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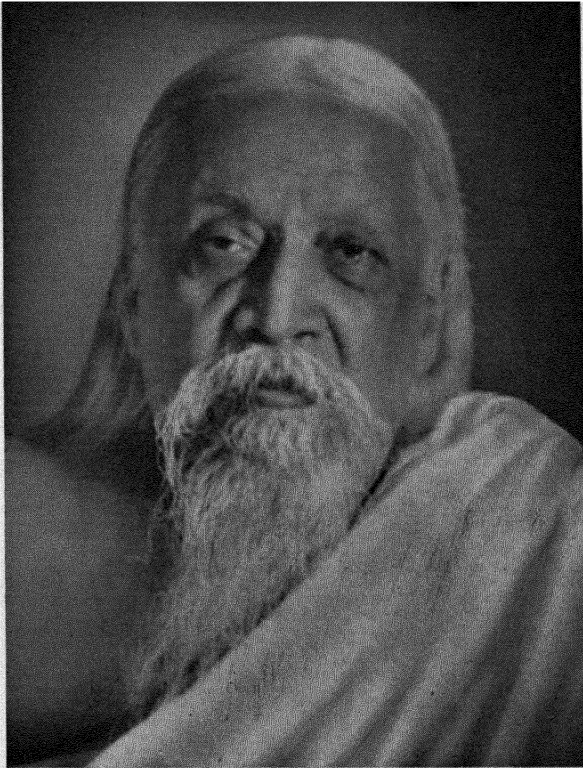
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Sri Aurobindo

INDIAN RESEARCH SERIES—X

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO

IN THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL

BY

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THE CHRISTIAN LITERATURE SOCIETY

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PREFACE

SRI AUROBINDO is considered to be the most outstanding religious philosopher in modern India. He is a representative of the Renaissance of Hinduism of the 19th and 20th centuries. He is in many respects unique, and he has struck a revolutionary path for the solution of many problems. He is described by Romain Rolland as the most noble representative of this movement, the foremost of Indian thinkers, from whom intellectual and religious India is awaiting a new revelation. In his massive book, *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo deals with the spiritual evolution of the universe, giving startling new interpretations of old revelations. It is considered as the greatest philosophical work produced in India for centuries.

He is also a great poet, but it is as a religious philosopher he is most famous, and from that point of view the subject is treated here.

I wish to express my gratitude to the friends in Pondicherry Ashram who gave me permission and help to make use of the library there. I give special thanks to Sri A. B. Purani who spent much of his time to give me instruction in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and religion, and valuable information about his life.

I am especially indebted to Dr S. Estborn, Gurukul, Madras, for his help in going through the whole manuscript. He has given valuable hints and suggestions on several points.

I also owe thanks to the C.L.S., for kindly consenting to undertake the publication of this book.

Kodaikanal
November 1958

E. OLSSON

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ABBREVIATIONS

- L.D. = The Life Divine.
L.U. = Lights on the Upanishads
L.Y. = Lights on Yoga.
8 U. = Eight Upanishads.
E.W. = The meeting of the East and the West in
Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy.
J. = Jayanti Numbers.

I. INTRODUCTION

ENTERING the town of Pondicherry on the east coast of India, walking along the avenue on the beach and in the adjacent streets, one cannot escape noticing a great number of men of a special type wandering about there. They are dressed in white, their hair is long and hanging down loose; they are of distinguished appearance. Women of this type are also visible, but their dress varies. These people belong to the famous ashram of Sri Aurobindo, the most important religious philosopher of modern India, whose headquarters are here. Blocks after blocks of houses mostly of bluish grey colour, fill the parts of the town round about the main ashram building. These houses are occupied by members of the ashram. Many of them are rich Bengali people. They buy a house and settle down in Pondicherry as disciples of Sri Aurobindo. In order to prevent the native population from becoming homeless, Government had finally to forbid outsiders to buy more houses, so many have now to settle down in rented buildings. In the main building no ashram inmates can reside. Downstairs there is a library, meditation and prayer rooms. The upper storey was occupied by Sri Aurobindo himself and the Mother, who still resides there. Sri Aurobindo died in 1950. In the courtyard of the main building is his samadhi (tomb of a saint). Far advanced yogis are buried; their bodies are not burnt like those of ordinary Hindus. The whole day it is attended by his devotees, who decorate the place with an abundance of beautiful flowers, grown by the inmates of the ashram in their different gardens. Each occupier of a house is bound to grow a garden there.

Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta on August 15th 1872. The date is memorable as it became the date of India's independence in 1947. His father was Doctor Krishnanathan Ghose, a Brahmin, having studied medicine in England. When he returned to India, he was an admirer of everything English, education, culture, customs and manners, and his praise of everything western was boundless. Therefore he sent his three sons, Aurobindo and the two elder brothers, to England for their education. Aurobindo was then only seven years old and he spent fourteen years there, completing his education. He was very enthusiastic in his studies. Besides

English and French he studied Italian, German, and Spanish, and acquainted himself with the literature of these countries. He distinguished himself both in school and college by his proficiency in Latin and Greek. He even won prizes for Latin and Greek verse in King's College, Cambridge, where he also got a classical scholarship. Twenty-one years old he returned to India, steeped in Western culture and thought. He knew no Indian language, not even his mother tongue, Bengali. He had spent two years of his childhood before going to England in a European school for European children in Darjeeling, where English was the medium of instruction. In his home also he had to speak English. Thus on his return from England he knew nothing of Indian religion, philosophy, literature, or languages and he had to begin learning his mother tongue, Bengali, from the primitive stages.

His father's desire had been that he should enter the Indian Civil Service, and he had qualified himself for that work though he himself was not anxious to do so. In the final examination there was also a test in riding, and it is said that purposely Aurobindo did not appear for that test, and thus he was not qualified to enter the Indian Civil Service. In England he had come into contact with the Maharaja of Baroda, who offered him instead a place in the Baroda State Service. He accepted it, settled in Baroda, and was much appreciated by the Maharaja, who was a progressive ruler. He often worked as the private secretary of the Raja though his official employment was first as lecturer in French, then as Lecturer in English, and finally as Vice-Principal of Baroda College.

Besides his ordinary duties he now began studying Indian languages for the first time in his life. He learnt first Bengali, his mother tongue, then also Marathi and Gujarathi, both State languages of Baroda. After a short time he began an intensive study of Sanskrit, which he soon mastered. He acquainted himself with Sanskrit literature, religious, and philosophic texts. The Gita and the Upanishads became his chief spiritual guides. Only later he took up the study of the Vedas. His original interpretation of the Rig Veda hymns show his deep scholarship and great aptitude for mastering languages, and penetrate into the depths of the hymns of the old R̥sis. His time in Baroda lasted from 1893 to 1906; during this time his patriotism was awakened and he began to show love of everything Indian. India's ancient

people with its imposing culture thrilled him. India became the embodiment of a great spiritual message, and the home of great spiritual experiences. His ideal of patriotism proceeded on the basis of love and brotherhood but it had to be unity of brothers as free men, not the unity between master and slave. Naturally India's freedom and full independence became his aim. As a matter of fact the seed of patriotism existed earlier in Aurobindo's soul, sown by the father. In spite of his deep admiration of everything English, the father could not escape seeing the injustices committed by English rule and policies in India. He had regularly sent to his sons in England cuttings from Indian papers, showing the ruthlessness of English officials in profiting from India. Most probably it was this seed that grew and made Aurobindo decide not to enter the Indian Civil Service. Already in England he showed much sympathy for the struggle for freedom of Ireland and he admired the French revolutionists. Thus India's freedom and struggle became a passion to which he now devoted himself when returning to India. As long as he was in Baroda State Service, he could not publicly engage in any political activities against Britain. There was not yet any political organisation openly working for India's freedom. Without revolution Aurobindo and his sympathisers thus decided to await future events. Although he attended political meetings, he was not an active agitator at this time, but silently he played a prominent part. During his 13 years in Baroda was laid the foundation of the resplendent trend of Aurobindo's future life. Two strong urges ran parallel in his life, one spiritual, one political. It became more and more evident that the spiritual was predominant and his own spiritual development became more important than anything else. He was much influenced by Ramakrishna and Vivekananda and during this time he began practising different kinds of yoga. \

Politically small revolutionary groups started, but Aurobindo did not directly take part in the preparations for a revolution though he gave his moral support. But soon he had to throw off his mask, and come out in political life. In 1906 he left Baroda and settled in Calcutta and for the next three years his activities were in the full glare of publicity in the struggle for India's freedom. Though he vindicated non-violent non-co-operation as the means of attaining India's independence, the members of some revolutionary groups engaged in violence and riots, and in connection

with such violence against an English judge, Aurobindo was arrested in 1908, and kept in Alipore Jail for one year, but was then acquitted.

This time in jail was of the greatest importance for his spiritual development. He had rest, seclusion, and relief from political strain. Through intense Yoga practice he reached the summit of God-consciousness, and emerged as a God-inspired man. He had a vital experience of a Spiritual Presence filling the Universe and of everything being His manifestation. He had now the definite conviction that his future call had to be on the spiritual plane, not on the political. In spite of heavy protests from his friends, he left all political activities. He was anyhow convinced that he could not leave politics if he stayed in British India, for the attention of Government was still suspiciously directed towards him. Thus he decided to settle down in the French colony in Pondicherry where he could retire in perfect seclusion. For 40 uninterrupted years he remained there, continuing his spiritual practices. He gathered round him disciples from the whole of India in his ashram.

Some words have to be said about his private life. While in Baroda he married a young and beautiful girl, Mrinālīni. She was a high souled woman of great devotion and piety. He was from the beginning clear on the point that he could not lead a life of ordinary relationships between husband and wife and he tried to prepare her mind for a spiritual life other than that of a mere wife. But she could never rise to his spiritual ideals, and could never be of any spiritual help to him. For this young girl to marry a religious genius must have been a suffering and she never lived with him for long. His letters to her were full of spiritual advice, but his intellectual and spiritual superiority were so great that she could not follow him even on the lowest steps of spiritual development. After he settled in Pondicherry, plunging himself into Yoga, which demanded utter seclusion and austere continence, he never saw her more; she soon died in Calcutta in 1918.

The spiritual relationships with a woman that Aurobindo had desired, was anyhow given to him in another way in a far richer measure. A French lady, Mira Richard, and her husband, came to Pondicherry in 1914. She was far advanced in Yogic practices and both of them were of immense help to Aurobindo, both spiritually and economically. Through their assistance, he could

issue the philosophical magazine, the Arya. In 1915 the husband was called to France for military service, and Mira went with him. The husband died, and Mira returned to Pondicherry in 1920 to live in the ashram. From 1922 she took entire charge of all practical arrangements there, and systematically organized the household on ashram lines. Aurobindo retired from the world and all outside contacts took place through Mira, who was now called 'Mother'. Spiritually she was on the same level as he. The spiritual importance of 'The Mother' as the embodiment of Divine Sakti, will be touched upon later on in connexion with his philosophy. At present, after his death in 1950, she is the soul and spiritual leader of the whole ashram. There are more than 1,000 members of this ashram now, mostly consisting of people from North India. A few Europeans, chiefly of French nationality, and Americans, also come there. There are important Aurobindo circles in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta, beside smaller circles in several other places. The majority of men who join the ashram or the circles are of high intellectual standard, lead an austere, simple life, and perform yoga practices. But yoga practices aiming at suppression of the body and its mortification are not engaged in, as will be explained in the chapter on Yoga. Physical activities are encouraged as a means of lifting the body to a higher plane instead of suppressing it through ascetic practices.

II. OUTLINES OF SRI AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY

Gradations of manifestation:

The Supreme.

Saccidānanda unmanifest.
Saccidānanda in manifestation.

The supreme planes of Infinite consciousness:

- (a) Sat (which is Cit and Ānanda).
- (b) Cit (which is Sat and Ānanda).
- (c) Ānanda (which is Sat and Cit).

Supermind or Gnosis.

It represents the creative power of Saccidānanda, the medium of self-manifestation of the higher trinity into the lower triplicity.

Overmind.

It is the link between Supermind and Mind. Between the overmind and ordinary mind are the planes of:

- (a) Intuitive mind.
- (b) Illumined mind.
- (c) Higher mind.

Mind Proper (human).

Thinking Reason.

Dynamic Intelligence Externalising Intelligence.
Will, Vision.

(Centre: Ajna, between
the eyebrows) (Centre: Viśuddha, throat).

Vital Mind.

Physical Mind.

Lower Creation.

Mind.

Vital.

Physical.

Sri Aurobindo constantly refers to the seven chief planes:

Three higher planes: Sat, Cit, Ānanda.

The middle plane Supermind.

Three lower planes: Mind, Life, Matter.

Saccidānanda is the Absolute in its pure self-existence, in its aspect of indivisible consciousness. In its action through Gnosis it appears as God, *Īvara*, the creator of the world. In Reality there is no distinction between God and the Absolute.

Supermind, Vijñāna, Gnosis

This is not the supreme plane of our consciousness but a link plane. In the Gnosis Saccidānanda gathers up the light of his unseizable existence and pours it out on the soul in the shape and power of a divine knowledge, a divine will, bliss of existence. (*J.* 1954, p. 29). The gnosis is both light and force, truth-light full of truth-force. The Veda describes the Vijñāna plane as *Ṛtam*, *Satyam*, *Br̥hat*, the Right, Truth, Vast. *Br̥hat* is the infinity of *Saccidānanda*, out of which the other two proceed and in which they are founded.

Satyam is the Truth of Being which acts.

It is the static aspect of Truth.

Ṛtam is the action of the divine knowledge (*J.* 1954, p. 30, 31). It is the dynamic aspect of Truth. The Sun is the symbol of the Gnosis and is described in the Veda as the light, the father of all things, the bringer out of things into manifest existence, *Sūrya Savitr̥*. Supermind, having created the universe, is operative in every part of it. It is a creative power of the Divine, a knowledge—Will, which brings out of *Saccidānanda* its hidden multitudes according to its integral self-vision. The Supermind holds in its creative Will the secret of the development of the Many out of the One and prevents by its ordering self-knowledge the endless diffusion of the Many from dissipation and disintegration (*J.* 1942, p. 125–128). Sri Aurobindo presumes a triple status of the Supermind, which he calls:

(a) Comprehending consciousness.

(b) Apprehending consciousness.

(c) Projecting consciousness.

(a) ensures the Truth of the Self containing all things.

(b) ensures the Truth of the Self inhabiting all things.

(c) ensures the Truth of the Self becoming all things.

In (a) the Unity of things is the dominant feature.

In (b) the Unity is modified so as to support the manifestation of the Many in One, and the One in Many.

In (c) the Unity is further modified so as to support the evolution of a diversified individuality (J. 1942, p. 133, 136).

These three poises of the Supermind are not in any way mutually exclusive or separate from each other. In the Veda, all the poises are asserted.

(a) Agni is said to be all the other gods.

(b) He contains all the gods as the nave of the wheel contains the spokes.

(c) He is employed by man as messenger, priest, worker. He is the father as well as the Son of our works (L.D., p. 145). The Truth consciousness is everywhere present in the universe as its infinite potential multiplicity. Without this ordering self-knowledge the manifestation would be a shifting chaos. Each thing in Nature is governed by an indwelling vision and power. It is sub-conscious or inconscient to us, but not to itself.

Vijñāna is not synonymous with *buddhi*, reason, intelligence, which belongs to the mental plane, whereas *Vijñāna* belongs to the supramental plane. Reason and intelligence are only the lower buddhi. There is also a higher form of buddhi, the intuitive mind or reason. (Gnosis proceeds by visional concepts, not by intelligent, by direct truth-discernment, motion of rapid insight or swift discernment, it proceeds by leaps, whereas ordinary mental reason moves pace after pace. There is relation between them anyhow, for mind is born from what is above, but they act on different planes.

Even intuitive reason is not the Gnosis, it is only an edge of light from the Supermind, finding its way into the mental plane by flashes of illumination (J. 1954, p. 21-24). There are further differences between the gnosis and reason (J. 1954, p. 27-28).

Reason starts with appearances, and seeks the Truth behind. It shows Truth in the light of appearances.

Gnosis starts from the Truth and shows appearances in the light of Truth.

Reason proceeds by inference, it concludes.

Gnosis proceeds by identity or vision, it sees, it knows.

Reason is a process of groping and seeking.

Gnosis possesses, reveals, illumines.

Reason proceeds from moment to moment, loses and acquires.

Gnosis dominates time, and links present, past, and future.

Reason dwells in diversity, it does not see the totality, it deals with the finite, and cannot grasp or penetrate the infinite.

Gnosis dwells in unity, and by it knows diversities. It lives in the infinite, and knows finite things only in their relation to the infinite.

Reason is indirect and human.

Gnosis is direct and divine.)

Vijñāna is not only the concentrated consciousness of the Infinite, but also at the same time an infinite knowledge of the play of the Infinite.

Overmind

Overmind is the delegate of the Supermind to the Mind, the link between them. Supermind transmits to Overmind all its realities, but leaves it to formulate them according to an awareness of things, which is still a vision of Truth but parent of Ignorance. At the same time it connects the Supreme knowledge and the cosmic Ignorance and separates them. Overmind is aware of the central Truth, but gives each aspect and power full separate importance. In the Overmind is the original of cleavage between Knowledge and Ignorance, but the separateness is still founded on the basis of an underlying unity. In the Supermind all is held together as a harmonious play of the One Existence.) What to the mental reason are irreconcilable differences and contraries are to the Overmind co-existent correlatives and complementaries.

(In our mental state things exist as opposites, each claiming to be the Truth, and taxing others with error and falsehood.

There is a similar separation of Overmind from Supermind but there the veil of separation is transparent and allows a conscious transmission. There is in Overmind a limitation of knowledge, but not a denial or opposite of Truth and knowledge.

Between Overmind and Mind the veil is opaque, and the transmission obscure (*L.D.*, p. 255-259).)

Intuition

Intuition is a projection of action of higher grade of manifestation into ordinary human mind. The veiled intuitive element can sometimes be swiftly unveiled and establish connection between mind and the levels above. Intuition discloses a secret knowledge, already existent. It is a self-existent certitude, which carries in itself its own guarantee of Truth. If it is pure, not admitting into itself any mixture of sense-error or intellectual ideation, it is never contradicted by experience because it proceeds from the self-existent Truth of things. By opening ourselves to flashes of Intuition from Overmind or Supermind we can become overmental beings, not limited by intellect and sense but capable of more universal comprehension (*L.D.*, p. 264).

Instinct in animals is automatic intuition in the vital mind; it does not possess the light of human reason, which can err, and therefore it is much more sure than reason, the most sure instrument that the animal can rely on.

On a lower level reason can occasionally come to the help of intuition. On the emergence of Supermind no help of reason will be needed. In many cases we can see how intuition bursts on our ordinary consciousness like a visitation from a higher world. Some epoch-making researches in science are due to a sudden flash of intuition, which is later found by reason to be correct. Often a discovery comes to a scientist as a flash from above, not as a result of mere intellectual search. If human consciousness is raised from mind to a higher level, this unconscious activity can be made conscious and permanent. The intuition of a R̥ṣi, a Seer of inner vision, is a greater power than the consciousness of a thinker. On higher levels intuition becomes a steady light, revealing the fullness of Truth. The value of intuition depends on the level from which it emanates. Intuitions under the control of the mind suffer from defects, they are flashy, have limited range, lack of cohesion, because they contain much mental stuff, and their value is thus not so great.

The Intuitive mind, Illumined mind, and Higher mind are the planes between the Overmind and Ordinary mind.

Mind

Mind is derived from Supermind through the mediation of the Overmind, which takes each action and power, and gives to them an independent form, in which they acquire full separate importance. The dynamic movement of overmind knows the fundamental unity of things, but must allow the power of separation to develop independently. As consciousness descends further, the pervasive Unity, which is still kept alive in the Overmind, is now hidden and Mind is separated by an exclusive concentration from the Overmental sources. This is the separation of the cosmic Truth from the cosmic Ignorance. The division of consciousness which took place in the Overmind, though the basis of Unity was still perceived there, is thus the basis of Ignorance. The transition of Mind in knowledge to Mind in Ignorance was thus effected.

Mind in its essence is a consciousness which measures, limits, cuts out forms of things from the indivisible whole, and contains them as if each were a separate unit. Mind cannot possess the Infinite, it can only be possessed by it. Mind is only a subordinate function of Supermind and Supermind is the divine counterpart to Mind. In human *Vital Mind* there are three levels. Higher Vital, Mid-Vital, and Lower Vital. The Higher Vital is the plane of emotions, love, joy, sorrow. Its functions are to plan and imagine, but not to think and reason. The seat of the emotional is the Heart centre.

The Mid-Vital has strong vital reactions: ambition, pride, fear, lust of fame and power, passions of various kinds.

The Lower Vital is characterized by small desires and feelings: sexual desire, desire for food, vanity, quarrels, anger, small egoistic wishes.

Lower Creation

In each physical body or object, animal, plant, metal or stone, there is stored and active the same constant dynamic force, the Life-Force. Mind-Energy, Life-Energy, Material Energy, are different workings of one World Force. In the lowest stage the vibration is entirely subconscious, it is released into consciousness in the animal, with plant life as a middle stage, where we catch the idea of Life as distinguished from Matter; but in reality it is the same in all the stages, and a middle term between Mind and

Matter, constituent of the latter, and instinct with the former (*L.D.*, p. 167, 172, 173).

In plants there is no bodily locomotion though the presence of vitality can be shown. A sensitive plant shrinks from a contact. Probably there may be a more rudimentary life action in the sub-conscious sensation of a metal or stone though there is no bodily agitation.

Consciousness

Consciousness is not simply a mental awareness of objects, which is the ordinary sense we attach to it. It is the fundamental thing in all existence. It is the energy and movement of consciousness that creates the Universe. We have a physical consciousness proper to the body, distinct from mental consciousness. We have a vital consciousness, proper to life and its nature; plants and animals show movements of consciousness. Our ordinary human mind is only a fraction of our entire consciousness, which ranges from the mind levels to the superconscience above and to the sub-conscience below. The two poles of consciousness are its absolute negation in the Inconscience, and its absolute self-affirmation in its utter Transcendence. Our mind is only a middle term in a long series of ascending consciousness.

Cit, the Divine consciousness, is not our mental awareness, which is only a lower and limited movement (*J.* 1954, p. 96, 97).

The sense of duality is characteristic for our mental consciousness. But consciousness does not begin there. When we transcend the mental level and enter into supramental consciousness, the whole universe is seen and felt to be within ourselves, united and identified with us. As we descend below the mental level, consciousness becomes more and more diluted till it is completely darkened in Inconscience. All the three kinds of consciousness (physical, vital, mental) are mixed up in man, and their real status is hidden behind in our secret being. Powers of higher planes of consciousness can descend and produce results on the mental and vital physical planes, on which we usually live. Consciousness develops any parts from above downwards by progressive descension from spiritual levels towards involution in Matter. But it also works in the opposite direction by evolution from the Inconscient through all the levels above. Consciousness is thus the spiritual Reality, the very essence of all existence.

Higher consciousness ranges from higher Mind through Illumined, Intuitive, and Overmind to the border line of the Supramental level, where it works as Supramental consciousness. Subconscience works below all our physical activities; from there things come up into the physical, vital, and mental levels. It retains impressions of all our past experiences of life. Things rejected sink into the subconscious, and will return from there. The subconscious brings back inertia, weakness, obscure fears, desire, anger, to the physical consciousness. In the Inconscient consciousness is completely asleep.

The Descent of Consciousness

The Supreme, Unmanifest, Saccidānanda, possessing infinite possibilities, has by self-concentration and self-limitation manifested itself in the three Supreme planes of Infinite consciousness: Sat, Cit, Ānanda. This does not mean Sat and Cit and Ānanda but Sat (existence) which is Cit (Force) which is Ānanda (Delight). This is the world of fundamental realities, the Supermind or Gnosis. Saccidānanda is the Absolute in its pure self-existence, in its aspect of indivisible consciousness. In its action through the Supermind, Gnosis, as creator of the world, it appears as God, Īśvara. The Absolute in manifestation is God. Supermind is the nature of the Divine Being in its action as creator of the World, not in its absolute self-existence.

I. In Supermind the One and the Many in manifestation are merged in each other. The Absolute Unity is maintained at the same time as Multiplicity is manifested. The One becomes Many, but in becoming Many, still remains the same. This is the first step in the descent.

II. The next step is the descent from Supermind to Overmind. There the perfect balance between the One and the Many begins to be disturbed. The origin of cleavage is here, but the separateness is still founded on the basis of an underlying unity. Overmind is aware of the unity but the emphasis begins to be laid on the Many and there is still harmony. Between the Overmind and Mind proper there are the three levels: Pure Intuition, Illumined Mind, and Higher Mind. In these lower levels of the Overmind Unity is more and more thrown into the background, and Multiplicity comes forward. Yet Unity does not disappear altogether but remains more and more inactive.

III. The third step of descent is to Mind, where the harmony between Unity and Multiplicity is almost completely disturbed. Mind cannot comprehend more than one object simultaneously, it can only attend to each one at a time, withdrawing its attention from the rest. Mental consciousness is one-pointed. Mind is the birthplace of division and egoism. There is the source of Ignorance.

IV. Consciousness descends from the Mind into the Vital or Life-force. There the separative existence of each unit is still more emphasized. The meeting of the Mind with the Vital is in the Higher Vital, in the heart, the seat of emotions. The Mid-Vital is the centre of ambition, courage, capacity for work, arrogance; the Lower Vital of small desires and gross physical satisfactions.

V. The last step is the descent of consciousness into Matter. It has wiped itself out so completely that its outward form has become dark and dense. It is more a process of mere mechanical drive. Matter, the last limit at the bottom, appears to be unconscious, but in reality it is not so. It is inconscient, it holds the consciousness of all the other levels hidden, involved in itself (*J.* 1943, p. 5-8).

Now this consciousness, imprisoned in Matter, by the very force of its nature forces Matter to release it and to mount up. First there has been a descent, a gradual involution, a veiling and limitation of consciousness, then there is an ascent, a gradual evolution from the lowest to the highest level. At the present stage of evolution consciousness has arrived at the highest level of Mind. It is striving to enter Overmind, and finally Supermind. The drive of Nature will not cease till the cycle is completed, till consciousness has reached the level of Supermind (*J.* 1943, p. 9). The later stages are a logical continuation of the preceding ones. The old Indian ideal is that the earlier stages have to disappear when later ones are attained. A higher spiritual state can be reached by mind, separating itself from life and matter, from all the lower principles of mind, life, and matter. This has been practised from immemorial times by sages, having reached levels higher than mind. Sri Aurobindo takes a different view, by which he has given a unique contribution to the theory of evolution. The lower stages do not disappear, but are transformed, and continue under new conditions. This is his *principle of integration*.

Evolution involves not only an ascent from a lower to a higher level, but also an integration of the higher with the lower.

Evolution thus consists of two processes: the pressure from below exerted by the concealed consciousness, and the descent of the higher status of consciousness. The urge from below is only an aspiration to move upwards. There is a double process: sublimation and integration. Sublimation means that the lower is purified and modified to be fit for a higher status. Thus Matter rises into Life, Life into Mind, Mind into Overmind and Supermind. But this sublimation must be attended by integration. When the lower rises into the higher, it does not cease to exist. Lifted up it continues to exist, embraced by and modified by the higher. Thus when Matter is transformed into Life, Matter is not destroyed. Life exists in and through Matter in a new constitution. So also in the next stage. Life is not dissolved into Mind, but both Life and Matter are taken up by Mind and transformed. Matter has thus undergone two transformations, first in the Life plane, then in the Mental plane (*J.* 1943, p. 10).

This descent in the process of integration can be gradual or sudden, and takes place when the lower level is prepared and fit for transformation. Neither Mind nor Life are original creative powers, they are only intermediate instruments in the evolutionary process. The creative power behind is the whole time the Supramental consciousness working on different levels. The presence from the superior plane, where the new power is dominant, effects the transition by its descent from one level to another. Life emerges from Matter by a pressure from Inconscience, and by assistance from the Vital World. It begins to evolve towards conscious mind. In the same way Life evolved Mind by Cooperation of a pressure from within, and a descent from the mental level. Now Mind tries to evolve Overmind and Supermind by a similar pressure from within, and by a descent from the higher planes. This last evolution differs from the previous ones in two respects: it is directed by a conscious effort of the human mind and it is accompanied by an attempt to break the walls of Ignorance, whose origin is in the Mind, and become aware of the Unity-consciousness. Previously there has been an attempt for transmutation of Ignorance into Knowledge. The final aim is now its destruction, by which we can become united in consciousness with God and with all existence (*L.D.*, p. 643).

All the levels of consciousness were created by the first descent, but it is only Matter that stands in the fore-ground, all the other levels remain invisible in the background, hidden in Matter, behind a veil. So we have to presume that Life was already on the Vital plane though not manifest; dead matter was the only apparent reality on the physical plane when the return movement of consciousness, ascension, took place. But a mere drive from below cannot alone bring about a development to a higher level. The stirring and churning of Matter can produce a certain maturity, a fit ground for Life to appear in, but it can never produce life itself. For that a new factor has to appear. Life has to descend from its own level to the level of Matter, and raise it up. The bursting forth of a new manifestation can only happen when that which has to manifest itself descends. So also, before Life is transformed into Mind, Mind must descend into it from the mental level. Life cannot develop Mind by mechanical operations unless Mind descends and embraces Life. This is the procedure necessary for the ascent from one level to another, in the whole range of evolution. What we have to wait for in the future is thus a descent of the consciousness of the Overmind and Supermind into our mental plane when the ground is prepared and fit to be transformed into the next higher plane (*J.* 1943, p. 11).

In the Vital plane there are two principles: the necessity of the separate ego to survive in its distinctness, and another to fuse with others. The first principle predominates in the first stage of Life, the second in the later stage. The new terms entering in the first stage are: death and mutual devouring, hunger, struggle to increase and expand, conquer and possess. Death involves in itself a struggle to survive, hunger and desire a struggle for satisfaction and security. Desire is the stimulus by which Life tries to rise out of unsatisfied hunger towards the delight of existence. Thus came the aggressive principle of Life, the vital selfishness of the individual and the attempt for self-preservation and self-assertion. But these states contain in themselves the seeds of another state, which must increase in proportion as Mind evolves out of Life. There enters a new principle of co-operation and mutual help, the associated group, of conscious joining and interchange with others. Even in the higher stages of evolution we find the aspect of selfishness dominating, but as mind develops more and more, it perceives that the individual is a minor term,

and exists only by the universal. The two principles must be harmonised so that the individual can persist in the consciousness of his individuality and yet fuse himself with others without disturbing the principles of preservation and survival. For this, full emergence of Mind is necessary; it cannot be effected on the Vital plane without a conscious Mind, which imposes progressively its own law upon the material existence. Mind does not need to devour in order to grow and possess. The more it gives, the more it increases, the more it fuses itself into others, the more it fuses others into itself. Physical life does not desire to give, it desires only to take; this is the subconscious impulse of Nature (*L.D.*, ch. XXII).

The descent previously spoken of has been of an impersonal character, a descent of consciousness, considered as force or movement. But there is another aspect in which the descent is of personal character, the descent of a conscious Being. The Divine as the Supreme Person, the Creator, has also been following a similar course of manifestation, multiplication, and obscuration. The Supreme Person, Puruṣottama, is the origin. The manifestation of the Divine starts in Supermind. The first personalities, absolute Truth forms of the Divine, the higher gods, take birth here. In the next downward range, in the Overmind, the personalities of the Divine become more independent of each other, each aiming at a special fulfilment of its own. But the Unity is kept. In the Overmind is the abode of the true and high gods, the gods of the Vedic Ṛṣis. There is the own home of the gods. Unitary consciousness is still intact, it is the One God who is called variously with different names, says Ṛṣi Dirghatamas. With the appearance of Mind the individualism becomes prominent. Where consciousness descends from the Mind into the Vital, stand the Asuras, mentalised vital beings. The Asura belongs to the Mid-Vital, he is the personification of ambition, arrogance, self-seeking. Lower in the Mid-Vital appear beings less luminous and controlled, more violent and passionate in their desire and hunger. They are the Rakṣasas. All ancient legends refer to such a fact of descending consciousness, a Fall. The sons of Aditi and Diti in the Purānas are examples of the descent of personalities of consciousness, so also Olympians and Titans of the Greeks, Arhiman and Arhumzad of Old Iran, Yehovah and Satan of the Hebrews. The name Asura, which in classical language means 'not-god', has originally

meant one who has force or strength, (Asu + ra). It was used generally of all the gods. The change in meaning hints at a spiritual Fall. Satan was once Lucifer. To the Lower Vital, the domain of lust and cruelty, of all that is low and mean, belong the Piśācas, djinns, ghosts, and vampires. Still lower, on the border line to Matter, appear beings of still lower order, imps, elfs, goblins, fairies. Some gods of beauty and delight belong to the Higher Vital, such as Gandharvas, Kinnaras, Apsarasas, angels, seraphs, and cherubs. In their occult reality they properly belong to the Overmind, the heaven of the gods (*J.* 1943, p. 14-16). Some of these gods and beings of unseen worlds are confined and bound to their own plane, some extend their existence to other planes also, and assume on each plane the form appropriate to that plane.

There is also another descent of quite a peculiar nature, the descent of the Divine person Himself, not indirectly, but in an embodied form, and in the fullness of his consciousness. That is the Avatara, 'he who has descended'. On the human level he appears as a human being for two purposes. By his example he shows how ascension is effected, how a normal human being can rise to higher levels. The second purpose is this: Matter cannot be transformed by pure spiritual consciousness, either within, or above. A physical transformation seems to be possible only by a physical embodiment as a channel for the spiritual force. The Divine incarnation with his physical body seems to lift up physical Nature to a higher level. The incarnations of Viṣṇu had the purpose to raise material Nature to a new status in the course of evolution (*J.* 1943, p. 21, 22). The fish would symbolise consciousness, hidden in the Inconscience of water, the tortoise as hidden in dense Matter. The boar is the Divine Will-Force that pulled out the earth from obstructive subconscious forces into Life-manifestation. The man-lion represents the transformation of Life into Mind.

Ignorance (Avidyā)

What is the origin of Ignorance? Is it the opposite of knowledge, an anti-divine principle? Some philosophers have introduced such a principle, responsible for ignorance and evil. This leads to the acceptance of an eternal duality. Others introduce a power of illusion, imposing itself on the Infinite, the Reality. But such

an element foreign to the original Reality, introduced into the working of the cosmos, really means a dualistic principle.

Sri Aurobindo thus concludes that Ignorance must be considered as something happening within the Supreme Reality itself, not inflicted from outside. How then does All Knowledge create Ignorance? Is Ignorance all pervading, operating everywhere? Ignorance cannot exist in the Absolute, in the Supreme Reality. An Omniscient Reality cannot be ignorant of itself. Does Ignorance exist on all levels of consciousness? In the Inconscient we see neither Ignorance nor Knowledge. It does not exist in material Nature. On the vital plane, in plants and animals, we do not find the operation of ignorance. The animal has got a limited range of knowledge and consciousness, but sufficient to meet the needs of life by an instinctive operation. It does not seem to be subject to the sense of ignorance. It seems to be present only in human consciousness. It is not an all pervasive active principle in the universe, but intervenes at a certain stage in cosmic evolution. Leaving out the highest and lowest levels, it covers a certain belt of evolutionary movement, that of the Mind. Below that belt there is no active Ignorance, above that belt it is eliminated. Only in the intermediate stage of the Mind the Divine Reality becomes subject to Ignorance. Here Ignorance intervenes as a minor and subsequent movement. It belongs to a partial action of the Supreme, a development of its consciousness, limiting itself in such a way as to create the phenomenon of Ignorance. How does this appear at a certain stage? It is the nature of the Supreme to project Himself out into multitudinous forms of self-expression in the cosmos. To make that movement possible, Universal knowledge has imposed this phenomenon on itself. The Supreme contains within Himself innumerable potentialities of knowledge, consciousness, power creativity, and substance. To bring out the individualities of all the forms of becoming a concentration behind each potentiality is necessary. The concentration of the Supreme releases the universe into manifestation. To give individuality the consciousness has to limit itself, putting forward a portion of Itself, like multiple facets of a diamond of infinite size. A particular aspect is put in front, and the rest is withdrawn from view. The human being is conscious only of the portion put in front, ignorant of the rest. He is conscious only of his own personality, which is in front, and of the other portions of the Infinite Being

he is oblivious. The exclusive concentration is necessary to create this play of personality, this individualisation. The effectivity as an individual is brought out by this exclusive concentration. On the plane of Mind this happens, here there is differentiation with the sense of diversity prominent, leaving the sense of Unity behind. Ignorance is the result of the Mind viewing things in the division it makes, instead of viewing itself and its divisions as instrumentations of the play of the Supreme. The individual soul conceives of its individuality as a separate fact, instead of as a form of Oneness, and it makes itself the centre of its universe, instead of knowing itself as a concentration of the Universal (*L.D.*, p. 158, 159). In Overmind this self-oblivion does not yet fully exist. There is a veil, hiding the light of Truth, but it is transparent, it is a golden lid, hiding the face of the Supramental Truth, but reflecting its image. In Mind this veil is no longer transparent. Ignorance arises when a veil is interposed between Mind and its supporting sense of Unity. The consciousness of Unity is first diluted when Spirit descends into Overmind but there is no operation of the principle of Ignorance here, only a preparation for it (*J.* 1947, p. 76). The full play occurs at the mental level, where Mind is separated from its supramental basis. The opaque veil between Mind and Overmind, brought about by exclusive concentration, is the veil of Ignorance. Thus Avidyā is the apprehension of the divided Many, divorced from the unifying consciousness, the cognition of multiplicity, separated from the sustaining principle of Unity. Ignorance is not a power of original creation, but a secondary mode of operation, a subordinate development of Truth consciousness. True knowledge includes awareness of plurality, but on the basis of Unity. Ignorance is awareness of plurality, as divorced from the sustaining principle of Unity; it is an exclusive concentration of consciousness in a particular direction for the fulfilment of a specific purpose, it is purposeful self-oblivion and self-limitation of consciousness (*J.* 1947, p. 71, 79). This conscious self-limitation and concentration is a purposeful movement, not a blunder or a fall, not a curse, but a divine opportunity.

The purpose is that of delight, consisting in manifesting in infinitely diverse ways the infinite possibilities inherent in the Infinite. The eternal delight of immutable Being, moving out into the infinite delight of Becoming, contains the secret of the

creative urge (*J.* 1947, p. 74). The delight of the Spirit's self-manifestation in apparent opposites is the secret purpose controlling the entire process of becoming (*J.* 1947, p. 75, 77). Infinite delight takes a plunge into inconscient Matter so that at the other end of evolution the fulness of divine joy may be manifested. The insentience of Matter is destined to rise through the pains and pleasures of human existence into the bliss of supramental being. The Spirit gets involved in Nature so that Nature may gradually evolve into, and discover herself, in the full glory of the Spirit. Avidyā is thus not the negation of Vidyā. Ignorance is not radically opposed to Knowledge, but a subordinate development of Truth consciousness, a special application of Knowledge in a definite direction for a special purpose.

Evil

Evil is the result of Ignorance, and cannot exist where there is no ignorance. Evil is not a native element of Supreme Nature. Thus there is no absolute of evil, but there is an absolute of good. Evil is a creation of life, or Mind in Life, it chiefly belongs to the Vital Plane. In Matter evil cannot exist. The inferior nature falls below the duality of good and evil, which are not native to the material principle; they are absent from the world of Matter. In animal life the fact of evil is there, the evil of pain, suffering, and cruelty, but the sense of moral evil is absent. That is a mental idea, a creation of the human being. The duality of good and evil begins with conscious life, but emerges fully only with the development of mind in life. There is an extreme view that treats evil as a permanent feature of the world. It is as real as good. Sri Aurobindo has a deviating idea. Evil is not a permanent feature of the world, it is only a **temporary development**. There is no evil in Inconscience, nor on the levels above mind. Evil exists only in the middle stages (*J.* 1954, p. 127). Where Truth exists on a basis of Oneness, evil cannot enter. When separateness enters, evil can also enter. Good and evil can be compared with the phenomenon of light and shadow. Shadow cannot exist without light. Light does not depend on shadow for its existence. Good is self-existent, evil exists only as a contradiction. There is no mutual dependence of good and evil (*L.D.*, p. 535). What is said about evil is also applicable to falsehood and error. Error is a deviation from Truth, falsehood a distortion of Truth, or its contradiction or denial (*L.D.*, p. 534).

The first conception in Vital Mind of good and evil is this: What is helpful, useful, pleasant to the individual, is good, the opposite is evil. The next step refers to society; what is useful to society is good, the opposite evil. These are human values of good and evil that differ from a deeper spiritual sense. This deeper sense comes from an inborn light within our nature, a sure discrimination of what points to the higher light, or away from it. As the inferior light is below good and evil, so the superior spiritual light is beyond good and evil. A higher law intervenes, in which there is no place or utility for these values. There is a self-law of Supreme Truth, which is above all standards. There is a supreme and universal Good inherent, self-existent, in the luminous consciousness of the Supreme Infinite (*L.D.*, p. 543). Evil, falsehood, and error, are thus the results of the evolution of Life and Mind from Inconscience. What is the necessity for such a process, and what is its purpose?

The emergence of mental and vital consciousness from Inconscience takes place in a separate form of Life which must affirm itself against the principle of materia, and a constant pull of it towards relapse into the original Inconscience. The result is the growth of a self-affirming vital and physical individual; as mentality increases, this vital and material individual takes on a more developed form of a self-affirming mental, vital, and physical ego. In the animal self-affirmation relies on two sources of knowledge; intuition, and surface contact with the outside world. This intuition is unerring. When human intelligence adds itself to this basis, vital intuition diminishes, and mental intuition is a mixture, no longer a certitude. The emergence of Mind in Life brings an increased range and capacity of the evolving conscious force, but also an increase in the range of error. Intuition is an edge of light thrust out by the secret Supermind, and sure in its action. Intelligence would be subservient to Intuition, but the hold of Inconscience on Matter causes obscurity to the light within. Error thus becomes a necessary condition in the slow evolution towards knowledge. To shut out error is impossible without limiting the chances of acquisition of knowledge (*L.D.*, p. 547, 549).

Error by itself would not amount to falsehood, it would only be an imperfection of Truth. But the ego is there, the physical ego, the life ego, bent on vital self-affirmation, the mental ego, bent on its own personal self-affirmation, and largely used by the

vital urge for its life-desire; there is a great source of distortion of Truth, an unconscious or half-conscious will to error, an acceptance of ideas, not by clear perception of the true and false, but by personal convenience, choice, judgment. This is a fruitful ground for the growth of falsehood. The natural vital element in us, unchecked, untrained, retaining its primitive character, is not concerned with Truth or right consciousness and action. It is concerned with self-affirmation, possession, satisfaction of desire, and imposes these desires on the world around. It improves the principle of life-egoism on the domain of intellectual truth and spirit, brings hatred and dislike towards everything obstructing its expansion; its satisfaction of desire and impulse takes no account of right and wrong, but only of the fulfilment of desire. The individual ego is by ignorance separated from the Divine, but pushed secretly towards evolutionary unification in diversity, it has behind itself the impulse to the Infinite. This translates itself into the will to expand, take everything into itself, it does this for its separate advantage, not by unity. Therefore the disharmonies we call wrong and evil arise. Evolutionary intention acts through evil as well as through good. Confinement to a limited good would check the intended evolution.

The drives towards self-affirmation are Nature's chief means of effectuation, without which neither mind nor life can utilize their possibilities, or realise their aim here in existence. A limited consciousness, growing out of nescience, is the source of error; a personal attachment to the limitation, and the error born of it, is the source of falsehood; a wrong consciousness, governed by the life-ego, is the source of evil. Because our separate ego acts for its separate advantage, not by conscious interchange and unity, conflict and disharmony arise, whose products are wrong and evil. Evil is the result of this struggle (*L.D.*, p. 550-555).

Through constant struggle personality is developed. The world is a training ground for souls. But pain and sufferings are not a device of God for this training of souls, they are circumstances accompanying His increasing self-manifestation, a progressive manifestation of the Infinite in the Finite. But this shaping of unique personalities cannot enrich the Being of God, it cannot make any addition to perfection. So the real truth behind the moulding of human personalities is Spirit, hiding itself behind Nature and seeking His rediscovery through evolution in apparent

contraries. Does God seek delight through this self-manifestation, and does not perfection make further seeking meaningless? The idea of delight is not only the delight of being, but also of becoming, and this delight of becoming consists in unceasing creation, in the variable manifestation of the infinite possibilities of His nature. The self-expansive urge of the delight of becoming accounts for this Will to self-manifestation in the contraries of this Nature. Evil, pain, and suffering are incident to the self-expression of Spirit in Matter (*J.* 1945, p. 93-95).

Sri Aurobindo does not deny the existence of evil, or the working of the devil, but he refuses to accept them as ultimately independent principles. The duality of pain and pleasure can be transmuted into pure joy, for duality is essentially a distorted reflection of the pure delight of existence upon the realm of Ignorance. The devil and his hosts are the powers of darkness, offering resistance to all movement towards Light. This is the significance of the contests between the Vedic gods and the Sons of Darkness. Darkness is not an absolute negation of the luminous spirit, but it is a form of expression of the Spirit itself, and its function is to provide the Spirit with a basis of unique self-revelation in apparent contraries (*J.* 1945, p. 101).

Pain and pleasure are both distorted reflections on the screen of Ignorance of the secret delight of existence. Suffering is a shadow cast by evolving Ignorance in its gradual movement towards knowledge (*J.* 1945, p. 97).

Māyā

In the Vedas *Māyā* means the power of infinite consciousness to comprehend, contain in itself, measure out, and form Name and Shape out of the vast illimitable Truth. It is the consciousness and Force of the self-existent Absolute, Saccidānanda. It is the power commissioned to shape finite appearance out of the Infinite. *Māyā* is the power, cit-Śakti, applying itself to the task of manifesting definite results out of the infinite potentialities in the infinite Reality, which is not only Static Existence, but also Dynamic Power. By *Māyā* the Static Truth of essential being becomes ordered Truth of active being (*L.D.*, p. 108).

Māyā is an original power of the highest consciousness, and cannot be related to the nature of Ignorance. This is the higher, the Divine *Māyā*. The higher *Māyā* is concealed from us at first

by the play of a lower, a mental Māyā, which is an illusion. It persuades each person that he is in all as a separated being, not as a being always inseparably one with the rest of existence. We have to emerge from this error into the truth of the higher Māyā, where the each and the all co-exist in the inseparable Unity of the one Truth and the multiple symbol. The deluding mental Māyā has first to be embraced, then to be overcome. This difference between the lower and the higher Māyā has been missed by the philosophy of the illusionists. To them the mental Māyā is the creator of the world. But mind is only an instrument, not the creator of the descending creation, and the world is a conscious birth of that which is beyond Mind into forms of itself. Māyā comes to mean illusion in later philosophies because the difference between the lower and the higher Māyā was not understood. But the Vedic conception of Māyā is that of the Divine Māyā, a fundamental Reality and constitutive principle in the world (*L.D.*, p. 108, 109).

Birth and Rebirth

A few definitions may first be given.

Ātman or *Jīvātman* is inborn and eternal, although upholding the manifested personality from above. It stands above the creation, though in it.

The Psychic Being is the representative that *Jīvātman* puts forth on each plane of consciousness. It is the *soul*, *Puruṣa*, in the secret heart, supporting the actions of mind, life, and body. It 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. It is realised as *Puruṣa*, which entering into evolution, has all the divine potentialities. Self or *Ātman* is thus the Universal aspect, Soul or *Antarātman* is the individual aspect. *Ātman* in manifestation takes two aspects:

Puruṣa, as the conscious being
Prakṛti, as conscious nature.

The various *puruṣas* in us are: the psychic, mental, vital, and physical. They are thus projections of *Ātman*; *Prakṛti* acts in the mental, vital, and physical nature, and *Puruṣa* is to a certain extent disfigured there. There is a distinction between *Parā Prakṛti*, higher, and *Aparā Prakṛti*, lower.

Parā Prakṛti, concealed behind, is the nature of the Divine, a supreme consciousness Force, which manifests the Multiple Divine as the Many. It is the One and the Many.

Aparā Prakṛti is the lower nature, which manifests all the minds, lives, and bodies.

When we talk of inner consciousness, we mean the consciousness of the psychic being, inner mental, vital, and physical consciousness. It is necessary to become conscious in these inner regions. If they are not awake, the psychic being has no instrumentation for its activities. Then it has only outer mind, vital, and body, as instruments and they are too narrow. External physical being is in an ignorant way connected with the physical universe; it has developed external vital and mind. Inner mind and vital are in contact with the universal mental and vital and can be intimately aware of the forces occult to our outer consciousness. The exterior being is not in direct contact with the universal. The inner being has to get hold of the outer and turn it into an instrument of the Divine.

Birth is the assumption of a body by the individual soul. It is a necessity for the manifestation of the Soul on the material plane. Birth cannot be an isolated phenomenon without past or future. It must be followed by rebirth, by a succession of births. An isolated birth would break the rhythm of the Spirit's self-manifestation. The succession of births will stop with the emergence of Supermind, for then the isolation of the individual soul will end, as contact with the cosmic soul is no longer necessary.

Rebirth: The soul takes birth, and each time a mind, life, and body are formed out of the materials of Universal Nature, according to the soul's past evolution, and its needs for the future. When the body is dissolved, the vital goes into the vital plane, and remains there for some time, till the vital sheath disappears. The mental sheath is the last to dissolve. Finally the soul or psychic being retires into the psychic world to rest till a new birth is close. The soul gathers the essential elements of its experiences in life, and makes it the basis of growth in the evolution. When it returns to birth it takes up with its mental, vital, and physical sheaths so much as is useful to it in the new life for further experience. Funeral rites are performed for the vital part of the being to help it to get rid of the vital vibrations, which still attach it to the earth or to the vital worlds, so that it may pass quickly to

its rest in the psychic peace. Out of the universal mental, vital, and physical nature, a selection of their forces and movements is made to form the individual mind, vital, and physical. The Soul, the psychic being, the spark of the Divine, stands behind the manifestation in life, and supports it. It survives through death and birth (*Lights on Yoga*, p. 26, 29).

Immortality

In the lower creation, Aparā Prakṛti, the eternal portion of the Divine, Jivātman, appears as soul, psychic being, the representative of Jivātman in evolution, Puruṣa in the heart. When there is full consciousness, the Jivātman and the psychic being join together. Jivātman, Spirit, Eternal self of the living being upholds the living being in its evolution from birth to birth. Jivātman in its essence does not change or evolve, it stands above personal evolution. Sri Aurobindo gives a three-fold conception of immortality. Jivātman in all its different aspects is immortal. Immortal here has the sense of 'timeless being', not of 'unending persistence in time'. This is called *spiritual immortality*, the first of the three conceptions. The second is *psychic immortality*, and the third *material immortality*. The general course for ordinary human beings is described in Rebirth. The psychic being survives the death of the body, the dissolution of the vital and mental sheaths, and goes to the psychic plane. There a rearrangement is made of past experience for the determination of the next birth. The psychic being again descends into evolution, guides the individual through a long succession of births towards the realisation of the transcendent Spirit. The psychic being persists through the succession of births because it is the representative of eternal Spirit in evolution. When an individual's spiritual evolution is complete, the psychic being gets united with the Jivātman, which is without birth and death, uneffected by the mutations of evolution, (*J.* 1948, p. 25, 28). This is psychic immortality.

What about material immortality?

The final goal of earthly evolution is material immortality, that means the complete manifestation of the spirit in material conditions. But this is so far only an ideal. It is anyhow not impossible, because the physical, vital, and mental are only lower modes of manifestation of the Supreme Spirit. This idea is even

consistent with the meaning and significance of terrestrial evolution (*J.* 1948, p. 49-50).

Personality is only a temporary mental, vital, and physical formation, put forth by the real person, the Puruṣa. The vital and mental sheaths, though kept for some time, dissolve. Only the essential form of the past personality may remain as one element among many, but in the background, behind the veil of surface mind, life, body. It may contribute to the new formations, but it will not remain the unchanged type of nature. Rebirth does not exist for the prolongation of an unchanging personality, but as a means for the evolution of the spiritual being in Nature. The idea of immortality, of the soul's undying existence, does not therefore mean the survival after death of a definite unchanging personality, which will always remain the same throughout eternity, from one birth to another. For the growth of the new being towards perfection, not only new experiences are necessary, but also a new personality; the same characteristics, the same types of movements would not be helpful. There would not be evolution, but eternal repetition.

It is only the divine self in us which is imperishable because it is unborn and eternal. We would demand for a similar survival for our mind, life, and body; the dogma of the resurrection of the body demands that Man tries to discover the elixir of immortality to conquer the death of the body. Mind, life, and body would have to put on the divinity of the indwelling Spirit. But such survival could only persist in the subtle body. The awakened mental Puruṣa and vital Puruṣa could preserve the mind sheath and the vital sheath of the subtle body if they were strongly developed, organized by, and centred round, the true psychic being. But the basis of physical existence, the body, could not be preserved by this change. The physical cause of decay would have to be overcome, and the body would have to function according to the demands of progress in the evolution of a new being. If the immortality of the nature was possible, that would be the crown of rebirth, and a proof of the conquest of material Inconscience even in Matter. But so far it is only a beautiful idea of future earthly happiness (*L.D.*, p. 731-733).

Yoga

By Yoga people generally understand the old system of Rāja-yoga as taught by Patanjali. But that is not the proper sense of the term because it aims at the separation of human and divine, it ends the personal life with all its sufferings. It is rather 'Viyoga', separation. The real meaning of Yoga, Sri Aurobindo maintains, is 'union', its aim is union between the human soul and the Divine. The contact of the human consciousness with the Divine is the very essence of Yoga. Yoga is the union of that which has become separated in the play of the universe with its own true self, origin, and universality. The Gīta makes a distinction between the two natures Parā and Aparā, but does not indicate that the lower can be transformed into the higher. It is Sri Aurobindo who has for the first time brought out the possibility of this transformation by his *Integral Yoga*. In his philosophy that which appears as the undivine is only a mask of the Divine, and a means for a new divine creation. He has described in detail the gradations by which the Divine descends into the apparent undivine, and how the undivine ascends into the divine and union is effected. In Rāja Yoga the aim is the dissolution of Nature and attainment of the silent state of Puruṣa. Sri Aurobindo's aim is the preparation of the lower Nature so that the higher power can work in it and effect its transformation.

There is a capital distinction between Sri Aurobindo's Yoga and ancient systems. The latter aim at the liberation of the individual whereas Sri Aurobindo's yoga aims at the liberation of the whole humanity. The old systems have been practised in India from immemorial times, but have not brought about any transformation of the world, they have only helped individuals to reach the highest state. The problem is cosmic, not only individual, a radical change must be effected in the whole universe. It is not enough that single individuals are liberated, detached from this world. The liberation must be in the whole of man's nature, and it must be effected in the whole cosmos. That is the final goal. Old Yogas are world-renouncing and life-negating. Sri Aurobindo's Yoga does not aim at a departure out of the world into Heaven or Nirvana, but a change of life and existence in this world; it aims at a liberation in, and of Nature, not simply from Nature. The object is not release from life, but the divine

fulfilment of life. Therefore it is called Integral Yoga; there something is achieved for the whole earth consciousness, bringing in a new power from a higher level, not only in mind and life, but finally also into the body, not only into the individual, but into the whole world existence.

The followers of old Yogas look upon the powers of mind, life, and body as means of ascent, as a ladder for climbing up to the highest spiritual level. After the highest point is attained, this ladder has to be kicked aside. Man has to depend on his own effort. Sri Aurobindo maintains that though effort on the part of human being is necessary, that is not enough. There has also to be a descent of the Divine. In his Integral Yoga body, life, and mind are not simply means of ascending to the highest peak, but also means of bringing down powers from above; they are not merely a ladder, but instruments of divine activity on earth, the media of self-manifestation of the Spirit in Matter. But man has to make himself fit to receive this Divine power, which will not descend otherwise. There must be an intense aspiration in man for this power, and by Yoga he has to prepare himself for receiving it. Thus these two things must accompany each other: An intense craving for the Higher Power on the part of the individual, and an actual descent on the part of the Divine Source. This integral divine transformation of our embodied existence is the unique feature by which it is distinguished from other Yoga systems (*J.* 1946, p. 76-78). The fact that the deficiencies of this lower existence can be permanently overcome in this world itself by the power of Supermind, this new idea is Sri Aurobindo's contribution. Integral Yoga brings the ideal within a measurable distance of actual achievement by discovering the immense possibilities of the Supramental consciousness to transform our life within the framework of here and now (*J.* 1946, p. 82). Tapasyā of various kinds, as practised in ancient Yoga systems can certainly build up some results, but Sri Aurobindo considers them uncertain and fragmentary, as compared with the two processes recommended by him. The results through ancient systems are very difficult to attain for an ordinary man, and an experienced Yogi is necessary to guide the different steps of the sādḥaka (person practising Yoga).

Through what processes does Sri Aurobindo's Yoga work then? Do the sādḥakas not practise any of the methods of ancient

Yogas? Yes, many of them practise Āsana (postures) and Prānāyama (breath exercise); the process of concentration in the Ajna centre (between the eyebrows) also helps the coming of the result. This is the centre of dynamic mind, will, vision, mental formation. But there should be no ascetic practices to suppress the bodily functions, no strict fasting, no mortification of the flesh. According to the Integral Yoga the development of the body should go hand in hand with the spiritual development. As in Rāja Yoga silence of mind is a necessity also in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. But complete silence, which leads to the cessation of all thoughts and activities of Nature, cannot be recommended. In Sri Aurobindo's Yoga the aim of silent mind is not the dissolution of Nature, but a preparation of the lower Nature so that the higher Power can work in it, and effect its transformation. If entire silence of mind can be attained it will no doubt be a powerful aid. But it is extremely difficult to attain by the individual's own efforts. The important thing is to get rid of the habit of invasion of troubling thoughts, wrong feelings, confusion of ideas, unhappy movements, which disturb and cloud nature, and make it difficult for the Force to work. When the mind is quiet and at peace, the Force can work more easily. Sri Aurobindo's Yoga works chiefly through inner disciplines, which can be practised by all his followers. The result depends not only on the individual's own effort, but also on the Divine power descending within the sādḥaka. His Integral Yoga works by the following processes: aspiration, self-concentration, and self-opening to the Divine Power. Aspiration is a seeking for the Divine, a call and will for the descent of the Divine power to manifest within us. It includes the heart's seeking, the assent of the vital, and the mind's will to be transformed by the power of the Divine. A fixed and unflinching aspiration must call from below and a Supreme Grace will answer the call. This Supreme Grace can act only in the conditions of Light and Truth, so the lower nature must be well prepared before the final result can be completed. Self-opening comes through aspiration, rejection and surrender. It means calling in the Force to work and surrendering to it. Besides aspiration there must be rejection of the movements of the lower nature, of the ideas, opinions, and habits of the egoistic mind. If one's own desires, egoistic demands, and vital insistentcies are mixed with aspiration, it is idle to invoke the Divine Grace to descend.

If one calls for the Divine, and yet something is chosen which is false, ignorant, and undivine, then the Divine will recede and the person is open to attack. All that withstands the work of the Divine must be rejected altogether. Aspiration and rejection must proceed in faith and confidence. There must be a firm belief that the result is realisable. A state of doubt and anxiety hinders the effectivity. The surrender has to be total and sincere, it must seize all parts of man's being. Inert passivity is not real surrender; what our physical consciousness would call surrender, is often inertia. If there is any kind of egoistic turn or insincerity of motive, if the Yoga is done under pressure of vital demands, ambition, pride, seeking after power or satisfying any vital desire with the help of Yogic force, then the self-opening cannot take place, or only partially. The psychic being can be fully open only when the sādḥaka has got rid of all vital motives. Some egoistic element of mind or vital being often wants to use the force for its own purpose; it is willing to receive something from the Divine, but not to give itself in full surrender to the Divine (*Lights on Yoga*, p. 46, 47). If part of the being surrenders, but another part reserves itself, follows its own way, or makes its own conditions, then each time that happens, the Divine Grace is pushed away, it is vain to expect that the Divine Grace will abide within. The surrender must be true and complete, then only the Divine Power can do everything else. The Supreme demands full surrender but does not impose it. Man is free to deny or reject the Divine. The surrender must be self-made and free, without condition or reservation.

The two most important things are the opening of the heart centre (hṛt padma), and the opening of the mind centres (above the heart) to all that is above them. The heart opens to the psychic being and the mind centres open to the higher consciousness and the link between the psychic being and the higher consciousness is the principal means of the siddhi (supernormal achievement). The first opening is effected by a concentration in the heart, a call to the Divine to manifest within us, and through the psychic to take up and lead the whole nature. The second opening is effected by a concentration of the consciousness in the head, and afterwards above it. The highest of the mind centres is at the crown of the head, sahasradala. The centre which opens directly to the Divine is above the head, outside the physical body,

in the subtle body (sūkṣma śarīra). It opens to intuition, and through it overmind can have communication with the other mind centres (*Lights on Yoga*, p. 59).

Most spiritual disciplines insist on detachment from, and renunciation of all earthly wealth, and personal and egoistic desire for its possession. They even proclaim poverty and bareness of life as a spiritual condition. Sri Aurobindo has a different attitude towards wealth and riches. His opinion is that one must neither turn with an ascetic shrinking from wealth nor cherish an attachment to it. Wealth belongs to the divine and is a power to be placed at the service of the Supreme. To shrink from the earthly power of money and wealth is to leave it in the hands of hostile forces. It must be reconquered for the Divine. Those who hold wealth are only trustees of the Divine, not possessors of the wealth.

The attitude should be this: If required to live poorly, the sādḥaka can so live, and no sense of want should affect him or interfere with the full inner play of divine consciousness; if he is required to live richly, he can so live, without falling into attachment to his wealth, or the things he uses, or being enslaved by the habits that possession of riches creates (*The Mother*, ch. IV). Among Sri Aurobindo's disciples are thus found many rich persons in high positions as well as ordinary simple men and women. They all lead the same simple life as is prescribed for those in his ashram, and strict discipline is kept up; in the main building of the ashram perfect silence is a rule. Those living in their own separate houses have some more liberty, but even there one is struck by the silence. No loud talk, laughing, or shouting is heard in the vicinity, not even in the adjoining streets. The members of the Pondicherry ashram all eat in a common hall their meals, vegetarian, simple food. Not even tea or coffee is served there. As mentioned before, Sri Aurobindo's opinion is that there should be no ascetic practices to suppress bodily functions. Great stress is laid on keeping the body healthy and vigorous and physical activities are insisted on. They have a regular place on the daily programme in the ashram.

Many of the high-standing disciples practise āsana and prāṇāyama in addition to the spiritual disciplines, aspiration, rejection, surrender, which are engaged in during times fixed for devotional purposes. Ordinary people, not trained in outer Yoga practices, only go in for the inner disciplines. Through these dis-

ciplines man is preparing for the descent of the Divine power. But we cannot expect the mass of humanity suddenly to reach a state fit for the Divine power to descend. Sri Aurobindo's opinion is this: If an individual or a group of persons are ready for this descent, then only a drop of the Divine, entering this world, can change the whole nature. It may not be a rapid process. To reach this goal is Sri Aurobindo's aim. His hope was to see it fulfilled in his life-time, himself having reached the highest stage. Every time a high soul has enabled the Divine to enter his own being, a step is made in the direction of the transformation of the world, even if a human eye cannot discover it. The groups of disciples now preparing for the descent of the Divine are of importance for the final result. The present world chaos is only a destruction necessary for a completely new construction to be born through the descent of the Divine power, which will transform the world into a new creation.

The future of humanity

(See J. 1951 and 1943)

Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future is optimistic. But the source of his optimism is not morality but spirituality. At present man has lost his spiritual force. By employment of our powers of mind the results in civilisation have proved a failure, as regards permanent spiritual improvement of the world. We stand at the summit of human development, technical, scientific, cultural. But our spiritual development has not kept pace with the material and scientific. The civilization our mind has created has become too huge for our limited spiritual capacity, which is still only on the mental level. Mental civilization is responsible for the disastrous crisis that characterizes our present age. Mind can offer no solution of the present mess in the world. Its sources are exhausted. Mind has proved its bankruptcy.

Here Sri Aurobindo brings in his revolutionary theory. Reason is the most characteristic factor of modern human civilization. But the highest our mental civilization can reach is not high enough for our final destiny. Human society, as it exists today, is not the last word of evolution, mind is not the last stage, it must consummate itself in something higher than mind. Our mental stage is only an intermediate one on the march to a higher

perfection. A higher stage can only be reached by a radical transformation of our human consciousness by the descent of a higher consciousness, the Supermind. The world is now passing through a crisis, in which only the advent of Supermind can save us. In the evolutionary process Supermind is bound to descend and give a new push. Peace and goodwill among men cannot be reached at our present mental stage. As long as world evolution is dominated by mind, wars and quarrels between men will continue. The world can be raised to a higher level only through a new and higher race of men, which will surely emerge at the descent of Supermind. It may not be a sudden and miraculous transformation, but a gradual one. It will be an evolutionary process, which proceeds by taking up the present nature, mind, life, body into the Supramental Light and pours its Truth down into lower planes. It cannot happen with the whole world at once, but first with certain selected individuals, and then on a larger scale. There have existed all the time of the present world development certain perfected individuals, having reached Supreme Light. But their ideal has been to cut themselves off from ordinary world concerns; only by doing so they could reach salvation. The world as such has had no spiritual benefit or improvement. Sri Aurobindo aims at cosmic salvation, not only at individual perfection. This is his revolutionary idea. New principles must be at work, whose nature we are not able to grasp at our present stage. Evolution will go on unfolding newer and newer truths, radically different from any truths now accessible to our logical understanding. One of Sri Aurobindo's cardinal points is the 'principle of solidarity', which means that the evolution must embrace all the elements of our present covering, body, life, mind. The lower principles cannot remain where they are, evolution must transform the whole of world existence. Other philosophers, chiefly Nietzsche, have also stressed the emergence of something new, but through the disappearance of the old. The new rises out of the ashes of the old. Sri Aurobindo's evolution means transformation, not disappearance of the old. His optimism consists in his view of man as having a higher destiny, to become more than man, to become Superman. A spirit of harmony will then descend even to the lower order of creation. There will not be a compromise between the ideals of different religions, as they are in vogue today, but quite a new path will be mapped out, guided by the new Super-

consciousness that will emerge when the world takes the next momentous step upward. Sri Aurobindo thinks the time for this great change is fast approaching, he even expected to see it take place during his life-time. ~~Crisis after crisis will occur unless some fundamental change is effected in the structure of civilization.~~ In the present crisis, ~~only the descent of Supermind can save the world.~~ The religion of the future must be not from the standpoint of man but that of Superman; a standard of man as he is destined to be, not as he is now. The religion of Superman is a prophecy of a 'new Heaven and a new earth'. The new earth will not be the blind and egoistic earth of today. A new physical universe illumined by the superior light is to emerge.

Sri Aurobindo offers a message for our time: Only through man raised to the supramental level the present world chaos can be transformed. At present, civilization has become a dangerous weapon to satisfy the passions of our lower nature, egoism, and lust for power. We can see the disastrous result of a high scientific development used to satisfy primitive desires for comfort, wealth, power, without working in harmony with the laws of the Divine. The real cause of our present ills is the egoistic mode of our consciousness, which does not permit us to see our real common good. Our unities take the form of pacts and adjustments of give and take. The individual of today seeks his own self-aggrandisement. The new individual does not consider anything good for himself which is not also good for others. His interests will never clash with those of others. The present clashes between individual and individual, between individual and society, between nation and nation, are unthinkable in the new society. To the supramental being there will be no contradiction between his good and the good of others. The individual must realize that only in the life of his fellowmen is his own life complete, and the race must realise that its own perfection and permanent happiness must be founded on a free and full life of the individual. A radical spiritual change is necessary to transform society according to higher spiritual laws. A divine descent is the means to effect this change.

III. SRI AUROBINDO AND WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

It is held by some Indian Philosophers that East and West meet in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. I refer to the book: *The meeting of East and West in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy* by Professor Maitra of Benaras Hindu University. He definitely points out anyhow that opinions on this question may vary widely and that his essays represent his personal opinions. I want to stress three points where there are contacts between the two, but where Sri Aurobindo's philosophy has taken a divergent path. From his college career in England Sri Aurobindo was well acquainted with Western culture and philosophy, especially of Greece. His connexion with some old Indian systems by which he has been influenced, but where divergence exists, will be separately dealt with.

The psychology of the Superconscient

Sri Aurobindo's original contribution here is his exposition of the higher potentialities of the Superconscient. He has shown the organisation of the whole range of human psychology, from the subconscious to the superconscient. The most important part of his teaching describes how to raise our human consciousness from the ordinary mental level to the higher consciousness of Supermind. Besides connecting physical human consciousness with the subconscious and the inconscient realms, he maintains that there are further grades of evolution beyond mind possible to man. Besides the psychology of the Inconscient and the Subconscient, which has attracted the attention of modern western psychologists also, Sri Aurobindo gives an exposition of the psychology of the Superconscient. He is the philosopher of *Superman*. But his Superman has nothing to do with Nietzsche's Superman, who is an asura, not a god. Sri Aurobindo's Superman is the God-man, who exceeds man in spiritual qualities. Nietzsche is the first one to proclaim the name Superman. But to him goes not only the credit for having introduced it, but also the discredit of having lowered its nature down to that of a Titan, whose most prominent qualities are great physical strength, indomitable will, selfishness, cruelty, intolerance. But both Sri Aurobindo and Nietzsche seem to have this in common that they emphasize the fact that if the

world is to be raised to a higher level, it can only be done by a new and higher race of men. Sri Aurobindo's Superman is the result of an upward movement towards Divine perfection, whereas Nietzsche's Superman would rather be considered as the product of a downward movement.

Sri Aurobindo gives much significance to intuition, working from the higher levels of consciousness. The gulf between reason and intuition, which could not be bridged in some old philosophical systems, disappears in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. He gives intuition a higher place than reason. But the highest intuitions create their own logic. A reconciliation between reason and intuition can only take place on a higher level than mind. Our mental logic and reason must rise to a higher level, that of Supermind.

Among modern Western philosophers Bergson is the one who has most strongly emphasised the standpoint of intuition. Intuition is to him the faculty that moves man, not the intellect. Intuition is the faculty which enables us to grasp reality in its inmost essence. The usual kind of approach is through the intellect, which he considers as a round-about way. Intuition gives the direct approach. From Sri Aurobindo's point of view Bergson's theory suffers from two weaknesses. According to Bergson intuition is a pure flow, a spontaneous movement, called *élan vital*, the vital urge, 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. That purpose may be served by the intellect. Bergson's chief point has been to show intuition as superior to reason and it thus seems strange he has to resort to reason as a help to get the necessary stability. The second point is that Bergson excludes all purpose from the movement. It has no goal towards which it is moving. He has mixed together all the higher forms of consciousness under the single term of intuition. Sri Aurobindo has pointed out there is a distinction between lower and higher levels of intuition. Such distinction can be made only if there is a goal for the world process; some principles must be nearer the goal than others. Bergson can have no distinction between higher and lower movements as there is no goal for the process.

The process of evolution

The idea of evolution seems to have been more prominent in Western than in Eastern philosophy. In India the theories of evolution have not been given much attention. But Sri Aurobindo has made evolution the fundamental point, the basis of his whole philosophy. This is in itself a striking feature, but still more significant is the revolutionary idea he has introduced into his philosophy of evolution. It differs also in some respects from the evolutionary ideas in the West. In recent times Western philosophy has got a new tendency through its contact with science and biological advance. Specially are to be noted Darwin and Spencer with their naturalistic view of evolution. Sri Aurobindo condemns their naturalistic view as being mechanical with no sign of spiritual development. It starts from the lower principles, from the beginning. The higher processes are interpreted in terms of the lower. Sri Aurobindo's theory is derived from the nature of the highest principle. Natural processes find their meaning in the spiritual ones, which are the measuring rod for the lower, not the opposite. The lower principles are expressions even though imperfect, of the Ultimate Reality. The key to the understanding of the nature of evolution is thus not to be found in the process of nature but in the Ultimate Reality. Sri Aurobindo emphasizes that evolution must be a movement towards a goal, it must be a spiritual evolution. After the Spirit's self-projection into the world, involution, there is a return of the Spirit to itself, evolution. Every movement bears the stamp of its spiritual origin. It is not only a self-generative movement, but its every step is guided by the spirit, not only as a silent witness but as an active factor. Unless it is a spiritual evolution moving towards a goal, Sri Aurobindo will not call it an evolution at all. On the same ground he condemns Bergson's evolutionary ideas. Bergson's theory of evolution is one of the main principles of his philosophy. His great work 'Creative Evolution' strongly condemns the mechanical theory, but at the same time he rejects all teleological theories of evolution, which has proved a disaster to his philosophy. For what is creative evolution if there is no purpose in creation, if the movement is not guided by any purpose. Here is the great difference between Bergson's theory of evolution and that of Sri Aurobindo, who has gone further than any evolutionary philosopher. He has answered

the why of evolution and also the how. Whitehead may be the most outstanding of evolutionary philosophers of the present day in the West. His theory of evolution is also naturalistic. His basis is a naturalistic principle, prehension, a kind of feeling, which is the motive force of the whole world process. It starts from the lowest forms, and reaches out to the highly developed emotions. It is clearly a case of evolution from the standpoint of the beginning, thus of the same order as the theories of Darwin and Spencer, and thus condemned by Sri Aurobindo because there is no proper spiritual principle underlying. The weakness of Western evolutionary theories is that the movement has no proper purpose, no goal. ~~One might remark that Hegel like Sri Aurobindo insists on a spiritual evolution.~~ Both look at evolution from the standpoint of the end. But Hegel identifies Spirit with Reason, which standpoint Sri Aurobindo must of course condemn. For him reason is not the Ultimate Reality; several steps have to be climbed above Reason before the Ultimate Reality can be reached. Reason is an important feature but has to be exceeded in the higher spiritual life.

In his theory of evolution Sri Aurobindo has struck a new path. Greater and newer truths, different from those already evolved, have to be reached, truths not accessible to our mental logic understanding, which must be superseded by a higher consciousness, that of Supermind. There are several points of similarity between Sri Aurobindo and the New Platonists. I will only indicate some of these in comparison with Plotinūs' system. But even here Sri Aurobindo takes a divergent path in some respects.

(a) *Creation and Evolution*

Both Sri Aurobindo and Plotinus speak of two orders of principles, one upper and one lower, the latter being a derivative of the former. The central idea of both is common, the higher world sets the standard for the lower. Though the lower world is only a poor imitation of the higher, it is not a world of shadows but has a real status. There is correspondence between Sri Aurobindo's view of the upper and the lower hemisphere and Plotinus' view of the double Trinity. Sri Aurobindo's Absolute is the triple principle of Sat, Cit, Ānanda. The Absolute projects itself into a world of created beings through an intermediate principle, called

Supermind. Plotinus has also the higher and the lower triad: the higher Divine principles are: the Absolute, Spirit, Soul. The lower are: Spirit, Soul, Body, corresponding to Sri Aurobindo's Soul, Life, Matter. Each principle in the lower hemisphere is a subordinate aspect of the corresponding principle in the upper hemisphere. Mind is a subordinate aspect of the intermediate principle of Supermind.

Both these Philosophers also agree on the point that the status of the lower world is not fixed and unchangeable, but capable of improvement, receiving impressions from above. Sri Aurobindo anyhow goes one step further than Plotinus: He gives unlimited possibility to all the stages of the lower world to rise to the highest level, whereas Plotinus gives this unlimited possibility only to the human soul. Consequently Plotinus' scheme does not involve cosmic salvation. It is individualistic, ignoring the fact that the highest state is not one of isolation, but one in union with others. Here Plotinus agrees with the ancient idea that the highest condition consists in total detachment from the world.

Another difference between Plotinus and Sri Aurobindo is their conception of the drive that leads to evolution. Plotinus considers this inner urge more or less mechanical. The world cannot raise itself by its own efforts, its power is very limited. Sri Aurobindo points out that it is the Divine Will, the desire of the Spirit, that determines the ascent of the world. The inner urge is thus the Spirit's desire to return to itself. Even matter is Spirit, and thus the uplift of the whole world is bound to take place.

Though there is an outward similarity between Sri Aurobindo's theory of Divine Descent and Plotinus' theory of Emanation, there is a considerable difference. Sri Aurobindo's Descent is full of significance. Creation as a descent of God signifies that the created world even on the lowest level bears the stamp of its divine origin. Moreover it has a purpose: It is a Descent for the sake of a following Ascent. Plotinus' Emanation is really mechanical. There is no purpose or goal. Emanation has no connection with evolution. Emanations are over. No fresh ones will occur in the future.

It may also be remarked that the conception of the Absolute is different with these two philosophers. Sri Aurobindo describes the Absolute as having the highest consciousness. Plotinus' conception is negative, the highest stage is being totally without con-

sciousness. Sri Aurobindo's theory makes the Absolute the highest in perfection and richness. Plotinus makes it the highest in emptiness. Possessing no consciousness is the highest stage. Sri Aurobindo ascribes this to the lowest stage, that of the Inconscient.

(b) *Relation between Philosophy and Mysticism*

It may be of interest to note the different outlook the two philosophers have on this subject. Plotinus considers philosophy as a preliminary discipline, a training, before the mystic can attain God-realization. As such it is indispensable, but finally it has to be abandoned, like a ladder, when the higher stage is reached. At the final stage a mystic gives up thinking and knowledge. Everything has to be dropped, even his consciousness, in order to attain union with God. Plotinus describes the highest condition as a 'flight of the Alone to the Alone' (*Selected works of Plotinus*, p. 322). Here Sri Aurobindo is in opposition: The highest stage does not mean dropping but acquiring. Not by remaining alone, but in union with all, the mystic can attain the highest condition. His conception is that philosophy has to be perfected in the highest type of knowledge, Supramental knowledge. It cannot be discarded like the scaffolding of a building when it is completed. It must be altered and made a suitable vehicle for the higher Truth. Reason has limited powers, but the work started by reason must be carried on further by Supramental knowledge. Reason is completed and not annihilated by supramental knowledge. Intuition, a mystic's vision, is unable to give us the Truth in an ordered form, but here, in our surface being, reason helps and organizes our thoughts and actions. When a mystic's vision emerges, philosophy should not suffer self-extinction, but acquire consummation and perfection.

Ignorance and Evil

I refer to the previous chapters on this subject (p. 18-24). The merits of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is perhaps most apparent in his handling of Ignorance and Evil. Reference is also given to Professor Maitra's book *The Meeting of the East and the West*, p. 114-154). The Western view seems to be an admission that Evil is a permanent feature of this world. In India there are conflicting systems, supporting either the idea of the permanency

of Evil, leading to the Dwaita system, or the idea that Evil is an illusion. Sri Aurobindo combats both these philosophies, maintaining that a radical transformation of our outlook must be made. The principle which can effect this and cause a change in our approach to the problem is Evolution, as expounded by him. He thinks that the chief cause of the inadequate handling of the problem of Evil is the failure to understand and appreciate the value of the principle of Evolution. It is a contradiction in terms to speak of evolution, and yet assert the eternal existence of Evil. If evolution is a fact, then Evil can never be a permanent feature of the world (*E.W.*, p. 125). Sri Aurobindo's idea leads not only to individualistic salvation from Ignorance and Evil, but above all to cosmic salvation.

IV. SRI AUROBINDO AND INDIA'S ANCIENT PHILOSOPHIES

IN the section on Yoga, already dealt with, it is pointed out that there is a capital distinction between Sri Aurobindo's Yoga and ancient systems. It is described in that chapter how Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga will effect a transformation in the individual as well as in the cosmos. Through his Yoga a permanent and dynamic connexion between the higher consciousness and man's ordinary consciousness is effected, and the practical steps leading to such consciousness are explained. Sri Aurobindo's system of Yoga is a revolutionary and unique achievement. Indian philosophy has on the whole been individualistic on the question of salvation. The West has dealt with these problems more from a cosmic standpoint than from an individualistic. Sri Aurobindo has combined both the outlooks in his system of Integral Yoga.

Another exposition will now be given on the relation between Sri Aurobindo and

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| (a) The Veda, | (c) The Gīta, |
| (b) The Upanishads, | (d) The Tantra. |

Sri Aurobindo and the Veda

Sri Aurobindo has laboured much with the interpretations of the Rigvedic hymns. To give a full exposition of this would require a book by itself, and here I can only indicate some points, which are the basis of his interpretations.

There is an ancient view on the Veda, according to which we must pay attention to three aspects in order to understand the Vedic hymns aright:

- The physical,
- The cosmic divine,
- The spiritual.

The Vedic Ṛṣis adored the gods in these three aspects, though it may be that it is their sacrificial forms and personalities connected with their cosmic divine aspect that they placed in the forefront. Agni, the foremost god in the Vedic scheme of wor-

ship, is Fire in his physical or nature aspect; but as the presiding deity of Fire he is a Creative Principle in things, burning away the old and building up the new, and in his spiritual aspect he is the Divine in the soul of man, and in the soul of the Universe, and in the Beyond. On the basis of the idea that the physical and cosmic divine aspects are of prime concern Sāyana has written his commentary on the Veda. The sacrificial aspect is dominating. Indian scholars after Sāyana have followed his lines. Some have made some improvements or some minor discoveries of facts but the fundamental position remained. We have not got at the real sense, the spiritual aspect, which is the chief intention of the Vedas. Behind these ordinary interpretations is hidden the inner, the esoteric sense. The Ṛṣis were mystics, in possession of inner secrets. Until these secrets have been brought into light, Vedic interpretation still remains an open field. The Ṛṣis arranged their thought in a system of parallelism. The same deities were at the same time functioning for internal and external purposes. They used a system of words of double values; the same language served for worship in both aspects. But the esoteric sense predominates. The Vedas are chiefly for spiritual enlightenment. But in the Vedic age the spiritual achievement, the occult knowledge, was confined to a few, not spread in the mass of humanity. Therefore only a few initiates could understand the esoteric sense of the words, and the ritualistic sense, the external worship, became all important. On this basis Sri Aurobindo works: The Ṛṣis are seers of a single truth, they use a common language, words of both esoteric and exoteric sense, the latter understood by the mass of people, the former only by a few initiates. The Ṛṣis were highly advanced in spiritual culture, the mass of people were still on the primitive stages. But the hymns that the Ṛṣis sung had to appeal to both ordinary people and initiates. Under the veil of concrete and material forms and symbols are hidden spiritual secrecies. They are protected by a veil from the profane and revealed to the initiates.

Thus Sri Aurobindo holds the view that the Ṛgveda is a book of esoteric symbols, masked as a collection of ritual poems. The language is an ingenious mask for hidden truths.

A modern Indian scholar, Dr Varadachari of Sri Venkatesa College, Tirupati, appreciates Sri Aurobindo as follows (*Idea of God*, p 46, 47). 'Sri Aurobindo, the greatest among modern

psychological interpreters of the Vedic hymns, is a yogi. He differs from Sāyana, not indeed about the interpretations made in the sacrificial manner, for that may indeed be the truth in that direction, but about the interpretations he makes in respect of hymns and passages that are definitely psychological states of supreme consciousness. So thoroughly are the keys to interpretation from the psychological angle imbedded in the very literature of the hymns, that it is surprising that no psychological attempt was ever made by those who swear by the Veda'.

In the magazine *The Arya*, issued by Sri Aurobindo in the years 1914-1921, he wrote a series of essays, commentaries and translations under the heading 'Secrets of the Veda'. After his death they were collected in the book *On the Veda*; he has also translated a great number of hymns in their esoteric sense in the book *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*.

Sri Aurobindo and the Upanishads

Sri Aurobindo states himself that before he began his Vedic studies he was well acquainted with the Upanishads and the Gīta. When studying the Vedic hymns, he discovered in them many truths hidden, which had been taken up and developed in the Upanishads. He thus made a new approach to the hymns trying to restore their spiritual and inner sense. Then he also found that this line fitted into the texts of the earlier Upanishads, where he found the records of a powerful revival and a revelation of the soul of the Veda. | His opinion is thus that the Upanishads are not a revolutionary departure from the Vedic mind and fundamental ideas, but a continuation and development of these, trying to express all that was held in the symbolic Vedic speech as a mystery and a secret. | The sages of the Upanishads drew their inspiration from the Vedic seers, they rediscovered the hidden meaning of some hymns and expressed it in the language of their own age. The Vedas possess the high spiritual substance of the Upanishads, but lack their phraseology, their inspired knowledge was not expressed in intellectual and philosophical terms. The Vedantic sages tried to save as much as possible of the truths found by the Vedic seers and to re-experience and express them in their own terms. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is not based on the Upanishadic teachings, which have only confirmed the truths he himself had experienced, and found in the Vedas. But the close

contact between his philosophy and that of the Upanishads can be seen from the many references he gives to them in his work *The Life Divine*. Sri Aurobindo points out that there is a difference between the earlier Upanishads and the later ones. The former contain thoughts very close to the Veda, while the influence of the doctrine of Māyā is traced in the later ones. His disciple Sri Kapali Sastri, also draws attention to the fact that the Upanishadic sages were inspired by the hymns of the Vedas, He writes:

'The Rks and their seers are very often quoted or mentioned in Upanishad texts, and this is not due to any kind of sentimental regard, but due to the fact that the sages of the Upanishads knew that there were truths of spiritual and occult knowledge embedded in the Vedas' (*L.U.*, p. 161).

Sri Aurobindo has commented on the two earlier Upanishads, *Iśa* and *Kena*. In these he sees the Vedic thought as the basis for the Upanishadic thought. He finds the *Iśa* keeping close to Vedic roots and the thoughts of the Vedic Ṛṣis. To a large extent it is in touch with the outlook of the Vedic sages. It gives a comprehensive picture of the Ultimate Truth, and the reconciliation of opposites. It also appeals to the Vedic gods Agni, Vāyu, and Sūrya for the uplift of man. As an illustration I will mention some thoughts brought out by separate verses:

Iśa, verses 1, 5, 6, 7 deal with the theme: 'The Lord, One, indivisible, manifests himself in the multiplicity of things. This is a play of his cosmic consciousness. The immoving Lord and the moving creation, both are the same, Brahman, though they appear to be distinct. The whole cosmic cycle is this: The involution of the One in the Many, and the evolution of the Many in the One. Brahman should be seen in all things in the created universe as well as beyond it. The Lord of creation is called *Iśa*, Puruṣa, the Pure Existent, manifested in the Universe'. (*Iśa*, verse 8: *sa paryagāt.*) 'It is he that has gone abroad, he extended himself in the Universe.' This thought Sri Aurobindo connects with R.V.I. 154: 'Viṣṇu, triply extending, the cosmic aspect of the Supreme. He that went abroad is the Lord, who inhabits all mutable forms, and at the same time holds them all in his immutable self.'

Iśa, verse 16: 'The Puruṣa, then and there, I am He. Oneness constitutes and upholds multiplicity; multiplicity does not

constitute and uphold Oneness. The base is Oneness, not multiplicity.' The same thought Sri Aurobindo sees in R.V. IV 2:11: 'ditim ca rasvāditim uruṣya': 'Lavish on us the finite and guard the infinite'. The divided and the undivided consciousness are both necessary. We must see both the unity and the multiplicity. The infinite must be protected in us among the multiplicity of things. Multiplicity must be conscious of its oneness; oneness must embrace its multiplicity. *Īśa*, verses 9, 10, 11 specially concentrate on the pair *Vidyā*—*Avidyā*. In Sri Aurobindo's interpretations Day and Dawn represent Knowledge, *Vidyā*, Night represents Ignorance, *Avidyā*. Here comes out the conception of Divine and Human consciousness in man, the twin aspects of consciousness. Man should not accept exclusively either *Vidyā* or *Avidyā*. He must start from the bottom, *Avidyā*, and climb up to *Vidyā*. He must embrace both at the same time. The harmony can be achieved only if he knows all in order to transcend all. The necessities of the pairs of opposites comes out in several places of the *Rig-Veda*:

I 13.7; I 95.6; II 3.6; V 1, 4, 5, 6.

Īśa, verse 15: 'The face of Truth is covered with a golden lid; that do thou remove, O Fosterer, for the law of the Truth, for sight' (Sri Aurobindo's translation; see notes 8 *U.*, p. 13-15).

The Supreme radiant Truth (*Sūrya*) is covered with a golden lid. This lid is the inferior covering truth, which man sees as the outer form. He does not see the Dweller behind the lid or veil. Though the concepts of mind may be brilliant (a golden lid) they must be replaced by the divine vision of *Sūrya*. The lid must be removed.

With this may be compared R.V. V 62.1: 'There is a truth covered by a truth where they unyoke the horses of the sun' (Sri Aurobindo's translation). The cosmic truth of things veils the eternal unchanging truth, of which it is a manifestation. The rays are the thoughts proceeding luminously from the Supreme, but become distorted and disordered in our human mind. They form a golden lid, covering the face of Supreme Truth.

The *Kena* fixes the relation between human consciousness and Brahman consciousness, the relation between the subtle forces, working in the mental man through mind and life (*adhidaiva*) and the power of the spirit (*adhyātma*). The *Kena* approaches through the lower faculties, the *Īśa* begins with the indwelling

Lord. A few examples will illustrate the correspondence Sri Aurobindo sees between this Upanishad and the Veda.

Kena: The Vedic image of Prāṇa is kept up, a horse yoked to the chariot: Part I 1. 'By whom yoked does the first life—breath move forward on its path? By whom impelled is this word that men speak? What god set eye and ear to their workings?'

Part I 3. 'There sight attains not, nor speech attains, nor the mind. We know not nor can we discern how one should teach of That; for it is other than the known, and it is above beyond the unknown' (A's translation).

In R.V. I 170.1 the same idea occurs, where Indra speaks to Agastya: 'Who knoweth that which is supreme and wonderful? It has emotion and action in the consciousness of another, but when it is approached by thought it vanishes.' In parts III and IV of the Kena this thought is beautifully elucidated:

The gods had conquered the Titans; they thought the victory was theirs, they did not understand that Brahman stood behind. The Brahman appears before the gods, but does not reveal himself. Indra, Vāyu, and Agni appear on the scene. They retain much of their Vedic aspect. They represent the cosmic Divine on the mental, vital and material planes. The apparition shows he is no creation of Matter, subject to the flames of Agni, no vital creation, subject to the dominion of Vāyu, no creation of the mind, it vanishes before Indra. Indra approaches Ūmā, the Supreme consciousness, and from her the gods learn the truth. She said 'It is eternal'. Then only, he came to know that this was the Brahman. Only by coming into contact with the Supreme consciousness, they could know Brahman. Mind, life, body, through which the gods act, must become aware of something beyond, which governs them.

From the Kaṭha Upanishad a couple of illustrations may be given:

Kaṭha VI 17: The lodgement of the spirit, the Puruṣa, in the physical body of man is here talked of in very concrete terms: 'One must separate him with patience from one's own body, as one separates the main fibre from a blade of grass. Thou shalt know him for the Bright Immortal' (Sri Aurobindo's translation in *8 U.*). The knowledge, and realisation of the Spirit in the mortal is possible and necessary for man in this life on earth. Such

an attainment alone prepares for his survival as an individual Soul after the falling of the Physical sheath.

The same idea is found in R.V. VII 59.12. Here the release is compared to the falling from the stalk of the urvāruka (a species of cucumber). When ripe it falls of itself from the stalk.

Kaṭha V 2. 'The Swan' as a symbol of the Supreme Soul is talked of: hamsaḥ śuciṣat, the swan whose dwelling is in the purity. In R.V. IV 40.5, called the 'Hamsavati Ṛc' the purport is the same.

In *The Life Divine* (chapter III p. 330) Sri Aurobindo refers to the figure of two birds in one common tree as a symbol of the Eternal and the Individual.

This figure occurs in the Muṇḍaka Upanishad III. 1.1, as well as in R.V.I. 164.20. Sāyana in his commentary explains the figure as alluding to 'jīvātma', the vital spirit, and 'paramātma', the supreme spirit.

The quotations may be multiplied and in Sri Aurobindo's opinion they show that the Upanishadic sages were aware of the occult knowledge of the Ṛṣis. There may be a protest against the externalism of the Vedic practices, but at the same time it was a return to the spiritual springs that the Upanishadic sages had found in the Vedic Ṛṣis.

Sri Aurobindo and the Gīta

In his book: *Essays on the Gīta* Sri Aurobindo has given his interpretation. One important feature of this interpretation is that he has not sought to give an exposition of his own philosophy and his own Yoga, as some other commentators have done. He has kept his own outlook in the background, and tried to penetrate and give a faithful account of the view of the Gīta itself. The Gīta's teaching is not intended to support any exclusive school of philosophical thought, or any form of Yoga. Sri Aurobindo has pointed this out in his *Essays on the Gīta*. He writes: 'It is not a weapon for dialectical warfare; it is a gate opening on the whole world of spiritual truth and experience and the view it gives us embraces all the provinces of that supreme region' (p. 11, Vol. I). 'Our object in studying the Gīta will not be a scholastic or academical scrutiny of its thought nor to place its philosophy in the history of metaphysical speculation—We approach it for help and light, and our aim must be to distinguish its essential and

living message, that in it, on which humanity has to seize for its perfection and its highest spiritual welfare' (p. 14, Vol. I).

It is strange to find that Sri Aurobindo with his foreign education, totally isolated from Indian life and customs, culture, and traditions, became the greatest interpreter of India's soul, as expressed in her ancient spiritual culture and literature. It was during his time in Baroda that he first plunged into the study of Indian languages and afterwards, into her religious scriptures and literature. He acquainted himself with the Upanishads and the Gīta thoroughly. At this period he was actually living the Gīta in his life. He found it a spring of spiritual force and strength with concealed depths for those who drank deep enough from it. His life is an embodiment of the harmonious ideals put forth in the Gīta, and his speeches and writings give evidence that its full meaning was penetrated into by him. When he took up the Gīta, he did not accept any of the interpretations of the current schools. His mind was fresh and original, not already under the spell of traditional thought. The Gīta took hold of his life and shaped it anew.

There are differences between Sri Aurobindo's teaching and that of the Gīta on some points. They stand on a different level and there is a corresponding difference in the philosophical outlook. This does not mean that there is a conflict between the two. The chief difference is in the teaching of Yoga, and there the Yoga of the Gīta can very well be a beginning of Sri Aurobindo's, and the synthesis of the Gīta may be taken broadly as a starting point of the new and greater synthesis of Sri Aurobindo's (J. 1942, p. 51). 'The Gīta's Yoga is a graded discipline, by which the individual can advance towards the spiritual goal. Sri Aurobindo's Yoga on the other hand has for its aim not only the liberation and perfection of the individual, but the bringing down of a new spiritual light and power on the earth, which will open to all individuals of the human race possibilities of a divine life, hitherto never realised on the earth. The Gīta's Yoga shows to what spiritual heights man can rise individually at the present stage of the evolution of the human race, how he can make his body, life, and mind the instruments of spiritual living and action. Sri Aurobindo's Yoga wants to advance man a further step in the evolution so that he may go beyond the mind, and develop higher instruments of world knowledge and world action'

(J. 1942, p. 52). Sri Aurobindo himself writes: 'The ordinary life consists in work for personal aim and satisfaction of desire under some mental or moral control, touched sometimes by a mental ideal. The Gīta's Yoga consists in the offering of one's work as a sacrifice to the Divine, the conquest of desire, egoless and desireless action, bhakti for the Divine, an entering into the cosmic consciousness, the sense of unity with all creatures, oneness with the Divine. This (Sri Aurobindo's) Yoga adds the bringing down of the Supramental light and Force (its ultimate aim) and the transformation of the nature' (L.Y., p. 72). The Gīta does not refer to such a consummation of the human race though there are hints here and there. The Gīta's aim was not to open up the vision of a Supramental race, but to pave the way for its appearance. The paths shown by the Gīta are rather a preparation for the passing upward of the soul to the perfection of the supreme spiritual nature (parā prakṛti) from the lower ego (aparā prakṛti). The reconciliation between Soul and Nature, this supreme secret, is implied in the Gīta's distinction between parā and aparā, but it is not explicitly told how the transformation takes place, so there seems to be a gap between the two. Sri Aurobindo reveals the secret of the Supramental Force from above descending; it can victoriously handle the physical Nature in the ascent from aparā to parā. Sri Aurobindo has given a new Yoga, going further than the Gīta. He sees the goal of human effort as the divinisation through Supermind of human life on earth. His Yoga is not an adjustment into a new system of other yogas, it is a structure superseding them.

The motto of the Gīta: 'Raise yourself by your own efforts', may seem a contradiction of Sri Aurobindo's teaching of the descent of the Supramental Force as a step absolutely necessary for the advance of the soul. But Sri Aurobindo's view is really not a contradiction but a continuation, a step further above the Gīta. Man's own effort is the first necessary requisite for the Supramental Force to descend. Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is thus a consummation of that of the Gīta. Sri Aurobindo points out that the Gīta does not give preference to one of the yogas over the other. It keeps an equal balance between the three Jñānayoga, Karmayoga, Bhaktiyoga, emphasizing now knowledge, now works, now devotion, without absolute separate preference to one or the other. He is thus against the commentators on the Gīta who emphasize one or the

other way as being all important in the teachings of the Gīta. Its teaching is a synthesis of Knowledge and work. Devotion has also knowledge as its basis. Karmayoga can be perfected only by Jñānayoga, so also Bhaktiyoga. They all three meet and become one in the Puruṣottama, this Lord, who is the Self, in whom all knowledge culminates, and the Master of Sacrifice, to whom all works lead, as well as the Lord of Love, into whose being the heart of devotion enters. The apparent contradictions in Parabrahman as both active and inactive, static and dynamic, featureless and with features, the Gīta has reconciled by its conception of the Puruṣottama and the distinction between the two natures, parā and aparā. This distinction between the two natures is the practical basis of all the Yoga of the Gīta. Sri Aurobindo is the first one to point that out.

The Gīta has not entered into the question of Knowledge and Ignorance and its solution. How can the One become the Many without losing its Unity? How can Brahman be both Knowledge and Ignorance? Why does Brahman assume these limitations and imperfections?

In his *Essays on the Gīta* Sri Aurobindo has not entered into this, but he answers the questions in his *The Life Divine*. 'The Absolute neither creates nor is created. We can speak of creation only in the sense of the Being as Becoming in form and movement what it is already in substance and status' (*J.* 1942, p. 64).

'A solely silent and static Infinite, without an infinite power, dynamis, and energy is inadmissible; a powerless Absolute an impotent Spirit, is unthinkable. The silence, the status are the basis of the movement, an eternal immobility is the necessary condition, field, essence even, of the infinite mobility, a stable being is the condition and foundation of the vast action of the Force of being. The opposition we make is mental and conceptual; in reality, the silence of the Spirit and the dynamis of the Spirit are complementary truths and inseparable. These things may be difficult for us to understand because our own surface finite capacity in either direction is limited and our conceptions are based on our limitations; but it should be easy to see that these relative and finite conceptions do not apply to the Absolute and Infinite' (*J.* 1942, p. 65).

Sri Aurobindo and the Tantra

There has been much influence of Tantric philosophy and religious practices on Sri Aurobindo. He says himself that he was a Vedāntin as well as a Tantric. In Sri Aurobindo's Yoga both the Vedānta and the Tantra have met. The contribution of both is considerable, but at the same time, Sri Aurobindo's Yoga has gone beyond both of them. The subject would need a special treatise, but here only a few of the chief points can be mentioned to show in what direction the influence has worked, and where the chief differences are.

Vedāntic sādhanā (religious practice) aims at mukti (liberation) of the individual. Tantric sādhanā extends the liberation to a group of sādhakas (persons engaged in religious practices). Besides that it has a second aim as the highest bhukti, a cosmic enjoyment of the power of the Spirit. Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is a synthesis of these two, mukti and bhukti; but in addition he has a third aim: He aims not only at the liberation of the individual, not only even of a group of sādhakas, but far more: A total transformation of human nature through the descent of the Divine.

Vedānta has laid stress on the inactive Puruṣa aspect of Saccidānanda, Tantra on the dynamic Prakṛti aspect. Simply speaking, Vedānta is the sādhanā of the Puruṣa and Tantra of the Prakṛti. Sri Aurobindo has made a synthesis of the Yoga of Puruṣa and the Yoga of Prakṛti into a higher Integral Yoga.

Sri Aurobindo is in agreement with Vedānta in calling the Supreme Reality Saccidānanda. But he does not, like some Vedāntins, regard the impersonal aspect of the one indivisible, immobile Brahman in its Nirguna (featureless) state as the Supreme Truth. He regards the one supreme Puruṣa or the Puruṣottama as the Supreme Truth. There he differs from Vedānta.

Tantra considers the Ultimate Reality as at the same time silent static and possessing power and dynamis. Sri Aurobindo's Puruṣottama is in Tantra called Paramaśiva. The supreme movement of Saccidānanda, its own dynamis, is in Tantra called Ādya Śakti, the Mother of the Universe. At the status of Saccidānanda there is no difference between stability and movement. Paramaśiva and Śakti exist in mutual embrace and love. Like Tantra Sri Aurobindo calls Ādya Śakti the Divine Mother. But there is

one difference. Paramaśiva of the Tantra is ever absorbed in samādhi (abstract meditation) and has no will of manifestation. Ādya Śakti is the cause of manifestation and of withdrawal from manifestation. Sri Aurobindo's Puruṣottama has a cosmic will, the will of manifestation. It is not merely the Tantric Paramaśiva absorbed in samādhi of Saccidānanda. Sri Aurobindo's Divine Mother is the embodied will of Puruṣottama. In his book *The Mother* he reveals the mystery of Śakti. What he has written there agrees with what we find in Tantra (*The Mother*, ch. VI).

In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy the Divine Mother plays an important part as the embodied will of Puruṣottama. The one who is adored as the Divine Mother is the Divine conscious Force, dominating all existence. In her eternal consciousness she bears the Supreme Divine, which is manifest in her as Saccidānanda, and through her in the worlds as the consciousness of Ívara Śakti. In three ways one can be aware of the Mother when one enters into contact with the conscious Force: in her Transcendent, Universal, and Individual aspects. In her transcendent aspect she stands above the worlds and links the creation to the ever unmanifested mystery of the Supreme. In her Universal aspect she is Mahāśakti, who creates all beings, enters, supports, and conducts all processes. In this aspect four leading powers stand in front, embodying her powers of Wisdom, Strength, Harmony, and Perfection. According to these she is called by the names:

Mahēswarī, laying down the large lines of world forces.

Mahākālī, giving energy and impulse.

Mahālakṣmī, discovering their rhythm and measures.

Mahāsaraswatī, presiding over the details of execution, combination, and exactitude of result.

In her Individual aspect she mediates between human personality and the divine nature.

Kuṇḍalinī Śakti. The teaching of the Tantra is this: Ādya Śakti as Parā Prakṛti has entered each Jīva (individual soul) as its own prakṛti, absorbed in sleep in the inconscience of Avidyā. This śakti, sleeping in Jīva, is called Kuṇḍalinī Śakti. This Śakti has to be awakened from its sleep and turned upwards. The Tantra has seven important centres or cakras, through which the Kuṇḍalinī has to pass. Its seat is in Mūladhara, the lowest centre. There it has to be awakened, lifted up and piercing the other six centres

till it reaches the highest, sahasradala, where it unites with Mahāśakti, and is merged in the bliss of union with Paramaśiva. When Ādya Śakti is aroused, she goes upward by swift means and as a result the Jīva, carried upward by the stream of its own Śakti, arrives at union with parā Ādya Śakti. The force involved in Prakṛti returns to its source and attains fulfilment. When Kuṇḍalinī Śakti becomes united with Paramaśiva, the body becomes free from disease and decay. The Jīva attains to the world of Ānanda (supreme bliss).

Sri Aurobindo in his *Lights on Yoga* gives a description of the seven centres, which are identical with the Tantric ones. They are all in the middle of the body, not on left or right. They are supposed to be attached to the spinal chord, but in fact they are all in the subtle body (sūkṣma deha). One has the feeling of their activities as if in the physical body when the consciousness is awake.

The centres are:

1. Mūladhara, the lowest, governing the physical down to the subconscious.
2. Svādiṣṭhana, the abdominal centre, governing the lower vital.
3. Nabhipadma or manipura, the navel centre, governing the higher vital.
4. Hṛdyadma, the heart centre, governing the emotional being.
5. Viśuddha, the throat centre, governing the expressive and externalising mind.
6. Ājnācakra, between the eye-brows, governing the dynamic mind, will, vision, mental formation.
7. Sahasradala, the thousand-petalled lotus, commands the higher thinking mind, the illumined mind, and opens at the highest to the intuition, through which the over-mind can have communication with the rest.

The sādhana of Tantric philosophy and that of Sri Aurobindo are anyhow quite different, they do not proceed in the same way. The Tantric sādhana begins in the lowest centre, and raises Kuṇḍalinī Śakti upwards. Sri Aurobindo does not awaken the power of Kuṇḍalinī at the beginning from the lowest centre. He begins in the heart centre with a psychic aspiration to reach to

higher levels. This is the Vedic Agni. Then there is the surrender of one's ego to the Divine. His Yoga implies the awakening of the Puruṣa, which separates from the lower prakṛti, and surrenders all to the inner and higher Divine Śakti. By that very touch of the Divine the lower Kuṇḍalinī Śakti arises. There is no separate sādhana necessary to raise the Kuṇḍalinī from the lowest to the highest centre. When the awakened Puruṣa surrenders to the Divine Śakti, as a result the Divine descends and extends in the whole being. To Sri Aurobindo it is all important that the soul opens itself and surrenders to the higher spiritual force. The twin movements of ascent and descent are built on self-surrender, which lifts man above the mental level, and the divine śakti, making the Superconscious fully operative in the human mould (*J.* 1946, p. 78).

Kuṇḍalinī Yoga thus starts from the bottom; it aims at rousing the Kuṇḍalinī from the lowest to the highest centre, where it meets the supreme consciousness. In Sri Aurobindo's Yoga there is both an upward and a downward movement. The ascent is in the beginning. The end is the descent of the Divine and the final transformation of Prakṛti. He does not simply aim at reaching the Divine, but he wants to transform the whole world of Jīvas by the Divine Force. This is the final aim of creation, and is something new in Yoga philosophy. The Tantra does not ascertain any special aim of creation; after creation comes dissolution, and the Tantra hints at succeeding creations and dissolutions (sṛṣṭi and laya).

When the lower is brought up to a thrilling touch of the Divine, bodily consciousness is lost. It is said: When Kuṇḍali sleeps, man is awake to the world. When she awakes, man sleeps, that is, loses all consciousness of the world and enters the causal body. It is true that in Kuṇḍali Yoga spiritual progress is much accelerated and produces full knowledge within a short time. The movement of Prakṛti is swift. Once Kuṇḍalinī is aroused, she by herself rushes towards Paramaśiva, and the sādhana becomes easy.

Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga aims at integral union with the Divine, based not on detachment from the consciousness of the world, when bodily consciousness is lost, but amidst the waking consciousness of the world. His yoga is a gradual and discriminating process, not the swift process of Tantric Yoga. He points out

the dangers of such rapid progress. If the replacement of the individual effort by the Divine Śakti takes place before the lower nature has been completely purified, there is the danger of lower adverse forces catching hold of it. The Kuṇḍalī Yoga cannot be performed by ordinary people without the guidance of an experienced Yogi. By constant practice of Prānāyama (breath exercise), Āsana (posture exercise) Bandhā, and Mudrā (varieties of Āsana) the sādḥaka under the guidance of a Guru can rouse the Kuṇḍalinī from her sleep and bring it under control of the will.

The chief difference between the Tantric Yoga and Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is thus:

The Tantra lays the initial stress on the action of awakened śakti in the nervous system of the body. It starts from the bottom, and Kuṇḍalinī Śakti ascends the ladder upwards to the summit.

Sri Aurobindo begins on the mind level. To him spirit in mind is more important than spirit in body. Mind opens directly to a higher spiritual force, which descends when the mind is prepared for it, and brings the whole of man's nature into action.

V. SRI AUROBINDO AND CHRISTIANITY.

Christian influences and disciples

As Sri Aurobindo spent fourteen years of his youth in Europe for his education, it seems probable that there must have been some influence from Christianity on his religion. He rarely refers to Christ and Christianity, and we do not know how strong the influence on his thought might have been. It may be that national pride prevented him from making any reference to foreign influence. Anyhow there is affinity of thought on many points between the two religions. By some Indian Christians Sri Aurobindo's religion has been described as a bridge between Hinduism and Christianity. In each of the two a common trend of life is evolved, the soul reaching out for a new power, the realization of the Divine in Man.

Many Europeans and Americans have joined Sri Aurobindo as his disciples, and many of them profess that they remain Christians in spite of that. One lady definitely told me that she understands Christ and Christianity much better after coming in contact with Sri Aurobindo's religion. She professed to be a Christian and a disciple of Sri Aurobindo at the same time. Though such a position seems impossible to me, it may be true that a Christian can benefit by studying Sri Aurobindo's religion. But there are vital points where the two differ, as will be shown in the following chapters, and one cannot accept both the religions equally. There is a fundamental difference between the importance and function of Christ in the two religions, which in my opinion is the main reason why a true Christian can't at the same time be a true disciple of Sri Aurobindo. Another lady in Sri Aurobindo's ashram said: 'I am a Christian but with two reservations: To me Christ is only a great religious founder like several others, but I do not believe in Him being a Saviour in the sense the Bible attaches to it. Further I do not believe that man has only one life—existence on earth. One has to believe in the possibility for man to develop through several earthly existences.' I will return later to the first reservation. To the second may be said that though Christ did not openly declare that we have only one life on earth, the urgency, with which He insisted on the importance

of this earthly life, imploring men not to neglect the opportunities it gives, may point in that direction.

The Main Differences

Three main differences between the two religions may be pointed out here:

1. Sin and Evil.
2. Christ and the Incarnation.
3. The Cross and Salvation.

1. *Sin and Evil*

In the chapters on Ignorance and Evil it is shown that Sri Aurobindo considers evil as the result of ignorance. It cannot exist where there is no ignorance. If ignorance disappears, evil can no longer endure. There is no absolute of evil. Ignorance does not have self-existence, it exists by absence or limitation of knowledge. So also evil exists by limitation of truth, error by deviation from truth, and falsehood by distortion of truth or its contradiction and denial. The opposites: good—evil, truth—error and falsehood, virtue—sin, are not mutually dependent on each other. There is a contradiction like that of light and shadow. Light does not depend for its existence on shadow, but shadow depends on light.

Ignorance is an indispensable step in the slow evolution towards knowledge, so also are evil, error, falsehood, and sin in the evolution towards truth. At each step different possibilities of fact, judgment, and interpretation present themselves; they have to be tested, rejected, or accepted and confirmed. To shut out error is impossible without limiting the chances of acquisition of knowledge and truth. At what juncture of evolution do these opposites enter? The vital mind is the creator of the fact of evil. In animal life the fact of evil is there, suffering, pain, cruelty, but the sense of moral evil is absent. There is no sin or falsehood in animal life, all action is neutral and permissible for the preservation of life. The life-ego is bent on vital self-affirmation, used by the vital urge for its life-desire. In the tension between the vital ego and the mental ego there is an inexhaustible source of distortion of truth. The natural vital element is concerned only with life-growth, satisfaction of desire, trying to impose its demands on the world around it. Nature accepts the conflict and disharmony which we call evil and wrong, because they are necessary steps in

evolution. Evolutionary intention acts through evil as well as good. Confinement to a limited good would check the intended evolution. Man must leave certain things behind, and move towards others, until out of good and evil he can emerge into the eternal and infinite Good, where there is cessation of the duality of good and evil.

Sri Aurobindo does not deny the existence of evil, but he does not accept evil as an ultimately independent principle. The forces of evil are real, in their root—nature attached to ignorance. Supraphysical beings embody these forces, and are active to impose their adverse construction on terrestrial beings; they oppose the increase of light, truth, and good. This is figured in the conflict between the powers of Light and Darkness, a tradition common to many religions. Error, falsehood, sin and evil are cosmic powers, but relative in their nature not absolute, as they depend for existence on the perversion or contradiction of their opposites. They are not self-existent absolutes like Truth and Good, which are inherent aspects of the Supreme, Self-existent. They are creation of Life or of Mind in Life. Their aspects can be explained by the co-existence of worlds of a descending involution with parallel worlds of an ascending evolution, but it is in the return of Inconscience towards consciousness that we can see them taking their formation and can best understand them as normal and inevitable.

The Christian idea of the origin of evil differs greatly from Sri Aurobindo's. Evil is not caused by mere ignorance, it is a result of man's disobedience to God and his fall. Like Sri Aurobindo the Bible accepts a dualism between good and evil, between God and an evil power. A battle is going on between these two powers. The dualism is not absolute, evil has no eternal power like Good. Evil is anyhow a reality, not an illusion. Christ himself and also St Paul emphasized the existence of the kingdom of evil. Christ's fight against temptations, his agony in Gethsemane, reveal his strong sense of fight against the evil force. It is also evident in His words to the disciples: Watch ye and pray lest ye enter into temptation (Mark 14:33). Man's personal fight against the Evil one does not take such strong expressions in Sri Aurobindo's religion as in the life of Christ himself and of St Paul (Romans 7:24).

Sri Aurobindo seldom uses the word sin and chiefly it is used

as the opposite of virtue. From what is said above about evil we understand that there is a wide difference between Sri Aurobindo's idea of sin and that of the Bible. According to Christianity sin is not caused by mere ignorance. It's root is in man's will, in revolt against God's will, in disobedience, in a wrong decision, it is a movement in the wrong direction, not only an incomplete movement. It is an altogether wrong course, which can be corrected only by a turning in the opposite direction by conversion. When man becomes conscious of it he will have a sense of guilt, feel true repentance and crave forgiveness. This consciousness of sin as guilt is thus foreign to Sri Aurobindo. Ordinary Hindus have no deep sense of sin, no urgent desire for forgiveness. Pilgrimages, bathing in sacred rivers and purification ceremonies only show a shallow sense of sin and desire for forgiveness. The idea that all that happens in the world, both good and evil, is God's action dominates an ordinary Hindu mind, which does not understand the fact of man's evil will, opposing God's purposes.

2. *Christ and the Incarnation*

In the chapter on *The Descent of Consciousness* it is pointed out that beside the descent of the supreme as a force of consciousness of impersonal character there is a descent of the Divine person Himself. He descends not as a disembodied force, acting as a general movement, but in an embodied form and in the fullness of his consciousness. The word for this Divine incarnation, Avatara, he who has descended, shows the Divine coming down Himself as a terrestrial being on our material plane. For what purpose? The purpose on the lower planes is illustrated by the incarnations of Viṣṇu, showing how to effect an ascension of consciousness, how to raise material nature to a higher status in her evolutionary course. Matter cannot be transformed by pure spiritual consciousness alone. It seems that a physical transformation is possible only by physical embodiment as a channel for the spiritual force. It is with his physical body that the Divine as an incarnation seems to push and lift up physical Nature to a new and higher status. When we come to the human level, the incarnation has also another purpose. The Divine appears as a human person to show how the ascension and transformation can be effected, how a human being can rise from a lower status of consciousness to a higher. The embodied Divine shows the path,

walks himself the path, and man can follow. These incarnations occur time after time when there is a necessity. When there is decrease of 'dharma' in the world, an incarnation can appear to raise humanity. Buddha and Kṛṣṇa are such incarnations. Sri Aurobindo counts Christ also as such an incarnation, like others. Christ's appearance is thus no unique event, it is of the same kind as other incarnations.

The Biblical conception of the son of God, God in Flesh, an intermediary between the human and the Divine, declaring Himself to be the Way, the Truth, the Life, expresses a similar truth. But there is a wide difference between the two religions. God, descending as Christ, the Saviour of mankind, is a unique event; Christ is different from other incarnations. Christ as a Saviour from sin, by His death opening the way to God for forgiveness of man's guilt, this conception is not conceived by Sri Aurobindo. This will be further elucidated in the following chapter on the Cross and Salvation.

The question has often been asked: Cannot Christ be considered as superman then? Sri Aurobindo definitely answers the question by 'No'. His reasons will be given in a following chapter on Superman.

3. *The Cross and Salvation*

The real significance of the Cross, revealing the conquest of the immense power of sin and evil through Christ's sacrifice, cannot be understood by Sri Aurobindo. Man's sin was too great a reality to be removed by his own efforts. Only God could do it. God's interference through the sacrifice of His son on the Cross was necessary.

(a) The Cross as reconciliation of God and Man.

Man had been disobedient, rebelled against God. A reconciliation was necessary. God had to take the initiative to effect this. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son (Rom. 5:10).

According to Sri Aurobindo there was never enmity between God and Man. Man's 'fall' was not due to his evil will, there was no disobedience from man's side; the entrance of sin was a necessary step in evolution. Thus there can be no talk of reconciliation in his religion.

(b) Christ's death as a sacrifice.

The idea of sacrifice, so common in Hindu thought, does not show any deep feeling of sin and guilt. Sacrifices are offered to God time after time mostly in order to propitiate Him to give earthly benefits and long life to the offerer. Occasionally it is a thanks offering; but it is rarely an offering because man feels the guilt of sin. Thus an ordinary Hindu can hardly understand the significance of Christ's self-sacrifice on the Cross to remove man's guilt of sin, a penalty for man's trespasses, made once for all for the whole human race. The idea of vicarious suffering, Christ's death on the Cross for sinners, is also foreign to Hindu thought. Though every man understands that parents may suffer for their children, a friend for his friend, the idea of God suffering for man, Christ suffering for us, for the sins of the whole world, is foreign to a Hindu. Sri Aurobindo repudiates the idea of Christ's death as a sacrifice for man's guilt. Man was not a transgressor, man must work himself for his own salvation. Only God's Grace through this descent in man is necessary, but there can be no talk of suffering on God's part for the guilt of humanity. The consummation of God's love in sacrificing His Son that man should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16) is strange to Sri Aurobindo. The descent of the Divine is also called God's Grace. He does not use the word Divine Love here, but the Mother goes further saying: 'Love is the supreme force which the eternal consciousness sent down from itself into an obscure and darkened world that it might bring back that world and its beings to the Divine.' With the awakening to Love there entered into the world the possibility of coming back to the Divine. But there is no idea of Divine Love making any sacrifice.

(c) The Cross is figured as a battle where Christ won the victory over sin and death, over the powers of Darkness. Through this victory the position of man is changed, man is free from the bonds of sin. The cross is a turning point in history. The fight is still going on in every individual's heart, but the way is open between God and man for every man's victory over evil. To Sri Aurobindo Christ is no turning point in the history of the world, his death was no unique event, thus the Cross can have no special significance for the final victory of Light over Darkness.

Salvation: As salvation in Christianity comes through the Cross, Sri Aurobindo must naturally give some other way of

salvation. If sin and evil are necessary steps in the course of evolution, salvation can only mean removal of obstacles hindering man in his ascent to higher levels. Salvation can only mean the removal of ignorance. This is at present a slow process, which can only proceed in stages on man's ascent above the mental level. Only when man's mental stage is fit for ascent to higher levels, when through his own efforts he has merited the Divine Grace, only then through the Divine descent, can salvation come through the gradual disappearance of Ignorance. This may not happen for the whole humanity at the same time. The formation of Superman with Ignorance removed will first take place in a few individuals fit for that stage. But the descent of the Divine will gradually effect the transformation of the whole cosmos, creating a new race with supramental possibilities. At present the state of Superman has not been reached. In a few individuals ignorance is partly conquered even now, they have ascended above ordinary mental stage, reached the level of Higher mind or Overmind, but not yet reached the stage of Superman. This salvation is a fact to be hoped for and prepared for. Sri Aurobindo was convinced that it would take place in the near future. In Sri Aurobindo's terminology salvation would mean change of consciousness. Ignorance disappears at the ascent of consciousness from the mental level to the levels of Higher mind, Overmind, and Supermind. Usually this change is a gradual process, but it can also take place like a flash of lightning, and may then be compared to Christian conversion, when the power of consciousness changes the whole nature and life of man with miraculous suddenness. St Paul's conversion is an illustration of this, so also the conversion of Mary Magdalene. Christ did not speak a word to her but touched in her something deeper than her mind, some element of her consciousness, and she was changed as if she had gone through a new birth. In Hinduism Swami Vivekananda is also an illustration. Sri Ramakrishna touched him with his foot, nothing else, no exposition of religious doctrines or discussions as might have been expected in the case of this brilliant intellectual scholar. He found himself swept into a new plane of consciousness, getting a vision of Truth and Knowledge. Both in Christianity and Hinduism there are many cases of such sudden change of consciousness. They are only instances of the powers of the higher planes of consciousness coming down and producing results on our ordinary mental plane.

Whether called conversion or change of consciousness, they are means of salvation, delivering the bound human consciousness from darkness, in Christianity from the guilt of sin, in Sri Aurobindo's religion from the bonds of Ignorance. Many mystics can testify to the miraculous working of this spiritual force, the Divine Descent called God's Grace. The usual experience in Sri Aurobindo's religion is anyhow a slow ascent worked out through much effort from man himself through Yoga, followed by a descent of the Divine step by step, overcoming the force of Ignorance.

Affinities with differences between the two religions

1. Purposeful creation.
2. New life from above.
3. Human self-surrender.
4. Superman—Spiritual man.
5. The consummation.

1. *Purposeful Creation*

Christianity and Sri Aurobindo here stand on common ground where Spirit is moving towards a universal creative purpose. God speaks and reveals himself by creation. Creation is the book religion has to read. Religion has to do with life, and human life is a stage in the creative process. Religion must study the creative process with a view to get illumination as to the purpose and will of God and His way of dealing with man. Man has to be placed in the context of the creative process with the preceding terms of Matter and Life. The Supreme is not only Static but Dynamic, not only a dogma but Life. Man is not the last stage in the creative process. Both Christianity and Sri Aurobindo see a higher future for man. Sri Aurobindo finds the destiny of man from the story of evolution. God has descended through self-concealment, which process he calls involution. By the reverse order he recovers himself in evolution, mounting the steps of the ladder. The recovery of God is a necessity. Man is not the goal, there is a further advance for man. Human life is only an intermediate stage. Man must reach a higher level, that of Superman. We Christians say that man was created as the image of God, and man's final destiny is to return to that stage, God's image. There are anyhow differences to be noted in these processes; though both

the religions agree that man in his present stage is doomed, salvation can only take place in a new term of evolution. Sri Aurobindo sees this new term as the appearance of Superman, we Christians find this higher destiny realized through Christ. Sri Aurobindo takes man's present mental state as an unavoidable step in evolution and man can be perfected only by a new power because the possibilities on man's present level are exhausted. Mind must be lifted up to supermind through the intervention of a new power from above. This intervention has not yet taken place but is near at hand. Christians believe that man fell from his original state of being the image of God through wilful disobedience and rebellion against God. The new power through which man's original state can be recovered, is Christ. The advent of Christ is a complete fact but man's perfection, his union with God, can only be completed in Heaven. Christ has opened the way for our restoration.

2. *New life from above*

The realization of a new birth through the Spirit working in us, God in man, is a common feature in both religions. Christ said: 'The Kingdom of God is within you', and Sri Aurobindo proclaims the same truth, found through his own religious experience. A new creative order, a new cosmic energy, has to be introduced into the universe, a Kingdom of God, a new type of men. St Paul and St John also definitely talk of a new birth, and two types of men, the old, psychic man, and the new spiritual man. For the transition a new birth is necessary (1 Cor. 2:14; John 3:1-15). The new force, infused into the universe, creating something new, is in Sri Aurobindo's religion the descent of the Supreme Spirit, in Christianity the descent of the Holy Spirit through Christ.

But there are considerable differences in the conception of this new birth.

Sri Aurobindo's conception is this: In the previous stages of creation God also infused a new power, a new cosmic energy, thereby creating something radically new. Having created inanimate matter, he put into it life by the new force, and animate beings were created. At the next step He put mind into some animate beings, thereby creating man. The final touch is now remaining, whereby a new type of men will be created out of the

ordinary mental type, men transcending our present human limitations. This new type transcends man as man transcends animal. This new birth is thus a biological process like the change from matter into life, from life into mind; this change will be from mind into supermind, from man into superman. But it also involves a spiritual change, it will cover every sphere of life, physical, mental, and moral. Man will be endowed with supramental reason, intelligence, and intuition. In what way this change will take place, if it will be gradual or sudden, we do not know.

Christianity definitely sees chiefly a spiritual sense of the new birth through the Holy Spirit, the new force entering the universe through Christ. A new type of man is created. St John talks at length on the subject in John 3:1-15 where Christ teaches Nicodemus about the new birth. Through repentance and faith only this new birth can take place; rebellion is changed into a state of Sonship; through the forgiveness of sins the new men become children of God. The terms repentance and forgiveness have no place in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. He asks man to surrender, to open the door to the new descending Spirit to take his abode in us and lift us up.

Another difference is this: Christianity states that the descent of the Holy Spirit, creating a new man through new birth, has already taken place at the first Whitsuntide, and is still taking place in every man who is ready for the new birth. The descent of the Holy Spirit is a historical fact. Sri Aurobindo's conception is that this impending descent of supermind creating the new type of man, Superman, has not yet taken place. He expected it in this age, and prepared for it. The new type of man, transcending the old mental type, has thus not yet appeared. The preparation is not repentance and forgiveness of sins, but follows other laws. The preparation is surrender to the Divine, preceded by aspiration and rejection of movements of our lower nature, as described in the chapter on Yoga.

3. *Self-surrender*

Surrender is the way to prepare for the descent of the Spirit in man. There is much affinity of thought here between the two religions. The idea of surrender is a rejection of the ancient Indian idea of reaching salvation through man's own efforts. But surrender does not mean passive resignation. It is a great effort

to put your will at the disposal of the Divine Will, accepting whatever comes as the action of Divine consciousness through you.

There is anyhow difference in the conception of the idea of surrender in the two religions. According to Christian thought man has to surrender to God without a single straw of his own merits and efforts to build on. Man surrenders with a feeling of his own unworthiness and sinfulness. This surrender is preceded by repentance and forgiveness. Man is an unworthy sinner, who cannot deserve God's grace by any merit of his own. God's initiative is the call to man who has to feel his sin and get forgiveness before the surrender can take place. Man's own efforts are of no use before God's forgiveness has taken place.

In Sri Aurobindo's religion man has to earn God's grace to a certain extent. Unless man has made efforts himself to rise to a higher level, God's grace cannot descend. Man has to prepare the way for the Divine grace to descend through various steps of Yoga, which is a laborious task. Only after the act of surrender, a great effort of Will, the Divine descends in man to raise him to a higher level. There is thus a co-ordination between man's effort and the Divine grace. The latter builds on the former. Sri Aurobindo's idea is thus that surrender is the last step in a series of efforts made by man himself, the completion is effected through the descent of Divine grace.

4. *Superman*

Both Sri Aurobindo and Christianity agree on the point that man is not in his present stage on the highest attainable level. Our present human stage has to be followed by a more advanced one, which Sri Aurobindo calls Superman, Christianity denotes as the spiritual man, the child of God. There is correspondence between the two ideas of a new man to be born; Superman and the God-man: Superman is the new type of Sri Aurobindo's man; God-man, the likeness of Christ as God-man, is the new Christian type. Man will be transformed into Sri Aurobindo's Superman, and in Christianity men will become the children of God (John 3:1).

But there is much difference between Sri Aurobindo's Superman and Christ as God-man, Sri Aurobindo's new type of men and the Biblical 'Sons of God'. Sri Aurobindo's Superman has not yet appeared, humanity is preparing for that event, we have

not yet seen the perfected supramental beings. Christ has come and with Him the possibility for man to become a child of God. The transformation is going on, we have not reached perfection, which will be completed with the second coming of Christ (1 John 3:2).

Some want to see in Christ the Superman, but Sri Aurobindo definitely repudiates that idea for the following two reasons:

(a) Christ's advent is a past historical fact.

The advent of Superman will happen in future.

(b) Superman is the result of an effort from below and the descent from above of Superconsciousness. Man has to work his way up from ordinary human consciousness to Supermental consciousness. Christ had God-consciousness from the beginning. He is the result of a descent of the Divine only, one action, not two. Thus He is an incarnation, not Superman.

5. *The Consummation*

Not only man will be transformed but the whole creation. This is the teaching both of Christianity and Sri Aurobindo. St Paul talks about the deliverance of the whole creation (Rom. 8:22), and we Christians believe in a New Heaven and a new earth (2 Peter 3:13). But we do not know definitely in what way this new earth will appear, through dissolution and disappearance of the old, or through transformation. Here Sri Aurobindo is definite. In his theory of evolution a higher grade is evolved from a lower, but the lower one is not dissolved but transformed. This is a unique feature as compared with ancient Indian systems, where a higher creation rises from the ashes of the lower. When Supermind descends and transforms Mind, at the same time it will pervade and transform Life and Matter, and change the conditions of Life on this earth. The new Man to be evolved is not spirit only but also body, the body being a transformed body. We can find a similar significance in the resurrected body of Christ.

Conclusion

The similarity between the Christian religion and that of Sri Aurobindo is chiefly the firm belief in a higher future for man to be attained, either here on earth or in Heaven. Man is only a step in the development of creation to be superseded, transformed,

perfected. The ways and conditions for this consummation are different in both, and in the light of the Gospel Sri Aurobindo may be considered to have wrong conceptions on several points. But there are many departments where we can learn from each other and complement each other. We Christians may profit by Sri Aurobindo's practice of devotion, worship, meditation, and silence. We may have erred in many respects, seeking to regenerate spiritual powers not from life itself but from institutions and dogmas, so that our life and religion have become overlaid with the dust of doctrines and rites. Sri Aurobindo's message calls men back to the life process itself. Christ did the same, but as centuries have passed, we seem to have become forgetful of that call.

For the basic Christian fact of Christ as the Saviour of Mankind through the Cross it is harder to get any understanding from the followers of Sri Aurobindo. Christians seem to me to have a definite advantage there. Christ's victory over sin and evil is a historical fact. But it is not a past fact only, it is a reality in our lives. Christ lives and reigns for ever. Christ opened the way for salvation, man can walk that way, but the final perfection will only be reached in Heaven. To every individual salvation is a joyful fact. To a follower of Sri Aurobindo salvation is a future event to be hoped for. But all his disciples whom I have met, and they are many, are optimistic and possessed of a firm faith in the final descent of Supermind, effecting full salvation.

It must anyhow be remarked that most of his disciples are on a fairly high level both mentally and materially. None come there as beggars, either spiritually or materially. Nobody feels like a worthless beggar or sinner. All have something of their own efforts to build on and do not suffer from the kind of inferiority complex that we are used to find among our low caste or out-caste Christians. Christ taught us to seek and help depressed, neglected, underdeveloped individuals. But such are as a rule not found among Sri Aurobindo's disciples, who consider the sense of guilt of sin as the cause of the inferiority complex in man, discouraging his own efforts to rise. According to Sri Aurobindo man's own efforts are a condition for the Supreme Grace to descend. It would seem that an ordinary human being struggling by his own efforts to conquer ignorance might feel pessimistic at the prospect of salvation at a dim distance. But Sri Aurobindo's disciples are no

pessimists. The prospect of the Divine descent is glorious enough to inspire in them the firm belief in its realization in a near future. Sri Aurobindo's religion is a religion of optimism.

In the light of the Gospel criticism may be made on Sri Aurobindo's disciples because of their attitude towards beggars and suffering, neglected individuals, who always crowd Indian streets. In front of the ashram buildings in Pondicherry no beggars were ever seen, because they do not get alms there. Sri Aurobindo's followers have this attitude: A beggar only asks for material help, he has no aspiration for anything of spiritual value. A temporary material gift has no value unless something spiritual can be given at the same time. A beggar is not on a mental level fit to receive spiritual help, and thus it is no use giving the alms he craves for. We want to concentrate on the uplift of the whole cosmos to a plane where there is no suffering and ignorance. A small temporary material help is of no use compared to the great purpose we are striving for and prepare for. When the time comes for the transformation of cosmos, there will be no sickness and poverty any more. The transformation will come when a few individuals are fit for the state of Superman. We concentrate on reaching that level which will make the descent of Supermind in this world possible. Automatically the lower individuals will also be raised then to a higher level.

We Christians cannot defend such an attitude. Christ's own example and teaching demand from us mercy and help in material needs. We do not know if Christ refused to help anybody coming to him. It may be that the Bible has not recorded the refusals if there were any. But it is certain that Christ would have discovered the spiritual aspiration and fitness for a spiritual gift behind the request for material help. We do not have that visionary capacity, but have to follow Christ in attending to the material needs of those who seek our help. Moreover we must realise that a material gift given in love is also a spiritual gift, and love can work wonders even if we do not see the results. Christ saw humanity as a great fellowship, a universal family round the Father, where love is spontaneous, working unconditionally in unselfish service. Sri Aurobindo's followers have not understood that point.

They do not make any propaganda for their religion. There is no urgent attempt to persuade people to join as his disciples.

They work silently through literature. Some go about lecturing, but never to big mass meetings, only to small selected assemblies, whose members are fit to receive their message. They may be considered as spiritual aristocrats by many, which position will be inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel and Christ's order to His disciples: 'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature' (Mark 16:15).

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