Spirit is the sole real truth” and Asia tried to mould her external life in view of this sublime goal (SM 289). Aurobindo in his own distinctive way brings out his critique of the dualism of matter and spirit in his response to the *refusal of the ascetic* (over emphasis of Spirit) and the *denial of the materialist* (over emphasis of Matter at the cost of Spirit). In contrast with the Western trend, the East has laid its whole emphasis on Spirit and at least for a period it neglected the possibilities and relevance of life and focused on the narrow development of a fixed status. Aurobindo recognizes the danger involved in this exaggerated position of the East. As he warned the West for her over emphasis on the material dimension vis-à-vis he warns the East for her over emphasis of the Spiritual. For him, what characterised the history of last 2000 years is the revolt between matter and spirit.

For Aurobindo, the antinomy between the two is unreal for the fundamental is the Spirit and life is only its manifestation. His argument is that the East “has deviated into a divorce between the Spirit and its instruments and a disparagement and narrowing of the mental and external life of the race.” The core of the Aurobindonian argument is that the “fullest and most absolute attainment of the spiritual can be securely based” only on the basis of the material or the instrumental life (SM 289). In this respect Aurobindo appreciates the West and commendably suggests to the East: “The message the West brings to the East is a true message. ... Life also is the Divine, its progressive expansion is the self-expression of the Brahman, and to deny Life is to diminish the Godhead within us” (SM 289).

In the dualism of matter and spirit what we have is the separation of fact and value. Organic nature of the universe is countered by a mechanistic approach to it, whereby the nature becomes devoid of any intrinsic value.

A second move in the direction of the dualism of matter and spirit resulted in the separation of man and nature. When the nature is conceived intrinsically valueless, it naturally demanded that man put value in it, which finally resulted in the objectification of nature. The natural corollary of the separation of man and nature was the alienation of man from nature, which finally ended up in nihilism. Taking a distance from the then existing predominant view of nature and life Aurobindo considered it to be intrinsically valuable.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Is dipolarity dicotomy? Explain?

2) Describe Aurobindo's scheme of thinking on Synthesis of Spirit and Matter.

2.8 LET US SUM UP

Our discussion in this unit focused on Aurobindo's synthetic approach to life and reality. Aurobindo arguing against then existing prevalent trend stood for a holistic view where both matter and spirit are equally important. It is this synthetic approach of Aurobindo what helped him to upheld the descent of the Absolute into the material world and evolutionary ascent of the matter into the spiritual sphere. And this will be our point of discussion in the next unit.

2.9 KEY WORDS

Dualism: of matter and spirit, is the separation of fact and value. Organic nature of the universe is countered by a mechanistic approach to it, whereby the nature becomes devoid of any intrinsic value.

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UNIT 3 EVOLUTION AND INVOLUTION

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- 3.0 Objectives
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3.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to clarify two important concepts in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, namely Evolution and Involution. We have made some reference to the fact that the distinctiveness of Aurobindo from other vedantic thinkers is that Aurobindo follows a synthetic approach to life and reality, taking into account the complementarity of Matter and Spirit. In fact it is his evolutionary view of the nature of existence, including the Absolute, that made it possible. In and through these two concepts Aurobindo makes clear that the world is real (not mere illusion), and the nature of this world is becoming and this becoming is also true in the case of the Absolute.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Aurobindo maintains, that the reception of both spirit and matter and the thesis that matter is also Brahman can be unacceptable to a rational mind unless we admit a series of ascending terms (Life, Mind, Supermind, and the grades that link mind to Supermind) between Spirit and Matter. Without the reception of the intermediary grades in the identification of Spirit and Matter, representing each in terms of the other, will be an artificial creation of the thought.

As we have already discussed, the second presupposition, wherein one observes the originality of Aurobindo and how he transcends the theories of his predecessors, of the Integral (*purna*) Advaita is faith in the "involution" (descent) of the Absolute Reality in the material world. The Vedanta accepts that life is already involved in matter and Mind in life because in essence Matter is a form of veiled life, life a veiled form of Consciousness. Here we also have Aurobindo's novel response to the problem of the one and the many. The condition of possibility for the evolution in reality is the "involution." Aurobindo writes in the *Life Divine* that a first involutionary foundation in which originates all that has to evolve, an emergence and action of the involved powers in or upon that foundation in an ascending series, and a culminating emergence of the highest power of all as the agent of a supreme manifestation are the necessary stages of the journey of evolutionary Nature.

3.2 THE CONCEPT OF EVOLUTION: A PROCESS TOWARD INTEGRAL UNITY

It was already established previously that in Aurobindo's integral vision Reality is characterised by two poles: Spirit and Matter. For, in his vision it is the involution of the Absolute that is responsible for the whole world process. However, our common experience delineates that matter and Spirit belong to two different realms: finite and infinite, immanent and transcendental. How can we reconcile the two? Furthermore, we are still to explain the how of the involution of the Absolute. It is his theory of evolution or becoming that answers these questions. Moreover, discussion of the concept of evolution would further clarify the questions of the One and the Many and the co-existence of matter and spirit. It would still clarify how the whole problem of Indian philosophy is inter-related to the problem of the One and the Many, a claim that we made at the outset. First we have to see the role of evolution in Indian philosophy.

3.3 THE IDEA OF EVOLUTION IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

The idea of evolution is not something new or recent to the Indian tradition, though generally it is not well treated by many today. It was already in the Vedas and Upanishads, especially in *Rig Veda*. We have a clear reference to the concept of evolution in *Rig Veda*, in the tenth mandala. Here, evolution is presented in connection with involution. One can identify a number of other passages in the classics of Indian philosophy which speak of this evolutionary ascension (the Evolutionary Process—Ascent and Integration) in nature. A clear vision of evolution can be seen in Upanishadic literature. In the Upanishadic teaching, the world is the creative manifestation of Brahman which takes place in and through an involutory and evolutionary process (TU 3.1). Realisation of this Brahman in individual existence also passes through various stages. Thus, *Taittiriya* Upanishad maintains that the true seeker of Truth comes gradually to the knowledge of Brahman in successive revelations (TU 3). The Absolute, Sachchidananda is the beginning and end of evolution. The finite is one with the Infinite. "This is full, that is full from the Full, the Full is taken out and yet the Full remains" (IU Santimantram).

Furthermore, the idea of evolution was already in the teaching of *Gita* as well. From *Gita* one gets the idea of Brahman as Purushottama, who is transcendent, motionless, and calm existence, and is yet dynamic and creative. It is nothing but Purushottama who evolves into both material and spiritual world, by his own power and determination. Srivastava maintains that it is the same power that Aurobindo names as "Cit-sakti or the Consciousness-Force, or Purushottama which reveals His Supreme nature: the transcendent and originating Sakti of the Purushottama is his para-prakriti". Evolution is the transformation of the lower nature (*apara prakriti*) into the higher nature (*para prakriti*). From this general background of the concept of evolution in Indian philosophy we could enter into the discussion of the same in Aurobindo.

3.4 AUROBINDO'S VISION OF EVOLUTION

The keynote of Aurobindo's thought is evolution. It is believed that he entertained the idea of evolution from his earliest writings in 1890-1892 when he was an undergraduate in King's College, Cambridge. His unfinished work of this period entitled, *The Harmony of Virtue*, gives ample evidence for this supposition. In this work which is written in the model of Socratic dialogue - a dialogue between Keshav Ganesh Desai - who clearly stands for Aurobindo himself - and his English friends - a new theory of virtue is proposed. The key to the virtue is evolution. He also speaks of a descent into the nether regions of consciousness, of which he later spoke in *Savitri*. Thus, one could say that both the ideas of evolution and involution, which is the

condition of possibility for evolution, were already present, at least in a germ form, in his thought from the very beginning. He states, “an involution of Spirit in Matter is the beginning”. The involution is the necessary condition of evolution.

Here a question emerges as to why Aurobindo conceives existence as a process or evolution? For him, the ultimate purpose of human existence is the realisation of Sachchidananda. The attainment of this goal depends on the gradual development that the person achieves. Therefore, evolutionary process is a must for two reasons: (i) the initial stages of evolution, namely matter, life and mind, are already a matter of our own experience. What is inevitable is the experience of the center of undivided power, Sachchidananda. However, because of the separation the first three stages (matter, life and mind) have from the spiritual source, there results a lapse which culminates in a total Inconscience out of which come an involved Being and Consciousness which have to emerge by a gradual evolution. Therefore, (ii) the evolution becomes an inevitable reality in human existence. Aurobindo maintains that evolution first develops, as it is bound to develop. In Matter, Life appears and living physical beings; in Life, Mind manifests as embodied thinking and living beings; in Mind, ever increasing powers and activities in forms of Matter, the Supermind or Truth-Consciousness must appear, inevitably, by the very force of what is contained in the Inconscience and the necessity in Nature to bring it into manifestation. Supermind appearing manifests the Spirit’s self-knowledge and whole-knowledge in a supramental living being and must bring about by the same law, by an inherent necessity and inevitability, the dynamic manifestation here of the divine Existence, Consciousness and Delight of existence. Thus, Aurobindo states that “Life has begun from an involution of the spiritual truth of things in what seems to be its opposite.” Once there is involution there cannot be but evolution; the evolution is not only possible, but inevitable, in the sense that involution is in view of evolution. Only then the very purpose of involution is actualised, namely divinization of the material world.

3.5 DISTINCTIVENESS OF AUROBINDO’S CONCEPT OF EVOLUTION

It is observed that Aurobindo has combined the Eastern and the Western perspectives of evolution in his view. To facilitate a proper understanding of Aurobindonian theory, one has to see it also in contrast with that of the West. In light of the Eastern perspective, the Western perspective of evolution is not sufficiently spiritual. While the West speaks of an evolution of matter, the East concentrates on the evolution of the Spirit; while the West speaks more of a natural evolution, the East, especially Aurobindo, speaks of spiritual evolution, which is the evolution of Sachchidananda. It is basically an internal growth of Consciousness and an external development is only instrumentally applicable to it. The Spirit is “involved” in all the material realities. It is the involution of Spirit in matter and in all the evolutes of matter that spiritualises the Eastern theory of evolution in the Aurobindonian perspective. A spiritual evolution, an evolution of consciousness *in* Matter is then the keynote, the central significant motive of the terrestrial existence. Moreover, Aurobindo states that a complete involution of all that the Spirit is and its evolutionary self-unfolding are the double term of our material existence.

Thus, for Aurobindo the whole history is a movement of evolution, of a progressive self-manifestation of the Spirit in a material universe. In this context it can be observed that the fundamental flaw of Sankara when he rejected the reality of the world is that he “ignored the greatest truth that a divinised man can only emerge in a divinised cosmos.” Therefore, what is necessary is an integral evolution, rather than a partial one. “Evolution must be a cosmic Yoga”.

3.6 TELEOLOGY CENTRAL TO AUROBINDO'S CONCEPT OF EVOLUTION

Aurobindo's evolution is fundamentally teleological. For Aurobindo, a merely mobile nature would give us only the cyclic rhythm of becoming which is so common a feature of various ancient theories of the world. Such a view would be devoid of both hierarchical structure and teleology. Neither can it account for the persistent aspiration of the human consciousness to exceed itself to arrive at the integral conscious knowledge of all Being. Even the *Lila* (cosmic play) is not without its goal and object. For, it carries within itself an object to be accomplished and without the fulfilment of that object it would have no completeness of significance. As different from the Western thinkers of evolution, Aurobindo holds that if Brahman, the supreme Consciousness, is really involved in all evolution, it is but logical that the process of all evolution should finally culminate in the evolutionary manifestation of this super consciousness.

This teleological dimension is what distinguishes Aurobindo's evolution from that of Bergson (1859-1941), a western contemporary of Aurobindo. This demands further justification. Aurobindo maintains that Bergson's theory suffers from two weaknesses: firstly, Bergson maintains the *élan vital* as a pure flow, a spontaneous movement which goes on rushing. Thus, there can be no integration, no cohesion between what goes before or comes after. He feels the necessity of giving some stability to intuition, thus that purpose maybe served by the intellect. Though Bergson wanted to place intuition superior to reason, he had to resort to reason to give it stability; secondly, Bergson excluded teleology from the evolutionary process. He has taken together all the higher forms of consciousness under the title intuition. On the contrary, Aurobindo has pointed out lower and higher levels of intuition. Only in this way can one refer to any sort of teleology in the movement. It may be right to say that in Aurobindo one can see the why and how of evolution while Bergson is satisfied with the latter question alone. In Bergson's perspective, evolution should be seen as the endurance of '*élan vital*' the vital impetus that is continuously developing and generating new forms. Evolution has to be understood as creative and it is not mechanic. His basic understanding of reality was that in life, in whatever form it might appear, there is an observable '*élan vital*', a drive of life, purpose, creativity and meaning.

In Aurobindo's vision evolution is emergent, free, and purposive. The apparent mechanical progression of evolution has a spiritual nexus inherent in it. Aurobindo, like Plato, observes that thing that is made is attracted towards the thing that *is*, becoming towards being, the natural to the supernatural, the symbol towards the thing itself, nature towards God. Each stage of evolution is subtler and more complex than the previous one as the purpose of evolution is the delight of self-manifestation of Sachchidananda. This teleological vision of evolution serves also as the foundation of his philosophy of history and his speculation about the future of mankind. The unique features of the Aurobindonian theory of evolution is commendably summarised as follows: "Evolution is not simply an increasingly complex configuration of matter and motion, presided over by chance. Nor is it the rattling-off of a chain forged innumerable years ago, presided over by an extra-cosmic divine mind. Nor is it the gradual emergence, in accidental fashion, of new qualities and superior values; all out of the void The process of evolution is the infinitely diversified self-determination of the essentially indeterminable reality. ... Evolution is the creative adventure of the world spirit in the unchartered ocean of Inconscience, so that the infinite possibilities inherent in Reality maybe infinitely expressed in material conditions." (Chaudhuri 1960, 31).

Aurobindo's philosophy leaves no doubt concerning the fact that cosmic history has a definite direction and purpose. Through it and in it, the eternal spirit seeks its self-realization, beginning, as it were, from the inconscience of matter, and passing through many stages it flowers into the full consciousness of its being when it completes the cycle of evolution and involution.

To clarify this cyclic process one has to recollect what has been seen about the basic forms of existence. It has already been stated above that existence in its activity expresses itself as a Conscious-Force. The working of this force is presented to the consciousness as its own form of being. Since the force is the action of the Conscious-Being the result also is nothing but the forms of that Conscious-Being. The natural consequence of the above affirmation has its bearing on the whole of Aurobindonian philosophy. If the result of the action of the Conscious-force is Conscious-being itself the substance or matter of every existence is only a form of Spirit, the pure Existence. It is also true that life is an action of the Conscious-Force and material forms are its result. However, life is involved in these material forms appearing in them first as inconscient force and as a result of the inner dynamics of evolution brings back into it the consciousness as it is done by Mind. In fact being conscious is the form of the being of Pure Existence either in its manifested form or unmanifested form. However, involution becomes the condition of possibility for the evolution.

3.7 SACHCHIDANANDA AND THE INVOLUTION

In the previous sections we pointed out that the world is the manifestation of the Sachchidananda, the Absolute in Indian philosophy. However, this may seem an arbitrary statement unless one clarifies the how of this manifestation. Our immediate task is to analyse this dimension of the Sachchidananda-World relation. It has to be analysed in the light of two paradoxes: (i) why did Sachchidananda, the infinite and all-perfect create or manifest the universe; and (ii) the nature of Sachchidananda, which is immutable, static, eternal, self-existent, featureless, etc. is contradictory to the nature of the created world which is transient, finite, imperfect, mutable, etc. In this respect the dilemma concerns as to how are we to concur with the reality of the world and the Absoluteness of Sachchidananda? For the first paradox one can find no answer other than the following that the cosmic manifestation is for the pure Delight (*Lila*) of Sachchidananda.

With respect to the second paradox Sankara solved it by identifying the material cause of the universe in the principle of Maya, while Madhva found *Prakriti* as the material cause of the universe. In these ways, they avoided applying *parinamavada* (theory of modification) in the case of God. In other words, they advocated a sort of absolute identity and identity in difference respectively to account for God-world relation. However, Aurobindo repudiated such a perspective.

Aurobindo solves the problem of the second paradox by recognizing in Sachchidananda a double nature; *Sachchidananda in its power of manifestation and Sachchidananda in its pure unmanifested nature*. Here we see also how Aurobindo surpasses Sankara and Madhva. He writes, "All that is in the kinesis, the movement, the action, the creation, is the Brahman; the becoming is a movement of the being; Time is a manifestation of the Eternal. All is one Being, one Consciousness, one even in infinite multiplicity, and there is no need to bisect it into an opposition of transcendent Reality and unreal cosmic Maya." (LD 461).

This takes us to Aurobindo's concept of involution, the first condition to understand the above relation. In other words, the involution of the Absolute is the condition of possibility for the evolution of the world or the manifestation of the world. And in explaining this we enter here into the hardcore of Aurobindo's metaphysics of becoming.

3.8 THE INVOLUTION OF THE ABSOLUTE

In dealing with the question of "involution" our objective is to clarify what is meant by Involution or in the Western categories "Becoming" and the why of it. It would clarify as well Aurobindo's conception of the Absolute as Being and Becoming. First, we take up the question what is meant by involution? In Aurobindo's own words, Involution "is the manifestation from above of that which we have to develop from below; it is the descent of God into that divine birth of the human being into which we mortal creatures must climb ..." (EG 157). The "Involution consists in the descent of the Infinite ... into the cosmic world or reality through the medium of the Supermind. Evolution, on the other hand, is the reverse process of Involution, and it consists in the ascent of the Spirit from matter through the medium of the Supermind back to its original nature" (Susai 49). These citations explain the core of the becoming of Sachchidananda and the evolution of the universe. Moreover, it points to the great role of the Supermind as well. The law of involution is characterised as a law of unity in multiplicity" where "the different beings that emerge from Brahman's Self-manifestation have their being and origin in the Divine.

Involution can be understood as the "self-imposed veiling" of Sachchidananda. One of the differences between involution and evolution is that the descent by its very nature is self-concealing which makes the presence of the Spirit more and more obscure, and on the contrary the ascent is more and more revealing which makes the presence of the Spirit explicit. However, both involution and evolution are self-revelation of the Absolute. In no way one sees involution as self-concealing making the Absolute more obscure, rather it only makes possible the Transcendent more an Immanent one. It is a self-concealing only in the sense that it manifests itself in another mode of existence, that is, Matter.

The more the descent proceeds, the thicker, the denser, becomes the veil and as a result the apparently non-conscious and inert matter emerges. It can be said that Involution is a progressive self-limitation, or self-absorption of Sachchidananda outwards or downwards by increasingly veiling and consequently diminishing the glory of His pure Existence, Consciousness-Force, Bliss and the creative medium of Supermind. The coinage "self-imposed veiling" in fact clarifies how do the spirit and matter have one and the same source of origin. It is from the Spirit itself matter emerges. From the opposite pole what we have in matter is Sachchidananda itself subject to a self-imposed veiling. Here a relevant question emerges: why the involution at all? The temporal world demands a rational explanation. And it was to answer this demand as well that Aurobindo speaks of the involution of the Absolute. From another perspective it can be observed that Aurobindo's theory of Involution is his answer for the question of creation in Christian understanding. The world evolves on its several levels because at each level Sachchidananda has already involved itself in each of these levels. Logically prior to evolution, involution is the process whereby Brahman or Sachchidananda, seeks its own manifestation through the multileveled universe (McDermott 171). There is all probability that by his theory of involution of Sachchidananda Aurobindo wanted to repudiate the theory of the world as illusion. It is notable that rather than using the word 'creation', Aurobindo prefers to use the Indian concept

sristi, which means “the manifestation of something which is hidden and unmanifest”. For Aurobindo, creation has to be understood in the sense that the Sachchidananda “manifests what is in itself, in its own essence.” One can speak of creation only in the sense of “Being becoming in form and movement what is already is in substance and status” (LD 333). Through his concept of involution Aurobindo states that being is with becoming.

3.9 THE EFFECTS OF INVOLUTION

Aurobindo’s concept of involution has great impact on his whole metaphysics. It is one of the demarcating points of his integral advaita from that of the classical advaita. By this Aurobindo was able to incorporate the modern evolutionary theory to the understanding of world process, and precisely to the understanding of the Absolute itself. Aurobindo establishes his theory of the world in and through various ways and means. The first effect of the theory of involution is the understanding that the World is the Manifestation. The self-manifestation of Sachchidananda takes place in a threefold movement of ‘descent’, ‘emergence’, and ‘release’. In the first movement of the Spirit, it descends itself to the Inconscient. The self-absorption of the Spirit in the Inconscient is to enjoy the self-delight in the finite variation. In the second move, the Spirit assumes the form or emerges into the triple world of Matter, Life, and Mind and this process culminates in the rational animal, human being. In the third and the final move, the Spirit releases itself from the limitations of spatio-temporal dimensions and realises itself as the One and Infinite (Roy 1995, 39). It is nothing but the ‘getting home’ of the Sachchidananda. The thesis that the world is the manifestation of the Absolute points also to the fact that it is real. “What issues from the Absolute, what the Eternal supports and informs and manifests in itself must have a reality” (LD 477). Aurobindo himself states that “the philosophy of *The Life Divine* is a realistic Advaita. The world is a manifestation of the Real and therefore is itself real” (LY 44). The idea of involution also clarifies the point that Sachchidananda is the Substratum and the Cause of the Universe.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How does evolution operate in human beings?

2) Explain the evolution and involution.

3.10 LET US SUM UP

The concept of Involution and evolution are not new to Indian philosophy. However the merit of Aurobindo is that he has rediscovered these concepts and presented it also in the light of contemporary understanding of evolution. Moreover, by doing so he has succeeded in finding a viable solution for the problem of matter and spirit and established his realism on a strong rational foundation.

3.11 KEY WORDS

Evolution: Evolution becomes an inevitable reality in human existence.

3.12 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 4 INTEGRAL VEDANTA

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of this unit is to introduce the student to the integral vision of life and reality by Aurobindo. All the schools of Indian thought are related to Vedanta in two ways: (i) they all stem from the Vedanta in the sense that they have either accepted or denied its doctrines and (ii) they are articulated as a response to the question of the one and the many. Aurobindo's integral Advaita or Vedanta is no exception to it. Therefore, our primary objective in this unit is to explicate how Aurobindo's predecessors have responded to this question and how Aurobindo is related to them. This is certainly a Herculean task, for it inevitably takes us to the discussion of Vedanta philosophy. We will also discuss in this section the fundamental presuppositions of Aurobindo's Philosophy and how the name Integral Advaita is applied to it.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Aurobindo's philosophy is known as integral advaita or integral Yoga. One cannot discuss the question of the one and the many in Indian philosophy in isolation of Vedanta; it calls us to delve into the genius of the masters of Vedanta philosophy. In fact, Aurobindo himself develops his metaphysics in dialogue with it. Therefore, as the *Sitz im Leben* of the Aurobindonian metaphysics we will also discuss three major schools of thought, though very briefly, in this unit. Nevertheless, first we look into the central presuppositions of Aurobindonian metaphysics.

4.2 FUNDAMENTAL PRESUPPOSITIONS OF AUROBINDO'S METAPHYSICS

The whole edifice of Aurobindo's philosophy is pillared on certain presuppositions. For Aurobindo, the central problem of philosophy is the problem of harmony. We should give proper attention to the great Vedantic formulas: "One without a second" and "All this is Brahman" (MU 2,7). What went wrong in the past is that we stressed the first at the expense of the second. Therefore, the goal of Aurobindo was to find out a way for the affirmation of both matter and Spirit. The central problem, therefore, is the problem of harmony. The second presupposition, wherein one observes the originality of Aurobindo and how he transcends the theories of his predecessors, of the Integral (*purna*) Advaita is faith in the "involution" (descent) of the Absolute Reality in the material world which we discuss in detail in this unit. In his theory of the

involution of the Absolute into the material world we also have Aurobindo's novel response to the problem of the one and the many. The condition of possibility for the third presupposition, namely evolution of reality, is the "involution." A fourth presupposition of Aurobindo is his faith in "cosmic consciousness." By entering into that consciousness we become aware of the fact that Matter, Mind, and Life are one existence. One can summarize the major conclusions of Aurobindo's integral view of Reality as follows: (i) The realization of the Absolute Reality as utterly transcendent with respect to all forms; (ii) Realization of the Absolute as a personal God, creative and all-pervasive Lord of the universe; (iii) Realization of the Absolute as moving and unmoving, finite and infinite, determinate and indeterminate, immanent and transcendent, etc.; and (iv) Realisation of the various planes of being, linked in graded continuity from the lowest matter to the highest spirit – identification of the evolutionary ascent.

4.3 AUROBINDO AND THE VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY

Aurobindo does not stand isolated in the history of Indian thought. Aurobindo places himself in the Vedanta tradition. He rather built his own system of Integral Advaita, that transcends the *Advaita* (Absolute monism) of Sankara, which stressed the non-dualistic character of reality; the *Vishishtadvaita* of Ramanuja, which proposed a qualified non-dualism; and the *Dvaitavada* of Madhva, which proposed a dualistic conception of Reality. Therefore, we develop Aurobindo's philosophy in dialogue with his great predecessors. In order to understand a philosophy one has to study its formative *Sitz im Leben*. Therefore, our first task is to understand the heritage of Indian philosophy that Aurobindo inherited from tradition. The questions of the ultimate Reality, the one and the many and God-World relation have captured the attention of Indian philosophers from the dawn of history, as it also happened in the West. There have been various attempts by the Indian thinkers to find a reasonable solution to these age-old philosophical problems.

4.4 AUROBINDO'S RESPONSE TO ABSOLUTE NON-DUALISM

Advaitism is associated with the celebrated Indian thinker Sankara (788-820). "The term 'Advaita' literally means "non-two-ness" and it connotes a theory which maintains that the ultimate Reality is not characterized by duality. Sankara is generally considered the greatest of the Indian philosophers. Furthermore, the Advaita of Sankara is qualified as the "temple of metaphysics" (U 333). Sankara is qualified as the great "synthesizer and conciliator" of Indian philosophy. His contribution to Indian philosophy includes a powerful, universal understanding of the Upanishads, which were interpreted diversely by various thinkers, who preceded him. He established his own philosophy in contradistinction, on one hand, to the heretic nihilism of the Sunyavadins (Buddhists) and, on the other, to the efficacy of Karma as an ultimate means to salvation. Sankara upholds Brahman as the highest transcendental Truth. Brahman is *Nirguna Brahma*. Brahman is the ground (*adhithana*) of all creation, the consciousness presupposed by all knowing, and the object which is eternally desirable in and for itself. For the Indian thinkers the dilemma consisted, on one hand, in maintaining the oneness of the Absolute (Brahman) and, on the other, in accounting for the many in the phenomenal world. However, our primary concern here is how does Sankara account for the multiplicity of the world once he has established Brahman as the sole Reality. For him, Brahman is both the material and efficient cause of the world. Sankara explains it by his theory of *Satkaryavada* that the material effect preexists in the cause. Sankara maintains that it is a logical conclusion. The point is, if the effect somehow preexists in the material cause, anything could come out of anything. However, Sankara observes that cause and effect cannot be identified in the sense that the effect is only a

manifestation of the cause. Therefore, Brahman, the cause, is the only reality, and the effect, the world, is only an apparent manifestation of the cause. Brahman is both the efficient and material cause of the universe. Thus, Sankara advocates an absolute non-dualism.

Sankara and Shankarites in their preoccupation to maintain the Absolute oneness of the Reality, denied the reality of the world. The heart of Sankara's teaching is often expressed by: *Brahma Satyam, Jagat Mithya, Jivo Brahmaiva naparah* (Brahman is real, the world is false, and the self is not different from Brahman). This text has been often quoted and interpreted to support and substantiate the view that Sankara expounded an illusory existence of the universe. However, this concept is very much disputed today.

The Shankarites had to deny the reality of the world to keep the Absolute oneness of Brahman. It was the only possibility open to them. However, Sankara admits the reality of the world from an empirical standpoint and not from a metaphysical or transcendental standpoint. By using his method of sublation (contradiction) which is the mental process of correcting and rectifying errors of judgement, Sankara develops an ontological hierarchy. This is the core of Sankara's absolute non-dualism.

Aurobindo on Advaita of Sankara

Aurobindo clearly repudiates Sankara's absolute monistic view of the world and maintains that 'All this is Brahman' (*Sarvam idam Brahma eva*) does not mean an identity between the phenomenal (*vyavaharika*) world of appearance and the ultimate (*paramarthika*) reality of Brahman. The reality of the Absolute does not nullify the reality of the temporal world. On the contrary, it points to the absolute dependence of the universe on the Absolute. Therefore, Aurobindo designates the philosophy of Sankara as "a qualified illusionism" in the sense that it does not give the external world a real existence. Here the ontological status of the world is "real and yet not really real". The criticism of Aurobindo against Sankara has to be seen in the light of the illusionism alleged against Sankara and which was so prevalent ever since the formulation of his theory. It is this (alleged) contention of the Sankarites that is challenged by Aurobindo. Aurobindo writes in repudiation of Sankara that "Cosmos is not the Divine in all his utter reality, but a single self-expression, a true but minor motion of his being". This citation highlights Aurobindo's realism very clearly. And his realism itself follows from the fact that the world is a manifestation of the Absolute, which in fact refers to the further truth that the involution of the Absolute is the essence of creation.

Sankara contended that the world is not truly real and the only true reality is Brahman. The inevitable consequence of such a view was that even the self of man was an illusion. In this respect the highest and the noblest ideal possible for human beings was to merge the individual soul into the essence of the Absolute reality. Such a perspective had a very negative consequence on human life; in fact, it promoted inaction and the renunciation of the world and everything in it as unworthy. The one-sidedness of spirituality was always a point of critique for Aurobindo. The ideal of human life is self-fulfillment rather than self-negation. In order to realise the Absolute an individual does not have to deny himself nor the cosmos but "need only deny his own separate ego-existence." Aurobindo is a strong critic of the ideal of self-absorption in the featureless Absolute.

Aurobindo claims that Advaitism can be maintained while accepting the reality of the World. In contrast to Sankara's interpretation of the Upanishads that they establish the oneness of reality as Brahman, at the cost of the reality of the world, Aurobindo points to the "coexistence of the divine and its multiple manifestations". The difference between Sankara and Aurobindo can be summarised in the following way: For Sankara as long as the individual is subject to Maya, he regards the cosmos as real, but once the individual withdraws from the cosmic Maya and attains liberation, he realizes that the cosmos is illusory. However, Aurobindo, maintains that the individual, due to ignorance, is unable to realise the identity of the cosmos with Brahman. Once his limited consciousness transcends into higher consciousness and the ignorance is replaced by true knowledge, he realizes the reality of both Brahman and the cosmos.

4.5 AUROBINDO'S RESPONSE TO QUALIFIED NON-DUALISM

Visistadvaita of Ramanuja

Ramanuja (1017-1137) is the chief exponent of the *Visistadvaita* or the qualified non-dualism. His was a "creative and constructive effort to systematize" the philosophy contained in the classics of Indian philosophy. In the theistic tradition of Advaita he is considered only second to the great Sankara. The chief philosophical problem confronted by Ramanuja, like Sankara, is that of the one and the many. How are we to reconcile the Upanishadic teaching regarding Brahman as the only true reality and the flux of the many of the empirical world? In other words, how can we account for the empirical world without endangering the Absoluteness of Brahman? It is true that Ramanuja concurs with Sankara that Brahman is real. However, unlike Sankara, for whom Brahman is identity without difference (*Nirguna*), for Ramanuja, Brahman is identity-in-difference (*Saguna*). In this respect, Ramanuja is one with Aurobindo who maintains identity-in-difference. Ramanuja maintains that the Upanishadic denial of any negative qualities to Brahman does not mean that he is devoid of any qualities (contrasting with Sankara but concurring with Aurobindo); on the contrary, Brahman possesses a number of positive qualities such as existence, consciousness, bliss, knowledge, truth, etc. It is these attributes which are responsible for the determinate nature of Brahman.

Ramanuja's Theory of Reality

Ramanuja's theory of reality is an ineluctable corollary of his theory of identity-in-difference. Therefore, unlike Sankara, he postulates three ontological realities: God or *Isvara*, Souls or *Jivas*, and the world or matter. Ramanuja's conception of reality is distinct in two ways: (i) he personalized the nature of Brahman, and (ii) he restores more personal attributes to the world and individual souls. Brahman is an organic unity, and thus maintains a real relation between God, soul, and the world (matter). It is a point of convergence between Ramanuja and Aurobindo. They are three factors (*tattva-traya*) of the same Reality.

Though soul and matter (*cit* and *acit*) are equally real, they are nevertheless absolutely dependent on God (*Isvara*). One of the unique contributions of Ramanuja is the understanding that to be real does not mean to be independent. Since, for Ramanuja inorganic matter is also ensouled, the nature of dependence is perceived as that of body upon soul. Matter and individual souls are conceived to be the body of the Absolute and they are directed and sustained by the Absolute. In other words, though matter and soul are substances, in relation to the Absolute they are attributes. The Absolute is the supreme Reality with soul and matter as his integral parts. Brahman is the Absolute reality in the sense that independent of it or outside of it, there is no

other reality. In fact, what Ramanuja proposes is an ontology of participation like that of Aquinas.

In this respect also Aurobindo is one with Ramanuja. Ramanuja maintains that the substance can be known only through the attributes. Therefore, it follows from this premise that God can be known only through the world (Branningan 64). In his Vishishtadvaita, Ramanuja clarifies both the immanence and transcendence of the Absolute. Thus, for him, the unity of Brahman is a unity of plurality, containing both conscious and unconscious elements. One has to place Ramanuja's response to the problem of the One and the Many in the context of his theory of reality. How does the one contain the many? Ramanuja explains it through his principle of *Samanadhikarnya* or the principle of coordination. The argument is that different words in the same sentence can point to the same reality. His interpretation of the classical text "This is that Devadatta" explains the theory further. The core of the argument is that Devadatta of the past and Devadatta of the present are not entirely identical, yet both refer to the same person. Ramanuja holds that just as different descriptive modes can denote one and the same person, so also unity and diversity, one and many, can coexist; they cannot be contradictories, rather they can be reconciled in a synthetic unity. The many are real and they characterize the one.

Ramanuja's philosophy clearly emphasizes the immanence of the supreme Reality in all existence. In it one has both the strength and weakness of Ramanuja's ontology. He succeeded in bringing down the Absolute, however, he finds it difficult to explain the precise relationship that exists between Brahman and the world. His theory of 'part and whole' would further question the integrity of the Brahman, since the part is subject to change and decay. It would also question how the temporal changes and the miseries in the universe affect Brahman, a concept which he has not considered adequately. It is also notable that in order to keep the unity of the universe and the Absolute, Ramanuja has focused on the immanence of God even at the cost of his transcendental dimension. In this respect, both from the religious as well as from the philosophical perspective, Advaita of Sankara is more appealing to the intellect, while Ramanuja's Vishishtadvaita appeals to the heart. Ramanuja in his attempt to safeguard the reality of the world, has altogether denied "the experience of a pure consciousness in an unqualified oneness". Ramanuja advocates a real relation between the Absolute and the world.

Nevertheless, in spite of Ramanuja's sincere efforts, he has failed to account for the subsistence of both *cit* (consciousness) and *acit* (matter) in a single whole – the Brahman. Ramanuja's Brahman is not a synthetic whole which might assimilate all its parts into itself. His concept of Brahman can be compared to a person whose body is composed of two opposing principles: *cit* – the individual consciousness (soul) and *acit* - the primordial matter. It seems that for Ramanuja, spirit and matter include both identity and difference in itself (*bhedabheda*). Such a position maybe applicable in a practical sense, but may not withstand an intellectual, logical scrutiny. Thus, one may have to admit that we are faced with a disjunctive proposition where the individual souls and primordial matter are either identical with or different from Brahman. However, the problem we face here is still acute, i.e., the former conclusion would take us to the Advaita philosophy of Sankara and the latter would demolish Ramanuja's Vishishtadvaita in favour of Dvaita of Madhva where Brahman, individual soul, and matter are really different. This was also the point of criticism by Madhva against Ramanuja.

A comparison of Sankara and Ramanuja in the light of Aurobindo would claim that the latter is more sympathetic to Ramanuja in his approach to Reality. However, Ramanuja's theory of dependence, which claims the absolute dependence of the universe on Brahman, even to the extent of negating the real existence of the universe is hardly acceptable to Aurobindo. Ramanuja, to a certain extent, succeeded in maintaining the reality of the world, but failed to work out the relationship between the two in a reasonable way. Ramanuja influenced Aurobindo with his theory of identity-in-difference and the theory of real relation. However, the merit of Aurobindo is that he succeeded in maintaining the Absoluteness of Brahman amidst his avowal of the temporal universe, where Ramanuja failed.

4.6 AUROBINDO AND ABSOLUTE DUALISM

Madhva (1199-1278) has a unique position in Indian philosophy with his dualistic conception of reality. His is a dualistic realism. The Sanskrit word *Dvaita* comes from the root *dvi* – meaning two. The term *dvaita* etymologically means duality or dualism. Dualism implies difference, which is said to constitute the essence of things. The theory of difference or dualism implies that each substance is unique with its own specific characteristics and nature. The difference is not only qualitative but also quantitative. Even the two objects that look alike are different in the sense that each possesses a self-differentiating characteristic. Madhva advocates, therefore, a pluralistic ontology. Madhva developed a vision of the universe where God, the individual soul and matter are considered really different, and are eternal and absolutely real. The latter two are dependent on God, in the sense that Brahman is the cause and the world is the effect.

Theory of Difference and Dependence

Madhva advocates, on the one hand, purely a theistic philosophy based on the dualism of God and the Jiva, and, on the other, the plurality of the universe. The foundation of his ontology is his theory of perception and his theory of knowledge. Human perception brings before the perceiving subject a world of objects. They are independent objects, independent of the perceiver and the knowledge of the perceiver. It is independent of the knowledge in the sense that knowledge does not create objects, but only reveals them. Perception also brings out the difference between the perceiver and the perceived or the cognizer and the cognized. For example, the perception of a table makes clear that the table is real and it is different from other objects. They are two independent entities which have their own reality in the outside world. These distinctions are real and objective. Thus, Madhva rejects the relation of inseparability, and for him this means that the understanding of the material universe as the body of God is no more acceptable. Matter and souls are rather real and different from Brahman.

Madhva, even though he advocates a pluralistic ontology, does admit the dependence of the world and soul on the Absolute. The core of Madhva's philosophy is the distinction he makes between twofold categories: the independent reals (*svatantra*) and the dependent reals (*paratantra*). For him, the only independent real is the Absolute, Brahman. Madhva is considered as an absolute dualist. The distinctive perception of the Brahman-world relation by Ramanuja and Madhva can be summarised in the following way: for Ramanuja, the impersonal God of Sankara was only an "inadequate and partial realization of 'the Supreme Person' (*Purushottama*)" who is Absolute and eternal. The Absolute is ultimately real, and therefore, whatever comes from it is real, both the universe and the individual souls, but dependent on God.

For Madhva, the individual soul was created by God, but never was and would never become one with him or part of him.

Aurobindo's Response

Aurobindo criticizes Madhva for creating an unbridgeable duality between Brahman and the world. Furthermore, while Ramanuja maintained a qualitative monism and a quantitative pluralism with regard to the reality of souls, Madhva advocates both a quantitative and qualitative pluralism. Here Aurobindo concurs with Ramanuja in his repudiation of Madhva. On the other hand, one of the distinctive features distinguishing Aurobindo as well as Madhva from Sankara is that in the former two material realities are not neglected, on the contrary, the individual souls and the material realities of the world are accorded ontological reality.

In the above sections our attempt was to see how the great predecessors of Aurobindo conceived reality and its relation to the phenomenal world. Our discussion also eventually clarified how these thinkers have responded to the question of the one and the many. We have undertaken this analysis with a clear purpose in mind: (i) to clarify what is the relation of Aurobindo to the classical philosophy of India; (ii) to clarify the points of difference as well as points of convergence that Aurobindo has with his predecessors; and (iii) to delineate in a nutshell the constitutive factors of Aurobindo's integral Advaitism. We see that neither the Advaita of Sankara nor the Vishishtadvaita of Ramanuja, nor even the Dvaitavada of Madhva, are devoid of imperfections. Each theory has its own merits and demerits. Our primary concern is to see how Aurobindo views these respective issues and how he solves the imperfections involved in these systems by his integral Advaita and how adequate and truthful his responses are.

4.7 INTEGRAL ADVAITA

It has already been made clear that Aurobindo places himself in the Advaita tradition. He acknowledges that his philosophy is a realistic Advaita. The question is about why Aurobindo's system is known as integral Advaita or *purna* Advaita? It is integral for the following reasons: (i) Aurobindo presents his philosophy as an advancement of the major Advaitic traditions, and (ii) the designation *Purna* (integral) connotes a stronger intrinsic value vested in the universe than advocated by his great predecessors. For Aurobindo, the Real is one, but this oneness does not point to an exclusion but rather to a totality. It is an identity in difference. It is devoid of any duality, but has a deeper unity of wholeness. Moreover, it is integral in two other senses: firstly, it takes into account the knowledge attained, not through any particular mental process in man, but through his whole being. Thus, it can be said that it is based on an integral epistemology; secondly, Aurobindo's conception of reality is based on neither man, nor God nor the world, nor any of the two alone, but on the integral consciousness underlying these three manifestations of Reality. For Aurobindo, Reality is an integral whole of which the individual, the universal and the transcendental are three facets.

Aurobindo's system is also designated as integral Yoga. By Yoga Aurobindo means a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent Existence we see partially expressed in man and in the Cosmos. 'Yoga' is essentially a 'spiritual integration'. It basically implies two factors: (i) Immediate contact with the inmost nature of existence in its manifold richness of content; and (ii) an integration of such different provinces of experience as science, art, morality, religion, etc., in the light of one's immediate insight into the heart of reality. Aurobindo defines

Integral Yoga as the turning of one or of all powers of our human existence into a means of reaching the Divine Being. Moreover, it is stated that the goal of integral Yoga is a divine perfection of the human being.

In contrast with the ancient systems of Yoga, which maintain a negative attitude towards life and nature, Aurobindo's system includes not only Being but also Becoming, not only the static or silent Spirit but also the dynamic Brahman. His system aims not only at the realization of God but also involves an entire consecration and change of the inner and outer life till it is fit to manifest a divine consciousness and become part of a divine work. Therefore, it is known as integral Yoga. Integral Yoga points to its comprehensive and all inclusive transformation of the state of mind and the life of the individual. Aurobindo's system is integral above all for the reason that it maintains a monistic pluralism.

4.8 DISTINCTIVENESS OF INTEGRAL YOGA

The previous explication of the name "integral" brought out a number of features that are specific to Aurobindo's metaphysics. Therefore, our task in this section is to elucidate further a few more points that pertain to the distinctive nature of the Aurobindonian metaphysics. Integral Yoga is distinct from and goes beyond other Yoga systems by aiming at two higher goals: (1) It aims to assemble, concentrate and discipline all the qualities, capacities, and motive forces in man and to elevate them to a "diviner spiritual level," and (2) It moves beyond the liberation of the soul into a wholly transcendent realm of isolated unity, to a "cosmic enjoyment [*bhukti*] of the power of the Spirit" which has never been the motive or object of other systems. In fact it is a bolder and larger system. Again, while the traditional Yoga aims at individual liberation, Aurobindo's system is concerned with making Earthly life Divine or bringing God down to Earth.

The question, however, concerns how practical are these ideals? The nature and final object of Integral Yoga can be clarified by the following facts: i) The liberation of the individual soul and the achievement of the perfect union with the Divine; ii) It is a corollary of the first, namely, the enjoyment of the perfect union of the individual and the eternal; iii) The fruits of the divine union are expressed and manifested in the works for promoting spirituality in the world.

Aurobindo's integral vision, in contrast to Sankara's advaitism, does not abandon life and world, but renounces "man's blind attachment to them." Aurobindo states clearly that for the integral advaitism renunciation is merely an instrument and not an object. A unique feature of integral Advaita is that it attempted for the first time in the history of Indian thought a synthesis of the evolutionary perspective of the modern West with the spiritual heritage of India. Aurobindo's philosophy is an Integral Spiritualistic Non-dualism for two reasons: (i) in Aurobindo's perspective all realities emerge from the fundamental spiritual substance, the Brahman; and (ii) the central purpose of Aurobindo's yoga is an inner self-development by which each one who follows it can in time discover the One Self in all and evolve a higher consciousness than the mental, a spiritual and a supramental consciousness which will transform and divinise human nature.

Aurobindo's system is distinctive for the reason that the object of his philosophy is integral reality. For him, reality is integral in that it means not only Being but also Becoming, not only the quiescent, eternal or non-temporal Brahman but also the dynamic Brahman or Brahman

manifesting itself through flux and in time. The core of integralism is the acceptance of the Supra-cosmic Transcendence and freedom (*Nirguna Brahma*), cosmic creativity and universality (*Saguna Brahma*), and unique individuality (*Jivatman*) as the three inseparable and equally real modes of existence of the supreme spiritual reality Sachchidananda. Among the three, primacy remains with the transcendent. Thus, it is safe to say that in Aurobindo we have a synthetic reconciliation of the Indian schools of thought.

4.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit our attempt was to understand the thought pattern of Aurobindo and how his philosophy is different from other Vedantic thinkers. His system is known as integral Vedanta as different from Absolute monism of Sankara, Absolute dualism of Madhva and Qualified monism of Ramanuja. Though he is rooted in Vedantic tradition he presented his thought applying Western categories and thus making it intelligible for people from other philosophical tradition. With this background we are able to move to the next unit where we will discuss the basic unity of reality as suggested by Aurobindo.

4.10 KEY WORDS

Tat-tvam asi: *Tat Tvam Asi*, a Sanskrit sentence, translating variously to "Thou art that," "That thou art," "You are that," or "That you are," is one of the Mahavakyas (Grand Pronouncements)

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Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo

Block 3

AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY OF HUMAN BEING

UNIT 1

Theories of Existence

UNIT 2

Man (*Jivatman*) and His Nature

UNIT 3

Knowledge and Ignorance

UNIT 4

Interpretation of '*Tat-tvam-asi*'



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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Aurobindo in his philosophy tries to synthesise the manifold views of the world and points out that realization consists in the total understanding of Brahman which satisfies the demands of knowledge and experience, freedom and immortality. Aurobindo thinks that every man is a Yogi, but not a conscious one. Those who have become conscious of this process through the Yogic experience can help the others. Aurobindo was against the old idea of separation of politics from religion and partly because to him nationalism was a spiritual process. For him, nationalism is not a mere political program. It is a religion that has come from God; a creed which you shall have to live. He called people as the instruments of God to save the spirit of India from lasting obscurity and abasement. For that he found yoga and other spiritual practices crucial.

Unit 1 explains the theories of Existence according to Indian Systems and Aurobindo. It provides a detailed account of the theories of existence in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. This unit shall bring to light the conceptual structure of Aurobindo's Metaphysics.

Unit 2 enumerates Aurobindo's concept of the human being with its evolving and spiritual nature. It spells out also the collective destiny of the whole, including humans. The nature of the individual has itself been a real problem, for we find various explanations for his existence are given. For Aurobindo, the purpose of the individual atomic soul in trying to achieve its real nature of immortality in and through the process of rebirths into matter and other lower forms of life is not explained as adequately as may be desired in the philosophies of realistic Vedanta.

Unit 3 illustrates the epistemological concepts in Aurobindo's thought, the role of knowledge in human life, the relationship between knowledge and ignorance and the ways of integrating wisdom into life. Aurobindo indicates that we can move out of our essential ignorance, expressed through limitations of rational mind and supported by ego, by coming in touch with our True Self and Soul. As a result, we realize that we are not only an individual being, but a world being; an eternal individual capable of transcending all limitations of unconsciousness, ego, division, and ignorance.

Unit 4 explores the basis and significance of advaitic philosophy in the light of Aurobindo's integral vedanta. An attempt is made to seek the relevance of the *mahavakya*, 'Tat-tvam asi,- You are that' for the contemporary world. The many-sided nature of reality is well known but its oneness is also what is perceived in a measure and in a sense even in our ordinary life but to reason and still more to our intuitive apprehension. Aurobindo's interpretation of 'tat tvam asi' has the potentiality to offer resources necessary for the promotion of peace and harmony between the humans and creation through their relationship to the Absolute.

UNIT 1 THEORIES OF EXISTENCE

Contents

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 The Ultimate Reality
- 1.3 Consciousness-Force
- 1.4 Evolution of Consciousness
- 1.5 The Structure and Organization of Being
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 Key Words
- 1.8 Further Readings and References

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the unit is to provide a detailed account of the theories of existence in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. This unit shall bring to light the conceptual structure of Aurobindo's Metaphysics. This unit shall include the following sections:

- Introduction
- The Ultimate Reality
- Consciousness-Force
- Evolution of Consciousness
- The Structure and Organization of Being

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Aurobindo's theories of existence echo the teachings of the ancient sages of India in stating that behind the appearances of the Universe there is the reality of a Being and Consciousness, a Self of all things, one and eternal. All beings are united in that One Self and Spirit but divided by a certain separativity of consciousness, an ignorance of their true Self and Reality in the mind, life and body. It is possible by a certain psychological discipline to remove this veil of separative consciousness and become aware of the true Self, the Divinity within us. This One Being and Consciousness is involved in Matter. Evolution is the method by which it liberates itself; consciousness appears in what seems to be inconscient, and once having appeared is self-impelled to grow higher and higher and at the same time to enlarge and develop towards a greater and greater perfection. Life is the first step of this release of consciousness; mind is the second; but the evolution does not finish with mind, it awaits a release into something greater, a consciousness which is spiritual and supramental. The next step of the evolution must be towards the development of Supermind and Spirit as the dominant power in the conscious being. For only

then will the involved Divinity in things release itself entirely and it become possible for life to manifest perfection.

While the first steps in evolution were taken by Nature without a conscious will in the plant and animal life, in man, Nature evolves by a conscious will in the instrument. A conversion has to be made, a turning of the consciousness by which mind changes into the higher principle. This method is found in the ancient psychological discipline and practice of Yoga. In the past, it has been attempted by a drawing away from the world and a disappearance into the height of the Self or Spirit. Aurobindo teaches that a descent of the higher principle is possible which will not merely release the spiritual Self out of the world, but release it in the world, replace the mind's ignorance or its very limited knowledge by a supramental Truth-Consciousness which will be a sufficient instrument of the inner Self and make it possible for the human being to find himself dynamically as well as inwardly and grow out of his animal humanity into a divine race. The psychological discipline of Yoga can be used to that end by opening all the parts of the being to a conversion or transformation through the descent and working of the higher still concealed supramental principle.

1.2 THE ULTIMATE REALITY

The metaphysical position of Aurobindo is described as Integral Non-Dualism. In tune with the declarations of the Vedas and the Upanisads, Aurobindo identifies consciousness with the ultimate reality, the sachchidananda; infinite existence, consciousness and bliss. The three are not a trinity but a unity. Aurobindo says that Sachchidananda is the One with a triple aspect. In the Supreme the three are not three but one - existence is consciousness, consciousness is bliss, and they are thus inseparable, not only inseparable but so much each other that they are not distinct at all. Sacchidananda is the unity of the many-sidedness of manifested things, the eternal harmony of all their variations and oppositions, the infinite perfection which justifies their limitations and is the goal of their imperfections. Aurobindo defines Brahman as the reality of things which fills and supports their idea and form. It is an eternal in all stabilities, truth behind all appearances and a constant which supports all mutations but itself does not undergo any change either in terms of increase or decrease. The Brahman is the highest and this highest is the all; there is none beyond or none other than it. To know it is to know all. In relation to the universe, the Brahman is not only the spiritual, material and conscious substance of all the ideas and forces and forms of the universe, but their origin, support and possessor. Just as we are the play and form, the mental, vital, psychic and physical expression of a supreme Self unconditioned by the mind, life and body, the universe too is the play and form and cosmic soul expression of a supreme existence. This existence is unconditioned by force and matter, idea, name and form and the distinction between puruṣa and prakṛti. Our supreme Self and the the supreme existence which has become the universe are one spirit, one Self and one existence. The individual is also an expression of the universal being, an emanation from the transcendence. Aurobindo here draws our attention to the fact that one's true Self is not the natural personality, the created individuality which we are aware of, but is a universal being in its relations with others and with nature. It is the living front of a supreme transcendental spirit.

Aurobindo gives equal ontological status to the transcendental as well as the divine in the form of creation. Aurobindo uses the term Brahman to denote an Absolute which takes all relativities in its embrace. To substantiate his position, he draws our attention to the Upanisads that affirm

that all is Brahman, Mind is Brahman, Life is Brahman, Matter is Brahman; addressing vayu, the Lord of air and of life it is said “O Vayu, thou art the manifest Brahman”. Again pointing to man, beast, birds and insects, each is separately identified with the Brahman – “O Brahman, thou art this old man and boy and girl, this bird, this insect. “ Aurobindo further identifies Brahman with the Consciousness that knows itself in all that exists. It is the force that sustains the gods, titan and even demons. It is the force that acts in man and other animals and forms and energies of nature. It is Ānanda, the secret bliss of existence without which no being can survive. Brahman is the inner soul in all, taking a form corresponding to each created form which it inhabits. It is that which is conscious not only in the conscious being but also in inconscient things. He is the timeless and Time; he is space and all that is in space; he is causality and the cause and the effect. All realities and all aspects and all semblances are the Brahman. According to Aurobindo, the impersonal divine, Nirguṇa Brahman and the personal divine, Saguṇa Brahman are equal and co-existent parts of the Divine.³¹ They are the two essential modes, the fundamental aspects, the two poles of the eternal being. The Transcendent divine reality exceeds both these modes. These two modes practically correspond to the silent and active Brahman.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Explain the Integral- Non-dualism of Aurobindo.

2) How does Aurobindo define the Brahman?

1.3 CONSCIOUSNESS-FORCE

Aurobindo asserts that however we explain the concept of consciousness, taking Nature to be an inert impulse or a conscious principle, it is certainly force. According to him the basic principle of things is a formative movement of energies. All forms are born of the meeting and mutual adaptation of unshaped forces. All actions and sensations arise as a response to some previous occurrence and manifest in the form of forces. Thus, even if the entire world is conceived essentially as an act of consciousness, an act is implied in it and in the act, a movement of force and a play of energy. This is the fundamental nature of the world as experienced within us. All our activities are the play of triple forces, namely, knowledge-force, desire-force and action-force. All the three are really three streams of one original and identical power called ādyā śakti. Even the states of rest are but an equilibrium in the play of forces. Represented by the two forms of Shiva and Kali, Brahman and Shakti are two inseparable aspects of the same existence. This force may be at rest or in motion. Even when it is at rest it exists and is never abolished, diminished or essentially altered. Force by its very nature exists in the two alternative states of self-concentration and self-diffusion. Aurobindo argues that this being accepted, the question as to how the movement of force originates, does not arise, as movement has been accepted as one of the states of force. The potentiality of force must translate itself as an alternative rhythm of of

rest and movement succeeding each other in time or else as an eternal self-concentration of force in immutable existence with a superficial play of movement, change and formation like the rising and falling of waves on the surface of ocean. Consciousness Force has three characteristics. They are:

1. Infinite self-variation
2. Infinite self-limitation
3. Infinite self-absorption

The Consciousness Force is not restricted to one particular state of consciousness or to one law of action. The individual consciousness can see itself as a limited and phenomenal being; it can also put off its apparent limitations and see itself as a universal and a transcendent Being. The underlying consciousness being one and the same, there is no essential difficulty in passing from one status to another. The one being can thus experience or realize itself triply from any of these three statuses.

The second characteristic of consciousness force is its power of self-limitation. It is the subordinate movement of the infinite consciousness determining itself within the bounds of space and time. The power of self-limitation expresses itself in two forms – individual self-limitation and cosmic self-limitation. Though all spiritual individuals are, in essence, the same, they have their individual differentiations. This individual self-limitation is not a fundamental characteristic but only an individual specialisation of a common universality or totality. The spiritual individual acts from his own locus of Truth and in accordance with his nature, but on a common basis and not being blind to other selves and the nature around him.

Apart from the individual self-limitation, there is also the cosmic self-limitation of the infinite consciousness, which is the power responsible for the existence and working of the universe. The Infinite Consciousness supports the universe with only a certain part of itself and holds back all that is not needed for the cosmic movement. The self-determination of the mind, life and matter take place according to the same principle. Aurobindo says that though such a self-limitation of consciousness seems contradictory to our normal reason, it is one of the powers of the infinite which the logic of the infinite alone can reveal.

Self-absorption is the third characteristic of the infinite that takes place in two ways: that of superconscience and inconscience. In the state of superconscience, the infinite consciousness takes a plunge into itself, which is a state of pure self-awareness of Being. This state is devoid of both the universal as well as the individual consciousness. It transcends both and is a state of absorption in the ineffable One. The Infinite consciousness again takes a plunge into the inconscient which is a state of utter darkness. This state, though it appears as one of non-being, is really one of Being where the Being is in a state of perfect self-oblivion. The inconscient also possesses intrinsically both consciousness and force. Here the infinite consciousness is hidden, blinded and works automatically. The states of the superconscient and the inconscient are that of total self-absorption of the infinite consciousness. Mind, life and matter are states where the infinite consciousness is partially self-absorbed. Aurobindo cites these powers of self-absorption of Brahman as the factors responsible for the simultaneous existence of the Nirguna and Saguna aspects of Brahman.

1.4 EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Biologically, evolution is a progressive self-manifestation of nature in and through all entities including human beings. The biological evolution continues in man but transcends its own boundaries and gives way to an evolution that is spiritual. All evolution is indeed a heightening of consciousness in the manifest being. In human beings both the physical and spiritual evolution are operative. The process of repeated births facilitates it. Each evolved form of the body houses an evolved power of consciousness maintained and kept in continuity by the process of heredity. The evolution of the soul which is more of an invisible process starts from the level of mind and proceeds further. Mind itself can never be the final destination of evolution, argues Aurobindo, since it is only a principle of ignorance and division seeking for knowledge. Only the supramental Truth-Consciousness can bring to light the true and complete self-knowledge and world knowledge. Only such an integral knowledge can be the consummation of all evolution. According to Aurobindo, before there could be any evolution, there must be an involution of the divine. But for this involution there would only be a successive creation of new things not contained in their antecedents. Instead of inevitable consequences and processes in a sequence, we will have arbitrarily willed or miraculously conceived processes that happen by an inexplicable chance. The progressive self-manifestation of Nature, usually termed as evolution, necessarily depends upon three successive elements. There is that which is already evolved, that which is persistently in the stage of conscious evolution, and that which is to be evolved. The march of Nature according to Aurobindo is not set to a regular and mechanical forward stepping. There are attempts to go beyond herself leading sometimes to subsequent deplorable retreats. She often rushes; has splendid and mighty outbursts and immense realizations.

Nature has evolved for us the bodily life and the combination and harmony of Matter and Life, both of which are fundamentally necessary elements for all action and progress upon earth. Matter is the foundation and first condition of all energies and realizations and life-energy is the basis of our means of existence in a material body and the basis of all mental and spiritual activities. The material movement in Nature has attained a certain maturity and stability whereby it can act as the perfect instrument for the progressive manifestation of divinity in humanity. Once the bodily life has evolved sufficiently to house the spirit, evolution proceeds to the mental which is a subtler and finer instrument for divine manifestation. Once nature frees herself from the trammels of physical and vital, it surges onto the mental for higher realizations. The human mind is not a unified structure but a plural one constitutive of many gradations. These include the material and nervous mind, the pure intellectual mind which frees itself from the illusions of the body and senses, and a divine mind above the intellect which in turn liberates itself from the imperfect modes of the logically discriminative and imaginative reason. Mind in human beings is first enmeshed in the life of the body. In plants it is completely involved and in animals it is imprisoned. In human beings however, the bodily life is only a base or first condition for further evolution. In keeping with the ancient idea that human beings are thinking beings (hence called 'manu'), Aurobindo says that true human existence begins only when the intellectual mentality emerges out of the material and frees itself from the clutches of the nervous and physical. Freedom is the mark of the ascent in the process of evolution. However the mental life is not completed evolution of Nature; it is not yet firmly founded in the human animal. Civilized man has yet to establish an equilibrium between the fully active mind and the body; he does not yet

normally possess it. The increasing effort towards a more intense mental life seems to create an increasing disequilibrium of the human elements. A rare phenomenon like a genius is not a freak, an inexplicable phenomenon. It is only a natural next step in the right line of Nature's evolution. Nature has harmonised the bodily life with the material mind, and now she is attempting a harmony of it with the play of intellectual mentality. Though this does lead to a depression of the full animal and vital vigour, it does not produce any active disturbances. Mind is not the last term of evolution nor is it the ultimate aim to which evolution strives, but is like the body, an instrument. In tune with the Indian tradition, Aurobindo asserts that that which is to be manifested is not a new term in human experience, but has been developed before and has even governed humanity in certain periods of development. And if since then, Nature has sunk back from her achievement, the reason must always be found in some unrealised harmony or some insufficiency of the intellectual and material basis to which she has now returned, some over-specialisation of the higher to the detriment of the lower existence. Yoga recognises besides the physical and vital being that constitutes the gross body of food-sheath (annamayakośa) and the vital vehicle (prānamayakośa), the mental being composed of the mind-sheath or mental vehicle (manomayakośa) termed the subtle body. There is also a supramental being called the causal body that is constituted of a knowledge (vijñānamayakośa) and bliss sheaths (ānandamayakośa). The knowledge in the knowledge sheath is not a systematised result of mental questioning and reasonings, neither is it a temporary arrangement of conclusions and opinions in terms of the highest probability, but a pure self-existent and self-luminous truth. The bliss here is not a supreme pleasure of the heart and sensations, with the experience of pain and sorrow as its background. There is also a delight, self-existent and independent of objects and particular experiences, a self-delight which is the very nature, the very stuff as it were of a transcendent and infinite existence.

Behind the manifold of the everchanging evanescent appearances of the universe, there is an abiding reality which has been expressed in the fundamental triune of Sat – Cit – Ānanda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss). All things and creatures are united in the One Reality, though they appear to be separate and divided owing to the mental consciousness which is an ignorance-consciousness. Through a process of involution, the one existence and consciousness is plunged in the universe into its opposite called the inconscient, which is seemingly a total absence of consciousness. Evolution is the process by which the supreme consciousness liberates itself from inconscience, resulting in the manifestation of progressively higher levels of consciousness. According to Aurobindo, the scientific theory of physical evolution deals with only the outward and visible machinery of a process which is fundamentally a spiritual evolution, an evolution of consciousness. Matter is the first emergent from the inconscience. Matter is not an inert substance as it appears to be, but a form of consciousness which is closest to inconscience. Life or vital consciousness is the second emergence in the evolutionary process. Mind is the highest level of consciousness that has developed in the human race collectively and is the third step of release from the inconscience. However evolution has not come to an end with the appearance of mind; it awaits a release into the higher, spiritual levels of consciousness of which there are many gradations, ranging from the higher mind through illumined mind, intuition and overmind up to Supermind. The present human race according to Aurobindo is a preparation for the leap into the next step of evolution, into the supramental consciousness. The urge towards growth and evolution, inherent in the whole universe, is the inner driving of the consciousness-force, the progressive manifestation of the spirit being the innate intention behind evolution. In order to fulfill the evolutionary intent, the spiritual growth needs to be a double movement of ascent and

descent. The individual consciousness must ascend to progressively higher levels of consciousness and then must bring down the dynamism of the higher levels into the mental, vital and physical consciousness so as to transform the lower levels. Liberation is indeed an indispensable step and the initial goal of spiritual development, but the further goal of evolution according to Aurobindo is transformation.

At each stage evolution takes place by the double process of the upsurging of the Consciousness-Force from its involution in the inconscience and a descent of the Consciousness-Force pressing from the planes of consciousness above, seeking for manifestation. It is the pressure of the Consciousness-Force from the plane of life above the material universe that assisted the emergence of life from Matter in which life already lay involved. It is a pressure from the mind that helped the emergence of mind which was already there involved in life and matter. Again it is the pressure of the spiritual worlds above mind, which are now preparing for the manifestation of the spirit now slumbering in mind, life and matter. The growing urge towards spiritual growth in humanity today is, according to Aurobindo, the push of the Consciousness-Force towards the next higher rung of evolution.

1.5 THE STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF BEING

In a normal state of consciousness one feels oneself to be a unitary entity, a single being partially conscious of his psychological make-up and barely in a position to distinguish between its different aspects, physical, emotional and mental. In a heightened state of consciousness, obtained as a result of the practice of a spiritual discipline, one discovers that one's psychological nature is complex and made up of different distinguishable parts of the being.

Sri Aurobindo distinguishes two systems that are simultaneously active in the organization of the being and its parts. One system is concentric, like a series of rings or sheaths and the other is vertical like a flight of steps. The concentric system consists of the outer or surface being, the inner being and the inmost being or the psychic. The outer being and the inner being have three corresponding parts – mental, vital and physical. The vertical system consists of various levels or gradations of consciousness below and above mental consciousness. The Inconscient, the Subconscient, the Physical, the Vital, Mind, Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition, Overmind, Supermind and Satcitananda constitute the chief levels of consciousness in the vertical system.

The three major divisions in the outer being consists of the mind (the mental), the life-self (the vital) and the body (the physical). Each of these parts has its own distinct type of consciousness, though in our ordinary awareness, they are all mixed up. Though separate, the three principal parts of the outer being – the mental, the vital and the physical - are intermixed and interact on one another, giving rise to distinguishable subdivisions within each part of the being. Thus, besides the mind proper (the thinking mind), there is a part of the mind which is intermixed with the vital, called the vital mind. There is also a part of the mind which is interfused with the physical, called the physical mind. Similar subdivisions exist within the vital and the physical. Two of these subdivisions which generally play a prominent role in most human beings are the vital mind and the physical mind.

The vital mind is the part of the mind which is intermixed and dominated by impulses, desires and feelings of the vital nature. The reasoning of the vital mind is a pseudo-reasoning as is well

illustrated by the common act of rationalization by which the mind, usurped by the vital, provides plausible rational explanations and justifications for impulses and desires of the vital.

The physical mind is the part of the mind which is intermingled with and partakes of the characteristics of the physical consciousness. Some of the chief characteristics of the physical namely inertia, obscurity, mechanical repetitiveness, automatism, constriction and chaotic activity are reflected in the physical mind in the form of mental torpor, doubt, mechanical reactions to things, habitual modes of thinking and confusion. The part of the mind which is closest to the physical is referred to as the mechanical mind; it is like a machine that goes on turning round and round whatever thoughts occur in it.

The Inner Being (The Subliminal)

Behind the outer being is the inner being, also called the subliminal self. Whereas the outer being receives consciously only the outer touches and knows things indirectly through the outer mind and the senses, the inner being is directly aware of the universal consciousness and the universal forces that play through us and around us. The inner mind is directly in touch with the universal mind, just as the inner vital is in direct touch with the universal life forces and the inner physical with the universal physical forces around us.

Environmental Consciousness (The Circumconscient)

The subliminal has a formation of consciousness which projects itself beyond the body and forms a circumconscient, an environing part of itself, through which it receives the contacts of the world and can become aware of them and deal with them before they enter. This environmental consciousness surrounding the body is that part of the individual being through which the individual is in inner contact with other beings and with universal forces.

The Inmost Being – The Psychic

Supporting mind, life and body is the inmost being, called by Sri Aurobindo the psychic being the term being derived from a Greek root (*psukhe*) which means the soul. The soul in its essence, called the psyche, is described by Sri Aurobindo as a spark and an eternal portion of the divine present in all things and beings in the universe. Whereas the Universal Self or Atman stands above the evolutionary process and is unaffected by it, the psyche is the element that develops in the evolution and grows into an individual self called the psychic being. It is to be noted that a distinction must be made also between the true soul (psychic being) and the desire soul (the vital being) which is often mistaken for the real soul.

Purusa and Prakrti

Developing the concepts of Sankhya philosophy, Sri Aurobindo distinguishes between the soul or spirit side of the Being called Purusa (person or conscious being), which is the essential or true being, and the Nature side of Being called Prakrti (Nature), which is the phenomenal or instrumental Being. Both the outer Being and the inner Being belong to Prakrti. Behind the outer mind and the inner mind, the outer vital and the inner vital, the outer physical and the inner physical, lies the true being, the Purusa, in the form of an inmost mental, vital, physical, more specifically called the true mind, the true vital, the true physical consciousness. The psychic being behind the outer being and the inner being and supporting them both is a Purusa. In our

ordinary consciousness we are unable to distinguish our true self, the Purusa, from the Nature side of our being, Prakrti, because Purusa is identified with Prakrti. In the state of identification, the Self is bound and governed by its instrumental nature – body, life and mind. The experience of the separation of Purusa from Prakrti may take place on any plane of the being. The true being may be realized in one or both of two aspects - the individual soul (psychic being) or the Universal Self (Atman).

The Individual and Universal Being

Being or Consciousness is all embracing and includes the Universe as well as the Individual. Universe is a diffusion of the Divine All in infinite space and time, the individual its concentration within limits of space and time. It is the ego that creates a wall and sense of separation between the individual being and the universal being. Thus each part of the individual being corresponds to a plane of the universal being. In our normal consciousness, we are not conscious of our true being, we are aware only of our outer being – body, life and mind – with which we identify our self. This identification of the true being with the outer being gives rise to an ego – physical, vital and mental - which gives the sense of I-ness, an individuality separate from the rest of the universe.

The Subconscious and the Inconscious

The subliminal or the inner being is behind the outer being of mind, life and body. The subconscious and the inconscious constitute the nether being below the physical consciousness. Everything on earth is based on the inconscious which is not really devoid of consciousness, but is the nethermost level of the involution of consciousness from which the evolution of consciousness starts. The subconscious is the antechamber of the inconscious and lies between the inconscious and the conscious mind, life and body. During the waking state the mind lives largely in impressions rising up from the subconscious. In ordinary sleep most dreams are formations made from subconscious impressions. In most human beings, the outer self of mind, life and body is to a great extent an instrument of the upsurging irrational, mechanical and repetitive movements of the subconscious during both waking and sleep.

The Superconscious

Just as the subconscious is what lies below the physical consciousness from which things come up into the physical, the vital and the mental parts of the being, so the superconscious, consisting of higher levels of consciousness, lies above normal mind, and from these higher ranges, things descend into the lower parts of the being. Whereas the subconscious is the basis of our material being and supports all that comes up in the physical nature, the superconscious supports all our spiritual possibilities and nature. Sri Aurobindo distinguishes various distinct levels of consciousness among the higher planes of being which lie above the ordinary mind. There are many layers in each of the main gradations between mind and supermind, and each of these layers can be regarded as a gradation in itself.

The Higher Mind

The first in the ladder of minds from the mind to the supermind is the higher mind. The higher mind has its origin the supermind and its special character is that its activity is dominated by thought. Aurobindo uses terms like ‘luminous thought-mind’ and ‘a mind of spirit born

conceptual knowledge' to denote it. The higher mind is far more powerful than reason or logical intelligence. Unlike knowledge in the mental level, which is a system of conclusions drawn from premises, knowledge in the higher mind is a self-revelation of eternal wisdom and not a knowledge acquired from extraneous sources.

The Illumined Mind

The illumined mind is a region of spiritual light. The clarity of the spiritual intelligence characteristic of the higher mind gives place to an intense luster, a splendor and illumination of spirit. This light is primarily a spiritual manifestation of the divine reality that is at once illuminative and creative. The illumined mind also witnesses the arrival of a dynamic inner force and power that replaces the comparatively slow and deliberative process of the higher mind.

The Intuitive Mind

The intuitive mind or intuitive reason is a higher form of the intellect which can do the work of the reason with a higher power by utilizing its intuitions, inspirations, its swift revelatory vision and its luminous insight and discrimination. The intuitive mind, just like the illumined mind does not proceed by thoughts but by visional concepts. It is a kind of truth-vision, truth hearing, truth memory and direct truth discernment.

The Overmind

Sri Aurobindo defines the overmind as a delegate of the supermind consciousness to the ignorance. The supermind transmits to the overmind all its realities and allows it to formulate it into a movement and according to an awareness of things which is still a vision of truth and yet at the same time a first parent of the ignorance. A line divides the supermind and overmind and it permits a free transmission and allows the lower power to derive from the higher power all that it holds or sees, but automatically compels a transitional change in the passage.

The Supermind

The Supermind is in its essence a truth-consciousness, a consciousness always free from ignorance which is the foundation of our present natural or evolutionary existence and from which nature in us is trying to arrive at self-knowledge and world-knowledge. It is a principle of active will and knowledge superior to the mind and is the creatrix of the world. It is not the ineffable Brahman but an intermediary power and a state of being between self-possession of the ineffable reality and the flux of the many. It is completely free from all forms of ignorance. It does not need to acquire knowledge from outside; it possesses all knowledge by its own right.

Beyond the supermind is the Sat-Cit-Ananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss), the supracosmic reality, the Divine, the supreme being who manifests himself as infinite existence of which the essentiality is consciousness, bliss and self-delight.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How does Aurobindo distinguish between Purusa and Prakrti?

2) Give a detailed account of the higher levels of consciousness beyond the ordinary mind, as explained by Aurobindo..

1.6 LET US SUM UP

The unit has given a brief description of the theory of existence from the Aurobindo's system of philosophical thinking.

1.7 KEY WORDS

Atman-brahman: Unity of empirical and absolute spirit.

1.6 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 2 MAN AND HIS NATURE

Contents

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
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- 2.2 Individual and Society
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- 2.9 Further Readings and References

2.0 OBJECTIVES

- To understand Aurobindo's concept of the human being
- To appreciate the evolving and spiritual nature of human beings
- To see the collective destiny of the whole, including humans.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Sri Aurobindo's contribution to Indian philosophical problems are important and his rare insight into the literature of Indian philosophy coupled with an earnestness and serious purposiveness make it imperative on the part of students of Indian Philosophy to study him with care and detachment. Sri Aurobindo in his philosophy tries to synthesise the manifold views of the world and points out that realization consists in the total understanding of Brahman which satisfies the demands of knowledge and experience, freedom and immortality. In this unit we take up some salient notions that will help us to understand human nature according to Aurobindo.

2.2 THE INDIVIDUAL SELF IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO

The nature of the individual has itself been a real problem, for we find various explanations for his existence. The individual soul is said to be a part of the material nature of spiritual ego or reality; its cognitive nature has been stated to be due to an accident of connection with outer objects and not belonging to it as a sentience-point (Varadachari 2011). In the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo immortality of the individual soul is accepted and therefore its rebirths are also accepted. The purpose of the individual atomic soul in trying to achieve its real nature of immortality in and through the process of rebirths into matter and other lower forms of life is not explained as adequately as may be desired in the philosophies of realistic Vedanta. If *Maya* had been inexplicable in *Mayavada*, it is no less true of the *Karma*. The explanation that it is inexplicable because its origination is unknown will not fully satisfy the seeker after a real and valuable explanation. We find in the philosophies of realisms too, *Maya* gets a place if not as a deluding agent, at least as a power-concept or knowledge-concept. The creative act is one of Delight of Brahman or God.

We take a long extract from Sri Aurobindo to show the emergence of the individual man:

“The Universe is a self creative process of the Supreme Reality whose presence makes spirit the substance of things, - all things are there as the spirit’s powers and means and forms of manifestation. An infinite existence, an infinite consciousness, an infinite force and will, an infinite delight of being is the Reality secret behind the appearances of the universe; its divine Supermind or Gnosis has arranged the cosmic order, but arranged it indirectly through the three subordinate and limiting terms of which we are conscious here Mind, Life and Matter. The material universe is the lowest stage of a downward plunge of the manifestation, an involution of the manifested being of this triune Reality into an apparent nescience of itself, that which we now call the Inconscient; but out of this nescience the evolution of that manifested being into a recovered self-awareness was from the very first inevitable. It was inevitable because that which is involved must evolve; for it is not only there as an existence, a force hidden in its apparent opposite, and every such force must in its inmost nature be moved to find itself, to realise itself, to realise itself into play but it is the reality of that which conceals it, it is the self which the Nescience has lost and which therefore it must be the whole secret meaning, the constant drift of its action to seek for and recover. It is through the conscious individual being that this recovery is possible; it is in him that the evolving consciousness becomes organized and capable of awakening to its own Reality. The immense importance of the individual being which increases as he rises in the scale, is the most remarkable and significant fact of a universe which started without consciousness and without individuality in an undifferentiated Nescience. This importance can only be justified if the Self as individual is no less real than the Self as cosmic Being or Spirit and both are powers of the Eternal. It is only so that can be explained the necessity for the growth of the individual and his discovery of himself as a condition for the discovery of the cosmic self and consciousness and of the Supreme Reality. If we adopt this solution, this is the first result, the reality of the persistent individual; but from that first consequence the other result follows, that rebirth of some kind is no longer a possible machinery which may or may not be accepted, it becomes a necessity, an inevitable outcome of the root nature of our existence” (Ghose 1949).

The above long extract is to put in clearest light the entire relevancy of the growth of the individual immortal soul from a concealed or veiled consciousness towards the superconscious consciousness of the Divine shaping its immortality with its ascent in the Organic through reducing the impenetrable and refractory Inconscient in a series of rebirths. The individual soul’s delight it is , and not its karma, that mystifying force of bondage, beginningless and mechanical, that propels it to organize the Inconscient, plane by plane, and to integrate them in the single organism of his highest achievement – the Divine Body, pure, immortal too, a perfect instrument of its own inner light, truth, delight and Consciousness-power. Thus the individual soul in its involution and evolution is undoubtedly persistent, not in an unreal manner nor in the manner of a fictitious stream nor is it helplessly caught up in the vice-grip of a terrible fate or karma or kismet (fate), wheeled forward and backward from one place of existence to another. In fact, the individual soul is a shaper of its own inner law of ascent and descent for the sake of enjoying that secret delight of its existence even when it is being overwhelmed by the tribulations of its ascending journey. It is, at first appearance, a coarse, selfish aggressive egoism placed in opposition to matter, struggling for survival, against it as well as against all that came to be with it. (Varadachari 2011)

Thus whether it is the breaking up of social organizations or of individuals, there emerge constantly recurrences or rebirths of these social forms and individuals till the equation of the social perfection and individual integral perfection is realised in all levels of true spiritual being.

2.2 INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

The relationship between the individual and the society appears at first look to be one of part and whole. The society is seeking its fulfillment in and through the individuals even as the fulfillment of the individuals is affirmed to consist in the fullest realisation of Society. The *angangi-bhava* (whole and part relation) or *sesa-sesi* (dependent-principal relation) between the society and the individual is the highest that humanism has been able to offer as a consolation to the distraught world.

In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy we have a clear enunciation of the metaphysical reality of the society as well as the integrity of the individuals through his unique thesis of eternal oneness in the eternal multiplicity, whether it be of the organism or the society, planes or powers, individuals or the Deity. It is this metaphysical basis that makes multiplicity seek the freedom for its many individuals even as the individuals are impelled towards some sort of unity wherein lies their strength. The two moments in the history of growth of individual freedom in society and achievement of social solidarity are, even when in frenzied movement, explained by his thesis. (Varadachari 2011)

The individual soul truly grows into a universal being, that is, a being having universal responsiveness and love and value for all, even as the universal Being is enabled to manifest itself in and through each of the individuals. The mystical consciousness which is the pioneering spirit ever after adventure into planes and spaces beyond the intellect, according to M. Bergson, seeks to evolve into the universal consciousness by a leap or a burst into the same through concentration, not indeed of its consciousness nor by a surrender to the Divine All, but by the strength of its vital impulse (*vital*). This explanation does scant justice to the fundamental uniqueness of each soul and the continuity of evolution, as it aims at the abolition of the true individuality in the expanse of Mind-energy of the intuitive level. It forgets that the mystics are realists and are unique personalities who, in spite of their universal outlook and disinterested activity, are strong personalities. On the other hand, according to Sri Aurobindo, the individual is a real one of the eternal multiplicity of the Divine, mounting or ascending the evolutionary rungs by rejecting the lower with the help of the Divine, so that ultimately the lower may be orientated or transmuted so as to express more and more fully the higher and highest planes of the individual soul, which indeed is a Divine personality. (Ghose 1949)

Thus the individual in the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo does not have merely a temporary existence nor is it a term in the phenomenal creation due to the operation of a *Maya* or *upadhi*; on the other hand, it can be a portion, *amsa*, a ray, or organ of the Divine, if by these terms we understand an integral oneness of the soul with the Divine One in every respect as one of the eternal multiplicity. (Varadachari 2011) Thus it is that the individual soul is capable of realising the supreme formula of its identity with the Divine of Brahman in a real manner through a real evolution and real surrender to the Divine which it apprehends to be its complementary and not a counter-reality.

2.4 HUMAN DESTINY

The destiny of the human individual is not to attain after death a transcendental or divine body (*aprakrta-sarira*) or to achieve a mergence or Divine Oneness after such a donning of the eternal luminuous body, but even here to feel the Divine in oneself in His Oneness as also in His eternal multiplicity, and because of that presence undergo the changes in nature which are verily the formation of the *Aprakrta-divya-sarira*. This is the significant possibility of the indwellingness of the Supreme Divine 'superiorly' in the individual through a radical surrender and prayer to Him. The *Jivan-mukta* ideal is reinforced by the siddha-ideal, for it is not the *jivan-mukta* of the Advaita Vedanta that we arrive at but a more integral realisation of the Divine Personality in the individual. This is so much the case that the final movement of the Total Liberation of all individuals, if indeed that should happen, will be such that the eternal multiplicity is to remain a multiplicity of perfect unique personalities of the Divine (Varadachari 2011).

Sri Aurobindo's interest, and his main and abiding concern in all that he has given us, is in the future of the human individual, his race, and his prospects. In the Divine Life, Divine Race and Divine Unity he sees the secret founts of aspiration of man so far. His meridian or culmination is all that can make man yield his lower treasures, not once for all but only for a time so that attaining he could descend to transform or even in ascending transform his world and society and relationships in the pattern of transcending delights.

At the same time we need to realise that the fulfillment of the Divine consummation of integral all-sided existence is beyond the possibilities of the individual soul. In the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo the ideal of human unity is fashioned in the Superconscious life of each individual who has ascended and thereby fulfilled the mission set before himself at the beginning of the creature adventure to realise the divine pattern of his unique evolution of the Total All in the Divine, in His eternal multiplicity. The individual indeed becomes a Buddha and Siddha (realised or enlightened persons) , not in the sense of having attained to a state of nirvana nor yet in the sense of possessing occult powers, but in the sense of fulfilling the Divine Eternity, Truth, Delight and Reality in terms of the Divine Knowledge of Gnosis. In that supreme consummation there is *urnatva*, fullness in the individual as it is in the Divine, constantly renewing the Divine activity of bliss and love and varied infinities of relationships, none of which limit to detriment, frustrate to annihilation or force into neurosis or veil to bind. Every individual personality of the Divine in his fullest vision perceives all as the play of the Divine and himself as the exponent of unique beauties and creative *mayas* of the Divine.

2.5 MAN AND EVOLUTION

It is very important to remember that in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy man is not the crown of the evolutionary process. There are many religions which have said that man is the final product of evolution. But Sri Aurobindo holds that man is an intermediate creature, based firmly in the material consciousness and yet reaching upwards into the divine consciousness, into what he later calls the supramental. He makes the point that man has the capacity to cooperate with the evolutionary thrust and thereby to speed up the process of evolution. Previously the rocks did not have anything to do with becoming vegetables, the vegetables did not have anything to do with becoming fish, and the fish had no particular contribution to become land animals and so on because it was a natural process of development which took place over vast areas of the earth

and millions of years of evolution. But with man it is different; “man is the first creature with the capacity to cooperate in the process of evolution,” as Karan Singh (2008) remarks.

2.6 JIVATMAN IN AUROBINDO’S OWN WORDS

The following long extract is taken from Aurobindo’s “Letters on Yoga” Subsection 4: The Central Being and is entitled “*Jiva – Jivatman*” (Ghose 1969). It will help us to appreciate the evolving understanding of human being that he had, besides give us the flavour of his almost poetic and powerful writing. The phrase “central being” in our yoga is usually applied to the portion of the Divine in us which supports all the rest and survives through death and birth. This central being has two forms - above, it is *Jivatman*, our true being, of which we become aware when the higher self-knowledge comes, - below, it is the psychic being which stands behind mind, body and life. The *Jivatman* is above the manifestation in life and presides over it; the psychic being stands behind the manifestation in life and supports it.

The natural attitude of the psychic being is to feel itself as the Child, the Son of God, the *Bhakta*; it is a portion of the Divine, one in essence, but in the dynamics of the manifestation there is always even in identity a difference. The *Jivatman*, on the contrary, lives in the essence and can merge itself in identity with the Divine; but it too, the moment it presides over the dynamics of the manifestation, knows itself as one centre of the multiple Divine, not as the Parameshwara. It is important to remember the distinction; for, otherwise, if there is the least vital egoism, one may begin to think of oneself as an Avatar or lose balance like Hridaya with Ramakrishna.

The word *Jiva* has two meanings in the Sanskritic tongues - “living creatures” and the spirit individualised and upholding the living being in its evolution from birth to birth. In the latter sense the full term is *Jivatma* - the Atman, spirit or eternal self of the living being. It is spoken of figuratively by the Gita as “an eternal portion of the Divine” - but the word fragmentation (used by you) is too strong, it could be applicable to the forms, but not to the spirit in them. Moreover the multiple Divine is an eternal reality antecedent to the creation here. An elaborate description of the *Jivatma* would be: “the multiple Divine manifested here as the individualised self or spirit of the created being.” The *Jivatma* in its essence does not change or evolve, its essence stands above the personal evolution; within the evolution itself it is represented by the evolving psychic being which supports all the rest of the nature.

The Advaita Vedanta (Monism) declares that the *Jiva* has no real existence, as the Divine is indivisible. Another school attributes a real but not an independent existence to the *Jiva* - it is, they say, one in essence, different in manifestation, and as the manifestation is real, eternal and not an illusion, it cannot be called unreal. The dualistic schools affirm the *Jiva* as an independent category or stand on the triplicity of God, soul and Nature. *Jivatma* is not the psychic being - we have fixed on *chaitya purusha* as the equivalent in Sanskrit of the psychic being. *Jivatma* is the individual Self - the central being. The central being is that which is not born, does not evolve, but presides over all the individual manifestation. The psychic is its projection here - for the psychic being is in the evolution and from within supports our whole evolution; it receives the essence of all experience and by that develops the personality Godward.

The Self is at once one in all and many - one in its essence, it manifests also as the individual self which may be described as in Nature an eternal portion of the Divine; in spirit a centre of the manifestation, individual but extending its universality and rising into transcendence. By *Jivatma*

we mean the individual self. Essentially it is one self with all others, but in the multiplicity of the Divine it is the individual self, an individual centre of the universe - and it sees everything in itself or itself in everything or both together according to its state of consciousness and point of view. The self, Atman is in its nature either transcendent or universal (*Paramatma, Atma*). When it individualises and becomes a central being, it is then the *Jivatman*. The *Jivatman* feels his oneness with the universal but at the same time his central separateness as a portion of the Divine. The soul, representative of the central being, is a spark of the Divine supporting all individual existence in Nature; the psychic being is a conscious form of that soul growing in the evolution - in the persistent process that develops first life in Matter, mind in life, until finally mind can develop into overmind and overmind into the supramental Truth. The soul supports the nature in its evolution through these grades, but is itself not any of these things.

The lower Nature, *apara prakriti*, is this external objective and superficial subjective apparent Nature which manifests all these minds, lives and bodies. The supreme Nature, *para prakriti*, concealed behind it is the very nature of the Divine - a supreme Consciousness-Force which manifests the multiple Divine as the Many. These Many are in themselves eternal selves of the Supreme in his supreme Nature, *para prakriti*. Here in relation to this world they appear as the *Jivatmas* supporting the evolution of the natural existences, *sarva-bhutani*, in the mutable Becoming which is the life of the *Kshara* (mobile or mutable) *Purusha*. The *Jiva* (or *Jivatma*) and the creatures, *sarva-bhutani*, are not the same thing. The *Jivatmas* really stand above the creation even though concerned in it; the natural existences, *sarva-bhutani*, are the creatures of Nature. Man, bird, beast, reptile are natural existences, but the individual Self in them is not even for a moment characteristically man, bird, beast or reptile; in its evolution it is the same through all these changes, a spiritual being that consents to the play of Nature.

What is original and eternal for ever in the Divine is the Being, what is developed in consciousness, conditions, forces, forms, etc., by the Divine Power is the Becoming. The eternal Divine is the Being; the universe in Time and all that is apparent in it is a Becoming. The eternal Being in its superior nature, *Para Prakriti*, is at once One and Many; but the eternal Multiplicity of the Divine when it stands behind the created existences, *sarva-bhutani*, appears as (or as we say, becomes) the *Jiva, para prakritir jivabhuta*. In the psychic, on the other hand, there are two aspects, the psychic existence or soul behind and in front the form of individuality it takes in its evolution in Nature.

The soul or psyche is immutable only in the sense that it contains all the possibilities of the Divine within it, but it has to evolve them and in its evolution it assumes the form of a developing psychic individual evolving in the manifestation the individual *Prakriti* and taking part in the evolution. It is the spark of the Divine Fire that grows behind the mind, vital and physical by means of the psychic being until it is able to transform the *Prakriti* of Ignorance into a *Prakriti* of Knowledge. This evolving psychic being is not therefore at any time all that the soul or essential psychic existence bears within it; it temporalises and individualises what is eternal in potentiality, transcendent in essence, in this projection of the spirit.

The central being is the being which presides over the different births one after the other, but is itself unborn, for it does not descend into the being but is above it - it holds together the mental, vital and physical being and all the various parts of the personality and it controls the life either through the mental being and the mental thought and will or through the psychic, whichever may happen to be most in front or most powerful in nature. If it does not exercise its control, then the

consciousness is in great disorder and every part of the personality acts for itself so that there is no coherence in the thought, feeling or action.

The psychic is not above but behind - its seat is behind the heart, its power is not knowledge but an essential or spiritual feeling - it has the clearest sense of the Truth and a sort of inherent perception of it which is of the nature of soul-perception and soul-feeling. It is our inmost being and supports all the others, mental, vital, physical, but it is also much veiled by them and has to act upon them as an influence rather than by its sovereign right of direct action; its direct action becomes normal and preponderant only at a high stage of development or by yoga. It is not the psychic being which, you feel, gives you the intuitions of things to be or warns you against the results of certain actions; that is some part of the inner being, sometimes the inner mental, sometimes the inner vital, sometimes, it may be, the inner or subtle physical *Purusha*. The inner being - inner mind, inner vital, inner or subtle physical - knows much that is unknown to the outer mind, the outer vital, the outer physical, for it is in a more direct contact with the secret forces of Nature. The psychic is the inmost being of all; a perception of truth which is inherent in the deepest substance of the consciousness, a sense of the good, true, beautiful, the Divine, is its privilege.

The central being - the *Jivatman* which is not born nor evolves but presides over the individual birth and evolution - puts forward a representative of himself on each plane of the consciousness. On the mental plane it is the true mental being, *manomaya purusha*, on the vital plane the true vital being, *pranamaya purusha*, on the physical plane the true physical being, *annamaya purusha*. Each being, therefore is, so long as the Ignorance lasts, centred round his mental, vital or physical *Purusha*, according to the plane on which he predominantly lives, and that is to him his central being. But the true representative all the time is concealed behind the mind, vital and physical - it is the psychic, our inmost being.

When the inmost knowledge begins to come, we become aware of the psychic being within us and it comes forward and leads the *sadhana*. We become aware also of the *Jivatman*, the undivided Self or Spirit above the manifestation of which the psychic is the representative here. The true inner being - the true mental, the true vital, the true physical represent each on its plane and answer to the central being, but the whole of the nature and especially the outer nature does not, nor the ordinary mental, vital or physical personality. The psychic being is the central being for the purposes of the evolution - it grows and develops; but there is a central being above of which the mind is not aware, which presides unseen over the existence and of which the psychic being is the representative in the manifested nature. It is what is called the *Jivatman*. The psychic is a spark of the Divine - but I do not know that it can be called a portion of the *Jivatma* - it is the same put forward in a different way.

What is meant by *Prakriti* or Nature is the outer or executive side of the *Shakti* or Conscious Force which forms and moves the worlds. This outer side appears here to be mechanical, a play of the forces, *Gunas*, etc. Behind it is the living Consciousness and Force of the Divine, the divine *Shakti*. The *Prakriti* itself is divided into the lower and higher, - the lower is the *Prakriti* of the Ignorance, the *Prakriti* of mind, life and Matter separated in consciousness from the Divine; the higher is the Divine *Prakriti* of *Sachchidananda* with its manifesting power of supermind, always aware of the Divine and free from Ignorance and its consequences. Man so long as he is in the ignorance is subject to the lower *Prakriti*, but by spiritual evolution he becomes aware of the higher Nature and seeks to come into contact with it. He can ascend into it

and it can descend into him - such an ascent and descent can transform the lower nature of mind, life and Matter. (Sri Aurobindo, SABCL, volume 22, pages 265-287).

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How does Aurobindo distinguish between Individual self and Brahman?

2) Give a detailed account of the understanding of human nature as explained by Aurobindo..

2.7 LET US SUM UP

The absolute may be regarded as the Being, the beginning and end of our metaphysical search. With care and caution, towards the end of our search, we can identify that Being or Absolute with God. For theists, such a God or Absolute is the unlimited existence, that is unalloyed bliss and perfect consciousness (*sat-cit-ananda*). We can respond to such a gift of existence personally or individually only through love.

2.8 KEY WORDS

Nescience: Absence of knowledge or awareness; ignorance

Inconscient: Unconscious; subconscious; wanting self-consciousness

Jivatman: *Atman* (the Self) is of two kinds - *jiva* or *jivatman*, and *Paramatman* or *Isvara*.

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UNIT 3 KNOWLEDGE AND IGNORANCE

Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Aurobindo On Knowledge And Ignorance
- 3.3 Seven Types Of Ignorance
- 3.4 Integral Knowledge
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3.0 OBJECTIVES

- To see the role of knowledge in Aurobindo's Philosophy.
- To see the relationship between knowledge and ignorance in Aurobindo.
- To try to understand ignorance in the scheme of things of Aurobindo.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

How is knowledge related to ignorance? Why is there evil in this world of goodness? These are some questions that Aurobindo has been engaging in. In the chapter "The Eternal and the Individual" from *"The Life Divine,"* Sri Aurobindo indicates that we can move out of our essential ignorance, expressed through limitations of rational mind and supported by ego, by coming into touch with our True Self and Soul. As a result, we realize that we are not only an individual being, but a world being; an eternal individual capable of transcending all limitations of unconsciousness, ego, division, and ignorance.

Sri Aurobindo refers to this evolved, universalized person as a "True Individual." He is in touch with an individuality that includes a wider, universal and eternal existence. This true Individual lives through oneself, as well as others. He also perceives the deepest being, the Soul and experience of Transcendence not just in himself but in others. Moreover, because the individual is Eternal in essence, he has the potential to evolve his being to its ultimate potential, including his material being, even becoming immortal. In this unit, we want to understand Aurobindo's concept of knowledge and its relationship to ignorance. We also try to seek the remedy for falsehood and evil.

3.2 AUROBINDO ON KNOWLEDGE AND IGNORANCE

The main insights of Aurobindo on knowledge and ignorance, as presented in *"The Life Divine"* may be summed up as follows: Our Essential Ignorance vs. Integral Knowledge: Sri Aurobindo begins by describing the difference between our essential Ignorance and the Integral Knowledge we can move towards. He says we need to discover the nature of our essential Ignorance, and the Knowledge that must replace it. That through our inward and upward self-unfolding of consciousness, we discover that Knowledge (Ghose 1949).

Utility and Limits of Logical Mind and Our Ignorance: He then focuses on the fact that the logical mind is helpful in breaking the Ignorance, but is limited. He says that it is helpful for overcoming the essential Ignorance by the partial understanding, intellectualization, et al of normal mind, but itself cannot arrive at the Knowledge we are seeking. He says that it is more a guardian against error than a discoverer of truth; that its propensities to make distinctions are stumbling blocks on the road to Integral Knowledge.

Limits of Reason Caused by Ego, Preventing Integral Knowledge: Sri Aurobindo then addresses why the reason of Logical Mind is so limited. He says that the main problem is that the reason identifies the individual self with the ego, and the exclusions of consciousness that arise when we are absorbed in ego. He then explains what the problems of ego are. In particular, that our ego tends to centralize the activities of Nature in ourselves. That we have experiences that distinguish ourselves from the rest of being, and that is what we think of as our nature, but is really ego in action. Thus, this sense of individualization, this ego-sense is the crux of the problem (Ghose 1949).

Thus, if we are to move out of the Ignorance and towards Integral Knowledge, we need to somehow move out of ego. To do that, we have to see beyond this individualization of ego to our greater self and world being. We have to come to see that this self of our individuality is not only an ego self, but one that embraces the whole world and all other beings.

Moving out of Ego and Ignorance through Soul Connection: Now we come to the crux of the chapter. How do we move towards this wider self, this individuality that embraces the whole of existence beyond ego. He says when we move to the soul and Self, we move towards this wider existence. He says that this Self and Soul connects us to other souls, individuals, and the cosmic. This is the unity of being in Self. Thus there are two becomings of the Self, our individualization and the world, the individual and the cosmic. Moreover, these two becomings are always related to one another and are mutually dependent. For the liberated soul who comes in contact with the transcendent perceives that all is in each and each is in all and all is in God and God is all (Ghose 1949).

Perceiving our True Individuality as Both Individual and World Being Key: Thus we must consider we can move from our individual status to becoming the True Individual. This person is not the ego, and yet who has a relationship with other individuals. The true individual is a conscious power of the being of the Eternal in his power of individualizing self experience; living in unity and mutuality with others. The true Individual is contained in the world-being and dwells in the Transcendent. This is the key point of the chapter. He enjoys the transcendence through himself and in others.

Utility and Power of the Negative: Now Sri Aurobindo focuses on several particular ways it expresses its Ignorance. One has to do with how we see the positives and negatives of life. He says that rather than look at the negatives as we normally do, we should understand that they are packed with force, teeming with power of existence, full of actual or potential contents. He says that the negatives bring in the rest of the possibilities of the Absolute that the positive does not allow. E.g. A great war may seem negative from one view, but from another may clear the way to great possibilities it may not have had before. From here Sri Aurobindo goes on to say that that everything has the Eternal in it, including the negative. I.e. the Absolute includes all and everything. That it is not bound to the limits of the positive.

Seeing Contradictions as Complements through Higher Consciousness: Sri Aurobindo then says that all dualities, contradictions in life can be seen for what they really are, as complements, complementary pairs when we rise to our highest consciousness. On the other hand, the human reason sees contradictions. Sri Aurobindo concludes that from this highest consciousness we perceive that all meets and all principles, all persistent realities of existence stand in a primary relationship to each other in a free, not an exclusive unity of the Absolute (Ghose 1949).

3.3 SEVEN TYPES OF IGNORANCE

Given this background, we are in a position to understand the seven types of ignorance, as elaborated by our author. Sri Aurobindo's systematic approach has us first examining the extent and nature of the Ignorance as a prelude to our search for Knowledge. The first ignorance is a self-ignorance. "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." (SAS 2011)

The cosmic ignorance is next: "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..." (Ghose 1949).

The third ignorance is the egoistic 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..." The temporal ignorance is fourth: "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..." The fifth ignorance is our psychological ignorance: "Even within this brief temporal becoming we are ignorant of our large and complex being, of that in us which is superconscient, subconscious, intraconscient, circumconscient to our surface becoming; we take that surface becoming with its small selection of overtly mentalised experiences for our whole existence..."

The constitutional ignorance is sixth: "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..." Finally, there is the practical ignorance: "As a result of all these ignorances, we miss the true knowledge, government and enjoyment of our life in the world; we are ignorant in our thought, will, sensations, actions, return wrong or imperfect responses at every point to the questionings of the world, wander in a maze of errors and desires, strivings and failures, pain and pleasure, sin and stumbling, follow a crooked road, grope blindly for a changing goal..."

3.4 INTEGRAL KNOWLEDGE

Sri Aurobindo avoids the temptation to define knowledge as a specific limited formulation based on one aspect or tendency which we can recognise in our conscious awareness. He accepts that each major line of development, each major philosophical statement of truth is in fact speaking to one part or focus of our being, but needs to be reconciled, balanced, harmonised and related to the others. Truth is not opposed to truth; rather truth expands to include all aspects of truth. His

goal is not to achieve a victory in a battle of ideas, but to find how to reconcile seemingly opposite formulations of truth in an all-encompassing, all-embracing view.

“An integral knowledge then must be 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. Our present state is an Ignorance and a many-sided seeking; it seeks the truth of all things but,— as is evident from the insistence and the variety of the human mind’s speculations as to the fundamental Truth which explains all others, the Reality at the basis of all things,— the fundamental truth of things, their basic reality must be found in some at once fundamental and universal Real; it is that which, once discovered, must embrace and explain all,—for “That being known all will be known”: the fundamental Real must necessarily be and contain the truth of all existence, the truth of the individual, the truth of the universe, the truth of all that is beyond the universe.” (Ghose 1949) The mind’s seeking in each individual direction has its value and becomes a basis for a more comprehensive knowledge when we can finally fit together each of these “truths” into that one all-comprehending Truth that forms the Integral Knowledge.

3.5 THE ORIGIN AND REMEDY OF FALSEHOOD, ERROR, WRONG AND EVIL

[The following extract is Sri Aurobindo’s own words and taken from *The Life Divine*. Some comments are given in square bracket]

The Lord accepts the sin and the virtue of none; because knowledge is veiled by Ignorance, mortal men are deluded. *Gita*. V. 15.

They live according to another idea of self than the reality, deluded, attached, expressing a falsehood, - as if by an enchantment they see the false as the true. *Maitrayani Upanishad*. VII. 10.

They live and move in the Ignorance and go round and round, battered and stumbling, like blind men led by one who is blind. *Mundaka Upanishad*. I. 2. 8.

One whose intelligence has attained to Unity, casts away from him both sin and virtue. *Gita*. II. 50.

He who has found the bliss of the Eternal is afflicted no more by the thought, “Why have I not done the good? Why have I done evil?” One who knows the self extricates himself from both these things. *Taittiriya Upanishad*. II. 9.

These are they who are conscious of the much falsehood in the world; they grow in the house of Truth, they are the strong and invincible sons of Infinity. *Rig Veda*. VII. 60. 5.

The first and the highest are truth; in the middle there is falsehood, but it is taken between the truth on both sides of it and it draws its being from the truth. [Sri Aurobindo's Note: The truth of the physical reality and the truth of the spiritual and superconscient reality. Into the intermediate subjective and mental realities which stand between them, falsehood can enter, but it takes either truth from above or truth from below as the substance out of which it builds itself and both are pressing upon it to turn its misconstructions into truth of life and truth of spirit.] *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. V. 5. 1.

If Ignorance is in its nature a self-limiting knowledge oblivious of the integral self-awareness and confined to an exclusive concentration in a single field or upon a concealing surface of cosmic movement, what, in this view, are we to make of the problem which most poignantly preoccupies the mind of man when it is turned on the mystery of his own existence and of cosmic existence, the problem of evil? A limited knowledge supported by a secret All-Wisdom as an instrument for working out within the necessary limitations a restricted world-order may be admitted as an intelligible process of the universal Consciousness and Energy; but the necessity of falsehood and error, the necessity of wrong and evil or their utility in the workings of the omnipresent Divine Reality is less easily admissible.

And yet if that Reality is what we have supposed it to be, there must be some necessity for the appearance of these contrary phenomena, some significance, some function that they had to serve in the economy of the universe. For in the complete and inalienable self-knowledge of the Brahman which is necessarily all-knowledge, since all this that is is the Brahman, such phenomena cannot have come in as a chance, an intervening accident, an involuntary forgetfulness or confusion of the Consciousness-Force of the All-Wise in the cosmos or an ugly contretemps for which the indwelling Spirit was not prepared and of which it is the prisoner erring in a labyrinth with the utmost difficulty of escape. Nor can it be an inexplicable mystery of being, original and eternal, of which the divine All-Teacher is incapable of giving an account to himself or to us. There must be behind it a significance of the All-Wisdom itself, a power of the All-Consciousness which permits and uses it for some indispensable function in the present workings of our self-experience and world-experience. This aspect of existence needs now to be examined more directly and determined in its origins and the limits of its reality and its place in Nature.

This problem may be taken up from three points of view, - its relation to the Absolute, the supreme Reality, its origin and place in the cosmic workings, its action and point of hold in the individual being. It is evident that these contrary phenomena have no direct root in the supreme Reality itself, there is nothing there that has this character; they are creations of the Ignorance and Inconscience, not fundamental or primary aspects of the Being, not native to the Transcendence or to the infinite power of the Cosmic Spirit. It is sometimes reasoned that as Truth and Good have their absolutes, so Falsehood and Evil must also have their absolutes, or, if it is not so, then both must belong to the relativity only; Knowledge and Ignorance, Truth and Falsehood, Good and Evil exist only in relation to each other and beyond the dualities here they have no existence. But this is not the fundamental truth of the relation of these opposites; for, in the first place, Falsehood and Evil are, unlike Truth and Good, very clearly results of the Ignorance and cannot exist where there is no Ignorance: they can have no self-existence in the Divine Being, they cannot be native elements of the Supreme Nature. If, then, the limited Knowledge which is the nature of Ignorance renounces its limitations, if Ignorance disappears into Knowledge, evil and falsehood can no longer endure: for both are fruits of unconsciousness and wrong consciousness and, if true or whole consciousness is there replacing Ignorance, they have no longer any basis for their existence. There can therefore be no absolute of falsehood, no absolute of evil; these things are a by-product of the world-movement: the sombre flowers of falsehood and suffering and evil have their root in the black soil of the Inconscient. On the other hand, there is no such intrinsic obstacle to the absoluteness of Truth and Good: the relativity of truth and error, good and evil is a fact of our experience, but it is similarly a by-product, it is not

a permanent factor native to existence; for it is true only of the valuations made by the human consciousness, true only of our partial knowledge and partial ignorance.

Truth is relative to us because our knowledge is surrounded by ignorance. Our exact vision stops short at outside appearances which are not the complete truth of things, and, if we go deeper, the illuminations we arrive at are guesses or inferences or intimations, not a sight of indubitable realities: our conclusions are partial, speculative or constructed, our statement of them, which is the expression of our indirect contact with the reality, has the nature of representations or figures, word-images of thought-perceptions that are themselves images, not embodiments of Truth itself, not directly real and authentic. These figures or representations are imperfect and opaque and carry with them their shadow of nescience or error; for they seem to deny or shut out other truths and even the truth they express does not get its full value: it is an end or edge of it that projects into form and the rest is left in the shadow unseen or disfigured or uncertainly visible. It might almost be said that no mental statement of things can be altogether true; it is not Truth bodied, pure and nude, but a draped figure, - often it is only the drapery that is visible. But this character does not apply to truth perceived by a direct action of consciousness or to the truth of knowledge by identity; our seeing there may be limited, but so far as it extends, it is authentic, and authenticity is a first step towards absoluteness: error may attach itself to a direct or identical vision of things by a mental accretion, by a mistaken or illegitimate extension or by the mind's misinterpretation, but it does not enter into the substance. This authentic or identical vision or experience of things is the true nature of knowledge and it is self-existent within the being, although rendered in our minds by a secondary formation that is unauthentic and derivative. Ignorance in its origin has not this self-existence or this authenticity; it exists by a limitation or absence or abeyance of knowledge, error by a deviation from truth, falsehood by a distortion of truth or its contradiction and denial. But it cannot be similarly said of knowledge that in its very nature it exists only by a limitation or absence or abeyance of ignorance: it may indeed emerge in the human mind partly by a process of such limitation or abeyance, by the receding of darkness from a partial light, or it may have the aspect of ignorance turning into knowledge; but in fact, it rises by an independent birth from our depths where it has a native existence.

Again, of good and evil it can be said that one exists by true consciousness, the other survives only by wrong consciousness: if there is an unmixed true consciousness, good alone can exist; it is no longer mixed with evil or formed in its presence. Human values of good and evil, as of truth and error, are indeed uncertain and relative: what is held as truth in one place or time is held in another place or time to be error; what is regarded as good is elsewhere or in other times regarded as evil. We find too that what we call evil results in good, what we call good results in evil. But this untoward outcome of good producing evil is due to the confusion and mixture of knowledge and ignorance, to the penetration of true consciousness by wrong consciousness, so that there is an ignorant or mistaken application of our good, or it is due to the intervention of afflicting forces. In the opposite case of evil producing good, the happier and contradictory result is due to the intervention of some true consciousness and force acting behind and in spite of wrong consciousness and wrong will or it is due to the intervention of redressing forces. This relativity, this mixture is a circumstance of human mentality and the workings of the Cosmic Force in human life; it is not the fundamental truth of good and evil. It might be objected that physical evil, such as pain and most bodily suffering, is independent of knowledge and ignorance, of right and wrong consciousness, inherent in physical Nature: but, fundamentally, all pain and suffering are the result of an insufficient consciousness-force in the surface being which

makes it unable to deal rightly with self and Nature or unable to assimilate and to harmonise itself with the contacts of the universal Energy; they would not exist if in us there were an integral presence of the luminous Consciousness and the divine Force of an integral Being. Therefore the relation of truth to falsehood, of good to evil is not a mutual dependence, but is in the nature of a contradiction as of light and shadow; a shadow depends on light for its existence, but light does not depend for its existence on the shadow. The relation between the Absolute and these contraries of some of its fundamental aspects is not that they are opposite fundamental aspects of the Absolute; falsehood and evil have no fundamentality, no power of infinity or eternal being, no self-existence even by latency in the Self-Existent, no authenticity of an original inherence.

It is no doubt a fact that once truth or good manifests, the conception of falsehood and evil becomes a possibility; for whenever there is an affirmation, its negation becomes conceivable. As the manifestation of existence, consciousness and delight made the manifestation of non-existence, inconscience, insensibility conceivable and, because conceivable, therefore in a way inevitable, for all possibilities push towards actuality until they reach it, so is it with these contraries of the aspects of the Divine Existence. It may be said on this ground that these opposites, since they must be immediately perceivable by the manifesting Consciousness on the very threshold of manifestation, can take rank as implied absolutes and are inseparable from all cosmic existence. But it must first be noted that it is only in cosmic manifestation that they become possible; they cannot pre-exist in the timeless being, for they are incompatible with the unity and bliss that are its substance.

The true solution can intervene only when by our spiritual growth we can become one self with all beings, know them as part of our self, deal with them as if they were our other selves; for then the division is healed, the law of separate self-affirmation leading by itself to affirmation against or at the expense of others is enlarged and liberated by adding to it the law of our self-affirmation for others and our self-finding in their self-finding and self-realisation. It has been made a rule of religious ethics to act in a spirit of universal compassion, to love one's neighbour as oneself, to do to others as one would have them do to us, to feel the joy and grief of others as one's own; but no man living in his ego is able truly and perfectly to do these things, he can only accept them as a demand of his mind, an aspiration of his heart, an effort of his will to live by a high standard and modify by a sincere endeavour his crude ego-nature. It is when others are known and felt intimately as oneself that this ideal can become a natural and spontaneous rule of our living and be realised in practice as in principle.

But even oneness with others is not enough by itself, if it is a oneness with their ignorance; for then the law of ignorance will work and error of action and wrong action will survive even if diminished in degree and mellowed in incidence and character. Our oneness with others must be fundamental, not a oneness with their minds, hearts, vital selves, egos, - even though these come to be included in our universalised consciousness, - but a oneness in the soul and spirit, and that can only come by our liberation into soul-awareness and self-knowledge. To be ourselves liberated from ego and realise our true selves is the first necessity; all else can be achieved as a luminous result, a necessary consequence.

That is one reason why a spiritual call must be accepted as imperative and take precedence over all other claims, intellectual, ethical, social, that belong to the domain of the Ignorance. For the mental law of good abides in that domain and can only modify and palliate; nothing can be a

sufficient substitute for the spiritual change that can realise the true and integral good because through the spirit we come to the root of action and existence.

In the spiritual knowledge of self there are three steps which are at the same time three parts of the one knowledge. The first is the discovery of the soul, not the outer soul of thought and emotion and desire, but the secret psychic entity, the divine element within us. When that becomes dominant over the nature, the soul becomes conscious and the mind, life and body take their true place as its instruments; we are aware of a guide within that knows the truth, the good, the true delight and beauty of existence, controls heart and intellect by its luminous law and leads our life and being towards spiritual completeness. Even within the obscure workings of the Ignorance we have then a witness who discerns, a living light that illumines, a will that refuses to be misled and separates the mind's truth from its error, the heart's intimate response from its vibrations to a wrong call and wrong demand upon it, the life's true ardour and plenitude of movement from vital passion and the turbid falsehoods of our vital nature and its dark self-seeking. This is the first step of self-realisation, to enthrone the soul, the divine psychic individual in the place of the ego.

The next step is to become aware of the eternal self in us unborn and one with the self of all beings. This self-realisation liberates and universalises; even if our action still proceeds in the dynamics of the Ignorance, it no longer binds or misleads because our inner being is seated in the light of self-knowledge. The third step is to know the Divine Being who is at once our supreme transcendent Self, the Cosmic Being, foundation of our universality, and the Divinity within of which our psychic being, the true evolving individual in our nature, is a portion, a spark, a flame growing into the eternal Fire from which it was lit and of which it is the witness ever living within us and the conscious instrument of its light and power and joy and beauty. Aware of the Divine as the Master of our being and action, we can learn to become channels of his Shakti, the Divine Puissance, and act according to her dictates or her rule of light and power within us. Our action will not then be mastered by our vital impulse or governed by a mental standard, for she acts according to the permanent yet plastic truth of things, - not that which the mind constructs, but the higher, deeper and subtler truth of each movement and circumstance as it is known to the supreme knowledge and demanded by the supreme will in the universe.

The liberation of the will follows upon the liberation in knowledge and is its dynamic consequence; it is knowledge that purifies, it is truth that liberates: evil is the fruit of a spiritual ignorance and it will disappear only by the growth of a spiritual consciousness and the light of spiritual knowledge. The division of our being from the being of others can only be healed by removing the divorce of our nature from the inner soul-reality, by abolishing the veil between our becoming and our self-being, by bridging the remoteness of our individuality in Nature from the Divine Being who is the omnipresent Reality in Nature and above Nature. But the last division to be removed is the scission between this Nature and the Supernatural which is the Self-Power of the Divine Existence.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How do you describe ignorance.?

2) Explain integral knowledge.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

The paradox of knowledge and ignorance, along with goodness and evil, has challenged humans. In this unit we see Aurobindo's understanding of ignorance as leading to integral knowledge..

3.7 KEY WORDS

Circumconscient: The subliminal self is the true mental being and in relation to our waking mind is rather secretly circumconscient; for it envelops as well as supports. Of all this larger part of our being we are ignorant. The term "Intraconscient" and "Circumconscient" of Sri Aurobindo were explained to differentiate the subtle states from grosser states.

Superconscient: We are ignorant also of the superconscient, that which we ordinarily call spirit or soul.

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UNIT 4 INTERPRETATION OF 'TAT-TVAM ASI'

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
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4.0 OBJECTIVES

- To see the basis and significance of advaitic philosophy.
- To see the relevance of 'Tat-tvam asi' for today.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Insightfully Sri Aurobindo wrote: "In liberation the individual soul realises itself as the One (that is yet Many). It may plunge into the one and merge or hide itself in its bosom—that is the laya of Advaita; it may feel its oneness and yet, as part of the Many that is the One, enjoy the Divine that is the Visistadvaitic liberation; it may lay stress on its Many aspect and go on playing with Krishna in the eternal Brindavan, that is the Dvaita liberation. Or it may, even being liberated remain in the Lila or Manifestation, or descend into it as often as it likes. The Divine is not bound by human philosophies—it is free in its play and free in its essence." In this unit we want to study Advaitic vision of Aurobindo, with the *mahavakya*, *Tat-tvam asi*. We also want to focus on its contemporary relevance for us.

4.2 TAT-TVAM ASI AND AUROBINDO

The actual test of a system in Indian religious thought is its capacity to grant liberation (*moksa*) to its followers. This test is inescapable and it is the difference between Western philosophy and Eastern philosophy. True love of wisdom which is the meaning of philosophy is to be had not in pursuing what is said to be truth but the wisdom that is life in freedom. Thus whatever secures freedom for the self is philosophy and not merely an intellectual edifice erected by the logic of the finite mind or bondage and called a systematic presentation of Reality in terms of the intellect.

Once this is grasped it naturally follows that Vedanta is not a mere intellectual construction nor a dialectical display of system but a profound search for the final liberation which alone would present a Vision (*darsana*) the Ultimate Reality. Such a *darsana* would not only be a synoptic Vision but an organic whole which could be called a harmony rather than a synthesis of standpoints. The many-sided nature of reality is well known but its oneness is also what is

perceived in a measure and in a sense even in our ordinary life but to reason and still more to our intuitive apprehension (Varadachari 2010).

Sri Aurobindo may be said to follow the great leaders of Vedanta in so far as he has through his original approach of yogic *anubhava* and *adhyatmic* (introspective meditative) approach sought to arrive at his own synthesis of the knowledge in the Veda, Upanishads and Gita. The threefold texts for Vedanta are recognised to be the Upanishads, Vedanta Sutras and the Gita. The Advaita approach claims to be based on the *anubhava* of oneness with the Ultimate Reality, that comes to one who has strenuously contemplated on the basic sentences or propositions of the scripture such as (i) *Tat tvam asi* (That thou art); (ii) *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am Brahman); *So'ham Asmi* (He or That am I); (iii) *Sarvamkhailvidam Brahma* (all this verily is Brahman), (iv) *Ekamevadvityam* (Only one without a second). It is obvious mere contemplation of Brahman passages such as the above will lead to realisation of the truths contained therein. What is necessary is the attainment of the Brahman through devotion and grace, as advocated by Sri Aurobindo.

4.3 BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF VEDANTA

Before we proceed to study the basic interpretation of *tat-tvam-asi* (That thou art), we shall see certain fundamental assumptions of all Vedantas as expounded by Pujya Dr. K.C. Varadachari (Varadachari 2010).

1. There is one and only One Supreme Being or Existence. This is absolutely distinct in a sense from all that are seen also to exist, which are not supreme, divisible, divided and having the nature of dependents on something else for their being and Nature.

1a. The Supreme principle which is One however sustains and supports and manifests and withdraws all the others.

1b. This Supreme Principle is Vastness as well as Minutest. It is thus the internal and external principle of all that is vast and minute.

1c. If we definitely assert that the Substance is that which is all and as such all are dependent on it, in the relation of attributes or modes or bodies, then there is Only One substance. All the rest are included in it.

2. That the Brahman can be known through a different method Of *Upasana* (devotional contemplation through knowledge) and not through mere reciting, reading of scriptures, or works or charity or alms-giving, or mere sacrifice.

2a. This is possible but one requires the grace of God, that arises through establishing mental peace (*prasada*) or silence that is spiritual.

2b. To say that to be an object of knowledge is to be also inconscient is not necessary. To emphasise subjective knowing of the object or intuitive knowing of it is not the same as the objectification of the subjective or mental states. Advaita of Mayavada accepts this axiom which is not axiomatic.

2c. Nor can it be said that to be a knower is the condition of all things at all times. This is the prerogative of the Supreme Brahman. Brahman is the Object of all souls for attainment of Him alone means liberation. Thus the Objectivity of God cannot be denied. Nor can it be said of the individual souls who have the dual capacity even like God of being objects of Grace of God and subjects of experience of Nature and God.

2d. The only question then is about the World or Nature or the Inconscient (*acit*). Its existence is said to be of the enjoyability or the enjoyable. It is in that sense objectivity. But it is never without the Godhead and as such it derives a subjectivity of a peculiar kind of being enjoyable to the Divine. This subjectivity cannot be derived from the acceptance of its being conscious or animated by consciousness or entelechies or monads or *jivas*. All the universe being considered to be thus a college of souls or an aggregate of them, at different levels of consciousness.

2e. Thus Nature seems to be accepted as a triple threaded force or energy of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* which undergoes the modifications for the embodiment of the souls in manifestation.

2f. It is possible that the threefoldness is a reflection or correspondence or degradation or grossening of the primal spiritual triplicity of *sat*, *cit* and *ananda*.

3. The transcendence of the Nature and mere isolated soul of souls is the goal of Being and the restoration of Reality to the soul as well as the restoration of the imbalance of Nature.

3a. This is by a Return or *nivritti* to God beyond or above manifestation.

3b. The Return is a withdrawal from the manifestation or the gross manifestation or even a subtle manifestation, for it is a return into God or Absolute Reality.

The renunciation of the relative Reality follows as a consequence or the renunciation of attachment to whatever is offered by relative realities or some of them for the sake of higher and freer enjoyment of others, or it is the enlightened divine way of enjoyment of manifestation as the body of God which has been offered as the field of enjoyment.

3c. The assertion of a world of enjoyment of unalloyed bliss beyond the world of karma such as the world of lower Nature is also the assertion of a transcendent way of enjoyment through God-knowledge rather than 'misery' (enjoyment with attached or selfish enjoyment of the soul).

Thus we find that the assumptions of the Vedanta point out to the necessity of a person for loving and attaining God or absolute Reality-status. This is the primary condition of all spiritual pursuit. All Vedantins accept that the moral and spiritual or yogic preparation is the sine qua non of spiritual ascent. The attainment of Brahman is a process of dedication or philosophy by which one grows into the being of Brahman. Thus the famous statement that one who knows Brahman attains Brahman. Being and Becoming become synonymous for the infinity of Being is such that it is a continuous becoming of oneself its Nature.

4.4 AUROBINDO'S ORGANIC CONCEPTION OF REALITY

Sri Aurobindo's organic conception through evolution gives concrete shape and meaning to the metaphysical form of the organic union presented by Sri Ramanuja. In this sense it is rich approach to the Divine by a direct plunge into the centre of our being or the heart. It is not

enough to realise that one is a part or ray or many of Brahman's Organism, but it is necessary also to grow into Him to be in a sense filled by Him and be born of Him. The Upanishads are not unaware of this birth of the soul of Brahman, of becoming filled with Brahman, or growing in the vastness of Brahman or moving in the Brahman according to the Supreme Law of Being (Varadachari 2010).

The logic of the mechanical or rectilinear logic is replaced by the dynamic logic of the Organic of growth, of ascent, of liberation and birth in Brahman, surpassing or transcending ignorance that is confined to the search for freedom in the dark interiors of it which are revealed by such concepts as realisation without ascent or transcendence which truly are possible without realising or ascending since all are *maya* or illusion or limitations on the unchanging and non-many or One.

Sri Aurobindo's exposition of the several *vidyas* show the absolute necessity for a dynamic conception of the Reality as a wonderful process of evolution which makes for the play of the Many in the One and of the One in the Many. The Lila is then not merely a mirage play or miracle play but a supreme Act of creative Delight which has been said to be the heart of Brahman. It is clear that Dvaita's supreme quality of differences together with the unifying doctrine of dependence lends itself to the play of the many in the One. The profound question would yet arise as to whether the many and the one are of equal status, in which case the many would not be the souls or atoms, but Brahman Himself.

Sri Aurobindo therefore considers that the Eternal One is also eternally many. This view is of course very basically different from the concept of many *antaryamins* (indwelling God) since there will be the identification of the souls which are in evolution and involution in different levels and planes with the inner spirit immortal in all on the one hand and on the other with the incarnating deity in the heart of the Devotees. This however explains the identity formula between the soul and God directly.

Sri Aurobindo's Vedanta, if we may so speak of his interpretation of the Upanishads metaphysically, realises the organic view as also the peculiar kind of *bhedabheda* (difference and non-difference) between the many and the one, not merely during the periods of creation and dissolution but eternally. There is a profound play of the two at all times, perhaps with the shift of poises when oneness is dominant and when manyness is dominant with perhaps an intermediating oneness-mannyness realising itself in all manifestation and liberation. This is shown by Prof Varadachari (2010).

The basic question is whether this approach to the Upanishads will yield the results of a coherent advaitic philosophy. The answer to this question will be that it is only actual *abhyasa* (practise) or *upasana* (sitting near in contemplation) of this profound psychological insight that will show that this view is right. Dialectical thought and mere interpretation based on finite logistics will fail to satisfy much less explain the profound seer-wisdom of the Vedic Rishis and the mystics of the South. One has to enter into the practice or *upasana*, and psychological opening into the Ultimate Reality by intuition will follow, as in the case of Sri Aurobindo. Thus, the intuition of the unity of the Creative principle with the reality of the Oneness-Mannyness is one of the most important discoveries of Sri Aurobindo. The further intuition that the above is the real amazing formula of the Vedic *Rishis* is of far-reaching importance. The formula that Sri Aurobindo has

given has wonderful efficacy in its capacity to explain almost all divergent facts of the different areas of human life and culture and growth (Varadachari 2010).

4.5 CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATIONS

Our Indian tradition has confronted the problem of the One and the Many through affirming neither the One (monism) nor the Many (pluralism) but suggesting the One-in-the-Many (*advaita*).

Advaita has a vertical dimension: the Many are integrated in the One Absolute as totally dependent so that compared to the One Real the many are not real in the same way, but only dependently real. Ramanuja, for instance, will speak of the world as the body of God. Just as the body cannot exist apart from the atman or spirit and would disintegrate into its various material components, the world is totally dependent on the Absolute Atman. The Hindu philosophical tradition has mostly insisted on this vertical dependence. Only some more recent Hindu leaders have realized that the various constituents of the body, while absolutely dependent on the spirit, are also relatively dependent on each other. Such mutual interdependence can be an experience of equality and community (Amaladoss 2003).

There is a traditional story about the 8th century philosopher Sankara. His affirmation of the reality of the One Absolute is such as almost to deny the reality of the many and consider them illusory. He is considered a monist by most commentators, though this is denied by others. As he was walking along a narrow ridge in a rice field he encounters a low caste servant coming along the same ridge in the other direction and demands the right of way. The low caste person shames him by challenging him to show the basis for a hierarchy between two equally dependent and illusory beings. We shall try to show in the following pages how the vision of advaita can offer us an alternate principle to promote community and peace in a pluralistic and divided world of today.

Advaita in Its Origins

Historians speak of an axial period in the religious history of the world around the 6th century before the common era. The Upanishads had their origin in India during that period. Starting with a pluralistic phenomenal world their searching reflection leads them to its roots in one reality. The process is both cosmic and personal (Amaladoss 2003).

In *Kena Upanishad*, the One and the many are affirmed: but one has to see them as related – the many dependent on the One, who is both immanent and transcendent. “He moves and he moves not. He is far, and he is near. He is within all, and he is outside all. Who sees all beings in his own Self, and his own Self in all beings, loses all fear. When a sage sees this great Unity and his Self has become all beings, what delusion and what sorrow can ever be near him?” Brahman, the inner reality of all things becomes the Self – the Atman.

This identification is explained in other Upanishads. In the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, the sage Varuna explains to his son Bhrigu Varuni the structure of his own being, leading him from the outer to the inner reality, from food to life, mind, reason and joy. “From joy all things have come, by joy they all live, and unto joy they all return.” In the *Katha Upanishad*, Yama, the god of death, tells Nachiketas: “Concealed in the heart of all beings is the Atman, the Spirit, the Self; smaller than the smallest atom, greater than the vast spaces. The man who surrenders his human will leaves

sorrows behind, and beholds the glory of the Atman by the grace of the Creator.” In the *Chandogya Upanishad*, Svetaketu, the seeker, is taught by his father. He is asked to put some salt into a glass of water. After the salt dissolves, the water is salty, but the salt cannot be recovered. The father then instructs the boy: “In the same way, O my son, you cannot see the Spirit. But in truth he is here. An invisible and subtle essence is the Spirit of the whole universe. That is Reality. That is Truth. Thou art That (*tatvamasi*). The *Mundaka Upanishad*, therefore, can sing: “He who knows all and sees all, and whose glory the universe shows, dwells as the Spirit of the divine city of Brahman in the region of the human heart... There the sun shines not, nor the moon, nor the stars; lightnings shine not there and much less earthly fire. From his light all these give light; and his radiance illumines all creation.” In the *Bhagavad Gita* a central text describes Arjuna’s vision of Krishna in his cosmic form. (Amaladoss 2003)

If the light of a thousand suns suddenly arose in the sky, that splendour might be compared to the radiance of the Supreme Spirit. And Arjuna saw in that radiance the whole universe in its variety, standing in a vast unity in the body of the God of gods (11:12-13). Krishna goes on to instruct Arjuna: “He who sees the Lord of all is ever the same in all that it, immortal in the field of mortality – he sees the truth. And when a man sees that the God in himself is the same God in all that is, he hurts not himself by hurting others. When a man sees that the infinity of various beings is abiding in the ONE, and is an evolution from the ONE, then he becomes one with Brahman” (13: 27-28, 30).

We have rapidly quoted a number of early texts. They speak a symbolic language and they need to be interpreted. They affirm a basic oneness of all being: Atman- Brahman. The One alone is really real, if one can say so. The many are dependent on the One and draw their reality and value from the One. Detaching ourselves from the many to attach ourselves to the One, we rediscover the many in the One. This advaitic vision, interpreted in various ways, has animated the Indian spiritual search to realize the Self. The world or Brahman is not cut off from the Atman or Self. Rather it acquires a new value. This value, however, has not always been appreciated in the course of history. While the vision was always there, the dominant *sadhana* or spiritual effort has been to renounce the many in the pursuit of the One. A distinction between the phenomenal (*vyavaharika*) and the transcendent (*paramartika*) worlds has also made it possible to accept an unequal and hierarchical social world characterized by caste-based feudal systems of social organization at the phenomenal level, while pursuing a holistic and integrative experience in the transcendent level. Even the Tantric schools which used the senses and the body more positively did not translate it in terms of social concern. The (Mahayana) Buddhists, denying the transcendental level, affirmed that *Nirvana* is *Samsara* and practised universal compassion. But such a social consciousness occurs in Hinduism only in the last (20th) century, influenced by great personalities like Vivekananda, Ramakrishna, Aurobindo, Tagore, Gandhi, etc.

The Mediaeval Period

Nammalvar, a Vaishnavite poet of the early 10th century of the common era (c. 880-930) sings: We here and that man, this man and that other in-between, and that woman, this, those things, those woman, and that other, whoever, those people, and these, and these others in-between, this thing, that thing, and this other in-between , whichever, all things dying, these things others in-between, good things, bad things, things that were, that will be, being all of them he stands there. Ramanuja (1017-1137), the philosopher-theologian, who systemizes the Vaishnava doctrine will picture this as “the world as the body of God” (Amaladoss 2003).

Social Interpretation of *Tat Tvam Asi* in Modern Times

In the modern times we can focus on three national leaders with social and political awareness who are inspired by the Aurobindo and the advaitic vision in relating, not only to God, but also to the others and nature. Sri Narayana Guru struggled for the equality of all humans in a positive way, by educating and developing the 'so-called' low caste people. He affirmed the advaitic vision as guaranteeing the equality of all beings, human and other.

“One of caste, one of religion and one in God is man;

Of one womb, of one form; difference therein none.

Within a species, is it not, that offspring truly breed?”

The society of man thus viewed, to a single caste belongs. (*Jati Mimamsa*)

“All are of one Self-fraternity.

Such being the dictum to avow,

In such a light how can we take life,

And devoid of least pity go on to eat?

The non-killing vow is great indeed,

And, greater still, non-eating to observe;

All in all. Should we not say, Oh men of righteousness,

Even to this amounts the essence of all religions?” (*Jiva Karunya Panchakam*)

“A compassionate man without any vested interest works both day and night for the welfare of others. On the other hand, a selfish man, desirous of his own good, toils day and night and comes again and again to his frustration. What is known as that person, or this person, when carefully considered, is the one undifferentiated form of the primeval Self. Whatever one does for the happiness of one's own self should also include the happiness of others. What is good for one and might cause disaster to another is opposed to the unity of the Self. Those who grievously hurt others will bring upon themselves the pain of consequential hell-fire.” (*Atmopdesa Sathakam*, 23-25). The advaitic vision leads Sri Narayana Guru to affirm, not only human equality, but also non-killing and non-eating of animals.

Rabindranath Tagore sees God in the toiling other.

“Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads!

Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark

corner of a temple with doors all shut?

Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground
and where the path-maker is breaking stones.

He is with them in sun and in shower,
and his garment is covered with dust

Put off thy holy mantle and even like him
come down on the dusty soil.

Come Out of thy meditations and leave aside
thy flowers and incense!

What harm is there if thy clothes become
tattered and stained?

Meet him and stand by him in toil and
in sweat of thy brow.”

Another poem “I know thee as my God and stand apart” is also insightful.

I know thee as my God and stand apart --
I do not know thee as my own and come closer.
I know thee as my father and bow before thy feet --
I do not grasp thy hand as my friend's.

I stand not where thou comest down and ownest thyself as mine,
there to clasp thee to my heart and take thee as my comrade.

Thou art the Brother amongst my brothers, but I heed them not,
I divide not my earnings with them, thus sharing my all with thee.

In pleasure and in pain I stand not by the side of men,
and thus stand by thee. I shrink to give up my life,
and thus do not plunge into the great waters of life.

Mahatma Gandhi states, “I am endeavouring to see God through service of humanity, for I know that God is neither in heaven, nor down below, but in every one. “

“To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist... He transcends speech and reason... He is a personal God to those who need His personal presence. He is embodied to those who need His touch. He is the purest essence. He simply is to those who have faith. He is all things to all men. He is in us and yet above and beyond us...”

“Non-violence is a power which can be wielded equally by all children, young men and women or grown up people, provided they have a living faith in the God of Love and have therefore equal love for all mankind. When non-violence is accepted as the law of life it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts.”

“*Ahimsa* is a comprehensive principle. We are helpless mortals caught in the conflagration of *himsa*. The saying that life lives on life has a deep meaning in it. Man cannot for a moment live without consciously or unconsciously committing outward *himsa*. The very fact of his living-eating, drinking and moving about necessarily involves some *himsa*, destruction of life, be it ever so minute. A votary of *ahimsa* therefore remains true to his faith if the spring of all his actions is compassion, if he shuns to the best of his ability the destruction of the tiniest creature, tries to save it, and thus incessantly strives to be free from the deadly coil of *himsa*. He will be constantly growing in self-restraint and compassion, but he can never become entirely free from outward *himsa*.”

Gandhi’s *ahimsa* therefore applies to the whole of creation, not only to the humans. He also realizes how difficult it is in practice.

4.6 THE ADVAITA: AN ALTERNATE PERSPECTIVE

Going through these texts discussed above we can see a consistent vision of an Absolute that is transcendent, but also immanent. As immanent it can serve as the foundation for cosmic community. Creationism, wrongly understood, has led to the secularization of the cosmos. The world is perceived as material and mechanical. It becomes an object which humans can dominate and exploit. Among the humans themselves individualism becomes the norm. Combined with unbridled consumerism, it leads to competition and conflict over scarce resources (Amaladoss 2003).

The root of such conflicts is the absence of relationship and community. The ideology of liberal capitalism idolizes the individual, who instrumentalizes the others and creation for his/her own benefit. It is in this context that the advaitic vision provides an alternative way of looking at others and the cosmos. While the advaita of Ramanuja, seeing the world as the body of God, underlines the mutual interdependence of all things and their dependent relationship on God, the advaita of Sankara is considered by many (foreign and Indian scholars) as monistic reducing the world to *maya* or illusion. But other scholars have pointed out that illusion itself is phenomenal and only points to the relative reality of the world when compared to the absolute reality of the Absolute. The Nirguna Brahman (without qualities) manifests itself in Saguna Brahman (with qualities). These are two dimensions of the same Brahman, the latter rooted in the former. The many devotional hymns of Sankara show how he treasured his relationship with the Absolute, even if it be one-sided.

Professor Amaladoss (2003) suggests that such an advaitic vision is an answer to the problem of the One and the Many. The monists affirm the One and deny the many as illusory. The pluralists, like the Jains in India, affirm the Many and deny the One. The advaita suggests a middle way seeing the One in the Many. The many are different manifestations of the One. The many are limited by the mediating elements. They are also different from each other. But all of them are dependent on the One in being. It is like an artist expressing himself/herself in a plurality of products, all seeking to express the same basic idea. It is the artist who gives meaning to these different products. But these products have an existence of their own, though they are dependent on the creative artist. This is only an analogy since the many do not stand on their own but are dependent on the One for their very being. This oneness in being generates a sense of community which is more basic than the diversity in manifestation. An awareness of this community can obviate competition and conflict at the level of the many.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is the Advaitic understanding of reality.

2) Give a detailed account of the relationship between Advaita philosophy and Aurobindo..

4.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have seen the significance of the profound advaitic insight “tat-tvam asi” and its significance for contemporary society. Aurobindo’s interpretation has the potentiality to offer resources necessary for the promotion of peace and harmony among the humans and other creations through their relationship to the Absolute which he has successfully achieved.

4.8 KEY WORDS

Darsana: Literally 'seeing' or 'view', the Sanskrit word which most closely approximates the Western term 'philosophy.' Also one of six orthodox philosophical systems or viewpoints on the nature of reality and the release from bondage to karma.'

Upasana: *Upasana* in Sanskrit literally means "Sitting near" but normally the term is used in Hinduism to denote a prescribed method for approaching a Deity or God or getting close to a deity/deities.

Tat-tvam asi: *Tat Tvam Asi*, a Sanskrit sentence, translating variously to "Thou art that," "That thou art," "You are that," or "That you are," is one of the Mahavakyas (Grand Pronouncements) in Vedantic Hinduism. It originally occurs in the Chandogya Upanishad. The meaning of this saying is that the Self - in its original, pure, primordial state - is wholly or partially identifiable or identical with the Ultimate Reality that is the ground and origin of all phenomena. The knowledge that this is so characterizes the experience of liberation or salvation that accompanies the *Unio Mystica*.

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School of Interdisciplinary and

Trans-disciplinary Studies



Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo

Block 4



SIGNIFICANCE OF AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY

UNIT 1



The Divine Life and Integral (*Purna*) Yoga

UNIT 2

Transpersonal Psychology: Evolution of Consciousness



UNIT 3

Conception of Educational Philosophy

UNIT 4



Towards Human Unity

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Aurobindo was a yogi and a mystic. He has said that the materials of his spiritual philosophy were provided by experiences obtained by practice of yoga. Yoga has the same relation with the inner being and nature of man as science has with the forces of external nature like steam or electricity. Yoga, Aurobindo says, is scientific in that its methods are observation of and experiment with the states, forces, functions of our subjective, that is, inner being and nature. Yoga is both science and art. It is a science because it knows by experience what man is inwardly and it is an art because it can apply that knowledge to change man's inner being and nature. Yoga is known as a means of attaining spiritual liberation, mukti or moksha. While that is true, it must be clearly understood that by the practice of yoga, it is possible to know the essential nature of our being, our true self. And yoga discovers the nature of our real self as consciousness. For Aurobindo, the whole of reality, including physical, psychological and spiritual, is integral. In the ever evolving process of reality, the whole reality is made of different levels of being. But without losing their individual identities, they are all part of one journey to the Supermind. Such a philosophy is relevant to our times. It re-embraces new forms of non-pathological, integral religion and integral personal spirituality that is congenial to science, philosophy and art and, more universal in its perspectives. It creates more effective and life-affirming solutions for every challenge or dream we have, whether your interests are culture, politics, religion, science or the environment.

Unit 1 brings out the significance of highly conceptualized and idealised vision of Aurobindo, namely the Divine Life in the human existence and Integral Yoga. The Integral Yoga is a unique method of Yoga invented, practiced and taught by Sri Aurobindo in the light of his yogic experiences.

Unit 2 explores some basic insights of transpersonal psychology to enable us to understand consciousness and its evolution and to be open to the possibility of evolution of their own consciousness. For Aurobindo, indeed yoga is practical psychology, transpersonal psychology, since it goes beyond individual and focuses on the collective, integral growth of consciousness of the whole reality.

Unit 3 introduces some key concepts of education as developed by Aurobindo to see the relationship between education and integral perfection (spirituality). His new integral world-view, which can be realised by proper education could, with some variations, be adapted to all the nations of the world, fostering the growth of the integral consciousness in every pupil and bringing back to legitimate authority of the Spirit over a matter..

Unit 4 makes us understand our search for human unity and Aurobindo's vision of our common spiritual destiny. We trace the human journey to unity, as developed by Aurobindo and seek its contemporary relevance and the real need for such a collective destiny. Even in our post-modern

world, where many people speak of not one human story, the spiritual quest of Aurobindo is relevant. Such a quest gives meaning to our collective evolutionary journey.



UNIT 1 THE DIVINE LIFE AND INTEGRAL (*PURNA*) YOGA

Contents

- 1.0 Objectives
 - 1.1 Introduction: Objects of Integral Yoga
 - 1.2 The Foundations of Integral Yoga
 - 1.3 The Triple Transformation
 - 1.4 Let Us Sum Up
 - 1.5 Further Readings and References

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to provide an insight into The Divine Life and Integral Yoga as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo. Systems of yoga are as old as human civilization itself. Several systems of Yoga have evolved over the ages and each one is a systematic technique to take human life to its highest state of perfection. The Integral Yoga is a unique method of Yoga invented, practiced and taught by Sri Aurobindo in the light of his yogic experiences. This unit shall contain the following units:

- Objects of Integral Yoga
- The Foundations of Integral Yoga
- The Triple Transformation

1.1 OBJECTS OF INTEGRAL YOGA

Yoga is a union with the Divine. It is a joining of the limited human consciousness with the infinite divine consciousness. The word 'yoga' for Aurobindo, has a wider, significance. To him, yoga is a complete union in the soul as well as nature by a moulding of the entire being into an image of the Divine. Not a partial union in the inner existence alone but an integral union in all elements of our being is the aim of Yoga. This calls for a change of the inner and outer life so that it may become a channel of joy of the Divine and a fit instrument of his works. All the elements of our personality – soul, mind, sense, heart, will, life and body - must fulfill themselves in a supreme perfection by their complete turning and self-giving to the Divine. The object is a complete spiritual change so that the being by degrees may become ready to express the Divine in its every thought, feeling and action.

Our life is a series of struggles to outgrow its ordinary limitations for rising to a higher status of existence. The true progress of life consists in an evolution from darkness to light, from sorrow to bliss, from weakness by limitation to the perfection of the infinite. The whole of life according to Aurobindo, is yoga, a series of mental, vital, or psychic movements towards full development of all our latent divine possibilities. The evolution going on in universal nature is also yoga, because it is an unconscious effort for revealing the spirit hidden within herself. Both man and Nature are evolving towards the same ultimate goal of perfect expression of the Divine in every sphere or plane of existence. But human beings need not follow the tardy method of cosmic evolution; they can hasten the slow natural process of his individual evolution by applying to it his own intelligence, will and endeavor.

Nature is leading man in a double evolution, one relating to his outward life and nature and the other to his occult inner being and nature. According to Aurobindo, the latter is now at a preliminary stage, for only a few have evolved beyond the mental into the spiritual level. The human mind has been for a long time past increasing in range, height and subtlety. Man's vital and physical parts are pressing on for expression of their yet unknown powers and capacities. This shows that Nature intends a full growth of the entire being in all its parts, which must also be the aim of Yoga. The Integral or Purna Yoga of Sri Aurobindo is therefore identical with Nature's Yoga, because the ultimate aim of both is a divine perfection of the human being. The object is not merely an outward or mundane perfection of the normal human mind, life and body. The aim is the full development of all members of the being, both inner and outer, for the greatest fulfillment of embodied existence. The demands of the spirit must not be ignored nor of material nature, for a balanced growth of our personality. A perfect yoga requires a perfect balance, a harmonious growth of all the parts.

Human fulfillment lies in uniting with God who is the only true being, and participating in His perfect purity, peace, light, force and bliss. One should seek for perfection because perfection is the nature of the Divine and the more one grows into His perfection, the more one feels Him manifest in the natural being. By turning our whole being to the Divine, we shall unite with the being, consciousness and delight of the Divine through every part of our human nature which will be moulded into an image of the divine Nature. The outcome will be that we shall always feel the Divine presence within us and become a perfect channel for the expression of the Divine in the world. The whole meaning of Integral Yoga is in fact a growth into the happy perfection of likeness to the divine, which means a rendering of the human into divine nature.

The primary need of man is a harmony among the discordant elements of his personality. A ceaseless fight is going on among them, each pressing for its own delight and fulfillment in disregard of the total welfare of the whole being. For instance, the vital part runs after many low and self-seeking pleasures which the mind does not accept as the true enjoyment of life. Human beings thirst for many objects and satisfactions which conflict with one another. He is constantly wavering between the right and the wrong; his nature contradicts what his soul regards as the true object of life. His knowledge, will and emotion show great disparity, which must be replaced by a divine harmony. The jarring elements must be harmonized by union with our inner Self who is the divine individual within us. That alone can bring peace, joy and harmony into being. Life in ignorance brings sorrow, suffering, limitation, weakness and mortality. An inner divine urge compels man to seek for light, power, peace, perfection and delight of existence. The soul within has an inherent longing for God; it needs self-giving, love, devotion, and union, which can only be satisfied by the Divine. The root cause of all evils of life is the separation of the finite being from its infinite source which possesses all bliss and power and knowledge. The remedy lies in the re-union of the individual with the Divine, the origin of his being, master of his life and beloved of his heart. Yoga is the path that leads to such union and spiritual fulfillment of life. The Divine confers on us the rich treasures of his spirit as recompense for all our toil and trouble. He is the giver of spiritual gifts that are infinitely more valuable than any material riches. Yoga gives us the delight of the Divine and the divine consciousness, which means the joy of peace and silence, of inner light, of growing inner knowledge and power, of divine love and bliss and numerous other spiritual experiences. The central object of the Yoga is union with the Divine. All other aims are only part of this one supreme fulfillment. Not personal power, liberation or perfection but integral union with the divine is the object of the yoga. Yoga

should be done for the fulfillment of God's will in us, His manifestation in the world and not for a personal achievement. We seek God not to attain an egoistic aim but to serve him, to manifest him in our lives and carry out his will in creation.

To attain the above objective, three yogic movements are necessary. First is to live in the tranquil inner self instead of the restless outer nature for an opening to the divine. One must by inner concentration awaken the inmost soul or the psychic being so that it may use its power to purify and change the ignorant nature and make it ready for divine union and spiritual transformation. Secondly to develop the cosmic consciousness by which the yogi becomes conscious of his union with the universal self and Nature. Thirdly to come in contact with the divine beyond the cosmos through the consciousness of the supermind, which is the ideal or divine mind in full possession of the truth. The supermind upon descending into nature will begin a miraculous operation for a divine change of the human being. By opening to the action of the supermind, the human consciousness will be changed into the divine and the ignorant nature into the supreme Supernature. The Supermind will change our mind, life and body for their complete conversion to divinity. This implies that the entire being will turn towards the divine, live and act for him and become full of the divine consciousness. All the elements will be recast into moulds of the divine consciousness growing ever more in peace, light, force love and bliss. The divinization of the whole human personality is the ultimate aim of this yoga which is therefore called purna or integral yoga.

Three processes become necessary for effecting an integral transformation. First, psychic change by direct action of the inmost psychic being; secondly spiritual change by descent of a higher consciousness from the upper planes; thirdly, supramental change by the transforming action of the Supermind which is the creative power of the Divine. The influx of light, peace, power, knowledge and delight from higher principles will convert the lower human consciousness into the higher consciousness and its higher working. The outer being by virtue of this essential change will learn to know, feel and act in terms of the higher principles. But the highest principle of Supermind alone has the power bringing about a radical transformation. Hence for the final perfection, which consists in the divinization of man, descent of the supermind into human consciousness is indispensable.

The descent of higher consciousness from upper spiritual planes is a remarkable element in Integral yoga. An internal realization may lead to liberation or some such change of the inner being but cannot transform the outer nature. An ascent of the lower consciousness to the higher planes followed by the descent of forces from them is the means of transformation. For complete transformation the whole higher consciousness with its Peace, Power, Light, Knowledge and Ananda must descend into the entire being – mind, life and body – for its transformation. Here the ultimate object is change of the life and existence, for which a full descent of the Divine consciousness into the whole nature is indispensable. Man must receive into himself the power and presence of spirit and by the direct action of that power become a fit instrument of its self-expression. His whole being must be tuned with the Divine and turned into a channel for the outpouring of divine love and power in the world. The legitimate activities of Nature are not to be suppressed or stopped; all the members must be allowed to function and express their powers in full, but in growing harmony with the divine truth. Vedanta seeks for an inner realization and identity of our spiritual self with the divine being with the object of release from rebirth. The Tantra aims higher at the mastery over nature and its spiritual change; it also seeks for release

but by identification with the divine shakti. The Integral Yoga aims at union in both aspects so that the human being may become divine and manifest fully the eternal truth in all its movements. The Integral Yoga by adoption of the dynamic ideal of self-perfection, becomes a yoga of expression. We must know and possess the highest truth and also express it in our life and action. We should love and serve our fellowmen as visible forms of the divine. Our life should be divine example to others, an expression of the supreme law of love and harmony. The object here is not merely the joy of inner communion with God but the delight of expression of the realized Self in the material world.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

- 1) What are the three important yogic movements that are necessary for the fulfillment of God's will in us?

- 2) What is the importance of the descent of higher consciousness in Integral yoga?

- 3) 'The primary need of man is a harmony among the discordant elements of his personality'. Explain.

1.2 THE FOUNDATIONS OF INTEGRAL YOGA

Qualities such as faith, quietude, sincerity etc are regarded as basic requisites for all spiritual progress. They are psychological states that dispose and prepare the mind for getting spiritual experience. Integral yoga prescribes certain effortful practices for the attainment of these qualities or movements that lead to perfection in Yoga. All of them are helpful for getting rid of mental or vital oppositions and disturbances that prevent our opening to the true consciousness. Anything that disturbs us for example fear, anger, greed, lust, hatred, jealousy is a wrong movement which can be countered by the cultivation of certain spiritual virtues that prevent its occurrence. The following are the essential qualities along with the disciplines required for their attainment in order that an aspirant may properly qualify himself for a systematic practice of Integral Yoga:

- a) Faith – Faith is certitude in the soul, belief in some truth that does not depend on reason or experience. It is a call or influence from the Supreme Spirit accepted by the inner soul. When the whole being assents to the truth seen by it or offered to its acceptance, the faith becomes perfect. A faith supported by the mind, heart and life-mind is an irresistible force for realization. Belief in divine grace or divine power will bring all rich and boundless perfections of the Spirit. Also it will ensure protection against all dangers, difficulties and apparent failures.

- b) Quiet and Calm – Calmness and quietude are essential for sadhana. Yoga is impossible if the mind is restless. A mind that is tossed about by restless and unruly thoughts, by vital desires and passions and by impulses of the body, is unfit for yogic practices. But quietness does not mean absence of all thought or mental or vital movement. By a quiet mind Aurobindo means a mind free from disturbance and trouble, steady, light and glad so as to open to the force that will change the nature. We have quietude (*achanchalata*) when the mind and vital are free from constant restlessness, over-activity or trouble that keeps them in a state of ceaseless agitation. The next step is calm, *sthirata*, which is a positive condition. It is a state that remains unaffected by any movement on the surface. This denotes a strong and firm quietude that can exist in spite of superficial disturbances. The mind is said to be calm when thoughts, feelings etc may pass through it, but it is not disturbed. It feels that the thoughts are not its own, it observes them but is not perturbed by anything. A more positive condition is *shanti* which carries with it a sense of settled and harmonious rest, a feeling of liberation and full satisfaction. This is a calm deepened into a secure quietude where no disturbance can come. Quietude, calm and peace in the mind and therefore in the vital, are the indispensable first conditions for success in yoga.
- c) Wideness – Consciousness must become not only calm but also wide. It should be felt as spreading out and enveloping everything so that one may dwell in it. Wideness is a sign of the extension of consciousness out of ordinary limits. The ordinary consciousness in each person is narrow and shut up in the mind, life and body. It sees itself as the centre of everything and does not know the truth of anything. But when by yoga the true consciousness which is that of the Self or Atman comes, the barrier begins to break down. The mind, the vital and even the physical consciousness grows wider and wider until one feels the whole universe within oneself. The wideness of consciousness which results from the realization of the Self within or above the being is of utmost importance in the yoga. This wideness will help the calm and peace to be stable even amidst activity. The limiting ego sense which is the root cause of all evil, will disappear on entering into cosmic vastness. A wideness of being is the secure foundation of the permanence of all higher spiritual experiences.
- d) Silence – Silence, *nischala niravata*, is a higher state of consciousness than calm or quietude and belongs to a higher state of yoga. Silence is a state in which either there is no movement of the mind or vital or else a great stillness which no surface movement can pierce or alter. The mind is altogether free from thoughts, desires or impulses or these are felt as surface movements that cannot touch the inner peace or calm. Complete silence can be gained by banishing thought altogether from the inner mind, keeping it vacant and voiceless. The ordinary mind is never silent; the silent mind is a result of yoga. The state of silence comes by the practice of a silent concentration in the inner being or Purusa. This yogic discipline leads to a division in the being; the inner self or Purusa is silent and watches, while the outer nature is the field of all active movements. The former is then felt as something separate from and unaffected by the activities of outer nature. The agitations of the mind and vital are regarded as surface movements which do not disturb the inner calm and silence. Afterwards one has to proceed to silence or quiet the prakrti or external nature. This can be done by the help of the will in the Purusa, one has the native power of rule or mastery over nature. This Rajayogic discipline of separation of the Purusa from prakrti is a most helpful practice for establishing peace and silence in the entire consciousness. But silence like peace is more easily established by a descent from

a higher consciousness in which silence is an inherent state unaffected by any movement. The descent may come as a result of a calm and deep aspiration or an act of grace of the divine. One has to open the mind upward lifting the consciousness out of the body and call calmly and steadily for peace and silence of the higher self above. These things will then descend first into the mind and then into the lower planes, even into the body. At the time of meditation the sadhak must not fight with the mind or make mental efforts to pull down the peace or silence. He should remain quiet, keeping only a silent will and aspiration for them.

- e) Sincerity – Sincerity is also an indispensable condition of success in sadhana. To be sincere means to have the sole aspiration of finding the divine giving up all personal demand or desire. Usually some vital demand is mixed with our sadhana for the divine. Many do yoga for personal reasons, some because they are disgusted with life, others because they are unhappy, some others because they wish to have more knowledge, others again because they wish to have more knowledge, others because they want to be spiritually great, yet others because they want to learn things so that they may teach them to others. Aurobindo says that to be entirely sincere means to desire the truth only, to surrender yourselves more and more to the Divine mother, to reject all personal demand and desire other than this one aspiration, to offer every action in life to the divine and do it as the work given without bringing in the ego. Every movement of the being – every thought, every feeling, every impulse – should flow towards the divine as the river towards the sea, that means a surrender of the whole being in all its parts.
- f) Surrender – Surrender is the chief secret and the central process of yoga. The Integral yoga seeks to realize the divine truth not beyond but here in earthly life. For this purpose it is necessary to transform the mind, life and body. But transformation is not possible unless one opens and surrenders to the divine being and to the divine mother, the supreme shakti. For the shakti, the divine consciousness force and world-mother is the mediatrix between the eternal one and the individual soul in the manifestation. Surrender is giving oneself to the divine – to give everything one is or has to the divine and regard nothing as one's own, to obey only the divine will and no other, to live for the divine and not for the ego. A complete trust and confidence in the divine power is indeed the main condition or essence of surrender. The inward acceptance or consent to receive is what we mean by the inner surrender of the mind, the vital and the physical being. But there is also the outer surrender. This means the giving up or rejection of all that conflicts with the spirit or need of the sadhana. It also implies obedience to the guidance of the Guru or of the divine whether through the psychic or at a later stage by direct intervention. Complete surrender is done in order that the whole being may become a fit temple for the divine presence and a faultless instrument for divine work. The chief obstacles to surrender are desire and ego.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is the role of faith in process of Integral Yoga?

2) Explain the widening of consciousness in the process of Integral Yoga.

3) What is the importance of silence in Integral Yoga?

1.3 THE TRIPLE TRANSFORMATION

The most important feature of Integral Yoga is the triple transformation. This refers to the process through which reality is transformed into the divine. This is described in *The Life Divine* part 2, ch.25, and *Letters on Yoga* part 4, section 1. The Triple Transformation refers to the two-fold movement of spiritual transformation - the inward psychicization by which the sadhak gets in contact with the inner divine principle or Psychic Being, and the spiritual transformation or spiritualization. For Sri Aurobindo, both these stages are equally necessary and important, as both serve as necessary prerequisites for the third and by far the most difficult element of change in the triple transformation, the Supramentalisation of the entire being.

Psychicisation

Psychicisation is one of the most essential stages of the integral yoga. As described in *The Life Divine* (book II - chapter 25) it refers to a spiritual movement inward, so that one realizes the psychic being - the psychic personality or Divine Soul - in the core of one's being, and enable this to transform the outer being, as well as serve as a spiritual Guide in the yoga. It is thanks to this Psychic transformation that the sadhak can avoid the pitfalls of the spiritual path, such as the intermediate zone. The three central spiritual methods here are Consecration, Moving to the Depths (Concentration), and Surrender. Consecration is to open to the Force before engaging in an activity. Moving to the Depths (or Concentration) is a movement away from the surface existence to a deeper existence within. Surrender means offering all one's work, one's life to the Divine Force and Intent. In connecting with the evolving divine soul within, the sadhak moves away from ego, ignorance, finiteness, and the limitations of the outer being. Psychicisation can serve as a prequel to spiritualisation, although they do not have to follow any sort of order. However, both the psychic and the spiritual transformation are equally necessary for the final stage of Supramental transformation.

Spiritualization

As a result of the Psychic transformation, light, peace, power is drawn into and descends into the body, transforming all of its parts — physical, vital, and mental. This is the Spiritual transformation, or Spiritualization, which refers to the bringing down of the larger spiritual consciousness or spiritual transformation. The spiritual transformation in itself however is not

sufficient to avoid pitfalls of the spiritual path, or bring about Supramentalisation. For that, the psychic transformation is needed as well.

Supramentalisation

Supramentalisation is the ultimate stage in the integral yoga. It refers to the bringing down of the Supramental consciousness, and the resulting transformation of the entire being. The supramental transformation is the final stage in the integral yoga, enabling the birth of a new individual fully formed by the supramental power. Such individuals would be the forerunners of a new truth-consciousness based supra-humanity. All aspects of division and ignorance of consciousness at the vital and mental levels would be overcome, replaced with a unity of consciousness at every plane, and even the physical body transformed and divinized. A new supramental species would then emerge, living a supramental, gnostic, divine life on earth.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Explain the 'triple transformation' in the context of Integral Yoga.

2) What is psychicization? What is its role in Integral Yoga?

3) Explain spiritualization and supramentalization.

1.4 LET US SUM UP

According to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo integral yoga is directed towards a union of one's self with the divine or the transmutation of all the chaotic elements into higher level of divine consciousness and harmony. It is concerned with attaining union or oneness with the universe and the highest possible level of divinity. While most disciplines of yoga, with a few exceptions, focus greatly on the development of a single aspect of the self, having their aims like achieving a state of liberation and transcendence, or the achievement of optimum physical fitness, integral yoga seeks a complete transformation of the entire being and is therefore regarded as being a wholesome discipline by practitioners. Where most disciplines concentrate on one aspect whilst neglecting others, integral yoga takes a broad and wholesome approach, leaving no area neglected. According to Sri Aurobindo all the areas of one's being need to be transformed. The

main aim of integral yoga is to achieve union and harmony with the karma, the jnana, and the bhakti, which would basically imply a combination of the Physical self, Vital self, Mental, Psychic, and Spiritual arenas. Integral yoga is a lot more complex than most other forms of yoga. It involves every fiber of your being and pervades every area of your life, which is why most people do not have the time or patience for a discipline like integral yoga. Integral yoga treats the discipline as a way of life and one that is learnt through ongoing experience.

1.5 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 2 TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY: EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

- To explore some basic insights of transpersonal psychology.
- To enable us to understand consciousness and its evolution.
- To open the students to the possibility of evolution of their own consciousness.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we attempt to understand the transpersonal psychology of Aurobindo and how he understands the evolution of consciousness in his integral vision. This unit is based primarily on the excellent article of Arabinda Basu, an acknowledged Aurobindo scholar (Basu 2001).

2.2 SRI AUROBINDO'S PSYCHOLOGY

Sri Aurobindo was a yogi and a mystic. He has said that the materials of his spiritual philosophy were provided by experiences obtained by practice of yoga. This is equally, if not more, true of the system of his metaphysical psychology. Some people who have no or little idea of yoga may wonder what yoga has to do with psychology or at the most they may think that breath control, sitting or lying in particular ways or trying to make the mind quiet by meditation or other means is yoga. In fact, these are specialised methods of yoga but not its essence (Basu 2001).

According to Sri Aurobindo, yoga has the same relation with the inner being and nature of man as science has with the forces of external nature like steam or electricity. Yoga, he says, is scientific in that its methods are observation of and experiment with the states, forces, functions of our subjective, that is, inner being and nature. Yoga is both science and art. It is a science because it knows by experience what man is inwardly and it is an art because it can apply that knowledge to change man's inner being and nature. Yoga is known as a means of attaining spiritual liberation, *mukti* or *moksha*. While that is true, it must be clearly understood that by the practice of yoga, it is possible to know the essential nature of our being, our true self. And yoga discovers the nature of our real self as consciousness. And this is where yoga and psychology meet. Indeed yoga is according to Sri Aurobindo practical psychology (Basu 2001). It is also transpersonal psychology, since it goes beyond individual and focuses on the collective, integral growth of consciousness of the whole reality.

2.3 AUROBINDO AND CONSCIOUSNESS

In expounding his experience-concept of Consciousness, Sri Aurobindo in a letter first states what it is not. On this fundamental point of his psychological system, we would like to quote his own words because they are precise and yet carry a wealth of suggestions and their nuances are difficult to convey in other terms. "Consciousness", he writes, "is not to my experience, a phenomenon dependent on the reactions of personality to the forces of Nature and amounting to no more than a seeing or interpretation of these reactions. If that were so, then when the personality becomes silent and immobile and gives no reactions, as there would be no seeing or interpretative action, there would therefore be no consciousness. That contradicts some of the fundamental experiences of yoga, e.g. a silent and immobile consciousness infinitely spread out, not dependent on the personality but impersonal and universal, not seeing and interpreting contacts but motionlessly self-aware, not dependent on the reactions, but persistent in itself even when no reactions take place. The subjective personality itself is only a formation of consciousness which is a power inherent, not in the activity of the temporary manifested personality, but in the being, the Self or Purusha" (Ghose, 1969).

Several things stand out in this passage which need to be understood clearly. We can only see a few salient points which it is essential to grasp for the understanding of Sri Aurobindo's metaphysical psychology as is done by Arabinda Basu (2001). First, consciousness is not a phenomenon; it does not depend on the reactions of the personality to stimulus from outside or on mental activities. When the mind falls silent and ceases to function, consciousness abides. It is true that ordinary people cannot silence their minds. On the other hand, its experience is not very uncommon. Many people have the experience of a still mind though they do not fall into the state of unconsciousness.

Secondly, consciousness is immobile, i.e., not in its essence activity. In the same letter from which a paragraph has been quoted above, Sri Aurobindo says that consciousness is not only a power of knowledge of self and things, it is or has a dynamic and creative energy. It is free to act or not to act and free in action and inaction.

Thirdly, it is universal, spread throughout the cosmos. It is difficult for ordinary people to conceive or imagine the nature of consciousness because it is mistakenly identified with the individual, which is only a formation of consciousness.

Fourthly, consciousness is the Self, *Atman*, the *Purusha*, the cosmic Soul. Those who are familiar with Vedantic thought may wonder that the Self and the Soul are being mentioned in terms of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo has even said that God is a manifestation of Consciousness. Elaboration of this aspect of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual philosophy will take us into deep metaphysics. It is enough for us to say that consciousness, though indeterminable, has the power of self-determination, and its primary self-determinations are the Self, the Soul, God or the Lord. Thus consciousness is the ultimate Reality, it is inherent in existence, it is Existence or sat.

Finally, consciousness is self-luminous, *sva-prakasa*. It is not revealed by anything other than itself; indeed it is in the Light of Consciousness that everything is revealed and known. Consciousness is Conscious-Force. The Conscious Force hierarchically arranges itself on many levels, on each of which it appears progressively less conscious and less forceful. According to Sri Aurobindo, there are seven principal levels of which Matter is the lowest. He speaks of the Inconscient from which Matter is formed by the completely involved and hidden and to all intents and purposes lost conscious force in it. In Matter consciousness is physical which is the base of the vital and mental consciousness. Mind itself has more than one layer of which the subconscious is now recognised in psychology. The subliminal mind is another level of mind (of consciousness also). The difference between the subconscious and the subliminal is this that the former while conscious in essence is not actually so and hovers between the unconscious and the physical consciousness, the latter is conscious though not fully so. Though the subliminal has a good deal of knowledge in it, it is capable of errors and mistakes (Basu 2001).

2.4 SUBCONSCIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS

Sri Aurobindo cites a remarkable example of the “subconscious consciousness”. He used this paradoxical phrase for the subconscious to show the formation of consciousness though below our surface mind. An uneducated maidservant was employed in the household of a professor of Hebrew, of which she knew not a word. But as she went on doing her daily chores, she used to hear willy-nilly the ringing tones of the professor's recitation of Hebrew poetry. Slowly the servant could repeat Hebrew verses verbatim. How could she do it? Her conscious mind did not understand or remember a word of what she used to hear, besides, she was using her conscious mind to do her job as best as she could.

The purpose of dealing with the subconscious and the subliminal is to show that they are levels of consciousness (Basu 2001). The fact that consciousness is not apparently present in the former and though the latter is conscious in itself, our mind does not know it is so, owing to one of the fundamental principles of the metaphysical psychology, viz., consciousness has the power to self-limit itself and appear as less conscious than it is in its essence.

2.5 METAPHYSICS AND PSYCHOLOGY

What is metaphysics and what is psychology? “Metaphysics”, writes Sri Aurobindo, “deals with the ultimate cause of things and all that is behind the world of phenomena. As regards mind and consciousness, it asks what they are and how they come into existence, what is their relation to Matter, Life etc. Psychology deals with mind and consciousness and tries to find out not so much their ultimate nature and relations as their actual workings and the rule and law of these workings”(Ghose 1969). Further he says, “Psychology is the science of consciousness and its status and operations in Nature and, if that can be glimpsed or experienced, its status and operations beyond what we know as Nature.”(Ghose 1994) This latter idea of psychology will push it to the borders of metaphysical or Vedantic or Yogic psychology.

Sri Aurobindo quite clearly reserves the term psychology to the levels of mind and vital in contrast with what pertains to the spiritual soul for which he employs the term psychic. In *The Human Cycle* he has written that there is the beginning of a perception that there are behind the economic motives and causes of social and historical development profound psychological, even perhaps soul factors, where also he distinguishes the psychological from the psychic (Ghose 1962).

But it will be a mistake to think that because Sri Aurobindo has such a metaphysical experience-concept of consciousness, he has neglected to deal with the phenomenal aspect of consciousness. He has dealt with human psychology in great detail. Not only that, the material theory of consciousness has engaged his close attention and he has given an objective, dispassionate critique of it. He has described that theory accurately, accepted what is true in it, but also shown where it falls short of accounting for the appearance of intelligence from non-intelligent matter. Needless to say, he rejects the identification of mind and brain which is the thesis of “physiological psychology”, a phrase he has employed in his writings on psychology. Incidentally, it is both interesting and instructive to note that he acknowledges that if the brain is damaged, the operations of consciousness are hampered which uses the brain as an instrument. He says consciousness is involved in the brain and that is why conscious activities are accompanied by activities of the brain cells.

The materialist hypothesis regarding consciousness, says Sri Aurobindo, is not enough. In fact, sense and reflex action become absurd if we try to explain by it thought and will, the imagination of the poet, the attention of the scientist, the reasoning of the philosopher. Call it mechanical cerebration, if you will, “but no mere mechanism of grey stuff of brain can explain these things; a gland cannot write Hamlet or pulp of brain work out a system of metaphysics.” There is a gulf here that cannot be bridged by any mechanical explanation of consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo further says that there may be connection of consciousness and an inconscient substance, there may be mutual interpretation, they may act on each other, “but they are and remain things opposite, incommensurate with each other, fundamentally diverse” (Basu 2001). To say that an observing and active consciousness emerges as a character of an eternal Inconscience is to indulge in a self-contradictory affirmation.

In fact, Sri Aurobindo himself has not described his system of psychology as “integral psychology”. He has employed the very suggestive phrase “complete psychology”, which he says “must be a complex of the science of mind, its operations and its relations to life and body

with intuitive and experimental knowledge of the nature of mind and its relations to supermind and spirit” (Ghose 1964). We hold that “consciousness is itself found to be not essentially a process,—although in mind it appears as a process.” By its very nature it is a self-existent being. Being or the Self of things can only be known by metaphysical—not necessarily intellectual—knowledge. This self-knowledge has two inseparable aspects, “a psychological knowledge of the process of Being, a metaphysical knowledge of its principles and essentiality” (Ghose 1964 and Basu 2001).

Sri Aurobindo is clear that “Vedantic psychology explores the idea and intuition of a higher reality than mind” (Ghose 1994). Therefore for him, “Yogic psychology is an examination of the nature and movements of consciousness as they are revealed to us by the processes and results of Yoga” (Basu 2001).

The metaphysical reality is not the subject matter of psychology. Let us be very clear that yoga is practised by something in our nature as human beings. It may discover in us unknown means of knowledge, action and enjoyment and instrument of the direct knowledge of the Self. Thus Vedantic psychology and yogic psychology are significant descriptions of Sri Aurobindo's psychological system in one aspect.

2.6 INTEGRAL YOGA AS APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

Sri Aurobindo has said, as pointed out above, that metaphysics deals with the fundamental principles of existence and life and in the final analysis it aims at knowing the ultimate Reality. Since yoga is applied psychology aiming at connecting psychological truths with metaphysical principles, its final goal is the Divine. Sri Aurobindo never tires of pointing out that the Divine is the object of the yoga. It is not to become a superman or a great yogi. These aims may be realised in the course of yoga's progress towards the Divine.

But what is to be noted especially is that Sri Aurobindo's view, shall we say vision, of the Divine is much more complex than is found in the earlier *yogas*. The reason is, these other visions are partial and the consequent realisations of God according to them are of one or more than one aspects of God but they do not have the integral experience of the Supreme. Sri Aurobindo is definitely of the view that the realisations of the Divine obtained by the partial *yogas* are not integral owing to the fact that they are achieved by levels of consciousness which do not harbour the integral knowledge. This is why he insists that the seeker must arise to the level of *vijnana*, (the Supermind) because it is that level of consciousness which has inherent in it the integral knowledge.

A brief review of the different *yogas* current in India for thousands of years can demonstrate the truth of Sri Aurobindo's contention regarding the partial character of those spiritual disciplines. Without trying to trace the history of yoga right from the time of the Veda, we refer to the five disciplines still current in India and widely practised. It is also noted that these *yogas* select one or the other of the principles of Nature instead of taking the whole of life which is the instrument of the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo (Basu 2001).

Hatha yoga for example takes the principle of life in the nervous system as its means. It may arrive at the knowledge of God but, in point of fact, its practices are so complicated and take such a long time and at the same time have to be disconnected with life in general, that it cannot be of any use directly to the goal of the yoga of Sri Aurobindo which is the radical transformation of all Nature down to the physical as a means of integral union with the Divine on all planes of existence.

Raja yoga takes mind as the instrument of its discipline. It is a very effective practice and is consummated by the separation of unconscious *Prakrti* which evolves as the world and all that is in it from *Purusa*, the pure conscious Soul. Raja yoga does not know of an overall reality like Brahman of the Vedanta.

Karma yoga takes the Will as its chief instrument of spiritual discipline. It starts with giving up the desire of fruits of action followed by the perception that the egoistic self is not the doer at all, combined with the perception that universal Nature is the real actor. It ends with surrender of fruits, actions, the ego, all of this to the Supreme Master of Will which brings about the closest possible union with the Divine, the Purushottama, *visatetadanantaram*.

Jnana yoga utilises the purified intelligence as the chief means for realisation of identity with Brahman which results in reducing the world into an utter unreality. This again is another great yoga the fruit of which, identity with Brahman, is one of the results that can be achieved by the integral yoga. Though Sri Aurobindo believes in the world as a self-manifestation of the dynamic Absolute, it is to be noted that he emphatically says that it is necessary for an integral yogin to have knowledge at a certain stage of the progress of yoga that the world is unreal. Otherwise, he says, there is great possibility that there would be some attachment to something in the world. Bhakti yoga's chief instrument is the heart, the emotional being, and it aims at turning all human emotions towards the Divine who is most prominently looked upon and experienced as the Beloved to whom complete adoration is due (Basu 2001).

The integral yoga is integral because it has seen the possibility of a new self-discovery of the Divine in and as completely spiritualised Matter by the supramental Knowledge-Will. And Sri Aurobindo is emphatic that the actualisation of this possibility is inevitable. It is the express purpose “to make Matter aware of God” and to enable it “to remember God.” (Basu 2001)

2.7 THE EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

[In the following extract, written around 1930, we see what the Master himself writes on evolution of consciousness.]

“All life here is a stage or a circumstance in an unfolding progressive evolution of a Spirit that has involved itself in Matter and is labouring to manifest itself in that reluctant substance. This is the whole secret of earthly existence.”

“But the key of that secret is not to be found in life itself or in the body; its hieroglyph is not in embryo or organism,—for these are only a physical means or base: the one significant mystery of this universe is the appearance and growth of consciousness in the vast mute unintelligence of Matter. The escape of Consciousness out of an apparent initial Inconscience,—but it was there

all the time masked and latent, for the inconscience of Matter is itself only a hooded consciousness—its struggle to find itself, its reaching out to its own inherent completeness, perfection, joy, light, strength, mastery, harmony, freedom, this is the prolonged miracle and yet the natural and all-explaining phenomenon of which we are at once the observers and a part, instrument and vehicle.”

“A Consciousness, a Being, a Power, a Joy was here from the beginning darkly imprisoned in this apparent denial of itself, this original night, this obscurity and nescience of material Nature. That which is and was for ever, free, perfect, eternal and infinite, That which all is, That which we call God, Brahman, Spirit, has here shut itself up in its own self-created opposite. The Omniscient has plunged itself into Nescience, the All-Conscious into Inconscience, the All-Wise into perpetual Ignorance. The Omnipotent has formulated itself in a vast cosmic self-driven Inertia that by disintegration creates; the Infinite is self-expressed here in a boundless fragmentation; the All-Blissful has put on a huge insensibility out of which it struggles by pain and hunger and desire and sorrow. Elsewhere the Divine is; here in physical life, in this obscure material world, it would seem almost as if the Divine is not but is only becoming. This gradual becoming of the Divine out of its own phenomenal opposites is the meaning and purpose of the terrestrial evolution.”

“Evolution in its essence is not the development of a more and more organised body or a more and more efficient life—these are only its machinery and outward circumstance. Evolution is the strife of a Consciousness somnambulised in Matter to wake and be free and find and possess itself and all its possibilities to the very utmost and widest, to the very last and highest. Evolution is the emancipation of a self-revealing Soul secret in Form and Force, the slow becoming of a Godhead, the growth of a Spirit.”

“In this evolution mental man is not the goal and end, the completing value, the highest last significance; he is too small and imperfect to be the crown of all this travail of Nature. Man is not final, but a middle term only, a transitional being, an instrumental intermediate creature.”

“This character of evolution and this mediary position of man are not at first apparent; for to the outward eye it would seem as if evolution, the physical evolution at least were finished long ago leaving man behind as its poor best result and no new beings or superior creations were to be expected any longer. But this appears to us only so long as we look at forms and outsides only and not at the inner significances of the whole process. Matter, body, life even are the first terms necessary for the work that had to be done. New living forms may no longer be appearing freely, but this is because it is not, or at least it is not primarily, new living forms that the Force of evolution is now busied with evolving, but new powers of consciousness. When Nature, the Divine Power, had formed a body erect and empowered to think, to devise, to inquire into itself and things and work consciously both on things and self, she had what she wanted for her secret aim; relegating all else to the sphere of secondary movements, she turned toward that long-hidden aim her main highest forces. For all till then was a long strenuously slow preparation; but throughout it the development of consciousness in which the appearance of man was the crucial turning point had been kept wrapped within her as her ultimate business and true purpose.”

“This slow preparation of Nature covered immense aeons of time and infinities of space in which they appeared to be her only business; the real business strikes on our view at least when we look with the outward eye of reason as if it came only as a fortuitous accident, in or near the end, for a span of time and in a speck and hardly noticeable corner of one of the smallest provinces of a possibly minor universe among these many boundless finites, these countless universes. If it were so, we could still reply that time and space matter not to the Infinite and Eternal; it is not a waste of labour for That—as it would be for our brief death-driven existences—to work for trillions of years in order to flower only for a moment. But that paradox too is only an appearance—for the history of this single earth is not all the story of evolution—other earths there are even now elsewhere, and even here many earth-cycles came before us, and many are those that will come hereafter.”

“Nature laboured for innumerable millions of years to create a material universe of flaming suns and systems; for a lesser but still interminable series of millions she stooped to make this earth a habitable planet. For all that incalculable time she was or seemed busy only with the evolution of Matter; life and mind were kept secret in an apparent non-existence. But the time came when life could manifest, a vibration in the metal, a growing and seeking, a drawing in and a feeling outward in the plant, an instinctive force and sense, a nexus of joy and pain and hunger and emotion and fear and struggle in the animal,—a first organised consciousness, the beginning of the long-planned miracle.”

“Thence forward she was busy no more exclusively with matter for its own sake, but most with matter useful for the expression of life; the evolution of life was now her one intent purpose. And slowly too mind manifested in life, an intensely feeling, a crude thinking and planning vital mind in the animal, but in man the full organisation and apparatus, the developing if yet imperfect mental being, the Manu, the thinking, devising, aspiring, already self-conscious creature. And from that time onward the growth of mind rather than any radical change of life became her shining preoccupation, her wonderful wager. Body appeared to evolve no more; life itself evolved little or only so much in its cycles as would serve to express Mind heightening and widening itself in the living body; an unseen internal evolution was now Nature's great passion and purpose.”

“And if Mind were all that consciousness could achieve, if Mind were the secret Godhead, if there were nothing higher, larger, [no] more miraculous ranges, man could be left to fulfil mind and complete his own being and there would or need be nothing here beyond him, carrying consciousness to its summits, extending it to its unwallled vastnesses, plunging with it into depths unfathomable; he would by perfecting himself consummate Nature. Evolution would end in a Man-God, crown of the earthly cycles.”

“But Mind is not all; for beyond mind is a greater consciousness; there is a supermind and spirit. As Nature laboured in the animal, the vital being, till she could manifest out of him man, the Manu, the thinker, so she is labouring in man, the mental being till she can manifest out of him a spiritual and supramental godhead, the truth conscious Seer, the knower by identity, the embodied Transcendental and Universal in the individual nature.”

“From the clod and metal to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from the animal to man, so much has she completed of her journey; a huge stretch or a stupendous leap still remains before her. As from matter to life, from life to mind, so now she must pass from mind to supermind, from man to superman; this is the gulf that she has to bridge, the supreme miracle that she has to perform before she can rest from her struggle and discontent and stand in the radiance of that supreme consciousness, glorified, transmuted, satisfied with her labour.”

“The subhuman was once here supreme in her, the human replacing it walks now in the front of Time, but still, aim and goal of the future there waits the supramental, the superman, an unborn glory yet unachieved before her.”

[This is extracted with slight adaptation from an essay written in two pieces "Man and the Supermind" and "The Involved and Evolving Godhead", around 1930. It was first published in the Bulletin in November 1976 as the first of two separate pieces under the title "Evolution"]

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How does Aurobindo understand psychic being of Human person.?

2) Explain the higher levels of consciousness.

2.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have seen the basic understanding of transpersonal psychology, as advocated by Sri Aurobindo. We also related it to our collective search for integral development and the evolution of consciousness.

2.9 KEY WORDS

Purusa: *Purusa* ("man") is the "self" which pervades the universe. It is one's true self, regarded as eternal and unaffected by external happenings.

Transpersonal psychology: It is a school of psychology that studies the transpersonal, self-transcendent or spiritual aspects of the human experience.

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UNIT 3 CONCEPTION OF EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
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- 3.2 Integral Perfection And Education
- 3.3 Integral Education For The Growth Of The Soul
- 3.4 The Significance Of Physical And Moral Education
- 3.5 The Principles Of Teaching And The Training Of The Senses
- 3.6 The Psychic And Spiritual Education
- 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.8 Further Readings and References

3.0 OBJECTIVES

- To introduce the students to some key concepts of education as developed by Sri Aurobindo.
- To see the relationship between education and integral perfection (spirituality).
- To familiarize ourselves with some of the principles of education according to Sri Aurobindo.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

An explorer and adventurer in consciousness, a visionary of evolution, Sri Aurobindo has proposed a new world-view, which can be realised by proper education. This unit, heavily depending on an excellent article by Professor M.K. Raina (2000), attempts to situate his philosophy of education on his integral world-view. In his writings on education, Sri Aurobindo formulated a theory that could, with some variations, be adapted to all the nations of the world, fostering the growth of the integral consciousness in every pupil and bringing back to legitimate authority of the Spirit over a matter.

3.2 INTEGRAL PERFECTION AND EDUCATION

There are many ways of approaching Sri Aurobindo, but the light that one can gain from him, will depend upon the height and breadth of one's own quest. It is in raising most comprehensive questions in their profundity relating to the world and its future possibilities and the role that we are required to play as also how we should prepare ourselves to fulfil that role that we shall find the real relevance of Sri Aurobindo and find ourselves truly equipped to study him and the supra-mental consciousness that he has discovered and brought down on the earth (Raina 2000).

Three fundamental problems which gave direction to the spiritual quest and philosophical thinking and helped to fashion Sri Aurobindo's major theories, relate to the paradox of the national life of India, the supposed conflict between spirituality and action, and the evolution of man. The search for solutions to these problems relates to the unique and creative tension in his own experience between spirituality and politics, both during his years of political activity and during his four decades of *sadhana* (spiritual discipline) at Pondicherry.

Aurobindo's writings provide the needed force for action, realization and transformation which is reflected in his philosophy arrived at through inner experience. He wrote "in fact I was never satisfied till experience came and it was on this experience that later on I founded my philosophy". His integral philosophy grew out of his Yoga—not the other way round. Two phrases that surge out of Sri Aurobindo's writings that sum up his message are: "Integral perfection" and 'spiritual religion of humanity". His call for integrality and synthesis is most distinctively reflected in his statements: "We of the coming day stand at the head of a new age of development which must lead to such a new and larger synthesis. [...] We do not belong to the past dawns, but to the noons of the future." To attain integral perfection, Sri Aurobindo has found education to be very crucial.

3.3 INTEGRAL EDUCATION FOR THE GROWTH OF THE SOUL

Originally a poet and a politician, not a philosopher, Sri Aurobindo engaged himself for forty-five years out of his seventy-eight years in the practice of Yoga, and developed a philosophy of complete affirmation, affirming the reality of the world from the ultimate standpoint and the meaningfulness of socio-political action from the spiritual standpoint. He was sovereignly aware of the significance of variations in the concept of man, his life and destiny, of the nation and of humanity and the life of human race, which get reflected in the respective philosophies of education, and developed his scheme of integral education rooted in "the developing soul of India, to her future need, to the greatness of her coming self creation, to her eternal spirit."

India, according to Sri Aurobindo (Ghose 1990), has seen always in man the individual a soul, a portion of the Divinity enwrapped in mind and body, a conscious manifestation in Nature of the universal self and spirit. In his educational philosophy, Sri Aurobindo upheld the basic but commonly forgotten principle that "it is the spirit, the living and vital issue that we have to do with, and there the question is not between modernism and antiquity, but between an imported civilisation and the greater possibilities of the Indian mind and nature, not between the present and the past, but between the present and the future". In devising a true and living education, three things according to Sri Aurobindo—the man, the individual in his commonness and his uniqueness, the nation or people and universal humanity—should be taken into account.

Accordingly, Aurobindo conceived of education as an instrument for the real working of the spirit in the mind and body of the individual and the nation. He thought of education that for the individual will make its one central object the growth of the soul and its powers and possibilities, for the nation will keep first in view the preservation, strengthening and enrichment of the nation—soul and its Dharma (virtue) and raise both into powers of the life and ascending mind and soul of humanity. And at no time will it lose sight of man's highest object, the awakening and development of his spiritual being (Raina 2000). It is the concept underlying the true and living integral education.

Integrality of education is conceived as a process of organic growth, and the way in which various faculties could be developed and integrated is dependent upon each child's inclination, rhythm of progression and law of development, *Swabhava* (inherent disposition) and *Swadharma* (inner nature). Integral education is not conceived as a juxtaposition of a number of subjects and even juxtaposition of varieties of faculties. The idea is to provide facilities for varieties of faculties, varieties of subjects and various combinations of pursuits of Knowledge,

Power, Harmony and Skill in works. These faculties are so provided that they could be made use of by each student and the teacher so that a natural process of harmonious development could be encouraged (Raina 2000).

3.4 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PHYSICAL AND MORAL EDUCATION

Seeking to effect a synthesis of the East and the West in the contemporary philosophy of education, Sri Aurobindo insisted that a healthy body is a necessary condition for intellectual or spiritual attainment. For him physical education means not only the proper functioning of the various organs of the body but also the development of strength, balance, and a sense of beauty. According to him, beauty is the ideal which physical life has to realise. "If our seeking is for a total perfection of the being", says Aurobindo, "the physical part of it cannot be left aside; for the body is the material basis, the body is the instrument which we have to use. [...] The perfection of the body, as great a perfection as we can bring about by means at our disposal" must be the ultimate aim of physical culture". Therefore, "a development of the physical consciousness must always be a considerable part of our aim, but for that the right development of the body itself is an essential element; health, strength, fitness are the first needs, but the physical frame itself must be the best possible" (Raina 2000).

The education of the intellect, opines Aurobindo, divorced from the perfection of the moral and emotional nature, is injurious to human progress. He admits the difficulties involved in providing a suitable moral training for schools and colleges. He distinguishes the heart from the mind, and says, that to instruct the mind is not to instruct the heart. He senses the danger of moral textbooks being used for the purpose, in that they make the thinking of high things mechanical and artificial, and whatever is mechanical and artificial is inoperative for good. Further, he points out pertinently that "the attempt to make boys moral and religious by the teaching of moral and religious text-books is a vanity and a delusion, precisely because the heart is not the mind and to instruct the mind does not necessarily improve the heart.

The best kind of moral training that Sri Aurobindo conceives of is, "to habituate himself to the right emotions, the noblest associations, the best mental, emotional and physical habits and the following out in right action of the fundamental impulses of his essential nature". By way of moral and religious education, any attempt at imposition of a certain discipline on children, dressing them into a certain mould, lashing them into a desired path is essentially hypocritical and heartless. Only what the man admires and accepts, becomes part of himself; the rest is a mask. On the other hand, to neglect moral and religious education is to corrupt the race. In moral training, Sri Aurobindo stresses the value of suggestion and deprecates imposition. "The first rule of moral training", he says, "is to suggest and invite, not command or impose. The best method of suggestion is by personal example, daily conversation and the books read from day to day" (Raina 2000).

"Every boy should", says Aurobindo, "therefore be given practical opportunity as well as intellectual encouragement to develop all that is best in the nature. If he has bad qualities, bad habits, bad *samaskaras* (behaviour patterns), whether of mind or body, he should not be treated harshly as a delinquent, but encouraged to get rid of them by the *Rajayogic* (a type of yoga)

method of *samyama* (self-control), rejection and substitution”. Instead of discouraging such people, Aurobindo would like them to be rather encouraged to think such bad traits, “not as sins or offences, but as symptoms of a curable disease, alterable by a steady and sustained effort of the will—falsehood being rejected [...] and replaced by truth, fear by courage, selfishness by sacrifice and renunciation, malice by love” (Raina 2000). So the bad traits must be positively transformed

No religious teaching, according to Aurobindo is of any value “unless it is lived, and the use of various kinds of *sadhana*, (spiritual self-training and exercise) is the only effective preparation for religious living. The ritual of prayer, homage, ceremony is carved for by many minds as an essential preparation and, if not made an end itself, is a great help to spiritual progress; if it is withheld, some other forms of meditation, devotion or religious duty must be put in its place. Otherwise, religious teaching is of little use and would almost be better ungiven” (Raina 2000).

3.5 THE PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING AND THE TRAINING OF THE SENSES

In a series of articles that Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1909–10, he enunciated three fundamental principles of teaching. He accepts the basic principle that nothing can be taught to the mind, which is not already concealed as potential knowledge in the unfolding soul of the creature. So also all perfecting of which the outer man is capable, is only a realizing of the eternal perfection of the Spirit within him. We know the Divine and become the Divine, because we are That already in our secret nature. All teaching is a revealing, all becoming is an unfolding. Self-attainment is the secret; self-knowledge and an increasing consciousness are the means and the process (Ghose 2003).

The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or taskmaster, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil’s mind; he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process. He does not impart knowledge to him; he shows him how to acquire knowledge for himself. He does not call forth the knowledge that is within; he only shows him where it lies and how it can be habituated to rise to the surface. The distinction that reserves this principle for the teaching of adolescent and adult minds and denies its application to child is a conservative and unintelligent doctrine. Child or man, boy or girl, there is only one sound principle of good teaching (Ghose 2003). Difference of age only serves to diminish or increase the amount of help and guidance necessary; it does not change its nature.

The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth. The idea of hammering the child into the shape desired by the parent or teacher is a barbarous and ignorant superstition. It is he himself who must be induced to expand in accordance with his own nature. There can be no greater error than for the parent to arrange beforehand that his son shall develop particular qualities, capacities, ideas, virtues, or be prepared for a prearranged career. To force the nature to abandon its own dharma is to do it permanent harm, mutilate its growth and deface its perfection. It is a selfish tyranny over a human soul and a wound to the nation, which loses the benefit of the best that a man could have given it and is forced to accept instead something imperfect and artificial, second-rate, perfunctory and common. Every one has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of perfection and strength in however small a sphere, which God offers him to take or refuse. The task is to find it, develop it and use it. The chief aim of

education should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself, which is best, and make it perfect for a noble use (Ghose 2003).

The third principle of education is to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be. The basis of a man's nature is almost always, in addition to his soul's past, his heredity, his surroundings, his nationality, his country, the soil from which he draws sustenance, the air which he breathes, the sights, sounds, habits to which he is accustomed. They mould him not the less powerfully because insensibly, and from that then we must begin. We must not take up the nature by the roots from the earth in which it must grow or surround the mind with images and ideas of a life, which is alien to that in which it must physically move. If anything has to be brought in from outside, it must be offered, not forced on the mind. A free and natural growth is the condition of genuine development. There are souls, which naturally revolt from their surroundings and seem to belong to another age and clime. Let them be free to follow their bent; but the majority languish, become empty, become artificial, if artificially molded into an alien form. It is God's arrangement that they should belong to a particular nation, age, society, that they should be children of the past, possessors of the present, creators of the future. The past is our foundation, the present our material, the future our aim and summit.

Therefore, Aurobindo is very clear: "The wise teacher will not seek to impose himself or his opinions on the passive acceptance of the receptive mind; he will throw in only what is productive and sure as a seed, which will grow under the divine fostering within. He will seek to awaken much more than to instruct; he will aim at the growth of the faculties and the experiences by a natural process and free expansion. He will give a method as an aid, as a utilizable device, not as an imperative formula or a fixed routine. And he will be on his guard against any turning of the means into a limitation, against the mechanizing of process. His whole business is to awaken the divine light and set working the divine force" (Ghose 2003).

These principles, it will be observed, are subtle and complex, and no rigid formula of practice can be derived from them. They impose a great responsibility on the teacher and demand from him extraordinary qualities of a profound psychologist (Joshi, 1975). In the matter of the training of the senses, Aurobindo aims at nothing less than perfection. This, he says, must be one of the first cares of the teacher. The two important things that are needed of the senses, he points out are "accuracy and sensitiveness" (Raina 2000). The senses depend for their accuracy and sensitiveness on the unobstructed activity of the nerves which are the channels of their information and the passive acceptance of the mind, the recipient. In case of any obstruction, the remedy lies in the purification of the nerve system. "This process inevitably restores the perfect and unobstructed activity of the channels and, if well and thoroughly done, leads to a high activity of the senses. The process is called in yogic discipline *nadi-suddhi* or nerve – purification" (Aurobindo, 1990).

Six senses which minister to knowledge, sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste, mind or *manas* (the sixth sense of the Indian psychology) can be developed through the physical nerves and their end—organs, but *manas* could be developed through yogic discipline *sukshmadristi* or subtle reception of images. Aurobindo wrote (Raina 2000): "Telepathy, clairvoyance, clairaudience, presentiment, thought-reading, character-reading and many other modern discoveries are very ancient powers of the mind which have been left undeveloped, and they all belong to the *manas*.

The development of the sixth sense has never formed part of human training. In a future age it will undoubtedly take a place in the necessary preliminary training of the human instrument. Meanwhile there is no reason why the mind should not be trained to give a correct report to the intellect so that our thought may start with absolutely correct if not with full impressions.”

Sri Aurobindo while analysing the causes of inefficiency of the senses, as gatherers of knowledge, attributes it to ‘insufficient use’. Students, he suggests, should overcome tamasic (optuseness of the mind and the senses) inertia and ought to be accustomed to catch the sights, sounds, etc., around them, distinguish them, mark their nature, properties and sources and fix them in the *citta* so that they may be always ready to respond when called for by the memory. “Attention” according to him, is the chief factor in knowledge and considers it the first condition of right memory and accuracy. Besides attention “concentration on several things at a time” says Aurobindo is often indispensable. He holds the view that it is quite possible to develop the power of double concentration, triple concentration, multiple concentration, which is a matter of *abhyasa* or steady natural practice.

Along with faculties of memory, judgement, observation, comparing and contrasting and analogy which are indispensable aids in the acquisition of knowledge, Aurobindo emphasizes Imagination as the most important and indispensable instrument. It has been divided into three functions, the forming of mental images, the power of creating thoughts, images and imitations or new combinations of existing thoughts and images, the appreciation of the soul in things, beauty, charm, greatness, hidden suggestiveness, the emotion and spiritual life that pervades the world. “This is in every way as important as the training of the faculties which observe and compare outward things” (Raina 2000). These mental faculties, as Aurobindo suggests, should first be exercised on things, afterwards on words and ideas.... All this should be done informally, drawing on the curiosity and interest, avoiding set teaching and memorising of rules.

Sri Aurobindo is critical of the practice of teaching by snippets which is in practice in the existing system of education. Teaching by snippets, says Aurobindo, must be done away with. He is critical since: “A subject is taught a little at a time, in conjunction with a host of others, with the result that what might be well learnt in a single year is badly learned in seven and the boy goes out ill—equipped, served with imperfect parcels of knowledges, master of none of the great departments of human knowledge” (Raina 2000).

He characterizes such a system of education as one attempting to “heighten this practice of teaching by snippets at the bottom and the middle and suddenly change it to a grandiose specialism at the top. This is to base the triangle on its apex and hope that it will stand” (Raina 2000). Aurobindo has, therefore, found some meaning in the old system which was more rational than the modern: “If it did not impart so much varied information, it built up a deeper, nobler and much more real culture. Much of the shallowness, discursive lightness and fickle mutability of the average modern mind is due to the vicious principle of teaching by snippets”.

However, Aurobindo is clear that in the future education we need not bind ourselves either by the ancient or the modern system but select only the most perfect and rapid means of mastering knowledge. For him, “every child is an inquirer, an investigator, analyser, a merciless anatomist.” Appeal to these qualities in him and let him acquire without knowing it the right

temper and the necessary fundamental knowledge of the scientist. Every child has an insatiable intellectual curiosity and turn for metaphysical enquiring. Use it to draw him on slowly to an understanding of the world and himself. Every child has the gift of imitation and a touch of imaginative power. Use it to give him the ground work of the faculty of the artist (Raina 2000).

It is by allowing Nature to work that we get the benefit of the gifts she has bestowed on us. Aurobindo is particular that the first attention of the teacher must be given to the medium and the instruments and, until these are perfected, to multiply subjects of regular instruction is to waste time and energy. "The mother tongue", he says "is the proper medium of education and therefore the first energies of the child should be directed to the thorough mastering of the medium" (Raina 2000). In connection with language teaching he advocates that when the mental instruments are sufficiently developed to acquire a language easily and swiftly, that is the time to introduce him to many languages, not when he can partially understand what he is taught and masters it laboriously and imperfectly. He believes in the disciplinary value of learning one language, especially one's own language, which he says, prepares one for mastering another. He maintains that with the facility developed in one's own language, to master others is easier.

3.6 THE PSYCHIC AND SPIRITUAL EDUCATION

Aurobindo also speaks of mental and psychic education, but his real interest is in a still higher stage, which according to him is spiritual or supra-mental education. This does not imply the annihilation of the individual but his enrichment through contact with the Absolute. The spiritual stage transcends the mental and the psychic stage. The justification for psychic and spiritual education rests upon three important considerations (Raina 2000): a) education should provide to the individual a steady exploration of something that is inmost in the psychological complexity of human consciousness; (b) the most important question of human life is to consider the aim of human life and the aim of one's own life and one's own position and the role in the society; and this question can best be answered only when the psychic and spiritual domains are explored and when one is enabled to develop psychic and spiritual faculties of knowledge; and (c) the contemporary crisis of humanity has arisen because of the disbalancement between the material advancement on the one hand and the inadequate spiritual progression on the other. (Ghose 1972a)

If, therefore, this crisis has to be met, development of psychic and spiritual consciousness should be fostered. Aurobindo tries to draw a distinction between psychic and spiritual in the following terms. At the level of psychic life, the individual feels an unbroken continuity in the world of forms and sees life as an immortal function in endless time and limitless space. The spiritual consciousness goes beyond time and space and is an identification with the infinite and the eternal. Aurobindo is expressing the same idea when he says that in psychic life selfishness must be discarded, but in the spiritual life there is no sense of the separate self. Aurobindo insists that it is not annihilation of the individual but its transformation which is the end of integral education. When man attains such education there is total transformation of matter. He calls it supramental education as it will work, not only upon the consciousness of individual beings, but upon the very substance of which they are built and even upon the physical environment in which they live (Raina 2000).

An unprecedented kind of experiment in education was launched by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, when in 1943, a school came to be established at Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry with merely 20 students on its rolls; soon it began to grow, and in 1951, when the number of students had increased, and studies in Higher Education had to be organized, it was expanded into Sri Aurobindo International University Centre. The Centre was conceived as one of the best means of preparing humanity for future that would be marked by the manifestation of a new light and power—the supra-mental light and power. It was launched so that the elite of the humanity may be made ready who would be able to work for the progressive unification of the race and who at the same time would be prepared to embody the new force descending upon the earth to transform it. The Centre conducted a programme of experimental research under the direct guidance of the Mother, and it became a laboratory of education for tomorrow.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How does Aurobindo understand 'education?'

2) Give a detailed account Aurobindo's educational philosophy.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

The educational doctrine of Sri Aurobindo is closely linked with his futuristic vision of human destiny which is reflected in his statement: They should be children of the past, possessors of the present, creators of the future. The past is our foundation, the present our material, the future our aim and summit. Aurobindo's visionary mystic mind articulated a concept of life which was unique since he conceived of it as a lavish and manifold opportunity given us to discover, realize, express the Divine and accordingly, visualized a system of education which would help expression of unrealized potentialities, in line with his concept of life. This called for a creative vision and an extraordinary adventure. For him human destiny is an ascent towards the supermind, towards realization of the Godhead and his philosophy of education provides a forceful and resilient framework to attain this goal (Raina 2000).

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UNIT 4 TOWARDS HUMAN UNITY

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- 4.2 Unity through Yoga
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- 4.4 Progress of Civilisation through Supermind
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4.0 OBJECTIVES

- To understand our search for human unity.
- To see Aurobindo's vision of our common spiritual destiny.
- To open the students to the possibility of humans living together.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Aurobindo's mature ideas on human unity are found in his famous book, "The Idea of Human Unity" and "The Life Divine." For our purpose we use the reflections of the Canadian-Iranaian philosopher, Ramin Jehanbegaloo, the winner of 2009 UN Peace Prize. According to Jehanbegaloo, Aurobindo truly believed throughout his life that such a spiritual unity would not be possible unless it is preceded by a general change in humankind's consciousness.

Nevertheless, he made it clear in the last chapter of his book *The Life Divine* that the spiritual transformation of humanity had nothing to do with religion. "There is the possibility in the swing back from a mechanistic idea of life and society the human mind may seek refuge in a return to the religious idea and a society governed or sanctioned by religion. But organized religion, though it can provide a means of inner uplift for the individual and preserve in it or behind it a way for his opening to spiritual experience, has not changed human life and society; it could not do so because, in governing society, it had to compromise with the lower parts of life and could not insist on the inner change of the whole being; it could insist only on a creedal adherence, a formal acceptance of its ethical standards and a conformity to institution, ceremony and ritual...A total spiritual direction given to the whole life and the

whole nature can alone lift humanity beyond itself..." (Ghose 1949) In fact, Aurobindo summed up the nature of Man in the ideal of a united human society (Jehanbegaloo 2006).

So in this unit we trace the human journey to unity, as developed by Sri Aurobindo. Then we study its contemporary relevance and the real need for such a collective destiny.

4.2 UNITY THROUGH YOGA

This unity, according to Sri Aurobindo, cannot take place unless Man's vital and mental nature was uplifted by a spiritual Supernature. Therefore, if true human unity is to be achieved Man needs "to pursue its upward evolution towards the finding of expression of the Divine... taking full advantage of the free development and gains of all individuals and nations and groupings of men, to work towards the day when mankind may be really and not ideally one family..." In other words, the Divine descends into Cosmic being, while Man ascends through the medium of a Supermind towards the Divine. Therefore, there is a double movement at work here. Man is eternally seeking the ultimate Reality, which Aurobindo calls *Saccidananda* using the Vedantic vocabulary. "*Saccidananda*", asserts Sri Aurobindo, "is the unknown" (Jehanbegaloo 2006). Reality is *sat*, *cit* and *ananda*, which Aurobindo translates by the three concepts of pure existence, conscious force and the delight of existence. The goal is "the flowering of the Divine in collective humanity." The ideal, says Aurobindo, is the free unity of mankind. "Today", writes Aurobindo in his book *The Ideal of Human Unity*, "the ideal of human unity is more or less vaguely making its way to the forefront of our consciousness...(It) is evidently a part of Nature's eventual scheme and must come about" (Ghose 50).

For Aurobindo the evolutionary process of human unity is possible not through rationality, but through Yogic experience. The way which leads to the life divine is "integral yoga." This is why Aurobindo thinks that every man is a Yogi, but not a conscious one. Those who have become conscious of this process through the Yogic experience can help the others. The simple reason to this is that, "All mankind is one in nature... Nothing which any individual race or nation can triumphantly realize ...has any permanent value except in so far as it adds something for this human march."

That is to say, Sri Aurobindo was against the old idea of separation of politics from religion and partly because to him nationalism was a spiritual process. "Nationalism is not a mere political program", wrote Aurobindo in his daily paper entitled *Bande Mataram*, "nationalism is a religion that has come from God; nationalism is a creed which you shall have to live.... If you are going to be a nationalist, if you are going to assent to this religion of nationalism, you must do it in the religious spirit. You must remember that you are the instruments of God... Then there will be a blessing on our work and this great nation will rise again and become once more what it was in the days of spiritual greatness. You are the instruments of God to save the light, to save the spirit of India from lasting obscurity and abasement..." For that he found yoga and other spiritual practices crucial.

4.3 THE SPECIAL ROLE OF INDIA

Aurobindo based his demand for Indian independence on the Romantic idea of the nation-soul. In his early writings, he talked about the "soul of India" and in his speeches and writings in 1907-1908, he defined nationalism as a civic religion. In another speech he went

further and equated Indian nationalism with the *sanatana dharma*. Yet, Aurobindo was not interested in perpetuating Hinduism as a sectarian religion. What he was interested in was “a new synthesis of religious thought and experience, a new religious world-life from intolerance, yet full of faith and fervour, accepting all forms of religion because it has an unshakable faith in the One.”

However, for Aurobindo this new synthesis had to go hand in hand with the inalienable right of nations to independence, simply because being ruled by foreigners was an unjust and unnatural condition. “Political freedom”, Aurobindo declared in 1907, “is the life breath of a nation: to attempt social reform, educational reform, industrial expansion, the moral improvement of race, without aiming first and foremost at political freedom is the very height of ignorance and futility.” In fact, from his early writings Aurobindo was keen to see India play a leading role in the progress of the world. This was because he saw the great stage of human progress as a moral and spiritual one and he believed that India had a lot to teach Europe at these levels.

Aurobindo considered Europe as “parcelled out in nations,” but in his view India was an old civilization (Jehanbegaloo 2006). India, according to Aurobindo, had a special place in Asia. Thus, “Asia”, from his point of view, “was the custodian of world’s peace of mind, the physician of the maladies which Europe generates. She is commissioned to rise from time to time from her ages of self-communion, self-sufficiency, self-absorption and rule the world for a season...when the restless spirit of Europe has added a new phase of discovery to the evolution of the science of material life, has regulated politics, re-based society, remodelled law, rediscovered science, the spirit of Asia, calm, contemplative, self-possessed, takes possession of Europe’s discovery and corrects its exaggeration, its aberrations by intuition; her spiritual light alone can turn the world.”

According to our author, Asia has always initiated, what Europe completed. The strength of Europe is in details, the strength of Asia is in synthesis. It is therefore the task of Asia to take up the work of human evolution, “when Europe comes to a standstill and loses itself in a clash of vain speculations, barren experiments and helpless struggles to escape from the consequences of her own mistakes. Such a time has now come in world’s history.”

Sri Aurobindo was a true believer in a dialogue of cultures. Therefore he was not in favour of India remaining isolated from the rest of the world, but he was against a blind imitation of the West. As a matter of fact, India’s blind imitation of the Western society was not only a mistake for India, but also for the whole world. “If India follows in the footsteps of Europe”, wrote Aurobindo, “accepts her political ideals, social system, economic principles, she will be overcome with the same maladies” as the Europeans.

Aurobindo was convinced that if India wants to survive as an independent state it had to be conscious about its spiritual force and its diversity. Indian unity would be achieved because of Indian diversity. “Diversity”, proclaimed Sri Aurobindo, “is as necessary as unity to our true completeness.” However, Aurobindo considered unity and uniformity as the law of life. Even though he considered the world union as the ultimate goal, he saw the nation as a “necessary unit” and an “indestructible” force. For him there was a limit to nationalism and India has to teach this lesson to the rest of the world.

4.4 PROGRESS OF CIVILISATION THROUGH SUPERMIND

Further, according to Aurobindo, the progress of the civilization depended on its advance towards human unity. "The perfect society", affirmed Aurobindo, "will be that which most entirely favours the perfection of the individual; the perfection of the individual will be incomplete if it does not help him towards the perfect state of the social aggregate to which he belongs and eventually to that of the largest possible human aggregate, the whole of a united humanity." Aurobindo saw the perfection of the individual as a widening and a heightening in human and cosmic development. This heightening results in the integration of all levels of life and the achievement of unity by the mind.

As such salvation for Aurobindo does not have a purely religious meaning. It is a rebirth of Man as a supramental being. "Man", writes Aurobindo. "is a transitional being; he is not final. For in man and high beyond him ascend the radiant degrees that climb to a divine supermanhood. There lies our destiny and the liberating key to our aspiring but troubled and limited mundane existence...Supermind is superman; a Gnostic supermanhood is the next distinct and triumphant evolutionary step to be reached by earthly nature." In other words, the Supermind helps Man to achieve integral realization of his personality and of ultimate reality.

The Supermind is, according to Aurobindo, the supreme truth-consciousness. It is the infinite principle of knowledge. It is the necessary link between the existence, consciousness and bliss (*Saccidananda*) and the phenomenal worlds of life and mind. As long as the mind is separated from the Supermind it perceives only the particular and not the universal. That is to say, "the mind cannot possess the infinite...it can only lie blissfully helpless under the luminous shadow of the Real cast down on it from planes of existence beyond its reach." The Supermind, therefore, can bring a big spiritual change in the nature of Man making possible the new integral personality.

Agreeing that realization of non-duality is the purpose of life, Sri Aurobindo holds that each unique individual has a singular path to realization of integral non-dualism. For this reason, he insists that daily action is itself the means of realization. Just as one practises yoga for the purpose of developing one's inner spirituality, so participation in worldly experience is of the same importance. This is true because, as Aurobindo insists, "All life is yoga." In other words, the integral yoga prepares the conditions for the descent of Supermind. The yogi realizes himself through the cosmos and through the social life (Jehanbegaloo 2006).

This is why Aurobindo believes that the process of evolution has a purpose, which is advancing ineluctably toward the realization of the Life Divine here on Earth. Sri Aurobindo elaborated his educational ideas in relation with his ideals of human unity and "travel towards divine perfection". For him, the goal of education was the study of the human mind, because he considered the mind as the principal instrument of knowledge. Thus the aim of education, according to Aurobindo is: "the building of the powers of the human mind and spirit, it is the formation or... the evoking of knowledge and will and the power to use knowledge, character, culture..." For Aurobindo, Man has to be transformed and spiritualized through the educational practice.

This process begins with self-knowledge which is self-mastery and it brings ultimately the transformation of Man into a spiritual being. The major task in education is to awaken the aspiration for the divine in the body and in the mind. However, Sri Aurobindo puts the weight of education on the supramental and the discovery of the psychic being. In his book *The Human Cycle*, he affirms "The true secret whether with child, or man, is to help him find his deeper self, the real psychic entity within. That, if we ever give it a chance to come

forward, and still more, if we call it into the foreground as ‘the leader of the march set in our front’, will itself take up most of the business of education out of our hands and develop the capacity of the psychological being towards a realization of potentialities.” Likewise, Aurobindo’s integral yoga contends that the union with the Divine Supermind is also possible through a complete cooperation with the cosmic creative power. “Yoga”, asserts Aurobindo, “is the exchange of an egoistic for a universal or cosmic consciousness lifted towards or informed by the super-cosmic, transcendent Unnamable who is the source and support of all things.” Yoga and education are one and the same process through which spirituality emerges in mind. That is why to Sri Aurobindo the eternal truths of ancient wisdom had an appeal. Spirituality unlike religion does not lay excessive stress on dogmas. “A total spiritual direction given to the whole life and whole nature can alone lift humanity beyond itself”, writes Aurobindo in his book *The Life Divine*. For it is true that, according to Aurobindo, without the higher spirit, the lower mind cannot be spiritualized (Ghose 1950).

4.5 ENLIGHTENED AWARENESS OF THE SPIRITUAL UNITY

As a spiritual and practical mystic, Aurobindo puts a lot of emphasis on the transcendent aspect of Man. For Aurobindo the only answer to the crisis in the human world is an enlightened awareness of the spiritual unity of our existence through which a sustainable world unity can be achieved. “The truth of the Spirit”, wrote Aurobindo, “may step in and lead humanity to the path of its highest possible happiness and perfection.” According to Sri Aurobindo, the perfection is yet to come, because Man has not constituted yet the final step in his evolutionary process. The goal of spiritual progress, therefore, ought to be creation of spiritual human being and spiritual communities.

In fact our author’s concept of human unity is not based on rational norms. It is not aimed at creating a more rational Man. Aurobindo’s goal is mainly aimed at achieving an enlightened spiritualized community. This spiritualized community would not have nation-states fighting with each other, because in such a community men are not egoistic and look beyond their self-interests. Similarly Aurobindo defines human unity as “the attempt of human mind and life to grow out of national idea and form and even in a way to destroy it, in the interest of larger synthesis of mankind.” For Sri Aurobindo the idea of “unity in diversity” would provide a solid basis for a durable synthesis of mankind. Because of this, he saw a common destiny and a common hope for both the East and the West. “East and West”, he wrote in 1949, “have the same human nature, a common human destiny, the same aspiration after a greater perfection, the same seeking after something higher than itself, something towards which inwardly and outwardly we move.

Yet the unity of mankind, according to our author (Ghose 1950), is evidently a part of nature's eventual scheme and must come about. Only it must be under other conditions and with safeguards which will keep the race intact in the roots of its vitality, richly diverse in its oneness.

4.6 INTEGRAL APPROACH TOWARDS HUMAN UNITY

An integral approach is possible and necessary towards our progress towards human unity. The evolution of a universal consciousness in the life of each individual would facilitate the emergence of a world unity. The emergence of a real cosmic consciousness willing a unity not only in the individual members of the human organism

through a transformation of their nature itself but also in the institutions of the individual is a radical necessity. Thus the universal problem of unity is an individual problem. The individual must transcend his mentality and his mechanical rationality and his vital rationality. At the stage of the human evolution the mind dominated the lower physical and vital, and the physical and vital are geared up to its demands and thus each human individual has a mental soul so to speak (Varadachari 2011). But thanks to the preoccupations of its energies with the environment it had become restricted and is in fact ignorant. The social organisations of these individuals are at the same level. The mental life of the individual is on one side a practical mind with restricted aims of survival in the body and of the body, and an abstract mind which seeks to know the general order and structure of the environment and act on it on the basis of laws discovered by it through observation. Practically the universals of its discovery are partial truths and pragmatically valuable.

The organism of the individual must undergo a further evolution. In fact, a new force of being must be made active in the human individual, not the abstract universal or general will of the human society based on sentiment and gregarious feeling or vital love, but on a real Cosmic Intelligence, discovery of the Cosmic Self or Supermind and its action within each individual would transform the organic vital and psychical unity into a spiritual or supramental-psychical, vital and physical unity (Varadachari 2011).

4.7 CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Vasudhaiva kudumbakam, so proclaimed the ancient Indians: the world is one family. The ideal of human unity, which was already present at the dawn of civilisation, has never appeared so close to realisation, but paradoxically the closer we come to it, the more it seems to elude us. It is as if at the onset of the 21st century the need for human unity has never been so great, and yet quite often this very unity, seen as inevitable, is perceived as somewhat threatening (Auroville 2011) and even non-desirable.

We speak of globalisation, and in the same breath we deplore the dangers of uniformity. We speak of democracy as a universal ideal and of the progress of all nations towards it as irreversible, and yet at the same time this democratic model is perceived as a system imposed by some nations on others. We are facing environmental problems which threaten the very survival of our planet. We are aware of 'global warming' and a decrease in the finite resources of the planet, and we know that in order to tackle these common problems the individual nation-state is not an adequate institution anymore. But the very concept of a supra-national body is perceived as a possible infringement on the sovereignty of the nation-state, won in numerous cases after many decades - or longer - of collective struggle and pain (Auroville 2011).

Erasure of cultures

We claim that today's world is a global village, because technological progress has made our earth very small, and news can instantly reach every inhabitant of the earth through the highroad of information. But there is the fear that this global village culture may erase the diverse cultures ("mini narratives") of the earth; indeed it is argued that there is already an immense drive towards uniformity of life habits and uniformity of knowledge, which is not healthy.

Economic front

At the economic front, the much-talked-about liberalisation process is seen by many as an attempt to impose everywhere a capitalist model only suited to some countries, and to spread everywhere a culture of consumerism. So some critics ask: A computer for everyone and bread for only one quarter of the world population; is this the goal towards which we are advancing?

Science

In the 19th century, intellectuals saw the progress of science as the great factor which would lead to the unification of mankind, since science was a thing common to all men in its conclusions and was international in its very nature; but we know now that science can be misused, and is being misused, to discover more and more means of destruction. We have lost faith in science as a panacea for all evils, but what is there to replace it?

Aurobindo was certain that the ideal of human unity will emerge also because of sciences. “Still the ideal, having once made its way to the front of thought, must certainly be attempted, and this ideal of human unity is likely to figure largely among the determining forces of the future; for the intellectual and material circumstances of the age have prepared and almost impose it, especially the scientific discoveries which have made our earth so small that its vastest kingdoms seem now no more than the provinces of a single country” (Ghose 1950).

Biggest obstacle

We know that egoism is the biggest obstacle to a life of harmony and peace on earth, but after so many centuries of civilisation no amount of religious preaching or moral teaching has been able to convince the ego to forego its claims, as to speak to him of fraternity is to speak to him of something fundamentally contrary to his nature (Auroville 2011).

4.8 NEED FOR REAL UNITY TODAY

From the above considerations, it appears that although we are moving somewhat reluctantly towards a kind of unification, this is not a process likely to solve the many acute problems of the earth. Nor will the envisaged unity answer the deeper needs and aspirations of the human being. In fact, we have begun to understand that if we want to preserve the freedom for man to develop and grow in all liberty, this unity cannot be built through mechanical means. It cannot be achieved as long as man does not recognise a real unity between man and man; it cannot be arrived at through social and mechanical devices; and “we have even started to realise that if its aim is not to bring about a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind, this unity is hardly desirable” (Auroville 2011).

Man will be surpassed

Precisely here comes the relevance of Sri Aurobindo’s experiences. It becomes therefore urgent to realise what this unity is towards which we feel pushed in spite of ourselves. Man is a transitional being, claimed Sri Aurobindo shortly after the First World War. He held that evolution continues and man will be surpassed. Not only did Sri Aurobindo foresee the next step in the evolution of man, but he told us how to participate in it. Instead of remaining a passive spectator in a painful and incomprehensible process, he urges us to consciously

collaborate in our own evolution and break free of our seemingly inextricable bonds (Auroville 2011).

Using inner means

But for this, we have to reverse our mental process, said Sri Aurobindo, and instead of using external means, we have to turn inward, because without a change in man's nature no real changes in the external circumstances are likely to take place. The only way we can move towards unity is to progressively realise that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality in which we are all one, not only realise it mentally but discover it in ourselves and live this knowledge. The secret of unity is within, said Sri Aurobindo; the secret of brotherhood is within. "There is no unity except by the soul, there is no real brotherhood except in the soul and by the soul. Only when we live from the soul and not from the ego will a real unity reign on earth" (Auroville 2011).

Connecting with the new consciousness

This 'spiritual age of humanity' then will represent a transformation in the nature of man as momentous as the appearance of the thinking mind on earth. In the same way as for millennia the mind was the centre of our life, so, in the new age opening for humanity, or 'supra-mental' age, the soul will become the centre of all life and activities. A new stage in the evolution of man has already begun; a new consciousness, higher than the mind, a truth-consciousness, as Sri Aurobindo said, in which the dualities, hesitations and limitations of the mind and the greed and blindness of the ego will no longer exist, has already started to appear, and all the upheavals and convulsions that are at present so painfully tearing our earth are the outward signs of this evolutionary crisis. This new consciousness is already at work in the atmosphere of the earth: "we can connect with it, we can call it in ourselves, we can use it to transform our entire nature and consequently the world in which we live" (Auroville 2011). That is the challenge we are faced with.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Do you agree with the possibility of unity of all?

2) What is the need for unity today?

4.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have studied the human search for a common unity, without which we are doomed. For this a spiritual basis is a must. Even in our post-modern world, where many people speak of not one human story, the spiritual quest of Aurobindo is relevant. Such a quest gives meaning to our collective evolutionary journey.

4.10 KEY WORDS

Saccidananda or **Satchidananda** or **Sat-cit-ananda**: a compound of three Sanskrit words, *sat*, *cit*, and *ananda* meaning existence, consciousness, and bliss. It refers to the Ultimate in philosophy.

Vasudhaiva kudumbakam: is a Sanskrit phrase that means that the whole world is one single family.

4.11 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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