

A PILGRIM'S QUEST FOR THE HIGHEST AND THE BEST

A Journey to the theme of Manifestation of
Supramental Consciousness in Matter

KIREET JOSHI

THE MOTHER'S INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH

A Pilgrim's Quest
for .
the Highest and the Best

Lokniketan

This book is addressed to all young people who, I urge will study and respond to the following message of Sri Aurobindo:

“It is the young who must be the builders of the new world, — not those who accept the competitive individualism, the capitalism or the materialistic communism of the West as India’s future ideal, nor those who are enslaved to old religious formulas and cannot believe in the acceptance and transformation of life by the spirit, but all those who are free in mind and heart to accept a completer truth and labour for a greater ideal. They must be men who will dedicate themselves not to the past or the present but to the future. They will need to consecrate their lives to an acceding of their lower self, to the realisation of God in themselves and in all human beings and to a whole-minded and indefatigable labour for the nation and for humanity.”

(Sri Aurobindo, ‘The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth’ Vol. 16, SABCL, p.331)

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Dedicated to
Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

A PILGRIM'S QUEST FOR THE HIGHEST AND THE BEST

*A Journey to the theme of Manifestation of
Supramental Consciousness in Matter*

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Preface

This book is primarily a critical examination of the denials that stand in the way of the quest for the highest and the best. Eventually, it is an introduction to the theme of the supramental manifestation in Matter. This theme, which covers the main substance of the works of Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) and the Mother (1878-1973), invites the contemporary pilgrim of today to continue his quest. The highest and the best are, according to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, attainable by means of their Integral Yoga, which is new in its objects and its methods, although it incorporates the lessons of the past yogic efforts of humanity.

It is hoped this book will lead the reader to study the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The most important works of Sri Aurobindo are: '*The Synthesis of Yoga*', '*The Life Divine*', '*Record of Yoga*', '*The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*', '*The Secret of the Veda*', '*Upanishads*', '*Essays on the Gita*' and '*Savitri*'. The most important works of the Mother are: '*Prayers and Meditations*', '*Conversations*', '*Questions and Answers*', and '*Mother's Agenda*' (13 volumes).

Kireet Joshi

The Quest and Denials

A pilgrim of our times, earnest in his quest and scrupulous in his methods, burning with a single aspiration to search for truth and to consecrate himself to the tasks that would flow from that search for the fulfilment of himself and for the eventual fulfilment of the human journey, finds himself arrested by various forms of denial and scepticism that pronounce the message that the present organisation of consciousness is the last limit and that the only course of rationality or reason-ableness is to limit himself to the boundaries of that organisation and be content with limited certainties and probabilities and ever crumbling ideals of tolerable existence for oneself and the world.

There is, indeed, a layer of human intellectuality which is tied to senses so exclusively that it finds its station and resting place in what these instruments perceive and cognize, and even if it reflects, it finds nothing more satisfying than the argument that senses are our sole means of knowledge and that nothing can be known and nothing can be valid if it does not refer back to its origin in sense experience.

Not long ago, materialism held the central field of inquiry, and it had predominant influence over the seekers of

knowledge and persuaded them to limit the aim of life to a feverish effort of the individual to snatch what he may from a transient existence or to dispassionate and objectless service of the race and of the individual, knowing well that the latter is a transient fiction of the nervous mentality and the former only a little more long lived collective form of the same nervous spasm of Matter.

It is true that materialism is no more being advanced so overwhelmingly, and it has been largely conceded that materialism cannot be defended as a metaphysical philosophy. This is because, in the first place, those who are inclined psychologically to favour materialism have largely come to the conclusion that no metaphysical philosophy, including materialism, is logically sustainable.¹ It has also come to be recognized increasingly that it is impossible to argue that just because physical senses are our instruments of knowledge, we must conclude that they are the *only* means of knowledge and that from the premise that matter is an object of cognition by physical senses, it cannot be argued that matter *alone* exists.²

Nonetheless, materialistic bias has continued to preponderate in the field of philosophy, epistemology, science and philosophy of science. And this preponderance can be seen in the way in which concepts such as those of infinity, eternity, universality, essence, explanation, causality and others have come to be dealt with during the last hundred years.³ All these concepts have been scrutinized with the microscopic lens which permits only those deliverances which are ultimately warranted by physical senses.

At one time, the knowledge of the phenomena was sought to be understood in the light of noumena, but this is no more

considered to be a necessary requirement of rational understanding. At one time, there seemed to be in the world an iron insistence on order, on a law basing on the possibilities. But today even while granting some apparent operations of laws of nature, what is predominantly emphasized is the unaccountability and freak and fantasy and random action. It is increasingly being recognized that the theory of Mechanical Necessity by itself does not elucidate the free play of the endless unaccountable variations which are visible in the universe as also in the evolutionary processes. Perceiving, however, that there is a good deal of freak and fantasy combined with a good deal of order, there is a trend to explain the world by pointing to a self-organizing dynamic Chance or to give up the idea altogether of explanation in terms of any universal law of causation. It has even been argued that one should not aim at explanation of the phenomena of the world, but one should remain content with their descriptions.⁴

It is true that science still aims at explaining phenomena apart from describing them in terms of the how and the why. But considering that induction is a necessary method of science, and since the assumptions of induction in regard to the law of uniformity of nature and the law of causation now are seen to be inconsistent with the freak and fantasy of the world-phenomena, various theories have been developed to explain induction empirically without the need to acknowledge non-empirical belief in the laws of universality and causality. As a result, philosophers of science have largely come to the conclusion that scientific knowledge is bound to remain subject to various shades of scepticism or fallibility.

It is against this background that science is being looked upon as a body of knowledge, the certainty of which can

never be guaranteed, and which will constantly be subject to corrigibility and fallibility. It is being admitted that on account of fallibility of scientific knowledge, while the boundaries of knowledge can be indefinitely expanded in course of time, questions such as those of the origin of the universe, mysteries and wonders of the universe, the paradoxes of the universe as also questions pertaining to the aim of life and those relating to fulfillment of the individual and the collectivity need not be raised, and even if raised, cannot be answered. It is also acknowledged that this conclusion and consequent attitude may be found unsatisfactory, but it is argued that there are no ascertainable faculties other than those of physical senses and those of anthropological rationality by the help of which any higher knowledge can be attained.

Bertrand Russell, speaking on his own behalf as that of like-minded philosophers, stated towards the end of his *History of Western Philosophy*, "They confess frankly that the human intellect is unable to find conclusive answers to many questions of profound importance to mankind, but they refuse to believe that there is some 'higher' way of knowing by which we can discover truths hidden from science and the intellect."⁵

D.P. Chattopadhyaya, in his book, *Induction, Probability and Scepticism*, has stated :

"The real world and the objects in it are not revealed to us all at once. We know them gradually, historically, and can never be cognitively sure of their absolute certainty. The knowing self and the known (and knowable) world are differently interlocked, inter-animated, and interactive, both biologically and epistemologically. In our knowledge of the

world we do not, rather cannot, stand totally apart from it. From the evolutionary point of view what is called survival value is in a way akin to truth value, truth of what our organism is informed of the world around us. Situated in the world, we have to know it. In spite of our ability to transcend our situation, in a limited way, we cannot totally get out of it. It is somewhat like our inability to jump out of our own skins and schemes.”⁶

Science and philosophy of science have thus come to advise us to accept in all humility our limitations in respect of knowledge, in respect of truth and in respect of certainty. But is this the end of the journey? Human aspiration refuses to accept it, and a question is raised : Are there any avenues which we can justifiably pursue, such as those proposed by religion, occultism, rationalistic philosophy and spirituality and persuade science and philosophy of science to join what can become a combined or synthetic quest, not only for the purposes of expanding conquest of the realms of truth but also those of the realization of the highest possible ideals of human welfare, human solidarity and human fulfillment?

Phenomenon of Consciousness: Problem of Science and Spirituality

In an important development in the recent march of science, the phenomenon of consciousness has begun to command increasing attention. As a matter of fact, as far back as the close of 19th century, the great Indian scientist, Jagdish Chandra Bose, had demonstrated the presence of consciousness in plants and even in metals. But, consequent upon the latest developments in Quantum Mechanics, such as Bell's Theorem,⁷ scientists have begun seriously to inquire into the mystery of consciousness.

Roger Penrose⁸ has, in his celebrated book *Shadows of the Mind: A Search for the Missing Science of Consciousness*, attempted to address the question of consciousness from a scientific standpoint. He has strongly contended that an essential ingredient is missing from the contemporary scientific picture. He acknowledges the precision and scope of physical laws but he complains that they contain no hint of any action that cannot be simulated computationally. He points out that there are, however, reasons for believing that there is in them a hidden non-computational action that the functioning of our brains must somehow be taking advantage of. He further argues that questions should be asked as to why the scientists have failed to recognize the fact that a non-computational phenomenon like consciousness should be inherent at least potentially in all material things. According to him, it is quite possible in physics, to have a fundamentally new property completely different from any contemplated hitherto, hidden, in the behaviour of ordinary matter.

David Bohm in his book, *Wholeness And The Implicate Order*,⁹ argues that the Quantum Theory presents a serious challenge to the theory of the mechanistic order. He points out that the key features of the Quantum Theory that challenge the mechanistic theory are:

1. Movement is in general discontinuous, in the sense that action is constituted of indivisible quanta (implying also that an electron, for example, can go from one state to another, without passing through any states in between).
2. Entities, such as electrons, can show different properties (e.g., particle-like, wave-like, or something in between), depending on the environmental context within which they exist and are subject to observation.

3. Two entities, such as electrons, which initially combine to form a molecule and then separate, show a peculiar non-local relationship, which can best be described as a non-causal connection of elements that are far apart (as demonstrated in the experiment of Einstein, Podolsky and Rosen).

These three key features of quantum theory, according to Bohm, clearly show the inadequacy of mechanistic notion. Thus, if all actions are in the form of discrete quanta, the interactions between different entities (e.g. electrons) constitute a single structure of indivisible links, so that the entire universe has to be thought of as an unbroken whole. In this whole, each element that we can abstract in thought shows basic properties (wave-like and particle-like, etc.) that depend on its overall environment, in a way that is much more reminiscent of how the organs constituting living beings are related, than it is of how parts of a machine interact.

Bohm discusses the relationship of matter and consciousness on the basis of some common ground and propounds an idea of a new world-view based on the concept of unbroken wholeness. He states:

“To obtain an understanding of the relationship of matter and consciousness has, however, thus far proved to be extremely difficult, and this difficulty has its root in the very great difference in their basic qualities as they present themselves in our experience. This difference has been expressed with particularly great clarity by Descartes, who described matter as ‘extended substance’ and consciousness as ‘thinking substance’. Evidently, by ‘extended substance’ Descartes meant something made up of distinct forms existing in space, in an order of extension and separation

basically similar to the one that we have been calling explicate. By using the term 'thinking substance' in such sharp contrast to 'extended substance' he was clearly implying that the various distinct forms appearing in thought do not have their existence in such an order of extension and separation (i.e. some kind of space), but rather in a different order, in which extension and separations have no fundamental significance. The implicate order has just this latter quality, so in a certain sense Descartes was perhaps anticipating that consciousness has to be understood in terms of an order that is closer to the implicate than it is to the explicate."

According to Bohm, matter as a whole can be understood in terms of the notion that the implicate order is the immediate and primary actuality (while the explicate order can be derived as a particular, distinguished case of the implicate order). The question that arises here, he pointed out, is that of whether or not the actual substance of consciousness can be understood in terms of the notion that the implicate order is also its primary and immediate actuality. He contends that if matter and consciousness could be understood in terms of the general notion of order, the way would be opened to comprehending their relationship on the basis of some common grounds. He concludes that in this way one could come to the term of a new notion of unbroken wholeness, in which consciousness is no longer to be fundamentally separated from matter.

Synthesis of Science and Spirituality: Not Yet

With the increasing evidence of the presence of consciousness or of the possibility of presence of consciousness in the physical, we seem to have entered into a new phase of

the development of scientific knowledge and of the philosophy of scientific knowledge. We seem to be arriving at a meeting point of matter and consciousness, of the physical and the supra-physical. But it would be premature to conclude that the identity of matter and consciousness and of the physical and the supra-physical has been proved, and that, therefore, we have arrived or that we are soon going to arrive at the synthesis of science and spirituality.

The presence and operation of consciousness in the physical world has been admitted by a number of philosophical systems, and these philosophical systems, even though they contain valuable insights, do not provide as yet any firm ground for the relevant verifiable knowledge. It has been found necessary, in order to know with greater certitude, to follow the curve of evolving consciousness until it arrives at a height and largeness of self-enlightenment in which highest subjective consciousness is discovered to be capable of the generation of objective universe.

Quest of Supra-physical Realities: Four Avenues

A crucial problem of Thought as also of Life is centered on the distinction between the physical and the supra-physical, on the possibility of transition from the physical to the supra-physical, and on establishing, if possible, the relation between the physical realities and supra-physical realities. It is, indeed, possible to question the existence of the supra-physical, and several systems of thought and philosophy have been built in the course of human history to convince the human mind that there is no such thing as the supra-physical, and that all that can be considered to be supra-physical is nothing else than an epiphenomenon of the physical. Even subjective experience which can be regarded as supra-physical is sought to be shown to be a twitch of the physical. But the human quest refuses to be permanently tied up to the physical and to the sensuous. The data of experience are so vast, so complex and so intriguing that persistent efforts have been made throughout the history of humankind to transcend the limitations of the physical realities. The human tendency to expect, to imagine, to generalize, to make inductive leap, to build concepts and theories is a minimum starting-point of the quest for the supra-physical. If we look at the world with fresh eyes and with wonder that

accompanies every impartial look at the world and events, we seem to be surrounded by something that is not physical and it betrays itself to be other than what it appears to be.

That the physical can be transcended and that there can be transition from the physical to the supra-physical, and even that there can be built up relations between the physical and supra-physical has been constantly affirmed and perceived by the study and practice of four avenues of human quest: religion, occultism, philosophy, and spiritual experience. These four lines of human quest have some kind of interdependence, but they have been pursued from time to time independently of each other or with predominance of one line of development in comparison with others. Of these four, the first three are approaches to the spiritual evolution of the human consciousness and being, but the last is the central avenue of entry.

Religion

It is difficult to define religion, considering that it is seen to have been manifested in various forms and at various levels. It has been conjectured that some kind of animism was the beginning of religion and that it developed in spiritism, totemism and in beliefs and experiences of gods and goddesses, and finally in the beliefs and experiences of one universal God or one universal principle of Being or Non-Being. At one stage, tribal religions with tribal gods and goddesses fought among themselves; at another stage, regional or national religions flourished; it was only at advanced levels that there have grown up universal religions, and even there, there have been claims and counter-claims regarding their universality. This complex history of the development of religion¹⁰ makes it difficult for us to define

religion in some precise terms. But it may be said that religion is that avenue of human quest which is marked by a belief or faith in reality or realities which are essentially supra-physical or invisible, which have super-human qualities and powers, and which can be invoked for aid in the growth of human life and in transgressing obstacles that lie in the process of what comes to be conceived as human fulfilment or human salvation or human perfection. But religions develop doctrines that tend to harden themselves into dogmas. A religious belief tends to develop a character that demands unquestioning faith and unquestionable acceptance on the ground that the truth that it claims cannot be proved rationally and can only rarely be verified, if at all, in experiences that lie beyond our senses and reason. Religion also tends to expand its domain of influence and tends to build up edifices, structures, forms by the help of which bridges can be built between humanity and that reality or those realities which are celebrated as of supreme importance. Religion is, therefore, conceived as something that binds humanity with God or gods or those beings or states of consciousness which are worthy of worship and celebration. In the process of building up these bridges, a prominent part is played by the growth of rituals and ceremonies as also of prescribed acts, of laws of conduct and of institutions by the aid of which human life can be moulded in forms that are considered helpful to the growth of human life on the lines that can eventually be harmonized with the sacredness that is attributed to the highest reality or realities that are prescribed to be objects of faith, reverence, admiration, and worship. Religions tend to trace their origin in scriptures, in Words of Revelation or in inspired avenues of approach to the Ineffable, Incommunicable and Unknowable.

Religion and Occultism

Religions have an element of occultism, — sometimes this element is predominant, sometimes preserved only in rituals, sometimes even largely exiled or condemned. In modern times, as a result of excessive rationalization, there has come about a discrediting and condemnation of most of the occult elements which seek to establish communication with that which is invisible. In a sense, occultism aims at knowledge of secret truths and potentialities of Nature which enable man to lift himself out of slavery to his physical limits of being. It is an attempt in particular to possess and organize the mysterious, occult, and subliminal power of Mind upon Life and of both Mind and Life over Matter. Occultism also strives to know the secret of physical things, and in this striving the development of several sciences come to be promoted, particularly, astronomy, physics, chemistry, geometry and the science of numbers. In fact, the knowledge developed by physical sciences can also be regarded as a part of occultism, since that knowledge reveals the secrets of material forces of nature, and occultism basically means the science of secret knowledge and application of secret knowledge so as to make secret knowledge utilizable for enlargement of discoveries and utilization of forces of Nature. It is true that occultism is popularly associated with magic and magical formulae and supposed mechanism of forces which are supraphysical or supranatural. Often occultism is looked upon as a superstition, although for those who have looked deeply into the hidden aspects of Nature-Force or experimented with their possibilities, occultism is not altogether a superstition. Just as in physical science, formulas and their applications can be astonishingly effective, even so when the forces of Life and Mind are studied, one can discover secret formulas and

methods of their applications, and one can even develop a domain of mechanization of latent forces, — mental and vital — in a restricted and specialized sense.

Occultism: Science of the Subliminal Consciousness

Occultism is essentially the science of the subtle physical, vital and mental realities that pervade a large part of the inner being of subjective existence¹¹ and a large part of the universe in its aspects of objective vital and mental existence. According to occultism, there are powers of the mind and the life-force which are potential and can be brought to bear upon material things and happenings or even brought in and added to the present systemization so as to enlarge the control of mind over our own life and body or to act on the minds, lives, bodies of others or on the movements of cosmic Forces. There are, indeed, phenomena which appear to be miraculous, but according to occult sciences, they can be explained as happenings which occur in the material world on account of the operations of the hidden powers of subtle Matter, Life, and Mind. Examples of hypnotism may appear to be anomalous, and examples of telepathy, telekinesis and many others which are anomalous can be explained by occultism in terms of growing knowledge of occult powers which otherwise touch us only by a casual or a hidden action whose process is unknown to us or imperfectly caught by a few; a systematized endeavor to understand these phenomena would fall within the province of occultism, and according to those who have explored larger provinces of occultism contend that there are wide and multiple fields and there are varied uses and processes of a vast range of domains which can be explored. Occultism discovers that we are all the time undergoing a battery of suggestions, thought suggestions, impulse

suggestions, will-suggestions, emotional and sensational suggestions, thought waves, life waves that come on us or into us from others or from the universal energy but act and produce their effects without our knowledge. Occultism is a systematized endeavor to know these movements and their laws and possibilities, to master and use the powers or Nature-forces behind them or to protect ourselves from them.

It is true, according to advanced seekers of occultism and of higher spiritual knowledge, that occultism has its own dangers, and just as several scientific discoveries can be misused or clumsily used by a humanity mentally and morally unready for the handling of the powers of these discoveries, even so discoveries of occultism can be perilous, particularly if attempts are made to explore mind and life processes only on the limited basis of knowledge of the material instrumentation and process of our normal and abnormal mind and life functionings and activities. The dangers can be even more perilous if the exploration and application of spiritual domains is ignored or if the spiritual knowledge is pursued as only one form of the knowledge of the mind. In the history of the development of occultism, one witnesses in some parts of the world how occultism deviated into white and black magic or into romantic or thaumaturgic paraphernalia of occult mysticism and the exaggeration of what was after all a limited and scanty knowledge. This deviation was the reason as to why it became easy to discredit the field of occultism. But in Egypt and the East, occultism arrived at a greater and more comprehensive endeavor, and one can notice ampler maturity even today in the remarkable system of the Tantras. Occultism is, according to those who have studied it and its developments in Egypt and in the East, not only a many-sided science of the supernormal but it supplied the basis of all the

occult elements of religion and even developed a great and powerful system of spiritual discipline and self-realization. In the larger sense of the term, occultism is a science of secrets, and in that larger sense, the secret knowledge of physical sciences, of the sciences of the vital plane and the mental plane, and the sciences of those domains which are beyond mind and which are domains of the spiritual powers and realities, can all be considered to be the domains of occultism. A study of the phenomena that occult sciences bring to our attention promises a new departure for the advancing movement of Knowledge in the increasing tide of inquiry. The idea that Matter is the sole truth of existence, when confronted with the data of occultism, will be constrained to give way to the idea that the universe, even physical universe, is constituted by quantum realities, as also by the magical and miraculous powers which escape the rigid formula of materialism. Modern science seems to be preparing itself for a scientific investigation of the still hidden secrets of powers of mind and life, of the subtle and of the psychic and of the abnormal or super-normal phenomena. At this important juncture of the new departure, it will be necessary to rediscover the restrictions and precautions that were developed by the wise sages and mystics. For the wisdom of the past that has been accumulated suggests that a mere development of the knowledge of the subtle matter, of life and of mind, should be subordinated and controlled by greater forces of the concealed spirit, which lies at levels that are deeper and higher than various levels of matter, life and mind.

Occultism, in a restricted and precise sense, is limited to the domains of subliminal consciousness as distinguished from the domains of the Spirit, provided that we mean by the

subliminal to cover those domains which lie behind the surface appearances and extend to the realms of the subtle Matter, Life and Mind. In this definite scope, occultism excludes those domains which are psychic and spiritual, — since the psychic reality belongs to the domain that is profounder than the mind, and the spiritual is higher than the mind. Occultism may thus be described as the science of the subliminal, which is distinguishable from the psychic and the spiritual. In terms of Indian psychology, the subliminal domains of knowledge like the physical domains of knowledge stress the phenomena of multiplicity rather than those of unity. The subliminal consciousness is, indeed, a vaster field of knowledge than the field of the knowledge of Matter, but still it is a domain of mixed Ignorance and Knowledge, considering that by knowledge is meant primarily the knowledge of unity or oneness, and by ignorance is meant primarily the preoccupation with multiplicity that ignores unity. If we focus on the central domains of occultism, we shall find that they are particularly centered on the study of Subtle Matter, life-forces and mind-forces, even though they attempt to enter also into the phenomena of the inmost soul or psychic being that is claimed to be discoverable by transcending the deeper depths of the inner life and inner mind. Occultism also aims at application of the knowledge that it gathers of the subjective inner being as also of the corresponding objective reality which can be contacted by the inner being.

In order to understand occultism, it would be convenient to distinguish between the surface consciousness, inner consciousness, (which can be called subliminal consciousness), inmost consciousness, higher consciousness, and highest consciousness. There is, also, a large domain of the

subconscious and the unconscious, which has come to be studied increasingly in the modern times under the influence of psychologists like Freud, Jung and Adler.¹² The surface consciousness is limited to the awareness that is excited by the sense experience, impulses, and operations of observing mind which aim at understanding, criticizing and organizing for purposes of dealing with life. This surface consciousness is sustained by self-experience, memory and ego, and although its limits can be expanded indefinitely, it remains ordinarily limited and confined to demands of physical life which admit a large gamut of emotional and mental life, farthest reaches of which fall short of the awareness that is normal to the dwelling in the subliminal consciousness, higher consciousness, and the subconsciousness. The inner or subliminal consciousness, which is the central domain of occultism, consists of the awareness of the subtle physical being, inner vital being and inner mental being, as also the awareness of what is cognized by these inner beings. It is recognized that it is always difficult for surface consciousness to open up to inner or subliminal consciousness; surface consciousness is normally unaware of the presence of the inner or subliminal consciousness, just as it is unaware of subconscious and unconscious. The inner or subliminal consciousness is a larger consciousness behind the surface; it is a more organized consciousness, and it is aware of what is in surface consciousness and aware also of limitations of surface consciousness. The psychic consciousness, which is the inmost consciousness, is a consciousness of the secret organizer and builder of outer and inner personality, and it is the secret ruler, although most often unrecognized, of the physical, vital and mental personality, which are considered and utilized by the psychic being as its instruments. A vast knowledge of the secret laws of human growth in the material

world becomes accessible only when one enters into psychic consciousness and one begins to dwell more and more consciously in that inmost consciousness. Higher consciousness is the proper domain of what is normally called spiritual consciousness, although named differently in different traditions. It is the domain of cōsmic and transcendental consciousness, the knowledge and the power of which varies according to the various levels of higher consciousness. The various levels of higher consciousness have been differently classified in different traditions, but in the latest classification which has been presented by Sri Aurobindo, these levels are distinguished from each other and described in an ascending order starting from Higher Mind and rising up to Illumined Mind, Intuitive Mind, Overmind and Supermind. The subconscious and inconscience are states of involved consciousness, not itself aware of all that is involved but it acts with some kind of automatic intelligence, and when it evolves there is a great deal of groping and chaotic functioning, although there are seeds in it of the powers of sight, sensibility and even of conceptions.

According to occult knowledge, there is in the inner realms of consciousness, a larger inner mental being, a larger inner vital being, even a larger inner subtle physical being distinguishable from surface body consciousness. Occultists in different traditions have developed varieties of methods by which one can enter into inner consciousness. If one succeeds in entering into these domains of inner consciousness, one can observe the springs of one's thoughts and feelings, the sources and the motives of one's action and the operative energies that build up one's surface personality. One discovers in oneself, the inner being that secretly thinks and perceives, the vital being that secretly feels and acts upon life through oneself,

and also the subtle physical being that secretly receives and responds to the context of things through one's body and its organs. In the subliminal being one can find the means of directly distinguishing between what rises from within and what comes to us from outside, from others or universal Nature. One can even arrive at the development of the powers to exercise control, choice, power of reception, rejection and selection, and even powers of self-building and harmonization. As one enters into the depths of the subliminal being, one is able to formulate oneself more luminously in one's life in the physical universe.

There is found in the subliminal being, a subtle sense of vision, hearing, touch, smell and taste; but these are not confined to the creation of images of things belonging to the physical environment, since the subliminal being is capable of receiving vibration of things beyond the restricted range of the physical senses or belonging to other planes or spheres of existence. A study of the subliminal consciousness points out that it is the subliminal consciousness and not the outer consciousness that possesses the powers of telepathy, clairvoyance, second sight and other super-normal faculties whose occurrence in the surface consciousness is due to opening in the wall erected by the outer personality's unseeing labour of individualization and interposed between itself and the inner domain of our being.

The processes of transition from the surface consciousness to the subliminal consciousness and the operations of the subliminal on the outer and of the outer on the subliminal are complex. Owing to this complexity, the action of the subliminal sense can be confusing or mis-leading, especially if it is interpreted by the outer mind to which the secret of its operations is unknown and its principle of sign construction

and symbolic figure languages is foreign. Advanced occultists and wise mystics, therefore, counsel the need to develop a greater inner power of intuition, tact and discrimination.

As pointed out above, subliminal consciousness is the domain of Knowledge — Ignorance, since even though it opens up vaster ranges of cognition and action, it still belongs to the domain of multiplicity and therefore subject to the ignorance of the underlying unity and of the essential knowledge of the true relationship between the individual consciousness, universal consciousness and transcendental consciousness. Great perils of occultism arise from great mixtures of knowledge and ignorance that are found in the domains in which occultism normally dwells. Occultism provides a very large field of self-knowledge and world-knowledge; it enables the individual to go behind his own surface consciousness and also penetrate behind the appearances of the physical world; occultism provides an entry and even mastery of the knowledge and powers of the inner mental, vital, and physical being and their powers and movements and the universal laws and the processes of the occult Mind and Life which are claimed to be standing behind the material front of the universe; but owing to the perils of the occult field of knowledge and action, religion has sometimes banned occultism or reduced its own occult element to minimum; philosophy, too, has also often rejected all aid of occult knowledge, and declared its distrust in the evidence provided by occultism. Philosophy often points out that the operations of the occult field are exposed to a mixed function and they are in danger of illuminating confusion rather than clarifying truth and that the mixed functioning of occultism is dangerous when men with unchastened minds and unpurified sensibilities attempt to rise into the subliminal

domains of consciousness. The main argument of philosophies which are unfavorable to occultism point out that the regions of occultism are regions of unsubstantial cloud and semi-brilliant form or a murk visited by flashes which blind more than they enlighten. There are number of spiritual disciplines also which have discouraged occult knowledge and power as dangerous lures and entangling obstacles, and they insist on the pure pursuit of the pure truth of the spirit. Nonetheless, with all the perils and limitations of occultism, there are a number of religions, philosophies and disciplines of spirituality which have acknowledged the value, however limited it may be, of the fund of knowledge and evidence that occultism has provided to the realities and the functionings of the subliminal consciousness and of the domains of the inner mind, inner vital and subtle physical being. Indeed, it can safely be affirmed that occultism does provide adequate data the explanation of which necessitates the admission of the possibility and even of reality of experiences which escape entirely from the rigid hold, the limiting dogmatism, of the materialist formula. In any case, any quest of truth and knowledge, if it is to be as comprehensive as it can be and which is not weary of the effort that is required in exploring and systematizing various possible avenues of search and their results, cannot justifiably ignore the data and claims that occultism has provided to the paths which have been made and which need to be made for arriving at the highest possible perfection on the earth.

For that aim to be achieved, there have been vast and profound efforts in the past; much experience and knowledge have been accumulated, but much more still remains to be done. In that work of the future, while the past and modern fields of research and modern methods of research will need

to be continued, new domains of research also are bound to be developed.

Spiritual Experience and Yoga

We stand today at a point of great transition where domains such as those which transcend the limitations, not only of science, but also of religion, occultism and philosophy, too, will need to be developed. It is in that context that yoga, which is practical psychology and science of direct spiritual experience, promises to be a quest of the highest utility. It is true that spiritual experience is the final aim and achievement of religion, although the history of religion shows how many religious systems have also tended to reduce to a minimum or dispensed with spiritual realization and experience. It is also true that occultism has sometimes put forward a spiritual aim as its goal, and followed occult knowledge and experience as an approach to it, but it has to be acknowledged that more often it has confined itself to occult knowledge and practice without spiritual vistas. On the other hand, spiritual experience has used religion as a starting-point; it has also used occultism as a starting-point; it has used philosophy too as a starting-point. But spiritual experience has also relied on its own pure strength, and it has often discouraged occult knowledge and powers as dangerous lures and entangling obstacles, and it has sought only the pure truths of the spirit; it has also put behind it all religious creed, worship and practice, it has tended to regard them as an inferior stage or first approach; it has passed on, leaving behind it all these religious supports, and it has laid down supra-religious paths that lead to the sheer contact of the spiritual reality. As stated earlier, spirituality has also acknowledged philosophy or spiritual philosophy as a starting-point, and spiritual philosophy has, in its turn,

acknowledged as its source, spiritual experience and realization or built its structures as an approach to it. On the other hand, pure spiritual quest has often dispensed with philosophy, and it has arrived at spiritual experience through the heart's fervor or a mystic inward spiritualization.

Role of Philosophy

Nonetheless, in the multi-sided effort of humanity, the role of philosophy as a means of effecting a transition from the physical to supra-physical has made contributions which can be considered to be of capital importance.

Reason is the central instrument of philosophy, and it enables the formation of perceptions and conceptions which can be obtained by penetrating appearances of the phenomena. It is true that in its mixed action, Reason confines itself to the circle of sensible experience and to the appearances of things in their relations, processes and utilities. But Reason asserts its pure action when, even while accepting human sensible experiences as a starting-point, it refuses to be limited by them; it goes behind, judges, works in its own right and strives to arrive at generalizations and even at unalterable concepts which attach themselves not to appearances of things, but to that which stands behind their appearances. The most important function of pure Reason is to correct the errors of the mind which is normally tied up with the senses. It is by the complete use of the pure Reason that one can arrive from physical to metaphysical knowledge, which is the highest contribution of philosophy.¹³

Philosophy aims at embracing vastest possible ranges of facts, physical and psychological, and, in an attempt to ascertain truths behind appearances, it develops criteria of

validity of knowledge. In this process, philosophy tends to criticize and control experience and it criticizes itself and strives to question all that is dogmatically assumed in all domains of experience, knowledge and utilities. The formulations of philosophy follow standards of intellectual knowledge, and philosophy may be regarded as only a way of formulating to ourselves intellectually in their essential significance the psychological and physical facts of existence and their relation to any ultimate reality that may exist.

The basic problem of philosophy is not only related to its role as a critique of experience and as a critique of Reason, but in collecting data of existence as comprehensively as possible. Reason aims at comprehensiveness, but in its haste to arrive at conclusions, it tends to ignore some important segments of experience, and this is one of the main reasons why philosophical systems are riddled with claims and counter-claims, and battles of logomachy.

In search of comprehensive data, philosophy is obliged to consider the claims of occultism, religion and spiritual experience. Occultism, if admitted, provides a vaster field of experience, but at the best, occultism points to a field of spiritual experience which lies beyond its proper domains of enquiry. Religion tends to claim the knowledge of spiritual realities; it pronounces its judgments based on intuitions and revelations that are proper to spirituality and spiritual experience. But religion tends to set itself in opposition to the demands of Reason and rational enquiry, and it tends to claim even that intuitions and revelations or inspirations of spiritual experiences are rather rare and cannot be and ought not to be subjected to strict demands that science and philosophy make in regard to the validity of knowledge. Religion prescribes faith as a method of holding on to the truths which have been

claimed to have been received in rare states or in rare individuals where revelations, intuitions or inspirations have flowered. In regard to those rare occurrences of illuminations, religion tends to formulate doctrines and puts them forward as dogmas, which are not defensible in terms of rationality but which are yet declared to be unquestionably valid. Religion and philosophy, religion and science stand in conflict on this very important issue. Philosophy and science often tend to reject the claims of religion, or while admitting their own limitations in arriving at conclusive statements of truths, they create double standards of truth: those relevant to science and philosophy and those relevant to religion, or else, there develops theological reasoning which provides justification for acceptance of the dogmas of religion and yet apply rational methods in explaining those phenomena of the world which can be sensibly and rationally verified but which are ultimately sought to be explained in the light of supra-rational revelations and dogmatic doctrines.

This entire field of philosophy in its interaction with religion and spiritual experience has been a field of interminable debates and even violent disagreements. Philosophy has therefore often tended to end these debates and disagreements by excluding altogether the realms of religion and spiritual experience.

Philosophy has sometimes striven to sublimate Reason to such a degree of refinement that it opens up to its deepest recesses where it discovers incorrigible intuitions, and it is found that it is capable of such catholicity and flexibility that the truths of intuitions and revelations can even be grasped by a logic that can formulate truths of spiritual experiences, not by resorting to dogmas, but by the cultivation of a larger Reason or by Reason where concepts of Reason and concepts

derived from spiritual experience can meet together in harmony. There are, indeed, problems in arriving at that harmony, and these problems need to be confronted in order that humanity can eventually be pushed to greater inquiry and discovery of such a wide totality that it is enabled to resolve conflicts between religion, science and philosophy, conflicts among religions themselves, conflicts among religions and spiritual experiences and conflicts in the field of direct spiritual experiences. In the meantime, it is to be admitted that philosophy has played a role of a bridge between the spirit and the intellectual Reason, and it has shown that the light of a spiritual or at least a spiritualized intelligence is necessary for the fullness of our total inner evolution, and without it, if another deeper guidance is lacking, the inner movement may be erratic and undisciplined, turbid and mixed with unspiritual elements or one-sided or incomplete in its catholicity.

At the highest summit of philosophical thought, pure reason comes to conceive infinity and eternity. All end and beginning presuppose something beyond the end or beginning. In the first place, infinity is conceived in terms of Time and Space, an eternal duration, interminable extension. In the philosophy of Immanuel Kant,¹⁴ for instance, Time and Space are conceived as conditions of consciousness under which we arrange our perceptions of phenomena. But existence — in itself has to be conceived as something beyond Time and Space, if the antinomies that attend on Time and Space, as also those in respect of other categories of quantity, quality, relation and modality, are to be avoided. In the philosophy of Bradley,¹⁵ which describes the movement of Pure Reason in the analysis of appearances, we find self-contradictions inherent in all appearances, including Time

and Space. Eternity comes to be conceived as the same all-containing ever-new moment, and infinity comes to be conceived as the same all-containing, all-pervading point without magnitude. It is admitted that there is here a conflict of terms, even a violent conflict, and yet these terms express quite accurately what is perceived or conceived by Pure Reason of Space and Time, and this perception or conception ends in conceiving Reality as Other than Thought, as something incorrigibly Real, transcending the limitations of Space and Time and all other appearances that are found to be in the universe. It is, indeed, possible to question the need of positing the conception of Infinity and Eternity and the conception of Timeless-eternity and Spaceless-infinity, although to the Pure Reason they are incorrigible concepts carrying with them rational certainty. But it is possible to go farther and to deny the very concepts of Pure Reason formulated by rationalists and to conceive of Reason in empirical terms. The empirical concept of Reason, however, is a fluctuating concept, considering that empiricism¹⁶ itself has varying forms. Nonetheless, the strength of empiricism lies in the fact that the concepts of Pure Reason do not in themselves fully satisfy the demand of our integral being. Just as our physical body sees things through two eyes always, even so, the integrality of our nature demands integral seeing as consisting of ideative conception and factuality verified in experience. Mere ideative conception or mere ideative certainty of the Reality caught in conception as actually existing beyond thought remains to the demand of our integral nature incomplete and at least to a part of our nature almost unreal until it becomes an experience. This is the ground on which empiricism finds its perennial source of strength.

But empiricism, as formulated in the materialistic or allied

systems of thought, confines itself to the deliverances of sensuous experiences; it avoids self-criticism and tends to develop some kind of dogmatism in regard to the incorrigibility of sensuous experience. Or else, if it develops self-criticism, it tends to develop fallibilism, even solipsism, or utter skepticism. Or at a more reasonable and at a more irrefutable level, it acknowledges the deliverances of scientific knowledge but pronounces that knowledge to be valid until it comes to be contradicted or modified in the light of further advances of scientific knowledge. This attitude is truly skeptical in character, and although it avoids any extreme position of skepticism, it refuses to grant the possibility of human Reason to arrive at any irrefutable certainty.

But human nature cannot for ever rest in a state of uncertainty. Even the needs of human survival demand the quest of certainty, and realizing that philosophy is unable to provide that kind of certainty, unless our ordinary limits of consciousness are transcended in supra-sensuous experiences, there arises, at the borders of philosophical thought, an irresistible urge to expand the capacities of human experience.

Philosophy and Spiritual Experience

This is where philosophy tends to admit the relevance of the realm of direct spiritual experience, — the realm of intuitive experience, inspirational experience, and revelatory experience. There are, however, great difficulties in understanding this realm of spiritual experience, mainly because it is a field traversed by rare individuals,¹⁷ and hardly in its purity, since it is over-whelmingly mixed up with religion or gets confined to the limits of occultism or to those occasional experiences of flashes which fail to illumine in some steady light of verifiability and comprehensiveness. And yet, it is

precisely this field of direct spiritual experience to which we are obliged to turn, if we are earnest in our inquiry and if we have patience to endure the persistence that is demanded by the inescapability of our need to know and our need to apply our knowledge to the problems of practical life in the midst of which we find ourselves poised uncomfortably and even painfully.

Spirituality and Yoga

In the history of human quest, the field of direct spiritual experience has come to be cultivated, both intensively and extensively. This cultivation has come to be explored and practiced systematically in various cultures of the world, and in India, this systematic exploration and practice have been recognized as Yoga, and it has come to be clearly distinguished from religion, occultism and philosophy.

Yoga¹⁸ is a systematic and methodized pursuit of spirituality and direct spiritual experience. Spirituality, in its distinctiveness, aims at the knowledge and possession of the Spirit, as distinguished from Mind, Life and Matter; it pursues Spirit as an object of knowledge and not merely as an object to be merely believed in by an act of faith or under the pressure of the claims of dogma. Spirituality is distinguishable from a high intellectuality; it is not identified merely with idealism or with an ethical turn of mind or moral purity and austerity; nor is it religiosity or an ardent and exalted emotional fervor; nor is it even a compound of these excellent things. Spiritual experience transcends mental belief, creed or faith, emotional aspiration, and regulation of conduct according to a religious or ethical formula. All these things are of value to spirituality, but only as preparatory movements. They still belong to the

movement of evolution which remains within the boundaries of the mind. These things are far from what can truly be described as spiritual experience or spiritual realization or as spiritual change, which is itself a starting-point of great and radical processes of what can be called processes of psychic transformation, spiritual transformation and supramental transformation.

If we wish to define spirituality in its distinctive character,¹⁹ it can be said that it is, in its essence and in its initial stages, an awakening to the inner reality of our being, to a Spirit, Self, Soul which is other than our Mind, Life and Body. This awakening is further nurtured by an inner aspiration to know, to feel and to be that spirit, self and soul. Spirituality is a radical and persistent effort to enter into contact with the greater Reality beyond and pervading the universe which inhabits also our own being, to be in communion and union with It. Spirituality is not merely a turning and orientation towards that greater Reality; spirituality aims at conversion, a transformation of our whole being as a result of the aspiration, the contact, and the union. Spirituality is a process of growth or a process of waking and developing into a new becoming, a new being, a new self, a new nature.

There are several tentative beginnings, and they are followed by slow processes of growth and evolution at the high levels of which there emerge ranges of spiritual experience and realization. At earlier stages, a certain kind of religiosity may become predominant; this kind of religiosity is marked by the nature of mind or life seeking and finding in itself a spiritual support or factor. In this stage, one is mostly preoccupied with the utilization of such contact as one can get or construct with something transcendental that can help

or serve mental ideas or moral ideals or vital or physical interests. Morality too can become a starting-point and one can even arrive at a stage of consciousness which can be judged to be a state of justice in the light of certain ethical principles or criteria. Philosophical or scientific thought can also be a stage of the beginning, and this thought may arrive at increasing levels of wisdom or at many high points of mental manhood. One can develop states of consciousness appropriate to those of the priest and the sage, or to the man of piety or to the man of courage and heroism or charity and justice or to the man of wide vision, intimate understanding and intellectual love of Reality or ripeness of synthetic thought and of action proceeding from discoveries of secret perceptions and conceptions. At a later stage, there occurs a preparatory influence or influx of the spiritual light, and there develops a spiritualized turn of thought with uplifting illuminations, or a spiritualized turn of the emotional or the aesthetic being, a spiritualized ethical formation in the character, a spiritualized urge in some life-action or other dynamic vital movement of the nature, increasing awareness of inner light, of a guidance or a communion, of a greater Control than the mind and will to which one learns to obey. At still higher stages, intuitions and illuminations grow in insistence and canalize themselves and begin to govern the whole life. One can expect at that stage the emergence of types of character which can be described in terms of saintliness, sagehood, seerhood; it is here that the true mystic, the rishi, the yogi or the prophet begin to flower; it is here that one can meet the servant of God, the soldier of the spirit. The sage and the seer live in a plane higher than the plane of mind; they live in the spiritual mind, since their thought or their vision is governed and moulded by an inner or a greater divine light of knowledge. The saint is moved by the awakened psychic

being in the inner heart, and he has grown powerful to govern the emotional and vital being. The saint is also marked by devotion that lives in the spiritual aspiration of the heart, its self-offering and its seeking. The soldier of the spirit, the hero of God's battle and the gentle and puissant servant of God stand in the vital kinetic nature driven by a higher spiritual energy and turned by it towards an inspired action, a God-given work or mission, the service of some Divine power, idea or ideal.

These higher degrees of spirituality are attained by constant aspiration and heroic efforts to break the boundaries of the mind so that the light of the spirit, the will-force and love and joy and compassion of the spirit that lie above the mind can pour into activities of conception; emotion and action can impart to them stability of increasing calm, silence and peace even while dynamism of the spiritual will manifests more and more puissantly. The distinction between the mind and the Spirit lies in the fact that while the mind, even at its highest levels, is over-weighed with multiplicity as its object and with division as its instrument of action, spirituality, even at its lowest levels is overweighed with the sense of unity and increasing synthesis in its instruments of action. Mind, even at its highest levels, tends to veil the integral Reality and to bind human nature to the imperatives of the laws of the body, life and mental operations, while the spirit is self-luminous and its increasing light reveals luminously various facets of Reality and opens up the gates, even the flood-gates, of the vision of the integral Reality, and it liberates human nature progressively and more and more fully from the imperatives of the laws of the body, life and mind.

In the higher or highest stages of spirituality, we find the emergence of the liberated man who has realized the Self and

Spirit within him. The liberated man enters into the cosmic consciousness and passes into union with the Eternal and, so far as he still accepts life and action, acts by the light and energy of the Power within him working through his human instruments of Nature. There are still higher stages of the spiritual change and of liberation; liberation of the soul or of the Self from the laws of the body, life and mind can be followed by the liberation of the mind, life and body from the yoke of their own respective laws; liberation of the spirit is followed by the liberation of nature, and there are achievements of total liberation of soul, mind, heart and action, a casting of them all into the sense of the Cosmic Self and the Divine Reality.

The history of spiritual evolution has witnessed even the higher ranges of Himalayan eminences and peaks of highest nature. And beyond these heights, the paths have been built towards the supramental ascent or the incommunicable Transcendence. The recent developments of the spiritual evolution have opened up the paths of the supramental descent and supramental manifestation on the earth so as to bring about largest synthesis of the Spirit and Matter, the boundaries of which, it is claimed, are constantly breaking so as to bring about on the earth a new species, the very nature of which will have inherent powers of the supramental consciousness, just as the human species is imbued with spontaneous powers of the development of the mind and various ranges of mental consciousness.

Spirituality and Knowledge

Spirituality and direct spiritual experiences carry with them noetic quality,²⁰ and they claim certainty of knowledge and the certainty of the truth of the object or the objects of

knowledge. In this respect, spirituality has been distinctly contrasted with religion and morality. Morality is admittedly a part of the ordinary life that seeks satisfaction and the development of the body, life and mind without any reference to their original source or self. Again, morality is that part of ordinary life which seeks to regulate and guide the various aspects of the physical and vital life or of mental or rational thought in the light of standards of conduct erected by moral or normative conscientiousness, — hedonistic, altruistic, or utilitarian or else in the light of standards of universal principles formulated under the light of the categorical imperative. But these standards of conduct are not found to be based on any claims of the certainty of knowledge. Moreover, these standards of conduct, in their application by a bewildered and an imperfect humanity, come easily to be conflicting principles. Justice often demands what love abhors, and in fact man's absolute justice easily turns out to be in practice a sovereign injustice. Morality is thus riddled with a state of uncertainty and disequilibrium.

Religion is an endeavor of man to turn away from the earth towards the Divine, even though it strives to relate man with God or gods or with the divine consciousness and to build bridges between heaven and earth and earth and heaven. It claims to be based on revelation or intuition, and it also claims veracity of the process and content of revelation or intuition, but it largely appeals to dogma and belief that does not and cannot question. It erects systems of rituals and ceremonies and provides codes of conduct or of prescribed acts, the ultimate justification of which is sought to be rooted in the revealed truth. It also erects or creates systems of institutions and modes of collective life designed to subserve the revealed truth. But religion is still governed by

mental consciousness; it often revolves in a round of rites, ceremonies and practices of set prescriptions and forms. Religion does promise eventual arrival at spiritual experience, but often, it is claimed that spiritual experience is beyond the normal limitations of humanity, even though the founders of religions, it is acknowledged, were blessed with the rare ability of divine seeing and divine hearing. The claims of one religion are often in conflict with those of other religions, and the issue of the conflict remains as yet an unresolved issue.

It is the limitations of morality and religion²¹ that have compelled the quest of direct spiritual experience. But even in the realm of direct spiritual experience the issue of the justification of the claim in regard to knowledge, certainty and truth is not easy to resolve.

Spirituality, Science and Criteria of Validity of Knowledge

Science demands physical valid proof of facts for building up justified or justifiable beliefs regarding them. But this demand in respect of phenomena of consciousness that are supra-physical and spiritual is often regarded as untenable.²² Consciousness is intrinsically supra-physical, and spirituality is the domain of higher and highest levels of consciousness and of supra-physical facts. Even though a supra-physical fact may impinge on the physical world and produce physical results, the action of the supra-physical on the physical and its effect on our senses cannot be its invariable action and most normal character or process. Ordinarily, the supra-physical produces a direct effect or a tangible impression on our mind and our life-being, and can only indirectly and through them, if at all, influence the

physical world and physical life. If it objectivises itself, it does so to subtler senses in us and only derivatively to the outward physical sense. In examples of the faculty of second sight and also of those of psychic faculties, this is what happens. It is through those subtle faculties that one can gain various kinds of evidence of the existence of other planes of beings and communication with them. It is then that one becomes aware that our physical mind and our physical senses are not the whole of us or the best or greatest part of us; and one begins to realize that reality cannot be restricted to a sole field of narrowness of the physical world.

It is, however, argued that the supra-physical experience is essentially subjective,²³ and that subjective experiences or subtle-sense images can easily be deceptive, since we have no recognized method or standard of verification. But the counter-argument is that error is not the prerogative of the inner subjective experience alone; it is also a part of the knowledge that can be gained by physical senses, and even of the objective methods and standards. And just as in the physical domain, methods of scrutinizing physical experiences have been worked out, and valid means of clarifications have been greatly standardized so that barren scepticism is no more defensible in regard to physical experiences, even so, in the occult sciences or in the yogic sciences, true standards and valid means of verification have been developed. Supra-physical experiences, when rightly interrogated and tested by their own characteristic appropriate standards of verification, are found to be valid, and the testimony of these experiences is confirmed again and again even in the physical and objective field. But it should be admitted that there is again too great a tendency to admit the extraordinary and miraculous or supernatural at its face value,

and there is, therefore, a reason to be more scrupulous and stringent in applying appropriate valid means of verification.

There is in science, insistence on the definition of knowledge, which includes one indispensable element, viz., its public character. It is true that it is much easier to satisfy the criterion of public character, where the data of our physical world are concerned, since most of the human beings can verify them through the physical organism, the operations of which are quite commonly and readily obtained. In regard to supra-physical experiences and supra-physical realities, where supra-physical senses or faculties are required for purposes of testing and for public shareability, the situation is more difficult. But if a serious study is made, and if it is admitted that all truth, supra-physical or physical, must be founded not on mental beliefs alone, but on experience, and that in each case experience must be of the kind, physical, subliminal or spiritual, which is appropriate to the order of the truths into which we are empowered to enter, and further, if their validity and significance must be scrutinized according to their own laws and by a consciousness which can enter into them and not according to the laws of another domain or by a consciousness which is capable only of truths of another order, then, we find in the yogic sciences sure grounds for enlarging our sphere of knowledge and even of satisfying the criterion of public shareability, provided we mean by public that public which has at its command those senses and faculties which are appropriate for the knowledge of the supra-physical.

Yoga as Science and Validity of Spiritual Knowledge

Indeed, if spiritual experiences were a matter of sporadic occurrence or of a sudden momentary flash, — then, considering the variety of spiritual experiences and considering the

conflicts in regard to the truth-claims of various spiritual experiences, one would have hesitated to assign much value to the realm of spiritual experiences. But the dismissal of the claims of spiritual experiences on the ground that they are occasional or extremely rare or riddled with conflicts turns out to be untenable in the light of the systematic body of knowledge, with regard to spiritual experiences that has been developed over millennia by a large number of seekers in different parts of the world. Methods of spiritual seeking have been developed, and their assured results have come to be verified, repeated, reiterated and even expanded. In India, these systems have come to be grouped under the word Yoga, the connotation of which includes: methodized efforts

- (a) which aim at self-perfection, and
- (b) which are marked by the expression of the potentialities latent in the being, as also
- (c) which are claimed to lead to a union of the human individual with the universal and the transcendental Existence we see partially expressed in man and in the universe.

According to Yoga, spiritual experiences, even if they occur sporadically to some or many, are in themselves not hazardous or accidental. There is always a psychological base for these experiences. Certain intensity in the being is a precondition; that intensity may pertain to the operations of thought or emotions or will, or even to some bodily condition or even to some subtlety of sense experience. Even if they seem to occur suddenly or without any conscious or willed psychological preparation, they are always connected with some secret processes of preparation of which the conscious mind may not be aware. Yoga goes farther and points out that

spiritual experiences can be made to occur, even at will, by a conscious application of certain specific methods on a regular and sustained basis. During the long history of Yoga,²⁴ methods have been developed, tested repeatedly, and the resultant spiritual experiences or supra-physical experiences have been tested; thus, as in science, so in Yoga these methods are formed upon a knowledge developed and confirmed by regular experiment, practical analysis and constant result. In India, Yoga has been recognized, and on account of millennia of experimentation, it has come to be regarded as shastra or science, which consists of the systematic body of the knowledge of the truths, principles, powers and processes that govern the spiritual experiences and spiritual realizations. This shastra has been built upon the perception and experience that our inner elements, functions, forces can be separated or resolved or they can be new – combined and set to novel and formerly impossible workings or can be transformed and resolved into a new general synthesis by fixed internal processes. Yoga is an attempt to realize psychological and physical perfection for our being by devising self-conscious means and willed arrangements of activity and by ever increasing expression of inner potentialities in a persistent and guided effort to unite our being with the divine reality and divine nature.

Just as in science, we first observe the natural force of electricity or of steam and its normal occurrences or normal operations, and then we handle these operations scientifically by means of experimentation and willed arrangements, so that we can generate electricity or steam at will and in the measure of requirements, even so Yoga observes and deals scientifically with the ranges of the psychical and spiritual being, and it arrives at the discovery and utilization of greater

secrets of physical, psycho-physical and other higher realities.²⁵ As in all true science, the object is an assured method of personal discovery or living repetition and possession of past discovery and a working out in full details of all the things found. As in science, so in Yoga, there is a high intention to hold the truth, the light found in our inner power of being and turn it to our power of being, our psychic self, our spirit, our self of knowledge and will, our self of love and joy, our self of life and action.

Systems of Yoga, Methods of Yoga and Verifiability of Yogic Knowledge

A study of different systems of yoga such as Raja yoga, Hatha yoga, Bhakti yoga, Jnana yoga and Karma yoga, will reveal to us the effectivity of yogic methods, and the results obtained by the pursuit of these methods can be compared with each other, contrasted in regard to their differences and can be verified, repeated and utilized, not only in their psychological or subjective aspects, but even in terms of physical aspects, if that is so willed and if the pursuit is carried out to a certain extreme or expanding limit.

Raja Yoga

Raja yoga,²⁶ for instance, depends on the perception and experience that, after sufficient mastery over the bodily posture that can bring about ease and comfort in the stability of the bodily condition (*āsana*), and after adequate mastery of the movements of breathing, (*prāṇāyām*), one can realize the relationship between movements of life-breath and movements of sensations, impulses, emotions and thoughts. Raja Yoga moves forward and utilizes this knowledge in arriving at great control and mastery of one's thought-movements, and one can arrive even at a total cessation of all the movements of the stuff of consciousness (*chitta-vritti*).

Raja yoga further underlines the aid that can be obtained from the formation of certain physical and conscious habits which can be regulated, modified and changed according to the needs of the attainment of the control and mastery over the thought movement. Here the methods of Raja yoga require regular and persistent pursuit of the principles of physical and psychological purification, and scrupulous practice of truths, harmony, continence and renunciation of desires to covet and possess material or other objects of the world.

But the central method of Raja yoga is a method of concentration, several steps of which have been discerned and prescribed for regular practice. Preliminary exercises include a persistent effort at the withdrawal of normal psychological tendency to wander about under the pressure of sensations or battery of suggestions that pour in our mind from outside. This practice of withdrawal is accompanied by the practice of an effort at gathering all energies on a particular point that may consist of any part of the body or a figure or a syllable or an idea. A sufficient capacity, it is found, develops by regular practice so that as soon as one is seated comfortably, certain quietude is felt effortlessly, and one is able to withdraw from external pressures and one is able to gather all the energies rapidly and focus them on the preferred point of concentration. But this is the first step of the central process of concentration. This step is technically called *Pratyāhāra*. The next step, which is called *Dhāraṇā*, consists of adequate dwelling on the point of concentration, and by regular practice, it is found that one can rapidly and effortlessly gets concentrated on the fixed point of concentration and one can remain in that state of dwelling on the fixed point of concentration for adequate duration. If *Dhāraṇā* is practised for a sufficiently long period over days

or weeks or months, one is enabled to be not only concentrated but so absorbed that it becomes difficult or disagreeable to easily come out of that state, and even if one comes out of that state, the memory of that absorption and the ease and lucidity and joy of that state lingers, and one is able to return to that state with little effort or even at will. That state of absorption or absorbed concentration on a fixed point or idea or figure or image is what is properly called *dhyāna* or meditation or contemplation. A remarkable result of the development of the state of *Dhyāna* is that there occurs a development of mental faculties: understanding becomes sharpened, awareness becomes alert, freshness in perception or in understanding becomes vivid, and the world begins to be felt in its aspects of mystery and wonder. One experiences unusual penetration of consciousness so as to grasp more and more easily the knowledge of secrets, and one begins to develop powers of influence and even the powers of telepathy, telekinesis and other allied powers.

The yoga-sūtra of Patanjali²⁷ speaks of development of extraordinary powers of consciousness, *vibhūti*s. One perceives that psychological functionings can be more and more readily discerned, separated or dissolved, and one can even combine the functions and forces of consciousness in new forms, and they can be set to novel and formerly impossible workings; even faculties of poetry or art or philosophy begin to grow and develop and they arrive at a rapid pace of flowering. Health begins to flourish, and curative powers of the body begin to be activated. But more importantly, states of quietude, calm, tranquility and peace begin to predominate even during active life. And as one advances, one becomes capable of entering into states of Samadhi, states of gradual cessation of modifications of consciousness. At last, the state

of Total Silence is achieved, and in that state of silence a true spiritual experience is obtained, the experience of a being, utterly unmoved, immobile and immovable, that stands unaffected even while it witnesses outer movements. This experience can be repeated, and one can be settled in a state of realization where the witness self (*Sakshi Purusha*) becomes a normal state, and one feels liberated forever from the turmoil of the thought and fleeting impressions of the multiplicity of the objects of the world.

The knowledge that arises in the state of realization carries with it this certainty of self-consciousness and this state of self-consciousness abides uninterruptedly. As Swami Vivekananda points out,²⁸ this entire process is methodical, one moves upwards step by step, and in this process, one is not required to hold dogmatic belief or to practice rituals or ceremonies. This process is entirely psychological, independent of religious beliefs and practices. It is a process that is scientific in character, it is experimental and it yields to the processes of verification by personal experience and verification not only in oneself, but in anybody else who undergoes the same methodical process of psychological concentration.

Hathayoga

Hathayoga consists of another scientific process of perception, practice and experience. In Hathayoga,²⁹ the primary and predominant attention is not on the mind and the powers of the mind but on the vital forces and functions and on the instrumentality of the physical body. Methods are centered on physical postures (*asanas*) and on the control of breath (*pranayama*). The science of Hathayoga lays down a methodical development of the control and mastery of the body and vital forces. This science depends on the perception

and experience that the vital forces and functions, to which our life is normally subjected and whose ordinary operations seem set and indispensable, can be mastered; these operations can be changed or suspended with results that would otherwise be impossible and seem miraculous to those who have not seized the rationale of that process. Hathayoga is able not only to demonstrate that the capacity of our total consciousness far exceeds that of our organs, the senses, the nerves, the brain, but that even for our ordinary thought and consciousness these organs are only their habitual instruments and not their generators. Consciousness uses the brain which its upward striving has produced; brain has not produced consciousness, nor does it use the consciousness. In abnormal instances of Hathayogic accomplishments, it can be shown that our organs are not entirely indispensable instruments, — that the heartbeats are not absolutely essential to life, any more than is breathing, nor the organized brain-cells to thought.³⁰

Power of attaining physical immobility is as important in Hathayoga as the power of mental immobility in Rajayoga or in several forms and disciplines of the yoga of knowledge. The Hathayoga practices of the asana show that yogic passivity of the body is a condition of the greatest increase, possession and continence of energy, just as the practices of Pratyāhara, Dharna and Dhyana and Samadhi show that the yogic passivity of mind is the solid base for the greatest increase, possession and continence of mental energy. It is seen that the body of the perfected Hathayogin is capable of feats of endurance, force, unfatigued expenditure of energy when the practices of asana are combined with those of Pranayama; the body acquires an immense power of health; its tendencies of decay, age and death are arrested. The

Hathayogin has a much greater power of longevity, and since the body is the instrument for increasing growth of consciousness and possession of spiritual experience, this power of longevity is a matter of great importance. There is an enormous variety of asanas in Hathayoga, running in their fullness beyond the number of eighty. This variety of asanas serves to alter the relation of the physical energy in the body to the earth energy with which it is related. It is seen that the heavy hold of the earth can be counteracted by the process of the lightening of the heaviness of the human body; and this can produce the phenomenon of *utthāpanā* or partial levitation. Powers developed by Hathayoga culminate in the extraordinary powers of *garimā* (heaviness), *mahimā* (greatness), *animā* (capacity to reduce the body to atomic size), and *laghimā* (the power to shorten the body).³¹

The power of pranayama which can be developed by the exercises of breathing brings about a purified and unobstructed state of the nervous system as a result; the Hathayogin is able to direct the vital energy to any part of the body and in any way or with any rhythm of its movement. According to the science of Hathayoga, it is possible to direct the different powers of the vital energy through various nerve channels, and one becomes aware of its action in the six Chakras or ganglionic centers of the nervous system. And one is able to open it up in each beyond its present limited, habitual and mechanical workings. But even a complete mastery of the body and the life and a free and effective use of them established upon purification of their workings is considered to be a mere basis of the more important matter of the psychical and spiritual effects. According to Hathayoga, there is an intimate connection between the body and the mind and spirit and also between the gross and the

subtle body. It is at this point that Hathayoga admits the methods of Rajayoga, and a point is reached at which a transition from Hathayoga to Rajayoga can be made. Hathayoga, thus, combined with Rajayoga, leads to the spiritual experience which Rajayoga provides, but the advantage of the Hathayogin is the power of physical health and longevity, which have their own utilities for the growth and sustenance of spiritual experience.³²

Yoga of Devotion

The yoga of devotion, as also the systems of yoga of works and knowledge, have methods and succession of the steps of development, but they are more intuitive and less mechanical. The yoga of devotion, by methods of purification of feelings and emotions, and by sublimating them through the processes of remembrance, adoration, offering, submission and surrender, leads to those spiritual experiences in which one gets united by the power of divine love with the supreme divine consciousness and its delight in states of supernal ecstasy. The methods of the yoga of Devotion, when followed with regularity and constancy, confirm the repeated experiences and realizations of the human individual with the universal consciousness and with the consciousness of the Lord of the universe.³³

Yoga of Knowledge

The yoga of knowledge³⁴ has also its own specific methods where the powers of intellect are purified and subtilised to such an extent that the intellectual distinctions between appearance and reality are heightened into experiential realizations by regular and sustained processes of meditation. The object of knowledge is made the object of

prolonged concentration, and this process is strengthened by *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nidhidhyāsa* (hearing of the object of knowledge, reflection on the object of knowledge and contemplation in which the object of knowledge is dwelt upon repeatedly and insistently, and eventually, effortlessly), and these processes end in a state of experience of the Spaceless and Timeless Reality, and this experience can be heightened into a permanent realization; the appearances of the world or the phenomenal reality of the world seem unsubstantial or become sublated on account of stabilization of consciousness in the identity of the ultimate reality which is experienced to be eternally permanent. The yoga of knowledge (*Jñānayoga*) utilizes the power of meditation that can transform mental thought into experience or into knowledge by identity. Two particular meditations are pursued in *Jñānayoga*, negative and positive. In the negative meditation, one develops and concentrates on the thought that the One or the internal Self is alone real and not the body, life-force and the mind; one becomes detached and disassociated from the identity that one has in ordinary consciousness with the body, life and mind. This negative process is supplemented by the positive process of meditation in which thought is centered on the ultimate reality and by constant meditation thought is sought to be transcended in experience of the universality and transcendental consciousness of the spaceless and timeless.

Yoga of Divine Works

In the yoga of divine works (Karma yoga),³⁵ the methods and processes insist on the utilization of the activities which are centered on the production of results or fruits of action. The principal method is to purify the element of desire which

is the normal motivation of human action that is constantly engaged in the production of results and in the enjoyment that results of action provide. The aim in Karma yoga is the realization that is attainable through the methods of Karma yoga: the realization of the divine will; and this realization is attained by a methodical elimination of desire and ego which are ordinarily inseparable from human action. The first step of the method of Karma yoga is to become engaged in action with a constant thought and eventual experience that even though every action is result-oriented, one has no right to the enjoyment of the result of action — *karmanyeva adhikāraṣṭe, mā phaleṣu kadācana* — (one has right only to action and not to its results or fruits). This process is aided by the development of a state of offering or a state of sacrifice, as a result of which the element of desire and of the enjoyment that is derived from the satisfaction of desire get gradually diminished. This is further aided by the knowledge that grows in the individual of the processes of energy, processes of action, and processes of relations between actions and results. The action, it is realized, proceeds from a vast universal engine, — from a universal dynamo of action, Prakṛiti. It is further realized that the idea that action proceeds from oneself does not correspond to the reality of the processes of action, that the ego which seems to be the originator and determiner of action is found to be an error, considering that even the ego is an instrument and a knot fashioned by the universal energy and therefore entirely derived from and dependent on the universal Prakṛiti. One also perceives that there is a rhythm in the working of the universal Prakṛiti and that there is a law of constant exchange of forces, and that this law is fulfilled when the forces of action which seem to be proceeding from the ego are offered to higher and higher levels of forces. The whole world is then

seen to be an exchange of offerings, an exchange of sacrifices. This is a major but not the final result of Karma yoga. By the process of offering to higher and higher forces of energy and action in the world, one begins to discover that there is a supreme originator of action, a supreme originator even of the universal Prakriti. The offering of one's action then is directed to that supreme originator, to the divine will. By constant offering of one's actions to that supreme will, the personal will and desire of action get ultimately eliminated, and the sense of egoistic doership is also annihilated. One becomes free from desire and ego, even though the flow of energy and action continues to operate. When that flow of action is devoid of desire and ego, the very nature of that flow of action gets changed. One finds that that flow of action is a spontaneous flow of the divine will and that one's individuality, which is freed from ego, is only a channel of the divine will and divine action. One acts in the world thereafter, but not out of desire nor out of the sense of doership, but as a simple and effortless instrument through which the divine will is manifested and accomplished. These are the methods and processes of Karma yoga. The realization of the divine will and the realization of the divine consciousness behind that will become attainable by rigorous and continuous employment of the relevant methods and processes.

Validity of Yogic Knowledge

It will be seen that, in the light of the body of the knowledge of the methods and results obtained through the processes of the methods, spiritual experiences are not or need not remain occasional or random or sporadic phenomena. Just as in physical sciences, validity of know-

ledge is obtained by verification of repeated production of the same phenomena by the employment of the same methods, even so, in the science of yoga, the validity of yogic knowledge is obtained by verification of repeated production of the spiritual phenomena by the employment of the same and identifiable methods. In both the cases, the knowledge is objective; yogic experiences and realizations cannot be dismissed as mere subjective phenomena.

Problem of Conflicting claims of Religions and Spiritual Experiences

The question of determination of true knowledge, certainty of knowledge and even comprehensive knowledge still needs to be explored in a greater detail, particularly with reference to the data of the claims of each major spiritual experience, that it delivers the most comprehensive knowledge of the ultimate reality and the universe as also with reference to the data of plurality of religions and the claims of each religion that the spiritual experience which is the foundation and which is also the culminating point of its practices delivers the highest knowledge and the most comprehensive knowledge, and, in any case, possesses some kind of superiority over similar claims made by other religions.

Cottingham's Analysis of the Problem

A recent book, authored by Cottingham, which discusses this question with great insight and penetrating analysis, may be referred to in this connection. The book, "*The Spiritual Dimension*"³⁶, makes a distinction between religion and spirituality, and points out that whereas in regard to religious beliefs, there are very polarized responses but with regard to spirituality, one is not connected with beliefs and theories or

their claims. Cottingham defines spirituality as something which is to be understood as being more concerned with activities rather than theories, with ways of living rather than doctrines subscribed to, with praxis rather than belief. And he argues that spiritual practice is temporally, heuristically, psychologically and morally prior to theoretical or metaphysical understanding of religious questions. But even then, he points out that gates to spiritual experiences are many, and one is called upon to answer the question as to which of the various gates of spiritual experiences one should take. In presenting this question, he refers not only to the problem of pluralism of religions but also to the problem of pluralism of spiritual experiences.

Possible Solution of the Problem

The problem becomes acute when it is seen that the statements which express religious beliefs do not harmonize among themselves and they seem to be often colliding among themselves sharply. Confronted with this conflict, Cottingham is led to enquire as to on what basis one can take a decision to commit oneself to one religion or to the other. He refers to a solution, according to which, the choice among different religions can be made on the basis of a personal decision or a personal preference. Those who accept this solution argue that all religions share a number of core ethical values, and as long as these core values are practiced, it does not matter whether one belongs to Christianity or to Judaism or to Hinduism or to Buddhism. This solution tends to regard pluralism of religions to be comparable to the pluralism of the methods of cooking or to the pluralism of the forms of sport. It is, however, realized that the differences among religions are not so simple, that even in regard to the core

ethical values, differences are sharp, and that the most important aspect of each religion is related to the perception of Truth. The difficulty of the pluralism of religions lies not merely in the plurality but in the conflicts among religions with regard to their perceptions of the truth and to the claim of each one that truth cannot be plural.

Cottingham refers also to the solution suggested by John Hick.³⁷ According to him, the truth or reality in itself is unapproachable, since the human apparatus of consciousness is never free to apprehend or comprehend reality as it is in itself, considering that human beings are always conditioned by the cultural backgrounds in which they are born and brought up. It will be seen that Hick's suggestion is basically Kantian. According to Kant, human beings are so conditioned in their epistemological apparatus that they can never experience the noumenal truth behind the phenomenal reality, and that they can experience only the phenomena which are inevitably framed within the categories which are inherent in human consciousness. According to Hick, various specific forms of religious awareness are formed by the presence of the divine Reality but this presence comes to given consciousness in terms of the different sets of religious concepts and structures, and of religious meanings that operate within the different religious traditions of the world.

It is true that this approach is attractive and it appears suitable for the more global culture in which humanity is obliged to operate more and more imperatively. But the difficulty lies in the fact that the object in each religion is claimed to have been revealed, not in the Kantian manner, but in a more realistic manner. As a result, different and conflicting religious statements cannot be reduced merely to

differing religious traditions or differing cultural traditions. Cottingham rightly points out that the problem is more fundamental. Comparing Buddhism and Islam, he points out that while according to Islam, and for that matter according to Judaism also, the ultimate reality is absolutely and unqualifiedly One Personal being, according to Buddhism, ultimate reality is not personal at all, and it even negates any appellation of oneness or plurality by which the Nihil is experienced as a resting place of the state of liberation. He also points out that according to Christianity, the ultimate reality is triune. Cottingham thus acknowledges that the differing and conflicting claims of religion pose a serious problem to the indifferentist approach to the phenomenon of pluralism of religions.

Cottingham refers also to the apophatic tradition.³⁸ According to this tradition, the test of religious belief lies in the experience on which the religious belief is based, and this experience is mystic, indiscernible and ineffable. This tradition is opposed to cataphatic tradition, according to which the object of spiritual experience is describable. On behalf of the apophatic tradition, it is argued that the ineffability of the spiritual experience which lies at the basis of religions prevents any philosophical argument or discussion, and that therefore philosophical disputations amongst religious doctrines can be dissolved by pointing out that the varying or conflicting statements of religions are only so many ways of expressing the inexpressible reality. According to this argument, what is important and what is common among all religions is the ineffable experience of Reality, and different formulations of that experience are of secondary importance and therefore, conflicts among them can be dismissed by stating that all of them are imperfect, and

therefore they should not be insisted upon.

At one level, this argument leads us back to the solution that John Hick has proposed. For, it may be argued that the incompatibilities of different statements simply dissolve away as the mind climbs upward on the path of unknowing or on the path of ineffability. It may be argued that the object of all religions, however differently described, — even if they appear to be conflicting among themselves, — is an inexpressible mystery, — a mystery which is caught and the wonder of which is deepened but which does not present itself as a problem. But against this position, Cottingham refers to an argument according to which the mystics who maintain the incomprehensibility of the Object of mystical experience do not seem to differ from skeptics or atheists, who assert that the first cause of all is unknown and unintelligible. Indeed, as Cottingham points out, this argument may be answered by stating that the mystic gets caught by the mystery of the Object of mystical experience, while skeptics or atheists do not get so caught.

Is Spiritual Experience Unavoidably Ineffable?

The deeper question is whether mystical or spiritual experiences on which different religions are based are utterly ineffable or whether these experiences are capable of being expressed, if not fully, at least partially or symbolically, and, if so, whether the conflicts among religions are rooted in the actual differences that are conveyed through expressions and symbolisms. Cottingham, at this point of the argument, admits a fresh impasse. For he argues that even if we grant the mystics their apophatic root, there must, if theism is to retain any distinctive character whatsoever, be some road back and some way for religious faith to return from the

darkness of unknowing and locate itself within the domain of a workable human language.

Cottingham refers to the Christian reader and points out that the central concept of the Incarnation makes visible to him, in the person of one human being, the icon of the invisible God. He argues that if the Transcendence of God is not to be lost in silence, we need a transition, a way of understanding God in human terms. At this stage, Cottingham proposes that liturgy provides a transition from the transcendent to the human dimensions. He contends that symbolic thinking that is implied in liturgy is exactly what might be expected to be the most fruitful way of approaching the deepest layers of meaning within our lives, as also the most likely avenue of glimpsing the ineffable source of such meaning. The question is whether this position is an adequate answer to the problem of the conflict among religious and spiritual experiences. For liturgy ceremonies in different religions differ, and symbolisms seem to point to objects that are not merely results of cultural diversity. We are thus led back to those assertions in which exclusivism of religions is rooted. Cottingham, however, argues that exclusivism is not necessarily entailed, — it need not and certainly should not. It is true, he contends, that religions have gone on the path of exclusivism, and that Christianity has often fought under exclusivistic banners such as under no name but that of Christ can we be saved, and outside the Church of Christ there is no salvation. But at this stage, he advances a fresh argument and points out that anyone who subscribes to the authentic moral precepts inherent in Christianity can hardly support that a surpassingly benevolent and loving Creator could attach his favour to adherence purely in virtue of the doctrinal choices. He points out that there is something deeper which binds one

human being with another and it is a revelation of the common witness in which the realness of equality and fraternity is revealed. It is at this deeper level that one finds an unknown marvel, a fundamental basis of existence, more important than all the differences and inequalities superimposed upon it. According to Cottingham, exclusivism of religions can be transcended when we realize that, as in the case of Christian theology, so in all other conflicting theologies, our life and soul demand intrinsically the imperative need for awareness of our common humanity and the need to reach out to others. This is, indeed, a climactic point of the argument of *"The Spiritual Dimension"*. One reaches here the integral connections between religious, theological and moral thought. And towards the end of the book, we are presented with images of integration.

Cottingham argues that the problem of pluralism of religions can be resolved not by comparing and contrasting and attempting to reconcile various propositions of religious beliefs; he suggests that one should always be open to religious beliefs which are not rooted in one's own culture. Since we are all culture bound, the religion which is related to our cultural roots will appeal to us and we shall naturally adhere ourselves to it. But this should not mean that we develop dogmatism and that we denounce others and that we should convert people of different religious beliefs to our own religious beliefs. What is important is not the proposition of our religion; we should not believe that salvation lies in carrying with us the label of the name of a religion which is rooted in our culture, but in praxis of religions; and Cottingham points out that the praxis of religions consists of the deepening of our inner awareness in the arrival of integration of our being, such as we find

advocated in the Aristotelian doctrine of virtue which avoids excesses of self-aggrandizement and self-abasement, and arrives at the golden mean. He also refers to the kind of integration that is advocated by the psychoanalytic system of Jung. But beyond the limits of the framework of the doctrines of Aristotle and Jung, Cottingham underlines the concept of integration by referring to the process by which different parts of being are harmonized in our wholeness. He speaks of integration that lies in the practice of morality and the practice of spirituality, which leads to the perception of oneness with all, in spite of distances that we find among ourselves and in spite of our maintaining those distances and differences. According to Cottingham, it is in that practice of integration, — not in insisting on distinctions and divisions of religious beliefs and practices, but in that spiritual dimension which enables us to arrive at our own integration and in looking upon others and being with others in the experience of integration.

Cottingham's Solution and Indian Solution of Conflict of Religions

Cottingham has brought out, with penetrating insight, several aspects of the problem of pluralism of religions, which is central to the contemporary world. In presenting the problem and its solution, Cottingham seems to come very close to the problem and solution of pluralism of religions that we find in the Indian experience of religion and spirituality.³⁹ If we study the development of pluralism in Indian religion and spirituality, we find that to the Indian mind the least important part of religion is its dogma, and what has been most important in India has been the religious spirit rather than the theological credo. A rigid stand on a fixed intellectual belief hampers the processes of tolerance

and harmonization. It is clear that it is when religions insist on their formulated beliefs that each one of them tends to claim itself as a true religion and others as false religions, according as they agree or do not agree with the credo of the critics. A critical examination of the formulated beliefs of religions shows that it is an error and even a falsehood to suppose that intellectual truth is the highest verity and, even, that there is no other. The Indian religious thinkers came to admit that the deepest core of religion transcends the intellectual formulations, rituals, ceremonies, prescribed acts and notions on which social and cultural institutions are built up; they acknowledge that the highest eternal verities are truths of the spirit and that the supreme truths are neither the rigid conclusions of logical reasoning nor the affirmations of credal statements, but fruits of the soul's inner experience. They acknowledge that intellectual truth is only one of the doors to the outer aspects of the religion. They also came to recognize that since intellectual truth turned towards the infinite must be, in its very nature, many-sided and not narrowly one, the most varying intellectual beliefs can be equally true because they mirror different facets of the Infinite. The Indian religious thinkers tended to maintain that however religions may come to be separated by intellectual distance, they still form so many side entrances which admit the mind to some faint ray from a Supreme Light. An important aspect that came to dominate in the process of reconciliation among religions was the spirit that declared that there are no true and false religions but rather that all religions are true in their own way and degree. As Swami Vivekananda declared with great emphasis, each religion is one of the thousand paths to the One Eternal.⁴⁰

All religions aim at relating human life or humanity to the

highest possible truths or truths and realities that are discovered in spiritual experience or through special revelations. The very word religion connotes its emphasis on this process of relationship. In the process of establishing this relationship between man and God or between human consciousness and the highest possible state of being of consciousness, religions have tended to place or recognize four necessities. In the first place, religions have tended to impose upon the mind a belief in a highest consciousness or state of existence universal and transcendent of the universe, from which all comes, in which all lives and moves without knowing it and of which all must one day grow aware, returning towards that which is perfect, eternal and infinite. Secondly, they tended to lay upon the individual life the need of self-preparation by development and experience till one is ready for an effort to grow consciously into the truth of this greater existence. Thirdly, they tended to provide in the framework a well-founded, well-explored, many-branching and always enlarging way of knowledge and spiritual or religious discipline. Lastly, they were led to provide, for those not yet ready for the higher steps, an organization of the individual and collective life, a framework of personal and social discipline and conduct, of mental and moral and vital development by which they could move each in his or her own limits and according to his or her own nature in such a way as to become eventually ready for the greater existence.

A speciality of religion in India attached to the last a great importance. It left out no part of life as foreign to the religious and spiritual life. Still the Indian religious tradition is not merely the form of a religio-social system. However greatly a given form of a religio-social system may count at the moment of a social life, however stubbornly the conservative

religious mind may oppose all pronounced or drastic change, still the core of Indian religion is a spiritual, not social discipline. Religions like Sikhism counted in the Vedic family although they broke down the old social tradition and invented a novel form. It is true that in all the four elements that constitute Indian religion, there are major and minor differences between adherents of various sects, schools, communities and races; nevertheless, there is also a general unity of spirit, of fundamental type and form and of spiritual temperament which creates in this vast fluidity an immense force of cohesion and a strong principle of oneness. In all forms of this religion, there is one common recognition of the supreme truth of all that is or of an existence beyond the mental and physical appearances we contact here. They admit that beyond mind, life and body, there is a Spirit and Self containing all that is finite and infinite, surpassing all that is relative, a supreme Absolute, originating and supporting all that is transient, a one Eternal. They all admit that there is one transcendent, universal, original and sempiternal divinity or divine Essence, Consciousness, Force and Bliss and that this Divinity is the fount and continent and inhabitant of things. But this Truth of being was not seized only as a philosophical speculation, a theological dogma, an abstraction contemplated by the intelligence. Indian religion did not consider the idea of this Truth to be indulged by the thinker in his study, but otherwise void of praxis. It was put forth as a living spiritual Truth, an Entity, a Power, a Presence that could be sought by all according to their degree of capacity and seized in a thousand ways through life and beyond life. The recognition and pursuit of something or someone Supreme behind all forms is a one universal statement of all Indian religions and developed and interacted among themselves through long centuries and millennia, and if it has taken a

hundred shapes, it was precisely because of its emphasis on praxis. It encouraged the pursuit of spiritual praxis, and did not consider intellectual or theological conceptions to be the one thing of central importance. It allowed the development of varieties of conceptions and varieties of forms and emphasized the attainment of spiritual consciousnesses by inner experience. As a result, we find in the Indian religion, varieties of schools or sects developing and living side by side under a general consensus that spiritual realizations and spiritual praxis is the one thing needful. To open to the inner Spirit, to live in the Infinite, to seek after and discover the Eternity or the Eternal, to be in union with God, — that is the common idea and aim of religion, that is the sense of spiritual salvation, that is the living Truth that fulfills and releases. According to one school or sect, the real self of man is indivisibly one with the universal Self or the supreme Spirit. According to another school or sect, the individual is one with the Divine in essence but different from him in Nature. According to a third school or sect, God, Nature, and the individual soul in man are three eternally different powers of being. The *Advaitin*, the *Vishishta-advaitin* and the Dualist, however they may differ from each other, they all agree in underlining the importance of the discovery of the inner spirit or self in man, the divine soul in him, and some kind of living and uniting contact or absolute unity of the soul in man with God or Supreme Self or Eternal Brahman. The Indian religion allowed the freedom to conceive an experience of the Divine as an impersonal Absolute and Infinite or to approach and feel Him as a transcendent and universal sempiternal Person, or even to conceive and have the experience of the highest spiritual reality as Non-Being. Differences of credal belief came to be perceived by the Indian religion as nothing more than various ways of seeing the one Self and Godhead

in all. What came to unite the plurality of religions was the emphasis on the dynamic praxis of the highest spiritual truth and the highest spiritual aim.

Yet the Problem of Religious Conflict Persists

Indian religion is not a religion, it is a banyan tree which has continually given rise to new religions, and yet some organic bond provided for plurality that would avoid any violent or sharp conflict. This does not mean that there were no conflicts among religions which branched out of the original trunk of the tree; there were conflicts, even sharp conflicts; there also developed exclusivism for a short or long period, and the tendency towards exclusivism is not entirely absent even today. But on account of the fact that praxis counted more than doctrine, there has been a continuous stress towards accommodation and even synthesis. When Jainism and Buddhism developed as anti-Vedic religions, the conflicts between Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism manifested sharply; but even then these three religions absorbed each other, and by this absorption, they were enriched and even in the days of sharpest conflicts, the emphasis on praxis in all the three religions was equally shared by all these religions. Within Hinduism itself, the conflict between Vaishnavism and Shaivism was quite sharp for centuries, but here, again, on account of the emphasis on praxis, the conflict among the doctrines has been comparatively moderate, and for the general masses both Vaishnavism and Shaivism have come to be regarded as alternative ways of approach to the Supreme or even as complementary methods or a synthetic pursuit.

One important element, which is central to all religions, and which can open up a wide gate for the solution of the

conflict among religions, is their common admission that they all look upon spirituality and spiritual experience as a final point of culmination of human effort. But this element has not really sufficiently been utilized for arriving at the solution of the problem of the plurality of religions and conflict in religions. Faced with plurality, an impartial seeker asks inevitably: which is the way? This inevitably leads to comparison of doctrines, and this comparison has not yielded any satisfying answer.

Another Line of Inquiry: Verifiability of Spiritual Experiences

One very helpful idea, which has been suggested, is that, in order to determine as to, in which among various religions lies the right way, is not to compare doctrines but to compare spiritual experiences which lie at the roots of religions. In the history of Indian religion, the effort to compare the nature and contents of underlying spiritual experiences has been very prominent.

There are, however, religions which, although founded on spiritual experiences consisting of visions, voices, intuitions, revelations or inspirations of the founders or some rare individuals, explicitly or implicitly state that verification of such experiences is not feasible, and that the only way by which one can enter into the truths and contents of the spiritual experiences is to take recourse to verbal or intellectual formulations in which the doctrines of religions are made available to humanity. To these doctrines the many minds of a half-ripe knowledge or no knowledge at all attach themselves with exclusiveness and passion and hold that this or the other doctrine or this or the other revelation or book of revelations is alone the eternal Word of God and all others are either imposters or less imperfectly inspired, that this or that doctrine or philosophical or theological reasoning is the

last word of the reasoning intellect and other systems are either errors or saved only by such partial truth in them as leaves them to the one true philosophical cult.

Humanity is, however, inclined today to grow a little modester and wiser; our fellows are no longer being slain, except by acts of terrorism, in the name of God's truth or because their minds have been differently framed or differently constituted from ours. We are less ready to curse and revile our neighbour because he is presumptuous enough to differ from us in opinion. Movements like theosophy and interfaith dialogue have created a climate in which increasing number of adherents of different religions are getting ready to admit that Truth is everywhere and cannot be a sole monopoly of one group of religious adherence. More tolerant, more receptive and more impartial studies are being initiated and developed to study religions and philosophies for the discovery of the truth and the help they contain and no longer merely in order to damn them as erroneous or false. Nonetheless, overwhelming number of adherents of each religion are still apt to declare that the truth declared in their religion gives the supreme knowledge which other religions or philosophies have missed or only imperfectly grasped so that they deal with subsidiary and inferior aspects of the truth of things or can merely prepare less evolved minds for the heights which have still not been scaled by other religions. Religious adherents are still prone to force upon themselves or others their sacred messages of the books or gospels that they admire; there is still overwhelming insistence that their preferred book of reverence shall be accepted as the eternally valid truth and no iota shall be denied its part of the plenary inspiration. We are still in the midst of sharpness of conflict of religions.

Dialogue among Religions for Conflict – Resolution: Exclusivism Persists

But in the healthier climate of mutual understanding, dialogue and interchange, three alternative attitudes have come to be formulated. According to one view, all religions are sacred and equally sacred, and therefore they all deserve to be equally respected. According to another view, all religions give the same message of universal brotherhood, of peace and harmony, and of the superiority of moral and spiritual praxis over verbal or intellectual formulations in which their doctrines have been set or declared. In works such as Bhagwan Das' *"Essential unity of religions"*,⁴¹ detailed comparisons among conflicting religions have been carried out in order to show how all religions are essentially one or united in their essential beliefs, or at least in the moral prescriptions which are provided in their message to humanity. According to the third view, each religion will stand to profit if all religions agree to learn from each other, — since each religion needs to be supplemented by the truths or doctrines or moral or spiritual emphasis which can be found in other religions. All these three views can be supported by reference to various aspects of data which can be discerned by comparative studies of religions.

There is no doubt about the fact that the sense of the Holy permeates all religions; in the symbols, in the temples or churches or mosques, or in the recitations of sacred words of religions or in the various acts prescribed in the performance of various religions in the practice of pilgrimages and fasting and prayers and austerities aiming at purification, and even in the lives of the adherents of different religions, one can perceive, feel and experience genuine presence of holiness and sacredness. On this ground alone, the message of equal

respect to all religions can be sustained. But the problem of the conflict of religions goes deeper. If equality of religions were to be advocated on the ground of the common sense of sacredness or holiness, the matter would have been much simpler, although there would still be a ground for claiming superiority of the one and inferiority of the other on the basis of the contention that one's own preferred religion evokes a higher degree of sacredness or holiness than that evoked by other religions.

The view that all religions are essentially one and that their spiritual or ethical prescription are essentially identical or similar can greatly be substantiated. All religions maintain that physical reality is a subordinate reality and that the higher or superior or ultimate reality or realities are supra-physical in character; all religions promise to open the gates for dwelling in higher planes or heavens for joy and harmony, the quality of which transcends the limitations of pains and pleasures of the physical world; and all religions advocate kindness, compassion and pursuit of ethical goodness and spiritual sacredness. But differences and conflicts among religions lie at deeper roots, and no comfort of the balm of some common elements among religions can soothe or heal the conflicts among religions. Some religions hold belief in God, some do not share their belief in God; even those who believe in God have different and conflicting views of the nature of God: some hold dualistic belief, others atheistic belief, and still others pantheistic beliefs; some believe in the existence of only one God, some believe in the existence of only one Absolute; some believe in one God but with inherent trinity and some believe in one God but also in many gods, too. And if we examine the beliefs of various cults and sects, we shall find hundreds of variations and subtle

differences which seem too difficult to be reconciled with each other. There are also varieties of beliefs and doctrines pertaining to the nature of the soul, the nature of the soul's life on the earth and the destiny of the soul during its sojourn on the earth and after the completion of the sojourn. The theory of rebirth is held in common mostly in religions which had their origin in India, but this theory is not held in common by all religions. Even where the theory of rebirth is acknowledged, the nature of the soul is not shared in common. Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism share the belief in rebirth; but in the multi-sided Hinduism itself there is no common belief in regard to the nature and the reality of the soul. The law of karma as understood in various religions is understood differently in different religions, and the significance of human action, even in those religions which do not believe in rebirth, is viewed differently. In the presence of these and many other differences among religions, the problem of conflict of religions seems to be impossible of solution. Religions, therefore, tend to be exclusive and to look forward to their exclusive conquest of the entire human race as the one real and permanent solution which can bestow universal peace on the earth.

It is clear that the claims of one dogma cannot overcome the claims of another dogma; in any process of argument, the claims of a dogma remain, by their very nature, unquestionable and beyond argument. If, therefore, there is no way in the field of argument by which the claims of a dogma can be examined or verified, the only alternative for an unbiased seeker is to come back to inquire whether the claims of spiritual experiences, which lie at the root of dogmas, can be examined and whether an impartial conclusion can be arrived at.

Exclusion of Exclusivism As a Solution

In the meantime, as a result of the growing climate of mutual understanding among religions, a new way of solution is being proposed. For a comparative study of religions shows not only several common points but also some specific and unique points that seem to characterize each religion. In this context, a question is being raised whether these unique points should necessarily be counted as factors of opposition and division and conflict among religions? Cannot these unique points be seen as special contributions to the total fund of the richness? And can these points not be shared by all religions? An assembly of religions in which religions can give up their exclusiveness by sharing the uniqueness of each religion could prove to be a real breakthrough for a genuine solution.

One of the major developments that has taken place in India during the last part of the 19th century can be regarded as a very propitious development towards the coming together of religions; this development is related to the colossal experiment carried out by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886). This experiment was an experiment in yoga, and the methods that Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa followed in this experiment were yogic. He practiced in a quick succession, methods after methods, and taking recourse to the yogic methods contained in every major religion, including Christianity and Islam, he verified that each of these religions had at its roots a valid yogic experience and realization and that therefore all of them can be united by admitting the truths of all religions in the light of the yogic experiences by which their truths can be verified. Happily, Swami Vivekananda, the great and heroic disciple

of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, became a potent vehicle of the message of the unity of religions. This message, when uttered publicly in the first Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893, was so refreshing and electrifying that it evoked among the representatives of all religions a warm welcome. That message was brief but packed with power, and it stated: "As the different streams having their sources in different places mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee."⁴²

Sri Aurobindo, recognizing special contributions that different religions have made, stated the following:

"Each religion has helped mankind. Paganism increased in man the light of beauty, the largeness and height of his life, his aim at a many-sided perfection; Christianity gave him some vision of divine love and charity; Judaism and Islam how to be religiously faithful in action and zealously devoted to God; Hinduism has opened to him the largest and profoundest spiritual possibilities...."⁴³

A catholic recognition of each religion may lead to a pursuit of a synthesis in which individuals, instead of confining themselves to any particular religion, may adopt an attitude and practice where exclusivism of religions is excluded. In doing so, dogmatism, ritualism and the temporal aspect of religions can come to be subordinated and even transcended. Increasing emphasis may fall on ethical perfection and psychological integration of the total being, — somewhat in the direction suggested by Cottingham. A major difficulty in the pursuit of this direction, however, lies in the fact that there are many concepts of ethical perfection,

and they collide with each other so acutely that one may wonder as to how that conflict could be resolved. Even in regard to the question of integration of the total being, there are varying notions and conflicting notions, the resolution of which would necessitate a long and detailed pursuit of various psychological disciplines that have been developed and which are still being developed in various systems of yoga and in their synthesis.

Criteria of Ethical Perfection and Integration of Total Being: An Exploration

Human nature is complex and it is at once egoistic, collectivistic, moralistic and idealistic. In its pursuits of idealism, it is not limited merely to ethical idealism; it conceives and pursues rationalistic idealism or aesthetic idealism; it also conceives and pursues idealism that religion prescribes; it conceives and pursues spiritual idealism and even spiritual perfection. The road is long; the labour involved in arriving at reconciliation of conflicting elements of human nature is arduous. On this long and arduous road of human nature, everyone finds enough room for debate in favour of one solution or the other. These debates, when examined, leave us in some kind of inconclusiveness. It is easy to surmount inconclusiveness by taking recourse to dogmatism or to the certainty that some spiritual experiences provide or seem to provide; or even in the field of spiritual enlightenment, there are claims and counter-claims, which require to be reconciled in some synthesis, if that is possible.

At lower levels of existence Nature has provided some kind of disorderly order; and instincts of self-preservation, on the one hand, and herd-instincts, on the other, are found to be so balanced that the individual and the collectivity sub-serve

each other, —not irreducibly and ideally, —but in some rough measure for immediate purposes. As one ascends higher and higher, the demands of self-assertion begin to collide with the demands of the collectivity, and in human life, this collision is sought to be resolved by erecting moral values and ideals, and even then resolutions are found to be superficial or temporary; major maladjustments and maladies of operation and injustice appear before our view. Higher levels of discovery and practice open up, and we are led to the exploration and practice of the largest ideals; vistas begin to appear before us of self-aware wisdom, self-conquest and mastery and compassion; and we are required to undertake a journey in these vast vistas in order to find effective clues to progressive harmonization.

Four Main Standards of Human Conduct: Their Conflict

We are all aware of the ethical theories of hedonism, hedonistic utilitarianism, ideal utilitarianism, intuitionism, and other higher formulations of ethical and spiritual norms.⁴⁴ They are all presented as universal doctrines intended to be prescribed uniformly for all people, but if we take human individual and human collectivity to be evolutionary in character and if we take elements of the complexity of human nature in an ascending order rising from infra-rational to the rational and from the rational to the supra-rational, we may perhaps be able to gain insights into an evolutionary mode of reconciling conflicting ethical standards and other ideals.

From this point of view, there are four main standards of human conduct that make an ascending scale. The first is personal need, preference and desire; the second is the law and good of the collectivity; the third is an ideal ethic; the last

is the highest and divine ideal and the divine law of the nature.

- (i) Standard of conduct which is prescribed by psychological and ethical but egoistic hedonism, falls into the first category; its argument is that because every individual psychologically seeks satisfaction of his personal needs for pleasure, — because everyone psychologically prefers pleasure to pain, every individual ought to seek one's own pleasure. The familiar criticism arises from the perception that human beings do not necessarily seek pleasure alone but some other things also; if, however, it is insisted that the other things which are arguably perceived as having behind them only one basic aim, viz., pleasure, even then, it is argued, it cannot be denied that there are different kinds of pleasures, some inferior and others that are superior; and this perception leads to the recognition that apart from pleasure there is something else which accounts for the hierarchy of pleasures. There is also the familiar argument which points out the naturalistic fallacy which seems to be involved in the argument that because pleasure is desired, pleasure is desirable.

In any case, however attractive descriptions we may make of this philosophy rooted in the human egoism and human demand for pleasure, it cannot be denied that the collectivistic idealism and higher forms of altruism, too, have their own roots in human nature. The law of competition, which is rooted in the egoistic psychology, is not the only possible law for organizing the life of the individual and of society; cooperation, too, is rooted in human nature, and co-operation is not necessarily an offshoot of egoism. It is true that in the early phases of battle between competition and co-operation, the former

wins the race; — not because co-operation, as a principle, is weak in human nature or lower in value but only because the law of competition is primitive and has the force of early primacy; that which is morally superior, that which is more civilized, gets defeated, as history has repeatedly shown, by what is primitive and barbaric, at least, in the first rounds of the battle.

Collectivistic ideals are morally superior and egoistic Hedonism obstructs the higher collectivistic law, but humanity which bears within its heart deeper and higher aspirations will continue to pursue collectivistic ideals and will also continue to fight for the victory of those ideals, in spite of earlier failures.

- (ii) If we examine the history of thought, we shall find that egoistic hedonism came, in due course, to be defended in the name of altruism and, eventually, was run over by universal ethical hedonism that embodied the force of collectivistic ideals. This moral law advocated, in effect, the search for maximum pleasure for maximum number of people. To use the term of Indian philosophy, the demands of *samaśṭi* came to be pressed forward against the claims of *aham bhāva*. The existence of the collectivistic law suggests a power other than that of personal egoism and induces or compels the individual to moderate his average demands to discipline his irrational and often violent movements and even to lose himself sometimes in a larger and less personal egoism. And yet, the collectivistic morality or idealism is found to be incapable of arriving at any satisfactory solution. Consequently, claims of society and claims of the individual continue to confront one another. There is a demand of the group that the individual should subordinate himself

more or less completely or even lose his independent existence in the community. On the other hand, the ideal and absolute solution from the individual's point of view would be to create a society that existed not for itself, but for the good of the individual and his fulfillment, — for the greater and more perfect life of all its members. An ideal society of either kind does not exist anywhere, and in actuality, the society somehow attempts to work out some kind of a com-promise, which sometimes gives an upper hand to the claims of the individuals and sometimes to the claims of the collectivity. In the end, the complexity of the problem increases and multiplies its issues. A need is felt to call in a new principle, and humanity begins to climb to a higher level of thought and action, where the life of personal need, preference and desire begins to be touched by a greater and elevated light, and the aesthetic, intellectual and normative ideals begin to preponderate over the demands of the physical and vital nature.

- (iii) At this higher level, search for pleasure, egoistic or altruistic, gives way to a search for higher ideals like knowledge and character. Hedonism itself tends to be modified, and as in Bertrand Russell's "*Conquest of Happiness*",⁴⁵ adequate and significant space is given to the development of impersonal pursuits, and of cultivation of faculties. Hedonistic utilitarianism begins to be over-passed by what has come to be called ideal utilitarianism, which, as formulated by Rashdall, advocated the combined pursuit of three ideals of character, knowledge and happiness.⁴⁶ But even this ethical theory could not sufficiently be defended within the formula of utilitarianism or consequentialism, because while utilitarianism

judges an action by its consequences, it was found that things like knowledge and character are ends-in-themselves and cannot be judged in terms of their consequences. There has always been in the field of ethics a search for the realm of ends, which are intrinsic and which are valuable in themselves, and this search has come to be asserted from time to time, particularly when a larger canvas of human aspiration is unfolded and normative demands in human nature begin to turn to the perception of some superlative ranges of consciousness in which the ideas of unconditionality, absoluteness and perfection begin to preponderate. In India, there was an early discovery of dharma, of an ideal law of harmony, of values of righteousness and of action that had to be performed with a sense of equanimity as far as consequences of action are concerned. In the West, in the tradition of Sermons of love and forgiveness, in the philosophy of Conscience and Intuitionism, similar ideas were put forward.

- (iv) A culminating point on this line of development in ethical philosophy came to be formulated by Kant, who discovered the presence of the Categorical Imperative in the normative part of human nature, and he derived from the deliverances of that imperative the doctrine of duty for its own sake. Kant even went farther and attempted to give formulations of the Categorical Imperative in the light of which standards of action can be determined.

At that level, the primacy of universal values came to the forefront which, in turn, began to influence the new equations between the individual and the collectivity. The question came to be asked as to what was the real nature of the individual, and Kant's own assessment was that the true individual was capable of liberating himself from the

clamour of desires into a realm of ends-in-themselves. Kant even declared that the individual himself should be looked upon not merely as a means but as an end-in-himself. A consequence of this acknowledgment was to affirm the validity of individualism; but this individualism could not be conceived in the terms of the affirmation of the egoistic limitations of the individual. It was clear that according to Kant, the individual in his true nature can rise above his appetites and desires and can become capable of uplifting himself to a state where actions can be determined in terms of intrinsic and universal values.

In the light of this and similar developments, the solution that the moralists presented to the problem of the conflict between the individual and the society was that the individual shall cherish no desires and claims that are not consistent with universal love, universal truth and universal justice, and that the collectivity shall hold all things cheap, even its safety and its most pressing interests, in comparison with truth, justice, humanity and the highest good of the people.⁴⁷

The moralist's ideal is being pressed in all the upward endeavours of the contemporary humanity. This ideal compels us to examine once again various doctrines of rights and duties, of the good and the virtue, and of the law of dharma, and in varying degrees we tend to formulate our preferences in favour of one formulation or another. Philosophers like Cottingham seem to prefer the Aristotelian account of virtue as a golden mean between two extremes; some others might prefer to go still to a more ancient formulation of the Socratic doctrine that virtue is knowledge, and there are still others who might find in the Buddhist concept of dharma a most comprehensive gospel of right

action. In some quarters, the concept of *rita* is being pressed. An impartial seeker, who is confronted with plurality of religions and who is consequently required to determine which one of this plurality of religions he should choose for his own pursuits, is advised that he should decide, not on the basis of the merits of religious doctrines but on the basis of the highest ethics that a particular religion permits or promotes. But the problem becomes perplexing when it is seen that just as there is plurality of religions, there is also plurality of highest forms of ethical doctrines. Moreover, the highest concepts or moral ideals, when followed in actual situations of life, fail to apply adequately or up to their expected standard. The human mind, one-sided and rigid in its construction, puts forward a one-sided mental and rigorous scheme or figure and claims for it totality and absoluteness and an application that ignores the subtler truth of things and the plasticity of life.

Ethics, Religion and Yoga

As we ponder over these difficult problems, we are led to discover that the moral nature of the human being is not the last and the highest component. Neither religious doctrines nor formulations of ethical ideals correspond to the highest demands that human beings are capable of. There is, it will be found, a divine being in us that can be directly contacted by the pursuit of spirituality and by the methods that are neither religious nor ethical, but yogic, — methods which demand rigorous practices of purification, of renunciation and austerity. At the highest borders, there is a demand for further transcendence where the divine reality is directly contacted and possessed and where the divine will begins to operate at a supra-mental level. In that spiritual and supra-mental component of our complex nature, it is claimed, is the integrating power; in it the truths of the individual and the collectivity coalesce; there, we discover that the individual and the collectivity are not what they appear to be in the lower or infra-rational parts of our being. Individual is not, it is discovered, fundamentally egoistic in nature; ego is only a temporary formation, but behind it there is the un-egoistic centre of universality, such that the individual finds its fullness in universality and universality finds its concentrated centre in the unegoistic individual.

It is claimed that beyond ethics and religion is a realm of the Spirit, and even though religions and ethics may lead us to the borders of that realm, a secure possession of that realm can be attained when the methods and practices of yoga are undertaken. It may even be said that the dilemmas that are inherent in the plurality of religions and plurality of ethical doctrines can be properly confronted and resolved when adherents of religious and ethical doctrines consent to transcend exclusivism and admit the possibilities of an entry into the realm of direct experiences of the Spirit and of attainment of illumined knowledge of the realm of the Spirit.

Does Yoga Promise Solution?

But does this realm of yogic endeavour lead to the knowledge that is true, objective and comprehensive? And does it provide, it may further be asked, the inspiration, guidance and attainment of perfection, — Yogic perfection, — that exceeds the boundaries of ordinary ethical or religious perfection? It may still be asked, will this endeavour ensure the highest possible integration of the being, — including the integration of the spiritual and the physical? And, finally, will this endeavour promote the highest welfare of humanity?

Solution in a New Synthesis of Yoga

The answer to these questions promises to be in the affirmative, if we undertake to pursue, study and practise the vast and integral path of a new Synthesis of Yoga that has been hewn during the last century by the colossal research in yoga that was initiated and conducted by Sri Aurobindo (1872 – 1950),⁴⁸ and which was developed to its fullness in collaboration with the Mother (1878 – 1973),⁴⁹ who, in turn, accomplished the tasks of the yogic research to their highest required degree,

leaving for the future, a vast field of further research, verification, confirmation and ever-progressive enlargement and realization.

Exclusivism, which is clearly seen among religions, can also be discerned in the realm of Yoga. It is for this reason that exclusivism of religions cannot be transcended merely by entrance into the field of yoga and pursuits of any exclusive method of yoga. But where — as in the field of religion, the claim that it makes in regard to the truth that it advocates, — its objectivity, its comprehensiveness and its power of imparting perfection, — rests on dogmatism and the necessity of faith, in the field of yoga, a given system of yoga can prove the veracity of the truths that it claims by referring to its processes and methods as also the results to which they arrive at, and thus by the process of repeatability, and verifiability. Again, in the process of yoga, the element of faith, that is indispensable in any process of knowledge, scientific, philosophical or yogic, is admitted as a dynamic element and not as an element, in which one is required to rest for ever. In yoga, faith is admitted, but it is constantly sought to be turned into knowledge, the results of which can be verified in terms that are suitable and appropriate to yoga. But the element of exclusivism in the field of yoga has proved to be a stumbling block, and it has also been the cause of the battles of rival claims. The Vedic systems of yoga have been combated by the Buddhist system of yoga, and both of them have been combated by the Jain system of yoga. The Vedic systems of yoga have also come to be combated by the Tantric systems of yoga. Advocates of Jnana yoga have rejected the claims of Karma yoga or Bhakti yoga, and *vice versa*. The advocates of Bhakti yoga maintain that the supreme status of liberation is a state of love for the divine

and they regard the process of Jnana yoga and Karma yoga as subordinate to the process of Bhakti yoga. The exclusive path of Jnana yoga maintains that action may prepare one for liberation but action can never be itself the instrument of liberation. The exclusive path of Karma yoga tends to assign supreme importance to divine action rather than to divine knowledge or divine love. These conflicts became prominent in India soon after the period of the original and esoteric system of the Vedic synthesis of yoga and they have continued to fuel controversies right up to the present day. It is true that the ancient Vedic synthesis of yoga has aided a great deal in securing, during the long history of yoga, the attitude of larger understanding, tolerance, accommodation and even the spirit of synthesis, but there has still been a great weakness and some kind of sense of failure. One of the great tasks that has been accomplished by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is that the real cause of the rise of exclusive systems of yoga and their continuous conflicts has been diagnosed and that cause has now been removed in the new synthesis of yoga which they have put forward.

This new synthesis of Yoga is unprecedented; it is neither the combination nor the culmination of the earlier paths of religions or of yoga. The earlier paths of yoga or the paths of yoga that lay behind various great religions were found by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to be all valid in their own degrees of their realizations and culminating points, but none of them were found to be as comprehensive as the demands of knowledge require, nor did they prove to be as integral as full integrality that can be demanded in terms of the unity and integrity of Spirit and Matter. As a matter of fact, it was found that religions and paths of yoga that lie behind religions aimed at the attainment of Reality or Heaven beyond the

earth, and even when there was occasionally a vision of City of God or of the heaven on the earth or even of the heaven and earth being one, no evidence could be found of any durable effort made to actualize or accomplish that vision. In the same way, none of the earlier yogic systems had envisaged the aim of the complete manifestation of Spirit in Matter or that of the total transformation of the life in Matter into the divine life on the earth. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were led to the new and integral aim by their intense labour of research on the basis of which the life on the earth can be led eventually to achieve total and integral integration, perfection, harmony and unity.

As Sri Aurobindo pointed out, in one of his letters on this subject, the Leader of the Way has to bear the great burden of all the past upward endeavour and also meet the obstacles that block the progress towards the future and the new discovery or invention. Let us quote the relevant lines from that letter:

“As for the Mother and myself, we have had to try all ways, follow all methods, to surmount mountains of difficulties, ...far more difficult conditions, battles to fight, wounds to endure, ways to cleave through impenetrable morass and desert and forest, hostile masses to conquer – a work such as, I am certain, none else had to do before us. For the Leader of the Way in a work like ours has not only to bring down and represent and embody the Divine, but to represent too the ascending element in humanity and to bear the burden of humanity to the full and experience, not in a mere play or Lila but in grim earnest, all the obstruction, difficulty, opposition, baffled and hampered and only slowly victorious labour which are possible on the Path. But it is neither necessary nor tolerable that all that should be repeated over

again to the full in the experience of others. It is because we have the complete experience that we can show a straighter and easier road to others – if they will only consent to take it....”⁵⁰

The integral path excludes exclusivism, but provides to each individual the path of free growth suitable to his temperament and capacities and the path of arriving at comprehensiveness, integration and perfection. This path includes everything from all the religions and all systems of Yoga which is essential for its all-inclusive aim and which contributes to the needed acceleration of the progression on the path.

Synthesis presupposes the presence of oneness in various elements which are to be synthesized; the various elements need to have organic interconnections among themselves and with the underlying oneness; and finally, synthesis implies linear combination or successive combination or vertical or integral combination, —but in all cases it should be a combination that involves intelligible discrimination. An indiscriminating combination in block would not be a synthesis, but confusion. The question of synthesis of yoga arises because there have been in the course of history a development of specialized schools of yoga and specialized processes of yoga, and there have also been various systems of the synthesis of yoga. If there is today a need for a new synthesis of yoga, it is because the object of spiritual evolution of the growing individual and of the graded development of terrestrial existence has come to be conceived in terms of the largest and ever progressive totality of integration, and this integration is incapable of being realized by any specialized processes of yoga or even by any earlier systems of the synthesis of yoga.

But the earlier specialized systems of synthesis of yoga are so disparate in their tendencies and so highly elaborated in their forms that it is not easy to find a proper method of arriving at their right union. The problem becomes even more difficult because in the past these highly specialized systems have been long confirmed in their mutual opposition of their ideas and methods. The new synthesis of yoga has, however, been able to seize on some central principle common to all which includes and utilizes in the right place and proportion the particular principles of the varieties of the yogic disciplines; it has also been able to seize on some central dynamic force which is the common secret of the divergent methods and capable therefore of organizing a natural selection and combination of their varied energies and different utilities. In the resulting synthesis, it has been possible to neglect the forms and outsides of the various yogic disciplines and various processes of successive practise. This synthesis is thus neither a combination in mass nor by successive practice.

The spiritual evolution which is the key of the new synthesis of yoga considers the individual soul and the universal principles of Matter, Life and Mind to be intertwined in an evolutionary process which has so far reached a critical stage where it is possible for the individual to develop knowledge and will that can be consciously applied for purposes of the evolution of supramental consciousness in matter by means of which the individual will be able to realize not only the integral Reality integrally but will also be able to fulfill itself in its role of Leadership of evolution and in the task of building the supramental temple of the divine in supramentalized Matter. The present stage of universal matter, life and mind is conceived as the

lower Nature, and what is attempted by means of the synthesis of yoga is to build the higher Nature of the Supermind, which is of the nature of Knowledge and which culminates in the life divine. The passage from the lower to the higher is the aim of the new synthesis of Yoga, and this passage is affected, not by the rejection of the lower and escape into the higher, but by the transformation of the lower and its elevation to the higher Nature. It is because the aim is that of a transformation of our integral being into the terms of the supramental divine existence that the synthesis of yoga or integral yoga becomes indispensable.

The one common principle and the one central dynamic Force in all systems of yoga is that of concentration; in the new synthesis, that common principle and force of concentration is sought to be developed integrally, as a result of which the method is to put our whole conscious being into relation, concentration and contact with the Divine and to call Him in to transform our entire being. As a result of this integral concentration, the present lower personality of the seeker is used in its entirety as the centre of a divine transfiguration and the instrument of its own perfection.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother recognize three outstanding features that characterize the yogic process and power when they act integrally on the given individual. In the first place, it does not act according to a fixed system of succession as in the specialized methods of yoga, but with a sort of free, scattered and yet gradually intensive and purposeful working determined by the temperament of the individual in whom it operates. This working nourishes the helpful materials which his nature offers and utilizes the obstacles which it presents for purposes of purification and

perfection. In a sense, therefore, each individual has in this path his own method of yoga, even though there are certain broad lines of working common to all which enable to construct, not indeed, a routine system, but yet some kind of shastra or scientific method of the synthesis of yoga.

Secondly, this process, being integral, accepts our nature such as it stands organized by our past evolution and without rejecting anything essential compels to undergo a divine change and divine integration.

Thirdly, every experience and outer contact with our world-environment, however trifling or however disastrous, is used for the yogic development, and every inner experience, even to the most repellent suffering or the most humiliating fall, becomes a step on the path to perfection. It is recognized that all life is a yoga of Nature and that yoga marks the stage at which every experience and effort becomes capable of self-awareness and therefore of right application in the individual.

Limitations of the Mind as an Instrument of Yogic Experience

In this movement, realization adds itself to realization. In other words, the process of this Yoga is progressive. The reason for this progressive movement is that the instrument which is used for this Yoga is primarily connected with the mind. And the nature of the mind has certain inherent difficulties which prevent direct integral realization of the integral Reality, which is the primary objective of this synthetic yoga. Sri Aurobindo points out that when the mental being seeks to know the Divine, it falls short as an instrument to realize the Object of realization in its entire indivisibility and integrality. As he points out:

“When ... the mental being seeks to know the divine, to realize it, to become it, it has first to lift this lid, to put by this veil. But when it succeeds in that difficult endeavour, it sees the divine as something superior to it, distant, high, conceptually, vitally, even physically above it, to which it looks up from its own humble station and to which it has, if at all that be possible, to rise, or if it be not possible, to call that down to itself, to be subject to it and to adore. It sees the divine as a superior plane of being, and then it regards it as a supreme state of existence, a heaven or a Sat or a Nirvana according to the nature of its own conception or realization. Or it sees it as

a supreme Being other than itself or at least other than its own present self, and then it calls it God under one name or another, and views it as personal or impersonal, qualified or without qualities, silent and indifferent Power or active Lord and Helper, again according to its own conception or realization, its vision or understanding of some side or some aspect of that Being. Or it sees it as a supreme Reality of which its own imperfect being is a reflection or from which it has become detached, and then it calls it Self or Brahman and qualifies it variously, always according to its own conception or realization, - Existence, Non-Existence, Tao, Nihil, Force, Unknowable."⁵¹

Sri Aurobindo goes farther and points out that when the Object of realization is seized in awareness by rising above the mental being, we cannot either raise ourselves to it and become it or bring it down to ourselves so that our own experience of our being and world-being can seize the blissful infinity, — the object of realization, — in its totality, integrality and indivisibility. In other words, the instrument of consciousness by which the Object of realization is seized in awareness has to be such an instrument of consciousness as to have the power of seizing comprehensiveness, unity, and indivisible unity. According to Sri Aurobindo, the mind is an instrument of conceptualization capable of making distinctions and discriminations, and its native power acts best when it has to act on divisions and by divisions. There is, however, according to Sri Aurobindo, a power or instrument of knowledge at a higher or highest level, which is supramental that can seize the integral object of realization integrally. It is when the mind rises from one level to higher levels towards the supermind that one realization adds itself to another realization, but the totality of the infinite can be

comprehended in its fullness only if one can rise to the level of the supermind in full state of consciousness and awareness. Sri Aurobindo has, in the course of his yogic research, discovered that there are several gradations of the rising layers of mental consciousness such as those of the Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuitive Mind and Overmind; and Sri Aurobindo points out that even in the overmental plane of consciousness, the unity and integrality of the Object of realization is not effected and that one has to rise still higher to the supramental consciousness.

Penultimate Experiences

According to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the exclusive paths of yoga do lead us to the experiences or realizations of the ultimate reality, but each one of them being grasped at the level of the mind, the experience that is obtained reveals only an aspect of the integral Reality. Thus, although the object of knowledge is ultimate, the experience of it is not ultimate, and there are a number of penultimate experiences of reality which give such an overwhelming feeling of ultimateness that the yogic systems which arrive at these penultimate experiences combat with each other and, even in the philosophical field, they become the sources of exclusive and rival schools of exclusive philosophy. Sri Aurobindo, while commenting upon one of these penultimate experiences, namely, the experience of the timeless Eternal, spaceless Infinite, the utterness of the Absolute, — the experience on which the philosophy of Advaita Mayavada is based, — states as follows:

“It (that experience) comes upon us with a great force of awakening to reality when the thought is stilled, when the mind withdraws from its constructions, when we pass into a pure selfhood void of all sense of individuality, empty of all

cosmic contents: if the spiritualized mind then looks at individual and cosmos, they may well seem to it to be an illusion, a scheme of names and figures and movements falsely imposed on the sole reality of the Self-Existent. ...There can be no denial of the overwhelming decisive convincingness, — *ekātma-pratyaya-sāram*, — with which this realization seizes the consciousness of the spiritual seeker. But still all spiritual experience is experience of the Infinite and it takes a multitude of directions; some of them, — and not this alone, — are so close to the Divine and the Absolute, so penetrated with the reality of Its presence or with the ineffable peace and power of the liberation from all that is less than It, that they carry with them this overwhelming sense of finality complete and decisive. There are a hundred ways of approaching the Supreme Reality and, as is the nature of the way taken, so will be the nature of the ultimate experience by which one passes into That which is ineffable, That of which no report can be given to the mind or expressed by any utterance. All these definitive culminations may be regarded as penultimates of the one Ultimate; they are steps by which the soul crosses the limits of Mind into the Absolute. ... A supreme experience which affirms and includes the truth of all spiritual experience, gives to each its own absolute, integralises all knowledge and experience in a supreme reality, might be the one step farther that is at once a largest illuminating and transforming Truth of all things and a highest infinite Transcendence.⁵²

Sri Aurobindo's First Penultimate Experience

It is significant that an early decisive stage of the yoga of Sri Aurobindo was marked by his attainment of realization that has been claimed to be the culmination of the Jnana yoga

of the Advaitic Mayavada. Sri Aurobindo had begun his practice of yoga in 1904 but within a short period, he had reached such a high level of concentration that in 1907, when he was guided by a Maharashtrian yogi, Lele, to fling away thoughts before they could enter into his mind, he was able to accomplish the task within three days and to attain the Silence of the Brahman in which the oneness and the soleness of the Brahman's Reality is realized. Sri Aurobindo has provided a vivid description of this realization, and it will be instructive to study this description, which is given below:

“It was my great debt to Lele that he showed me this. “Sit in meditation,” he said, “but do not think, look only at your mind; you will see thoughts *coming into it*; before they can enter throw these away from your mind till your mind is capable of entire silence.” I had never heard before of thoughts coming visibly into the mind from outside, but I did not think either of questioning the truth or the possibility, I simply sat down and did it. In a moment my mind became silent as a windless air on a high mountain summit and then I saw one thought and then another coming in a concrete way from outside; I flung them away before they could enter and take hold of the brain and in three days I was free. From that moment, in principle, the mental being in me became a free Intelligence, a universal Mind, not limited to the narrow circle of personal thought as a labourer in a thought factory, but a receiver of knowledge from all the hundred realms of being and free to choose what it willed in this vast sight-empire and thought-empire.”⁵³

“Now to reach Nirvana was the first radical result of my own Yoga. It threw me suddenly into a condition above and without thought, unstained by any mental or vital movement;

there was no ego, no real world — only when one looked through the immobile senses, something perceived or bore upon its sheer silence a world of empty forms, materialized shadows without true substance. There was no One or many even, only just absolutely That, featureless, relationless, sheer, indescribable, unthinkable, absolute, yet supremely real and solely real. This was no mental realization nor something glimpsed somewhere above, — no abstraction, — it was positive, the only positive reality, — although not a spatial physical world, pervading, occupying or rather flooding and drowning this semblance of a physical world, leaving no room or space for any reality but itself, allowing nothing else to seem at all actual, positive or substantial.”⁵⁴

But, as Sri Aurobindo points out, further realizations added themselves and each one of them fused itself with that original experience of the Eternal One. At an early stage, the aspect of an illusory world gave place to one in which illusion is only a small surface phenomenon with an immense Divine Reality behind it and a supreme Divine Reality above it and an intense Divine Reality in the heart of everything that had seemed at first only a cinematic shape or shadow.

Sri Aurobindo clarifies that this was no reimprisonment in the senses, no diminution or fall from supreme experience; it came rather as a constant heightening and widening of the Truth; it was the spirit that saw objects, not the senses, and the Peace, Silence, the freedom in Infinity remained always with the world or all worlds only as a continuous incidence in the timeless eternity of the Divine.

Integral Realization of the Integral Reality

Sri Aurobindo points out in his *"Synthesis of Yoga"* that if we can cross beyond the Mind's frontier twilight into the vast plane of supramental Knowledge, another positive and direct and living experience of the supreme Infinite is attained. It is then seen that the Absolute is beyond personality and beyond impersonality, and yet it is both the Impersonal and the supreme Person and all persons. It is seen that the Absolute is beyond the distinction of unity and multiplicity, and yet it is the One and the Innumerable Many in all the universes. It is further seen that it is beyond all limitation by quality and yet it is not limited by a quality-less void but it is too all infinite qualities. In that supramental experience, the Absolute is the individual soul and all souls and more of them; it is the formless Brahman and the universe. In the words of Sri Aurobindo: "It is the cosmic and the supracosmic spirit, the supreme Lord, the supreme Self, the supreme Purusha and the supreme Shakti, the Ever Unborn who is endlessly born, the Infinite who is innumerable finite, the multitudinous One, the complex Simple, the many-sided Single, the Word of the Silence Ineffable, the impersonal omnipresent Person, the Mystery, translucent in highest consciousness to its own spirit, but to a lesser consciousness veiled in its own exceeding light and

impenetrable for ever. These things are to the dimensional mind irreconcilable opposites, but to the constant vision and experience of the supramental Truth-Consciousness they are so simply and inevitably the intrinsic nature of each other that even to think of them as contraries is an unimaginable violence. The walls constructed by the measuring and separating Intellect have disappeared and the Truth in its simplicity and beauty appears and reduces all to terms of its harmony and unity and light. Dimensions and distinctions remain but as figures for use, not a separative prison for the self-forgetting Spirit.”⁵⁵

The New Synthesis of Yoga and the New Integral Aim of Life

The realization of the integral reality is the basic objective of the integral yoga, and to arrive at the supramental realization of the integral reality by the methods of the integral yoga that we find in Sri Aurobindo can be seen corroborated and confirmed by the description of the integral reality and supramental consciousness that we find in the records of the synthesis of yoga in the Veda, Upanishads and the Gita, and in the Tantra. But Sri Aurobindo and the Mother go farther and determine a new integral aim of life⁵⁶ which can be fulfilled by new methods of their integral yoga. Let us elucidate this important point in some detail.

Supra-terrestrial Theories of the Aim of Life

The Vedic and Upanishadic experience has declared that Matter also is Spirit or Brahman; but, Sri Aurobindo points out, these two extreme terms are so far divided that this identification cannot be convincing unless we recognize a series of ascending terms between Spirit and Matter. But

here, again, the integral experience of the Veda and the Upanishads confirms a series of ascending terms, — Life, Mind, Supermind and the grades that unite Mind to Supermind — between Spirit and Matter. In fact, not only the Veda and the Upanishads but several other theories also maintain that there are supra-terrestrial worlds, which exist independent of the physical cosmos and earthly existence. These supra-terrestrial theories are not necessarily integral in their vision of the world and their aim of life, but from the integral point of view, their assertion of the insistence on supra-terrestrial planes can be confirmed by a large body of knowledge, which has been developed by efforts that make a transition from the physical to the supra-physical, and it is even contended that the evolutionary movement in the material world is constantly aided by the forces and beings of these supra-terrestrial systems or planes of existence.

There are, indeed, several theories concerning supra-terrestrial planes of existence which have been put forward in the least rational form of questionable creed or dogma. It has, for example, been maintained that man is a being primarily created as a material living body upon earth into which a newly born divine soul is breathed or else with which it is associated by the fiat of an almighty Creator. According to this view, each individual is given one opportunity to be on the earth and at the end of that opportunity the individual soul departs to a world of eternal bliss or to a world of eternal misery either according as the general or preponderant balance of his acts is good or evil or according as he accepts or rejects a particular creed, mode of worship, divine mediator or else according to the pre-destined judgment of his Creator. But there are many other views, — and there is also an Indian view, — which regard the world as a field of a

play or *lila* of the divine Being with the conditions of cosmic existence in this world of an inferior Nature. According to this view, the soul of man takes part in the play through a series of births, but it is destined to re-ascend at last into the proper plane of the Divine Being and there enjoy an eternal proximity and communion, or else be unified with the Divine Being or get extinguished in the Being or in the Ineffable Non-Being. This is not the place to discuss philosophical issues involved in various statements of the supra-terrestrial theory, but the integral theories of yogic experience and even some other exclusive theories, which are based on yogic experience and knowledge, admit that every individual soul is immortal and that through a protracted series of births in the terrestrial plane, every soul is required in due course of its evolution to develop ethical and spiritual being as a means of ascension and therefore the one proper business of life in this world of Matter. Finally, in all these theories, the role of the individual and the way in which the individual can relate itself with the cosmic life, cosmic consciousness and even with supra-cosmic reality is underlined.

Supra-cosmic Aim of Life

But there are theories and even yogic experiences which, even while admitting the relative validity of the material life and also of the existence of supra-terrestrial planes, maintain that both material life and supra-terrestrial life are temporary and that the entire cosmos and individual souls in the cosmos are ultimately unreal, and the only effort that must be concentrated upon is to find ways and means so that one can be led to realize the eternal supra-cosmic or acosmic Spaceless and Timeless Absolute. According to this supra-cosmic view, just as we can enter into the cosmic cons-

sciousness and be one with all cosmic existence, even so, we can enter into the world-transcending consciousness and become superior to all cosmic existence. But if it is asked whether this transcendence is necessarily a rejection of all individual and cosmic existence, reference is made to the experience of the Spirit, which stands at the gates of the Transcendent. The supreme and perfect Spirit is described as luminous, pure, sustaining the world but inactive in it, without sinews of energy, without flaw of duality, without scar of division, unique, identical, free from all appearance of relation and of multiplicity, — the inactive Brahman, the transcendent Silence. It is in the experience of this pure and inactive Brahman or of the pure Self that the supra-cosmic view takes its stand. It maintains that transcendence of cosmic consciousness means also the rejection of cosmic consciousness. The appeal of this view is that neither the cosmic nor the terrestrial nor the supra-terrestrial life has any ultimate meaning and that renunciation is a sole path of knowledge, that acceptance of physical life is the act of the ignorant, and that cessation from birth is the right use of human birth. This supra-cosmic view, which is held by certain schools of Vedantic monism in varying formulations, is reiterated even more trenchantly by the philosophy, which is often described as the philosophy of Nihilism. And this philosophy of Nihilism, too, is supported by one of the most powerful yogic experiences. According to this experience, it is possible to travel beyond the Silence of the Brahman by a greater negation to extinguish self into Non-Being. The Non-Being is absolute withdrawal. It is possible to pass in Silence beyond the Silence.

Ours is an age out of sympathy with the supra-cosmic attitude which rejects life in the world. Our age may even

attribute the negativistic and its ascetic spirit to the failing of the vital energy in ancient days of India where it became prominent. But according to Sri Aurobindo, the supra-cosmic view cannot be rejected simply because our age is out of sympathy with it, since it corresponds to the truth of our existence, a state of conscious realization which stands at the very summit of our possibility. On the other hand, it is true that the supra-cosmic view is easily associated with a sense of the entire vanity of human life, the unreality of cosmic existence, the bitter ugliness and cruelty of earth, the insufficiency of supra-terrestrial or heavenly existence, and the aimlessness of repetitions of births in the body.

But the idea of total vanity of life is not altogether an inevitable consequence of the supracosmic theory of existence. As Sri Aurobindo points out, in the Vedantic Monism of the Upanishads, the experience of the supracosmic being does not cancel the experience of the reality of the Becoming. The becoming of the Brahman is accepted as reality; there is room therefore for a truth of the becoming: there is in that truth a right law of life; there is even room for arriving at the delight in the midst of the temporal existence and for the effective utilization of practical energy. The Upanishadic Monism has, therefore, been considered as an integral form of Monism and under that Monism, an attempt could be made to integrate the truths of all the other theories of the aim of life. But there is a difficulty in arriving at a true and effective integration. For even if the object of the highest synthesis of the Upanishadic knowledge is integral, there is, according to Sri Aurobindo, no inevitable arrival at the highest possible integration of all the theories of existence and their corresponding aims of life. The question is as to whether the Upanishads put forward the possibility and

realization of the transformation of the inconscient and transformation of material life into divine life. For, the full integration would imply the conquest of the Inconscience by the superconscience, so that the super-conscience, if it is concealed in the inconscience, can also manifest in its fullness. For then only there could be the effective fulfillment of the cosmic aim of life, which insists on the utter fulfillment of cosmic activities or terrestrial activities.

Sri Aurobindo points out that despite the dynamic aspect of the aim of life that we find in the entire system of the synthesis of yoga in the Upanishads, what is counseled to the soul is that the truth and law of its temporal becoming once fulfilled, cosmic life has no ultimate fulfillment, and the soul has to turn back to its final self-realisation, for its natural highest fulfillment is a release, a liberation into its original being, its eternal self, its timeless reality. In the words of Sri Aurobindo: "There is a circle of becoming starting from eternal Being and ending in it; or, from the point of view of the Supreme as a personal or superpersonal Reality, there is a temporary play, a game of becoming and living in the universe. Here, evidently, there is no other significance of life than the will of the Being to become, the will of consciousness and the urge of its force towards becoming, its delight of becoming; for the individual, when that is withdrawn from him or fulfilled in him and no longer active, the becoming ceases: but otherwise the universe persists or always comes back into manifestation, because the will to become is eternal and must be so since it is the inherent will of an eternal Existence. It may be said that one defect in this view of things is the absence of any fundamental reality of the individual, of any abiding value and significance of his natural or his spiritual activity... And yet the question

remains over; for the stress on our individual being, the demand on it, the value put on individual perfection and salvation is too great to be dismissed as a device for a minor operation, the coiling and uncoiling of an insignificant spiral amid the vast circlings of the Eternal's becoming in the universe."⁵⁷

Spiritual Evolution of the Soul and Terrestrial Existence: Key to the new Integral Aim of Life

The central point of importance in the solution lies in the discovery of Sri Aurobindo that spiritual evolution is the sense of our birth and terrestrial existence. In the light of this discovery, he found that the evolution of mind, life and spirit in Matter would be the sign of the possibility and even eventual inevitability of the manifestation of the Supermind and of the transformation of Matter leading to true integration of the Spirit and Matter. That is the reason why he lays a great stress on the theme of spiritual evolution and regards a complete involution of all that Spirit is and its evolutionary self-unfolding as the secret meaning and significance of our material existence.

As Sri Aurobindo points out: "An involution of spirit in the Inconscience is the beginning; an evolution in the Ignorance with its play of the possibilities of a partial developing knowledge is the middle, and the cause of the anomalies of our present nature, — our imperfection is the sign of a transitional state, a growth not yet completed, an effort that is finding its way; a consummation in a deployment of the spirit's self-knowledge and the self-power of its divine being and consciousness is the culmination: these are the three stages of this cycle of the spirit's progressive self-expression in life. The two stages that have already their play

seem at first sight to deny the possibility of the later consummating stage of the cycle, but logically they imply its emergence; for if the inconscience has evolved consciousness, the partial consciousness already reached must surely evolve into complete consciousness. It is a perfected and divinized life for which the earth-nature is seeking, and this seeking is a sign of the Divine Will in Nature. Other seekings also there are and these too find their means of self-fulfilment; a withdrawal into the supreme peace or ecstasy, a withdrawal into the bliss of the Divine Presence are open to the soul in earth-existence: for the Infinite in its manifestation has many possibilities and is not confined by its formulations. But neither of these withdrawals can be the fundamental intention in the Becoming itself here; for then an evolutionary progression would not have been undertaken, — such a progression here can only have for its aim a self-fulfilment here: a progressive manifestation of this kind can only have for its soul of significance the revelation of Being in a perfect Becoming.”⁵⁸

Full Manifestation of Spirit in Matter

The manifestation of divine life on earth is the distinctive and unprecedented aim that has been explicitly stated by Sri Aurobindo as the aim of his integral yoga. Full manifestation of Spirit in Matter as the culmination of integration of Spirit and Matter has sometimes been envisaged in the past, and in the earliest synthesis of yoga of the Veda this aim may have been, it appears, attempted. There is also a view that the kingdom of heaven is within us and it is not dependent on any outer manifestation or instrumentation or formula of external being. According to Sri Aurobindo, this view is valid and there can undoubtedly be a spiritual life within, and inner life has a supreme spiritual importance and the outer has a value

only in so far as it is expressive of the inner status. The Gita, too, states that the man of spiritual realization dwells in the divine and lives and acts and behaves, in all ways of his being and acting, in the Divine. And when one lives inwardly a divine life, the reflection of that divine life would fall on his outer acts or existence, even if they did not pass beyond the ordinary instrumentation of human thought and action in this world of earth-nature. According to Sri Aurobindo, this is the first truth and the essence of the matter; but still, from the point of view of spiritual evolution, this would be only an individual liberation and perfection in an unchanged environmental existence. He points out that for a greater dynamic earth-nature itself, a spiritual change of the whole principle and instrumentation of life and action, the appearance of new order of being in a new earth-life must be envisaged in our idea of the total consummation. This would mean total transmutation of the whole nature. The divine life on the earth would imply a way of living that develops higher instruments of world-vision and world-action for dynamisation of consciousness in the physical existence and takes up and transforms the values of a world of material Nature.

Supermind in the Veda and the Aim of Immortality

In the building up of the path for this consummation, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother undertook a colossal task of yogic research, and in the course of this task, the earlier religious and spiritual traditions of the world have been fully taken into account. As a part of this great effort of yogic research, Sri Aurobindo discovered, in the texts of Vedic Samhitas, a synthesis of yoga which he has put forward through his books, "*The Secret of the Veda*"⁵⁹ and "*Hymns to the Mystic Fire*".⁶⁰ In that synthesis of yoga, Sri Aurobindo found a glorious account, even an epical account, of the psychological being of man in its highest flights and widest rangings of divine knowledge, power, joy, life and glory; these flights and rangings were synthesized with the cosmic existence of the Gods, pursued behind the symbols of material universe in those superior planes which are hidden from the physical sense and the material mentality. The discovery of the supermind by the Vedic Rishis was of capital importance, and the victories which the Vedic Rishis attained have been extremely significant for the future development of yoga. The crown of the synthesis that the Vedic Rishis arrived at was the unity in the increasing soul of man and the eternal divine fullness of the cosmic godheads. This synthesis was based on the discovery of ultimate reality as something divine,

transcendental and blissful, and Vedic Rishis speak of the attainment of fulfilment and perfection and immortality which has been described as the state of the physical being which, when visited by the greatness of the infinite planes above and by the power of the great godheads who reign on those planes, breaks its limits, opens out to the Light and is upheld in its new wideness by the infinite Consciousness, Mother Aditi, and her sons, the divine powers of the Supreme Deva or the Divine Being.⁶¹

The great attainments of the Vedic Rishis have been summarized by Sri Aurobindo in the following words:

“They may not have yoked the lightning to their chariots, nor weighed sun and star, nor materialized all the destructive forces in Nature to aid them in massacre and domination, but they had measured and fathomed all the heavens and earths within us, they had cast their plummet into the inconscient and the subconscious and the superconscient; they had read the riddle of death and found the secret of immortality; they had sought for and discovered the One and known and worshipped Him in the glories of His light and purity and wisdom and power. These were their gods, as great and deep conceptions as ever informed the esoteric doctrine of the Egyptians or inspired the men of an older primitive Greece, the fathers of knowledge who founded the mystic rites of Orpheus or the secret initiation of Eleusis. But over it all there was the “Aryan light”, a confidence and joy and a happy, equal friendliness with the Gods which the Aryan brought with him into the world, free from the sombre shadows that fell upon Egypt from contact with the older races, Sons of deep-brooding Earth. These claimed Heaven as their father and their seers had delivered his Sun out of our material darkness.”⁶²

The Vedic synthesis was a synthesis of the Ultimate Reality that was at once '*tad ekam*' (That One), the Deva, the supreme person, and also the source of cosmic forces and gods, the sons of Aditi. The Vedic synthesis was a synthesis of the Divine as the transcendental, cosmic, and individual. It was also a synthesis of seven planes of existence that provided the basis for linking Matter, *Prithvi*, with the Supreme Existence, *Sat*. The conquest of *Swar* and the arrival at Surya, the abode of comprehensive light, could be regarded as epical victories.

Synthesis of Yoga in the Upanishads

It was the Vedic synthesis which provided the foundation for the synthesis of yoga in the Upanishads. As Sri Aurobindo points out, the Upanishads "draw together into a great harmony all that had been seen and experienced by the inspired and liberated knowers of the Eternal throughout a great and fruitful period of spiritual seeking".⁶³ The Upanishads link the lower mortal existence to the higher divine existence by the causal Idea or supramental Knowledge-Will, *vijnāna*, which we find elaborated upon in the Taittiriya Upanishad. It is the *vijnāna* which, by supporting and secretly guiding the confused activities of the Mind, Life and Body, ensures and compels the right arrangement of the universe. This *vijnāna* was called in the Veda the Truth because it represents by direct vision the truth of things both inclusive and independent of their appearances; the *vijnāna* was also called in the Veda the Right or Law, because it contains in itself the effective power of Chit and it works out all things according to their nature with a perfect knowledge and prevision; finally, the *vijnāna* was called the Vast in the Veda, because it is of the nature of an infinite cosmic Intelligence comprehensive of all particu-

lar activities.

Vijnāna is the principle of Maharloka, which is in the Veda the world of large consciousness. But this *vijnāna* is intuitional, not intellectual. It is one with the existence which throws out the form as a symbol of itself and it therefore carries with it always the knowledge of the Truth behind the form. It is this intuition or gnosis which is the Vedic truth, the self-vision and all-vision of *Surya*, the Sun, that symbolizes the supramental and integral consciousness.

In the *Iśa Upanishad*, we find towards its close a significant description of the Supermind and Supramental Truth-Consciousness as self-vision and all-vision of *Surya*. It is said that the face of Truth is covered with a brilliant golden lid. It is that golden lid which prevents the synthesis of the different aspects of the Truth. For on account of that lid, the rays of the light get scattered, and these rays, even if seized by our consciousness, prevent us from the integral vision of the ultimate reality. We are mental beings and our highest state of the mind, even though golden, is composed of the concepts and percepts of the mind, which are indeed a means of knowledge, rays of the Truth, but not in their nature integral Truth of existence. According to the *Iśa Upanishad*, we can only arrive at the true Truth, if *Surya* works in us to remove this brilliant and golden but mental formation that hides the face of the Truth. The *Iśa Upanishad* addresses Pushan, who represents in the Veda, the power of enlarging vision of the Sun. Pushan is fosterer or increaser. His work is to effect enlargement of the divided self-perception and action and will into the integral will and knowledge. When the work of Pushan is effected, the vision of *Surya*, the true supramental and integral knowledge is formed. In this formation, the *Upanishad* indicates two successive actions.

First, there is an arrangement or marshalling of the rays of *Surya* as a result of which separate intuitions are arranged in their true relations to each other. In the second movement, we arrive at totalities of intuitive knowledge and can finally go beyond to unity. This is the drawing together of the light of *Surya*. Then is obtained the integral vision of the Sun, which is the self-vision of the integral Reality. There is first the movement of marshalling the rays, *vyūha*, and then there is the process of drawing together of the rays of light, *raśmīn samūha*. This movement of integrality in the Upanishad confirms and reiterates the movement of integration described in the Rig Veda,⁶⁴ which hymns as follows: “Hidden by your truths is the Truth that is constant for ever where they unyoke the horses of the Sun; there the ten-thousands stand together; That is the One: I have seen the supreme godhead of the embodied gods.”

The Synthesis of Yoga in the Gita

Sri Aurobindo observes that the synthesis that we find in the Veda and the Upanishads continues in the Gita. The synthesis in the Gita as Sri Aurobindo explains in his “*Essays on the Gita*”, starts from the Upanishadic synthesis, and it builds up harmony of the three great means and powers, love, knowledge and works, through which the soul of man can directly approach and cast itself into the Eternal. The integral vision of the Ultimate Reality in the Gita is the confirmation and reiteration of the Vedic and Upanishadic vision of the integral reality. The Gita’s conception of the Purushottama and that of Para Prakriti as the higher nature of Purushottama bring together the harmony and integrality of the infinite and the finite, of personality and impersonality, of the *akshara* and *kshara* Purusha, the immobile and the mobile Purusha, and of the transcendental, the universal and the individual. The unity

of three powers of approaching the eternal, Love, Knowledge and Works, arises from the integral nature of the Ultimate Reality.

The Tantrik Synthesis of Yoga

Sri Aurobindo speaks of another synthesis, the Tantric, and acknowledges how the aims of the Tantra are synthesized in the integral aims of his synthesis of yoga. According to Sri Aurobindo, the Tantric synthesis is less subtle and spiritually profound, but it is even more bold and forceful than the synthesis of the Gita, — “for it seizes even upon the obstacles to the spiritual life and compels them to become the means for a richer spiritual conquest and enables us to embrace the whole of Life in our divine scope as the Lila of the Divine; and in some directions it is more immediately rich and fruitful, for it brings forward into the foreground along with divine knowledge, divine works and an enriched devotion of divine Love, the secrets also of the Hatha and Raja Yogas, the use of the body and of mental askesis for the opening up of the divine life on all its planes, to which the Gita gives only a passing and perfunctory attention.”⁶⁵

Divinization of Life on the Earth

According to Sri Aurobindo, the Tantra grasps at the idea of the divine perfectibility of man, — the idea which was possessed by the Vedic Rishis but thrown into the background by the intermediate ages. But this idea of the divine perfectibility had remained unfulfilled, and one of the distinctive features of Sri Aurobindo's own synthesis of yoga is to provide a large place not only to the idea of the divine perfectibility of man but to the actual realization of that idea. In fact, there has been in the history of religions and the history of occultism,

philosophy and yoga, a major deficiency in conceiving the fullness of the divine perfectibility of man, and consequently a disabling failure in the realization of that ideal. Even the Vedic Rishis, whose epical victories in regard to their yogic achievements and to the discovery of the supermind, have been underlined by Sri Aurobindo, appear to have only an imperfect experience in this regard. Sri Aurobindo states as follows:

“The Vedic Rishis never attained to the supermind for the earth or perhaps did not even make the attempt. They tried to rise individually to the supramental plane, but they did not bring it down and make it a permanent part of the earth-consciousness. Even there are verses of the Upanishad in which it is hinted that it is impossible to pass through the gates of the Sun (the symbol of the supermind) and yet retain an earthly body. It was because of this failure that the spiritual effort of India culminated in Mayavada. Our yoga is a double movement of ascent and descent; one rises to higher and higher levels of consciousness, but at the same time one brings down their power not only into mind and life, but in the end even into the body. And the highest of these levels, the one at which it aims is the supermind. Only when that can be brought down is a divine transformation possible in the earthconsciousness.”⁶⁶

The New Integral Aim of Life: Yogic Accomplishment in Matter

The integral aim that Sri Aurobindo came to formulate involves the realization of the divine consciousness in all its integrality, which can be possible only when a mental consciousness, even in its highest degrees of development, is transcended and the supramental consciousness is attained.

But this aim also includes the manifestation of the Spirit in Matter, and Sri Aurobindo, in his unprecedented labour of research had to cross the formidable barrier of the view that one could always ascend into higher states of consciousness, including the supramental consciousness, but earthly existence can never be made to receive higher and highest levels of consciousness and stabilize that consciousness in Matter to such a degree that Matter could manifest those highest levels of consciousness. The constant message of the past efforts was that one was required to leave the physical body in order to become permanently fixed in the supramental consciousness. That message has been constantly repeating itself in the declaration that the divine-consciousness and the earth-consciousness are poles apart, and however much one may try, earth-consciousness cannot be reconciled with the divine-consciousness, and that the integration of the supramental life and the earth-life is an impossibility. It was to break the barrier of this message that necessitated the most difficult and labourious programme of yogic research. The first part of this research consisted of scaling to the supreme heights of the supramental consciousness; the second part consisted of connecting the supramental consciousness with the earth-consciousness and of effecting the descent of the supermind on various levels that link the supramental consciousness with earth-consciousness and of bringing about the decisive descent of the supermind in Matter; and the third part of this research consisted of fixing the supramental consciousness in the physical consciousness, — a task which involved series of radical discoveries spread over years and years that led the Mother ultimately to that point of irreversible accomplishment so as to state in 1970: “The physical is CAPABLE of receiving the higher Light, the Truth, the true Consciousness and of man-i-fest-ing it.”⁶⁷

Thus the integral object that Sri Aurobindo had formulated for the integral yoga stands today as a fulfilled object, even though it is envisaged that the full working out of this fulfilled object still remains a programme of colossal research, and thus the yoga-shastra of integral yoga is an open book which can be pursued in the spirit of research and in the spirit of making new discoveries and expansions of future realizations and achievements.

Distinctive Features of the Object of the Integral Yoga

The object of the integral yoga that Sri Aurobindo has formulated has several distinctive features. There is, first, the object of an integral realization of Divine Being. This realization would include not only a realization of the One in its indistinguishable unity, but also in its multitude of aspects which are all necessary to the complete knowledge of it by the relative consciousness. This realization would imply unity in the Self, but also unity in the infinite diversity of activities, worlds and creatures.

Secondly, the object includes an integral liberation. This integral liberation would unite *sāyujya mukti*, *sālokya mukti* and *sādharmya mukti*. In other words, the integral liberation implies (i) the freedom born of unbroken contact of the individual being in all its parts with the Divine, *sāyujya mukti*, by which it becomes free even in its separation, even in the duality; (ii) *sālokya mukti* by which the whole conscious existence dwells in the same status of being as the Divine, in the state of Sachchidananda, and (iii) the acquisition of the divine nature by the transformation of the lower being into the human image of the divine, *sādharmya mukti*, and the complete and final release of all, the liberation of the human consciousness of the mind, life and body from the transitory

mould of the ego and its unification with the One Being, transcendently one, both in the world and beyond all universe.

Thirdly, the object would also include the result of this integral realization and liberation into the perfect harmony of the results of Knowledge, Love and Works. In other words, there is the attainment of the complete release from ego and knowledge by identification in the being with the One in all and beyond all. But this attainment is not only that of knowledge by identity but it wins also the unity in Beatitude and the harmonized diversity in Love, so that all relations of the play remain possible even when one retains on the heights of the being the eternal oneness with the Beloved. There is a farther consequence also and that consists of wideness and freedom in spirit that embraces life and does not depend upon withdrawal from life, and one is able to become without egoism, bondage or reaction the channel in one's mind and body for a divine action poured out freely upon the world.

Fourthly, the object includes the unity of freedom, purity, beatitude and perfection in their integrality. The integral purity implies the perfect reflection of the divine Being in ourselves as also the perfect outpouring of its Truth and Law in us in the terms of life and through the right functioning of the complex instrument we are in our parts. Integral purity brings about integral beatitude; there is the Delight or Ananda of all that is in the world, since they are seen as symbols of the Divine; and there is also the Delight or Ananda of that which is above the world. Integral purity and integral beatitude prepare the integral perfection of our humanity as a type of the Divine in the conditions of the human manifestation, a perfection founded on a certain free

universality of being, of love and joy, of play of knowledge and of play of will in power and will in unegoistic action.

Fifthly, integral perfection includes perfection of mind and body. In the attainment of this perfection, therefore, the highest results of Rajayoga and Hathayoga are included; and these results should be contained in the widest formula of the synthesis finally to be effected by humanity. These results are envisaged to be employed for an integral mental and physical life, and the mental and physical life would be in its nature a translation of the spiritual existence into its right mental and physical values. As a result, a synthesis is accomplished of the three degrees of Nature and of the three modes of human existence which Nature has evolved and is evolving.

Sixthly, the integral yoga and the integrality that is envisaged cannot be confined to the individual. Divine perfection embraces the realization of ourselves in being, in life and in love through others as well as through ourselves; therefore the extension of our liberty and of its results in others would be the inevitable outcome; and that would be also the broadest utility of our liberation and perfection. This would mean a constant and inherent attempt towards the increasing and ultimately complete generalization of the object and its accomplishment in humanity.

Finally, therefore, the object is to divinize the normal material life of humanity and also to divinize the great secular attempt of humanity of mental and moral self-culture in the individual and the race by the integralization of a widely perfect spiritual existence. This would be the crown alike of the individual and common effort of humanity. Consummation of this process of divinizing material life of humanity means the kingdom of heaven within reproduced in the

kingdom of heaven without, and this would be also the true fulfillment of the great dream cherished in different terms by world's religions.

According to Sri Aurobindo, this widest synthesis of perfection is conceivable and realizable, and as he points out, "The widest synthesis of perfection possible to thought is the sole effort entirely worthy of those whose dedicated vision perceives that God dwells concealed in humanity."⁶⁸

Distinctive Features of the Methods of Integral Yoga

The new synthesis of yoga has a method for achieving the object which is as total and integral as the aim set before it. The basic method consists of the total and integral concentration of consciousness; it takes up the aid of methods of earlier systems of yoga but only as a part action and of other methods that are distinctive. The earlier systems of yoga, synthetic or exclusive, had one common principle, which can be discerned in every system; that common principle is the principle of concentration. In the new synthesis, the method is to put our whole conscious being, all the instruments of our consciousness, in all-inclusive concentration, on the Divine and to call Him to transform our entire being into His; in effect, the pressure of the concentration, the force or Tapas of consciousness in us dwells in the Idea of the divine Nature, and this pressure falls upon that which we are in our entirety; it is by that all-receiving concentration that produces its own realization. In the words of Sri Aurobindo: "The divine and all-knowing and all-effecting descends upon the limited and obscure, progressively illumines and energises the whole lower nature and substitutes its own action for all the terms of the inferior human light and mortal activity."⁶⁹

Sri Aurobindo has assimilated in his new synthesis four systems of the synthesis of yoga, those of the Veda, Upanishads, Gita and Tantra, as also the rich fund of the yogic knowledge contained in various religions and in the vast heritage of the past yogic effort, such as what we find in Siddhanta and Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishana and Swami Vivekananda. Sri Aurobindo has, indeed, acknowledged the ideals and anticipations which appear to be allied to the ideals and anticipations of his new synthesis of yoga such as the perfectibility of the race, certain Tantric sadhanas, the effort after a complete physical Siddhi by certain Schools of Yoga and others, but Sri Aurobindo has laid emphasis on characterizing his synthesis as new and pointed out that a repetition of the aim and ideal of the old yogas was not enough in his eyes and that he has put forward a thing to be achieved that has not yet been achieved, not yet clearly visualized, even though it is the natural but still secret outcome of all the past spiritual endeavour.

In a letter addressed to a disciple, Sri Aurobindo has pointed out how his synthesis of yoga is new as compared with the old Yogas. He has stated that it is new:

- “1. Because it aims not at a departure out of world and life into Heaven or Nirvana, but at a change of life and existence, not as something subordinate or incidental, but as a distinct and central object. If there is a descent in other Yogas, yet it is only an incident on the way or resulting from the ascent — the ascent is the real thing. Here the ascent is the first step, but it is a means for the descent. It is the descent of the new consciousness attained by the ascent that is the stamp and seal of the *Sadhana*. Even the Tantra and Vaishnavism end in the

release from life; here the object is the divine fulfilment of life.

2. Because the object sought after is not an individual achievement of divine realization for the sake of the individual, but something to be gained for the earth-consciousness here, a cosmic, not solely a supra-cosmic achievement. The thing to be gained also is the bringing in of a Power of Consciousness (the Supramental) not yet organized or active directly in earth-nature, even in the spiritual life, but yet to be organized and made directly active.
3. Because a method has been preconized for achieving this purpose which is as total and integral as the aim set before it, viz., the total and integral change of the consciousness and nature, taking up old methods but only as a part action and present aid to others that are distinctive. I have not found this method (as a whole) or anything like it professed or realized in the old Yogas. If I had, I should not have wasted my time in hewing out a road and in thirty years of search and inner creation when I could have hastened home safely to my goal in an easy canter over paths already blazed out, laid down, perfectly mapped, macadamized, made secure and public. Our Yoga is not a retreading of old walks, but a spiritual adventure.”⁷⁰

Scientific Records of the Integral Yoga

The conduct and development of this new synthesis of yoga have many significant aspects. First of all, there is the aspect of a tremendous speed in the development of the research work conducted by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother,

and the landmarks of this development have been scrupulously and accurately recorded; these records have the scientific rigour of laboratory journals, which stand out as authentic first-hand testimony of the scientific nature of the research work, the parallel of which does not exist. For this is the first time when a program of yogic research has been seen, developed and executed as a conscious and deliberate program of human evolution, the goal of which is to bring about a definitive mutation of human species into a new and divine superhuman species. Sri Aurobindo kept a record of his own practice of yoga in a series of diaries. The earliest entries in these diaries began in 1909 and latest ended in 1927. These diaries have been now published in two volumes, entitled "*Record of Yoga*". Sri Aurobindo and the Mother wrote thousands of letters to the disciples, and large numbers of them are now available in three volumes, entitled "*Letters on Yoga*", and in other volumes of the Mother's works. Finally, thirteen volumes of "*Mother's Agenda*" contain the Mother's conversations with Satprem extending over nineteen years, which describe the curves of the research work that developed rapidly towards the descent of the supermind on the earth and subsequent developments during which the supermind came to be fixed permanently in the physical consciousness in the Mother's body, which had become so universalized as to represent the body of the human species as a whole.

The coming together of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is itself a matter of special significance. Two individuals, one from the East (India) and another from the West (France), — both of whom rare and accomplished beings, happened to meet each other on March 29, 1914, when the Mother came to Pondicherry from France. Both recognized that they had

to accomplish the task of supramental manifestation jointly. This was a momentous moment in the history of evolution on the earth. In the following statement of the Mother dated May 19, 1959, we can see a brief account of the hurricane movement of progression of the yogic research work that came to be jointly conducted by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother:

“... I had already covered this path by the beginning of the century and had established a constant relationship with the Supreme — That which is beyond the Personal and the gods and all the outward expressions of the Divine, but also beyond the Absolute Impersonal. It's something you cannot describe; you must experience it. And this is what must be brought down into Matter. Such is the descending path, the one I began with Sri Aurobindo; and there, the work is immense.

The thing can still be brought down as far as the mental and vital planes (although Sri Aurobindo said that thousands of lifetimes would be needed merely to bring it down to the mental plane, unless one practiced a perfect surrender). With Sri Aurobindo, we went down below Matter, right into the Subconscient and even into the Inconscient. But after the descent comes the transformation, and when you come down to the body, when you attempt to make it take one step forward — oh, not even a real step, just a little step! — everything starts grating; it's like stepping on an anthill ... And yet the presence, the help of the supreme Mother, is there constantly; thus you realize that for ordinary men such a task is impossible, or else millions of lives would be needed — but in truth, unless the work is done for them and the sadhana of the body done for the entire earth consciousness, they will never achieve the physical transformation, or else it will be

so remote that it is better not even to speak of it. ...

The path is difficult. ...”⁷¹

Mutation of the Human Species: The Next Species and The New Divine Body

Sri Aurobindo has envisaged the development of the Divine Body, and he has written in his "*The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*" on the structure and functioning that the divine body will have, when it will visibly be operating physically on the physical earth in the same way in which the human physical body is today operating on the physical earth. That, when it happens, will be, according to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the conclusive proof of the evolutionary birth of a new supramental species on the earth, and also of the synthesis of science and spirituality.

We speak today of the momentous development of genetic engineering. The onward march of this development is bound to raise more and more fundamental questions about ageing, death and indefinite prolongation of life. There are already speculations that death is a habit and that it can be cured. But even more important will be the question of accelerating human evolution and of the means and direction of the future evolution of the human species. It is against this context that the task which has been accomplished by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the development of the new synthesis of yoga will prove to be of direct relevance and momentous significance.

Total Transformation: The Keyword of the Integral Yoga

The one word that brings out centrally the novelty of the objective and method of the new synthesis of yoga is “transformation”. The yoga of the new evolution that would lead humanity into superhumanity or the mutation of human species into a new supramental species has at its core what Sri Aurobindo has called the process of triple transformation, — the psychic transformation, the spiritual transformation and the supramental transformation. Sri Aurobindo has given precise significance to all these terms. By transformation, Sri Aurobindo means, “a change of consciousness radical and complete and of a certain specific kind which is so conceived as to bring about a strong and assured step forward in the spiritual evolution of the being of a greater and higher kind and of a larger sweep and completeness than what took place when a mentalised being first appeared in a vital and material animal world.”⁷² According to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, this transformation can be effected only if the lowest bottom rock of the Inconscience can permanently be reversed, so that the supramental consciousness which is concealed in the heart of the inconscience is manifested. None of the powers of the mind or even of the Overmind can, according to the yogic experience of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, accomplish this task. Only a process of an ascent and descent that involves three steps can effectuate and accomplish this task. The first step is to arrive at the loftiest peaks of supramental consciousness; next is the gradual descent of the supermind right up to the level of the physical consciousness and physical substance and into sub-consciousness and the inconscience. The third step would be that of transformation of the inconscience and fixing of the supramental consci-

ousness into the material substance. This entire process implies that the gulf that exists between Mind and Supermind has to be bridged; the passages between the mind and supermind which are closed at present have to be opened; there are voids and silences between the mind and supermind and these have to be crossed and connected and new roads of ascent and descent have to be created. This can be done only by the triple transformation. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, "There must first be the psychic change, the conversion of our whole present nature into a soul-instrumentation; on that or along with that there must be the spiritual change, the descent of a higher Light, Knowledge, Power, Force, Bliss, Purity into the whole being, even into the lowest recesses of the life and body, even into the darkness of our subconsciousness; last, ... there must take place as a crowning movement the ascent into the Supermind and the transforming descent of the supramental Consciousness into our entire being and nature."⁷³

Integral Yoga: Supermind and Humanity

The most significant thing about the "*Synthesis of Yoga*" is that it is indispensably connected with the solutions that are being sought after by humanity to resolve the acute crisis from which it is undergoing at present, and thus to the attainment of the goal of what is contained in the ideal of "*lokasangraha*", — the progressive and painless development of human solidarity and unity. This is a subject on which Sri Aurobindo has written extensively in "*The Life Divine*", "*The Human Cycle*", "*The Ideal of Human Unity*", "*The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*". It is because humanity's highest welfare is dependent on the development of theme of synthesis of yoga and the research work that is

involved in the tasks connected with the supramental manifestation in Matter that it invites our imperative attention.

Speaking of the consequences for humanity of the supramental manifestation into our earthly existence, Sri Aurobindo has stated:

“... it would not only establish the Supermind and a supramental race of beings upon the earth, it could bring about an uplifting and transforming change in mind itself and as an inevitable consequence in the consciousness of man, the mental being and would equally bring about a radical and transforming change in the principles and forms of his living, his ways of action and the whole build and tenor of his life. ... One result of the intervention of Supermind in the earth-nature, the descent of the supreme creative Truth-Power, might well be a change in the law of evolution, its method and its arrangement: a larger element of the principle of evolution through knowledge might enter into the forces of the material universe. ...

It will even be possible for the mind no longer united by the intellect to become capable of a sort of mental gnosis, a luminous reproduction of the Truth in a diminished working extending the power of the Light not only to its own but to lower levels of consciousness in their climb towards self-transcendence. ...

... Supermind alone has the truth-consciousness in full and, if this comes down and intervenes, mind, life and body too can attain to the full power of the truth in them and their full possibility of perfection. This, no doubt, would not take place at once, but an evolutionary progress towards it could begin and grow with increasing rapidity towards its fullness.

All men might not reach that fullness till a later time, but still the human mind could come to stand perfected in the Light and a new humanity take its place as part of the new order.”⁷⁴

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- ²¹ Vide., Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, 1971, Pondicherry, Vol. 22, pp. 137-54.
- ²² Vide., Ibid., pp. 157-229.
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India, there is a wide and profuse literature, and some books like the Gita have come to be regarded as the books of Yogashastra, science of yoga. There is a need to develop a comprehensive exposition which would include not only the yogic systems which have developed in India but also in various parts of the world.

- ²⁵ Vide, Sri Aurobindo, *Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Pondicherry, 1971, Vol. 20, p.3.
- ²⁶ Vide, Radhakrishnan, S., *Indian Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 1923, Oxford, 7th Impression 2001, Chapter 5, pp. 336-73.
- ²⁷ The *Yogasutra* of Patanjali is the oldest text book of what has come to be known as Rajayoga. The third part of this book is called *Vibhūtipāda*; it presents the theme of the development of extraordinary powers of consciousness. Vyasa's commentary on the *Yogasutra* (4th Century A.D) gives the standard exposition of the yoga principles. Every system of Indian philosophy has its own system of yoga. It would therefore be an error to think that Rajayoga is the only system of yoga. Yoga is often erroneously associated also exclusively with Hathayoga. This misconception has led to the belief that yoga consists exclusively of the methods of breath control (*prāṇāyāma*), and physical postures (*āsana*). The books of Swami Vivekananda on Rajayoga, Jnanayoga, Karmayoga and Bhaktiyoga (Ref. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashram, Almora, 1958) have explained that the word Yoga has a very wide connotation, and it cannot be identified with Hathayoga alone or with Rajayoga alone. Sri Aurobindo's two volumes on the *Synthesis of Yoga* (SABLC, 1971, Vol. 20-21) have provided detailed exposition of various systems of yoga and shown how his synthesis of yoga follows a central principle by means of which different systems of yoga can be synthesized, even while it can afford to neglect the forms and outsides of various yogic disciplines. The synthesis that Sri Aurobindo has proposed cannot be arrived at either by combination en masse or by successive practices of various systems of yoga. This synthesis seizes on a central principle common to all which includes and utilizes, in the right place, their particular principles, and on some central dynamic force which is the common secret of their divergent methods and capable therefore of organizing a natural selection and combination of their varied energies and different utilities.
- ²⁸ Vide., Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashram, 1958, Almora, *Raja Yoga*, Vol. I, 9th Edition.

- ²⁹ Vide., Yogi Swatarama, *The Hathayoga Pradipika*, translated into English by Panchan Singh, Munshi Ram Manohar Lal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.
- ³⁰ Vide, Kak, Subhash, *Architecture of Knowledge*, Centre for Studies in Civilizations, 2004, New Delhi, Monograph series, Vol. 13, pp. 197-202.
- ³¹ The yogic science has been able to establish several states of realizations or Siddhis. In Hathayoga and Rajayoga, in Tantra as also in other systems of yoga, various Siddhis have been described. In all, siddhis are eight in number; two of them are siddhis of knowledge, three of power and three of being. The three siddhis of being are: Mahima, including Garima, Laghima and Anima. Mahima is unhampered force in the mental power or in the physical power. In the physical it shows itself by abnormal strength which is not muscular and may be even developed into the power of increasing the size (Mahima) and weight of the body (Garima), etc. Laghima is a similar power of lightness that results in the freedom from all pressure or weighing down in the mental, pranic or physical being. Laghima is the basis of utthapana or levitation. That demonstrates the power of overcoming gravitation. Anima is the power of freeing the atoms of subtle or gross matter from their ordinary limitations. It is by this power that yogis were supposed to make themselves invisible and invulnerable or to free the body from decay and death.

Three siddhis of power are: Aishwarya, Ishita and Vashita. Aishwarya is the power to control and make things happen or make people act according to the use of the will, even without any special concentration. Ishita is a power to make things come to you or happen merely by having a want or need or a sense that something ought to be. Vashita is the power to control a person or an object by concentration of one's will.

The two siddhis of consciousness are Vyapti and Prakamya. Vyapti is the siddhi by means of which thoughts, feelings, etc. or others or any kind of knowledge of things outside oneself are felt coming to the mind from those things or persons. This is the power of receptive Vyapti. There is also a power of communicative Vyapti, when one can send or put one's own thought, feeling, etc. into someone else. Prakamya is the siddhi when one looks mentally or physically at somebody or something and perceives what is in that person or thing. There is also another kind of Prakamya which is concerned with senses. There is a power of perceiving smells, sounds, contents, tastes, lights, colours and other objects of sense which are either not at all perceptible to

ordinary men or beyond the range of one's ordinary senses.

An interesting and instructive address delivered by Swami Vivekananda at Los Angeles, California, on January 8, 1900, is entitled "The powers of the mind". During the course of this address, Swami Vivekananda has narrated an extremely interesting personal experience, which is worth citing: "I once heard of a man who, if anyone went to him with questions in his mind, would answer them immediately; and I was also informed that he foretold events. I was curious and went to see him with few friends. We each had something in our minds to ask, and, to avoid mistakes, we wrote down our questions and put them in our pockets. As soon as the man saw one of us, he repeated our questions and gave the answers to them. Then he wrote something on paper, which he folded up, and asked me to sign on the back, and said, "Don't look at it; put it in your pocket and keep it there till I ask for it again." And so on to each one of us. He next told us about some events that would happen to us in the future. Then he said, "Now, think of a word or a sentence from any language you like." I thought of a long sentence from Sanskrit, a language of which he was entirely ignorant. "Now, take out the paper from your pocket," he said. The Sanskrit sentence was written there! He had written it an hour before with the remark. "In confirmation of what I have written, this man will think of this sentence." It was correct. Another of us who had been given a similar paper which he had signed and placed in his pocket, was also asked to think of a sentence. He thought of a sentence in Arabic, which it was still less possible for the man to know; it was some passage from the Koran and my friend found this written down on the paper.

Another of us was a physician. He thought of a sentence from a German medical book. It was written on his paper."

Swami Vivekananda had narrated several other incidents during the course of his address. The reader may refer to *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashram, 1958, Calcutta, Vol. II.

³² Vide., Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, 1971, Pondicherry, Vol. 20, pp. 506-20.

³³ Vide., Dayakrishna, Mukund Lath, Francine E. (Eds.), *Krishna Bhakti: A contemporary discussion*, Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 2000, New Delhi.

³⁴ Vide., Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashram, 1958, Calcutta, *Jnana Yoga*, Vol. I.

- ³⁵ Vide., *Bhagavad Gita*; vide also, Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, SABCL, 1971, Pondicherry, Vol. 13; vide also, Ibid, *The Yoga of Divine Works*, Vol. 20, pp. 47-270.
- ³⁶ Vide., Cottingham, John, *The Spiritual Dimension*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, particularly Ch. 8 (*Religion and Pluralism: Which Spirituality?*).
- ³⁷ Vide., Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, Macmillan Press, 1989, Basingstoke; vide also, Hick, J., Hellethwaite, B. (Eds), *Christianity and Other Religions*, Fortress Press, 1981, Philadelphia; vide also Hick, J., *The Fifth Dimension*, Oneworld Publications, 2004, Oxford.
- ³⁸ Cottingham, J., *The Spiritual Dimension*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, Cambridge, p. 159.
- ³⁹ Vide., Sri Aurobindo, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, SABCL, 1971, Pondicherry, Vol. 14, pp. 121-95; vide also, Ibid., *The Life Divine*, Vol. 19, pp. 863-74.
- ⁴⁰ Vide., Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashram, 1958, Almora, Vol. I, IXth Edition.
- ⁴¹ Vide., Bhagwan Das, *Essential unity of religions*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Atul Bordia Bhavana Printer, 1932, Bombay, 1st Edition.
- ⁴² Vide., Swami Vivekananda, Address at the World Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 11th September 1893, Advaita Ashram, 1958, Almora, Vol. I.
- ⁴³ Sri Aurobindo, *Thoughts and Glimpses*, SABCL, 1971, Pondicherry, Vol. 16, P. 394.
- ⁴⁴ Vide., Rashdall, Hastings, *Theory of Good and Evil*, Oxford University Press, 1924, London, Vol. I – II; vide also, Joad, C.E.M., *Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics*, Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1938, London; Berlin, I., *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford University Press, 1969, Oxford; Ross, W.D., *The Right and the Good*, Clarendon Press, 1930, Oxford; Brink, D., *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, 1981, Cambridge.
- ⁴⁵ Vide., Russell, Bertrand, Unwin Paperbacks, 1984, London, (particularly chapter seventeen, "The Happy Man". Towards the end of the chapter, Russell writes: "I have written in this book as a hedonist, that is to say, as one who regards happiness as the good, but the acts to be recommended from the point of view of the hedonist are on the whole

the same as those to be recommended by the sane moralist.” P. 190).

- ⁴⁶ Vide., Rashdall, Hastings, *Theory of Good and Evil*, Oxford University Press, 1969, London, Vol. I, Chs. VI – VII.
- ⁴⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL, 1971, Pondicherry, Vol. 19, pp. 1046-65; vide also, *ibid*, *Synthesis of Yoga*, Vol. 20, Ch. VII.
- ⁴⁸ Vide., *Ibid.*, *Synthesis of Yoga*, Vols. 20 – 21; *Sri Aurobindo: His Life and Work (A Brief Outline)*

Sri Aurobindo was born on the 15th August 1872 at Calcutta. At an early age of seven, he was taken along with his elder brothers to England for education, since his father wanted him to have no Indian influence in the shaping of his outlook and personality. And yet, even though Sri Aurobindo assimilated in himself richly the best of the European culture, he returned to India in 1893 with a burning aspiration to work for the liberation of India from foreign rule. While in England, Sri Aurobindo passed the I.C.S. Examination, and yet he felt no call for it; so he got himself disqualified by remaining absent from the riding test. The Gaekwar of Baroda happened to be there at that time, and Sri Aurobindo accepted the proposal to be his Personal Secretary, and returned to India.

Soon thereafter, however, Sri Aurobindo switched over to the Baroda College as Professor of French and then of English, and when in 1906, he left for Bengal, he was the acting Principal of the College. It was during the Baroda period that Sri Aurobindo assimilated in himself the spirit and culture of India and prepared himself for his future political and spiritual work. Indeed, his political work had already begun in Baroda, but it was behind the scenes, largely of the nature of a preparation for an armed revolution for the liberation of India.

Sri Aurobindo was the first among the Indian leaders to declare and work for the aim of complete Independence of India. In 1905, Bengal was divided, and Sri Aurobindo left Baroda and, invited by the nationalistic leaders, he joined at Calcutta the newly started National College as its first Principal. It was here that Sri Aurobindo, while working secretly for the revolution, chalked out also a plan of outer action. This plan consisted of the programme of passive Resistance, Boycott and Swadeshi, which was later adopted as the policy of the struggle for freedom. It was here again that Sri Aurobindo wrote powerfully and boldly for *Bande Mataram*, and later for *Karma Yogin*; through his writings, he electrified the nation and surcharged the people with a new energy which ultimately led the nation to her freedom. It was, therefore, significant that when India at-

tained her liberation in 1947, it was on the 15th August, the birthday of Sri Aurobindo.

The pioneering work that Sri Aurobindo did for the liberation of India was evidently a part of his larger work for the entire humanity and for the whole earth. For him, the liberation of India was an indispensable part of the new world-order. Moreover, the practice of Yoga, which he had started in 1902, led him, even while in the thick of intense political and literary activity, to major realizations of the Brahmic Silence, Nirvana, and also of the universal dynamic Presence of the Divine. And, in 1908, when he was in Alipore jail during his trial under the charge of sedition, he received through numerous experiences and realizations the assurance of the liberation of the country and also the knowledge of the initial lines on which his own future work was to proceed. For he saw that even in the field of Yoga something was still lacking, something radical that alone would help resolve the problems of the world and would lead mankind to its next evolutionary stage. And so, in 1910, soon after his acquittal from the jail, he withdrew to Pondicherry to concentrate upon this new research work, to hew a new path. It has been a most dynamic work with the entire earth as its central field. It was in the course of this work that Sri Aurobindo declared that the Supramental is the Truth and that its advent on the earth is inevitable. To bring down the supramental consciousness and power on the earth has been the central work of Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo has explained the nature of this work, the nature of the Supermind, the necessity of its descent, the process of this descent and the dynamic consequences of this descent for the solutions of the problems of mankind, in his voluminous writings most of which were written serially in the philosophical monthly, *Arya*, which was started in 1914, immediately after the first arrival of the Mother from France to Pondicherry. Some of the most important of these and other writings are: *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, *Essays on the Gita*, *On the Veda*, *The Upanishads*, *The Future Poetry*, *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*, and the epic *Savitri*.

When Sri Aurobindo withdrew in 1926 into his room for concentrating in the required way on the 'Supramental Yoga', the Mother organized and developed his Ashram. In 1943, a school for the education of children was founded, and after the passing of Sri Aurobindo in 1950, the Mother developed that school into an International University Centre, where numerous original and bold experiments of education were carried out un-

der her guidance. This educational work was a part of Supramental Yoga, and we have rare insights into education and yoga in the volumes entitled *Questions and Answers*, which contain conversations of the Mother that took place in her classes. In 1958, the Mother withdrew to her room in order to come to terms with the research in the problems related to the supramental transformation of the physical consciousness at the cellular level. In 1968, the Mother founded Auroville, and International city as a collective field for the material and spiritual researches required for realizing human unity as a part of the supramental action on the earth.

The Mother's exploration into the body-consciousness and her discovery of a 'cellular mind' capable of restructuring the nature of the body is contained in a document of more than six thousand pages, published in Thirteen Volumes. This is *L'Agenda de Mère (Mother's Agenda)*, an account of her extraordinary exploration narrated by the Mother to Satprem covering a period of more than twenty years, during which the Mother slowly uncovered the 'Great Passage' to the next species by the supramental transformation of the physical consciousness and fulfilled the work that Sri Aurobindo had given to her.

⁴⁹ Vide., *Mother's Agenda* (Vols. 1 – 13), Institut de Recherches Évolutives, Paris & Mira Aditi, Mysore ;

The Mother: Her Life and Work (A Brief Outline)

The Mother (Mirra Alfassa) was born in Paris on the 21st February, 1878. Her mother was Egyptian and her father was Turkish – both of them were perfect materialists. As a result, although she had inner experiences, including that of the divine presence, right from her childhood, she was in her external life an atheist until she entered into adulthood. In her early years, she had a good grounding in music (piano), painting and higher mathematics.

By the age of eighteen, she had begun to feel an intense need to KNOW, but all that she learnt and studied would explain nothing. Her need to know led her into two directions. The first was the world of painting. She mingled with the artists and widened her horizons. She married a pupil of Gustave Moreau, Henri Morisset, and she came to know Rodin and the great impressionists of that era. The second direction in which she turned was opened up when she heard of Max Theon and his teachings.

At this stage, she had a series of visions, and in several of these visions she saw Sri Aurobindo just as he looked physically, but glorified. She was to meet Sri Aurobindo ten years later in 1914 when she came to

India from France, and it was then that she came to identify Sri Aurobindo of the vision with Sri Aurobindo as she saw him then.

Around this time, she came into contact with Bhagavad-Gita through an Indian who had come to Europe. He had told her, "Read it with THAT knowledge – with the knowledge that Lord Krishna represents the immanent God, the God within you." She not only studied the Gita, but within a month, she attained to the realization of the immanent Supreme.

Soon thereafter, she went to Tlemcen in Algeria to work with Max Theon and his wife Madame Theon. Theon was well versed in the Rigveda and he was the first to talk to the Mother of the idea that the earth is symbolic where universal action is concentrated allowing divine forces to incarnate and work concretely. Madame Theon was an extraordinary occultist, having incredible faculties. She could leave one body and enter the consciousness of the next plane, fully experiencing the surroundings and all that was there, describe it... twelve times. The Mother learned to do the same thing and, with great dexterity. In one of her experiences, while entering into the last stage before the Formless, she experienced total Unity. And she found herself in the presence of the "Principle" of the human form. It did not resemble man as we are used to seeing him, but it was an upright form, standing just on the border between the world of forms and the Formless, like a kind of standard or archetype. Afterwards, when Mother met Sri Aurobindo and talked to him about it, he said, "It is surely the prototype of the supramental form."

Soon after her return from Tlemcen in Algeria, there was in 1908 divorce from Henri Morisset. From 1910 to 1920 – these ten years were a period of intensive mental study for the Mother. This mental development in all its comprehensiveness led her to the conclusion that while all ideas are true, a synthesis has to be made, and that there is something luminous and true beyond the synthesis. In her philosophic studies, she was accompanied by Paul Richard who, in his visit to Pondicherry 1910, had met Sri Aurobindo. In 1914, Mother accompanied Paul Richard to Pondicherry and met Sri Aurobindo on 29th March. In her very first meeting, both Sri Aurobindo and Mother, felt, at exactly the same moment, "now the Realisation will be accomplished." In one of his letters Sri Aurobindo wrote on the Mother as follows:

Mother was doing Yoga before she knew or met Sri Aurobindo, but their lines of Sadhana independently followed the same course. When they met, they helped each other in perfecting the sadhana. What is known as Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is the joint creation of Sri Aurobindo and the

Mother. (Sri Aurobindo: *On Himself*, SABCL, 1971, Vol. 26, p. 459)

After the outbreak of the World War I in August, 1914, the Mother had to return to France along with Paul Richard and then she spent four years in Japan; but she returned for good to Pondicherry in 1920 in order to work with Sri Aurobindo.

On 24th November 1926, Sri Aurobindo attained to a decisive stage and the Overmind was brought down into Matter, and an overmental creation came into view. But the aim was to bring about the supramental creation. As Sri Aurobindo became too occupied with the descent of the supermind, he did not have the time to deal with people, and he put the Mother in charge of all the disciples and external activities of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. This was in 1926.

Sri Aurobindo has spoken of the four personalities of the Mother, namely, those of Wisdom (Maheshwari), Power (Mahakali), Harmony (Mahalakshmi) and Perfection in works (Mahasaraswati). In all her activities, these four personalities of the Mother could be seen at work. The work was microscopic; it was complex; it was both external and internal. It became clearer that the task of fixing the Supermind in the physical had to be done by opening up the physical cells. Just when the descent of the supermind reached a critical point, the Second World War broke out. This war was perceived by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as a fierce resistance to the task of the Supramental descent. Hence, they put all their yogic force against Nazism and the war ended in 1945, with the victory for the Allies as Sri Aurobindo had willed. In early 1950, Sri Aurobindo told the Mother: "One of us must go. We cannot both remain upon earth." And when the Mother said, "If one of us must go, I want that it should be me." "It cannot be you," he replied, "because you alone can do the material thing." He forbade the Mother to leave her body. "It is absolutely forbidden," he said, "you cannot, you must remain."

After Sri Aurobindo left his body on 5th December 1950, the Mother continued Sri Aurobindo's work. In 1951, she established the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre, which conducted extraordinary educational experiments to invent a new method of educating children from early childhood upwards so as to prepare them for the supramental work. On 29th February 1956, the Mother declared that the Supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow. She wrote: "The manifestation of the Supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality."

In 1958, the Mother entered into a new phase of Yoga, which aimed at fixing the supramental consciousness in the cells of the body so as to establish, in the world, the conditions of the emergence of the next species, the supramental species that would manifest the Supermind in the supramental body.

It was in the course of this "Yoga of the Cells" that the Mother discovered the "Mind of the Cells" which has the necessary capacity to re-constitute the physical body. This great yogic process has been described in thirteen volumes entitled "Mother's Agenda", which consists of the Mother's conversations with Satprem, one of her disciples, who had become her confidant.

In 1968, Mother founded "Auroville", an international township, a few kilometers away from Pondicherry, as a "laboratory of new evolution."

On 14th March, 1970, Mother declared that the work that Sri Aurobindo had given to her was accomplished. She said, "The physical is capable of receiving the Superior Light, the Truth, the True Consciousness and to manifest it."

Thereafter, she continued to accelerate the evolution of the new species, a task which is still continuing, even though she left her physical body on 17th November, 1973.

⁵⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, SABCL, 1971, Pondicherry, Vol. 26, p.464.

⁵¹ Ibid., *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Vol. 20, pp. 377-8.

⁵² Ibid., *The Life Divine*, Vol. 18, pp. 469-70.

⁵³ Ibid., *On Himself*, Vol. 26, pp.83-4.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 101.

⁵⁵ Ibid., *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Vol. 20, p. 283.

⁵⁶ Vide., Ibid., *The Life Divine*, Vol. 19, ch. 16.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 669.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 681-2.

⁵⁹ Vide., Ibid., *The Secret of the Veda*, Vol. 10.

⁶⁰ Vidè., Ibid., *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, Vol. 11.

⁶¹ Vide., RV., I.72.9.

⁶² Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, SABCL, 1971, Pondicherry, Vol. 10, pp. 439-40.

⁶³ Ibid., *Essays on the Gita*, Vol. 13, p. 7.

- ⁶⁴ RV., V.61.1.
- ⁶⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, SABCL, 1971, Pondicherry, Vol. 13, p. 7.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., *Letters on Yoga*, Vol. 22, p. 102.
- ⁶⁷ *Mother's Agenda*, Mira Aditi Centre, 2000, Mysore, Vol. 11, p. 102.
- ⁶⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, 1971, Pondicherry, Vol. 20, p. 44.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid., p.p. 40
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., *On Himself*, Vol. 26, p. 109.
- ⁷¹ *Mother's Agenda*, Mira Aditi Centre, 2000, Mysore, Vol. 1, p. 300.
- ⁷² Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, 1971, Pondicherry, Vol. 22, p. 98.
- ⁷³ Ibid., *The Life Divine*, Vol. 19, p. 891.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*, Vol. 16, pp. 50-9.

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This book is primarily a critical examination of the denials that stand in the way of the quest for the highest and the best. Eventually, it is an introduction to the theme of the supramental manifestation in Matter. This theme, which covers the main substance of the works of Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) and the Mother (1878-1973), invites the contemporary pilgrim of today to continue his quest. The highest and the best are, according to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, attainable by means of their Integral Yoga, which is new in its objects and its methods, although it incorporates the lessons of the past yogic efforts of humanity.

It is hoped this book will lead the reader to study the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The most important works of Sri Aurobindo are: "The Synthesis of Yoga", "The Life Divine", "Record of Yoga", "The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth", "The Secret of the Veda", "Upanishads", "Essays on the Gita" and "Savitri". The most important works of the Mother are: "Prayers and Meditations", "Conversations", "Questions and Answers", and "Mother's Agenda" (13 volumes).