

SUPERMIND IN INTEGRAL YOGA

IGNORANCE, BONDAGE, LIBERATION AND PERFECTION

KIREET JOSHI

THE MOTHER'S INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH

Supermind in the Integral Yoga

Problem of Ignorance, Bondage, Liberation and Perfection

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)

Dedicated to

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

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PROBLEM OF IGNORANCE, BONDAGE, LIBERATION AND PERFECTION

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Preface

The most distinctive thesis of the Integral Yoga is that supramental consciousness can, by its descent in Matter transform earthly life into divine life. In other words, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have discovered the method by which supramental descent on the earth can be brought about and even Matter can manifest supramental consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo has, while describing supermind, referred to the Vedic concept of truth-consciousness (*rita-chit*) and accepted the Vedic description of truth-consciousness as an apt description of the supermind. Both in the Vedas and the Upanishads, we have the evidence that the ancient Rishis had discovered the supramental consciousness, but there is no evidence that they could bring about the descent of the supermind in Matter. A systematic and philosophic exposition of the supermind is to be found for the first time in the history of philosophy in Sri Aurobindo's '*The Life Divine*' and, what is most striking in '*The Life Divine*' is Sri Aurobindo's account of the origin of the ignorance in one of the subordinate functionings of the supermind. This stands in contrast to the ordinary general view, which has become widespread in India, that the ignorance and its origin are inexplicable and that the earthly life is inextricably connected with Ignorance. As a result, it has come to be maintained that the worldly life and ignorance are so inseparable from each other that in order to depart from ignorance one must depart from earthly and material life of the world. This view has now come to be shown to be

mistaken, not only philosophically but even in yogic process of realization. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have succeeded in establishing and manifesting the supermind in Matter. This success maybe regarded as the most momentous event of our times, and it is for this reason that we need to study Sri Aurobindo's concept of the supermind and its relationship with the material world.

This book is an attempt to bring together some of the most important statements of Sri Aurobindo in regard to the supermind and how the origin of the ignorance can be shown to be explicable in the context of the operations of the supermind.

This introductory book will, it is hoped, stimulate readers to study Sri Aurobindo's '*The Life Divine*' in order to find out many answers that remain to be discovered in the context of world's history of philosophy and yogic adventure of consciousness.

Kireet Joshi

Introduction

The new synthesis of the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother has come to be known as the Integral Yoga¹. This yoga has, as its first basis, the Vedantic realization of Existence–Consciousness–Bliss (Sachchidananda) as the ultimate reality and the ultimate foundation of the universe and all that is in the universe. However, the world that we see is the world of divided mentality which does not appear to be a direct manifestation of Sachchidananda. The divided mentality and the life and body, in which we exist on the earth, and the material existence which is governed by the divided mentality, must be, therefore, a development from that which originally manifests directly from the Sachchidananda. There must be an intermediate link between the Sachchidananda, on the one hand, and the divided mentality, on the other, and this link must be able to explain the relationship of each other and establish between them such a relation as will make it possible for us to realize the one Existence, Consciousness, Delight in the mould of the mind, life and body. Such an intermediate link must be found, if the ultimate reality is Sat–Chit–Ananda, one without the second².

According to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, that intermediate link exists, and that link is evidenced by the loftiest experience and realization of the Ultimate Reality, eternal and infinite and indeterminable. That intermediate link is the Supermind, and Sri Aurobindo calls it the Truth-Consciousness, because it is a principle superior to mentality

and exists, manifests, acts and proceeds in the fundamental truth and unity of things and not like the mind in their appearances and phenomenal divisions. Sri Aurobindo defines the Supermind as “at once the self-awareness of the Infinite and Eternal and a power of self-determination inherent in that self-awareness; the first is its foundation and status, the second is its power of being, the dynamis of its self-existence.”³

The supramental Truth-Consciousness is the conscious power that manifests the timeless eternity and Spaceless infinity of the Supreme Sat–Chit–Ananda in Time-Eternity and Space-Infinity. The Supreme is not a rigid Indeterminable and all-negating Absolute. It is Indeterminable⁴ in the sense that no determinations proceeding from It can limit It and exhaust It. All that is called creation is in reality a self-manifestation of the Spaceless and Timeless Reality by its own power that is inherent in it as the self-awareness of the Infinite and Eternal. That power is the supramental power having in it endless powers of being and energy.

Supermind is not merely what we can infer, but it is a principle of active Will and Knowledge that can be realized in experience. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

“We may by a progressive expanding or a sudden luminous self-transcendence mount up to these summits in unforgettable moments or dwell on them during hours or days of greatest superhuman experience. When we descend again, there are doors of communication which we can keep always open or reopen even though they should constantly shut. But to dwell there permanently on this last and highest summit of the created and creative being is in the end the supreme ideal for our evolving human consciousness when it seeks not self-annulment but self-perfection.”⁵

PART ONE

The Veda and the Supermind

It is instructive to observe that in the early stages of Sri Aurobindo's own yogic development, an ascent to the supermind was effected; during that stage of development certain lines of his self-development were spontaneously converging towards the ancient and now unfrequented paths followed by the Vedic Rishis. At that time, there had begun to arise in his consciousness an arrangement of symbolic names attached to certain psychological experiences which had begun to regularize themselves; among them there were experiences of the faculties which the Vedic Rishis had described as supramental in character⁶. Sri Aurobindo, therefore, in order to arrive at a subsidiary description of the supermind, which could serve more accurately to provide precision to its significance, refers to these faculties, and the words connected with those faculties, such as "*ṛta-chit*" (Truth-Consciousness), "*satyam*" (Truth), "*ṛtam*" (Right), "*brhat*" (Vast), and "*kavi kratu*" (Knowledge-Will), were adopted by Sri Aurobindo as expressive of the conception of the Supermind. As a result, Sri Aurobindo describes Supermind "as a vastness beyond the ordinary firmaments of our consciousness in which truth of being is luminously one with all that expresses it and assures inevitably truth of vision, formulation, arrangement, word, act and movement and therefore truth also of result of movement, result of action and expression, infallible ordinance or law".⁷ The essential terms of the Vedic description of the supermind are:

Vast all-comprehensiveness, luminous truth and harmony of being in that vastness and not a vague chaos or self-lost obscurity, truth of law and act and knowledge expressive of that harmonious truth of being. The Truth, the Right and the Vast – this is the brief formula of the Supermind.

Two primary faculties of which the Vedic seers speak in regard to the “truth-conscious” soul are Sight and Hearing. These two faculties are known as *dr̥ṣṭi* and *śruti*; they are not sensuous sight and sensuous hearing but their corresponding supramental faculties of revelation and inspiration. Whereas the human mentality gropes for knowledge, supermind is possessed of knowledge; revelation and inspiration are, according to the Vedic seers, direct operations of inherent Knowledge describable as truth-vision and truth-audition.

Truth-consciousness or supramental consciousness is an intermediate formulation which refers back to a term above it and forward to another below it. Above the Supermind is the Unitarian or indivisible consciousness of pure Sachchidananda in which there are no separating distinctions; below the supermind is the analytic or dividing consciousness of Mind which can only know by separation and distinction and has at the most a vague and secondary apprehension of unity and infinity. Supermind occupies the position of a link between these two. The higher term above it is the Sachchidananda consciousness and the term below the supramental consciousness is that of the mental consciousness. The supermind may thus be described with a greater precision as the comprehensive and creative consciousness, which by its power of pervading and comprehending knowledge is the child of that self-awareness by identity which is the poise of the Supreme Brahman, and, which by its power of projecting, confronting, apprehending

knowledge is the parent of that awareness by distinction which is the process of the Mind.⁸

The supermind is the consciousness of what can be called Divine Nature, *parā prakṛti*, to use the terminology of the Gita⁹, as distinguished from the lower nature, *aparā prakṛti*, of which our mental nature is the present highest evolute. The mental nature is primarily concerned with particulars rather than with the universals; although universals can be conceived by the mental nature, here they are not experienced concretely. Mental consciousness is normally limited at a given time to one poise or one form of action, and it is difficult for it to hold several poises simultaneously. But the Divine Nature is not so particularized, nor so limited; it can be many things at a time and take more than one enduring poise or status for all time.

Triple status of the Supermind

In the yogic realization of the Supermind, Sri Aurobindo has found that in the principle of Supermind, there are three general poises or sessions of its world-founding consciousness. In the first poise or status, the Supermind finds in its creative expression the inalienable unity of things; it is the status of comprehensiveness in which all the differentiations are united by the predominant power of unity; there is differentiation of forms and lines of knowledge and will, which are united, too, and Knowledge is Action and Action is Knowledge; this status is, however, that of comprehensiveness. The second poise modifies that unity so as to support the manifestation of the Many in the One and the One in the Many; in this status, unity predominates and differentiations, too, are united, but here,

the Supreme Transcendental Reality projects its eternal portion, the individual. Thus there comes about the play of the individual with the transcendental and with universal in the supramental unifying consciousness. This is the manifestation of the Many-in-the One, and the One-in-the Many; this status is that of the apprehending consciousness within the overarching unifying comprehensiveness of the Supermind. The third poise further modifies it so as to support the development of a diversified individuality; this is the status of farther predominance of the power of differentiation in which the individual projects itself into the forms, and that results in a richer play permitting prominence of the Many in their relationship with the One. This may be called the status, where projecting operation of consciousness predominates.

The description of these three poises as given by Sri Aurobindo brings out the fullness of the idea of the supermind as also of the relationship between the transcendental, the universal and the individual. We may, therefore, describe these three poises of the supermind in Sri Aurobindo's own words:

“It (supermind) is not the pure unitarian consciousness; for that is a timeless and spaceless concentration of Sachchidananda in itself, in which Conscious Force does not cast itself out into any kind of extension and, if it contains the universe at all, contains it in eternal potentiality and not in temporal actuality. This, (the first status of Supermind), on the contrary, is an equal self-extension of Sachchidananda all-comprehending, all-possessing, all-constituting. But this all is one, not many; there is no individualisation. It is when the reflection of this Supermind falls upon our stilled and purified self that we lose all sense of individuality; for there

is no concentration of consciousness there to support an individual development. All is developed in unity and as one; all is held by this Divine Consciousness as forms of its existence, not as in any degree separate existences. Somewhat as the thoughts and images that occur in our mind are not separate existences to us, but forms taken by our consciousness, so are all names and forms to this primary Supermind. It is the pure divine ideation and formation in the Infinite, — only an ideation and formation that is organised not as an unreal play of mental thought, but as a real play of conscious being. The divine soul in this poise would make no difference between Conscious-Soul and Force-Soul, for all force would be action of consciousness, nor between Matter and Spirit since all mould would be simply form of Spirit.

“In the second poise of the Supermind the Divine Consciousness stands back in the idea from the movement which it contains, realising it by a sort of apprehending consciousness, following it, occupying and inhabiting its works, seeming to distribute itself in its forms. In each name and form it would realise itself as the stable Conscious-Self, the same in all; but also it would realise itself as a concentration of Conscious-Self following and supporting the individual play of movement and upholding its differentiation from other play of movement, — the same everywhere in soul-essence, but varying in soul-form. This concentration supporting the soul-form would be the individual Divine or Jivatman as distinguished from the universal Divine or one all-constituting self. There would be no essential difference, but only a practical differentiation for the play which would not abrogate the real unity. The universal Divine would know all soul-forms as itself and yet

establish a different relation with each separately and in each with all the others. The individual Divine would envisage its existence as a soul-form and soul-movement of the One and, while by the comprehending action of consciousness it would enjoy its unity with the One and with all soul-forms, it would also by a forward or frontal apprehending action support and enjoy its individual movement and its relations of a free difference in unity both with the One and with all its forms. If our purified mind were to reflect this secondary poise of Supermind, our soul could support and occupy its individual existence and yet even there realise itself as the One that has become all, inhabits all, contains all, enjoying even in its particular modification its unity with God and its fellows. In no other circumstance of the supramental existence would there be any characteristic change; the only change would be this play of the One that has manifested its multiplicity and of the Many that are still one, with all that is necessary to maintain and conduct the play.

“A third poise of the Supermind would be attained if the supporting concentration were no longer to stand at the back, as it were, of the movement, inhabiting it with a certain superiority to it and so following and enjoying, but were to project itself into the movement and to be in a way involved in it. Here, the character of the play would be altered, but only in so far as the individual Divine would so predominantly make the play of relations with the universal and with its other forms the practical field of its conscious experience that the realisation of utter unity with them would be only a supreme accompaniment and constant culmination of all experience; but in the higher poise unity would be the dominant and fundamental experience and variation would be only a play of the unity. This tertiary poise would be

therefore that of a sort of fundamental blissful dualism in unity — no longer unity qualified by a subordinate dualism — between the individual Divine and its universal source, with all the consequences that would accrue from the maintenance and operation of such a dualism.”¹⁰

The supermind is the consciousness and will of the Supreme; but there is no gulf between the Supreme and the Universal and the Individual; the supreme himself even while being transcendental and supracosmic is also cosmic; and the individual is the individual divine or Jivatman as distinguished from the universal Divine, since the individual is the transcendental itself realizing itself as a concentration of Conscious-Self following and supporting the individual play of movement and upholding its differentiation from other play of movement. The individual is the Supreme supporting the soul-form by means of concentration in the supermind in the second status of the apprehending consciousness. Again, it is the supreme that is itself universal Divine who knows all soul-forms as itself and yet establishes a different relation with each separately and in each with all the others. On the other hand, the individual Divine envisages its existence as a soul-form and soul-movement of the One; it enjoys by the comprehending action of consciousness its unity with the One and with all soul-forms; and by means of apprehending consciousness it supports and enjoys its individual movement and its relations of a free difference in unity both with the One and with all its forms. By means of its projecting and confronting consciousness, which is proper to the third poise of the supermind, the individual Divine is able to alter its relations with the universal and with its other forms; in this altered state, the realization of utter unity with the universal and with its other

forms would no more remain dominant; diversity and variation preponderate and the utter unity is only a supreme accompaniment and constant culmination of all experience. The individual or the Jivatman in the supramental consciousness partakes simultaneously in all the experiences and activities of the supreme Divine, and although in all the dynamic activities its individuality is retained and maintained, it would enjoy the divine status of immobility and mobility as also inmost identity with the Supreme. In its relations with its supreme Self, the individual *jīvātman* will have the sense of oneness of the transcendent and universal Divine with its own being. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

“It will enjoy that oneness of God with itself in its own individuality and with its other selves in the universality. Its relations of knowledge will be the play of the divine omniscience, for God is Knowledge, and what is ignorance with us will be there only the holding back of knowledge in the repose of conscious self-awareness so that certain forms of that self-awareness may be brought forward into activity of Light. Its relations of will will be there the play of the divine omnipotence, for God is Force, Will and Power, and what with us is weakness and incapacity will be the holding back of will in tranquil concentrated force so that certain forms of divine conscious-force may realise themselves brought forward into form of Power. Its relations of love and delight will be the play of the divine ecstasy, for God is Love and Delight, and what with us would be denial of love and delight will be the holding back of joy in the still sea of Bliss so that certain forms of divine union and enjoyment may be brought in front in an active upwelling of waves of the Bliss. So also all its becoming will be formation of the divine being in response to these activities and what is with us cessation,

death, annihilation will be only rest, transition or holding back of the joyous creative Maya in the eternal being of Sachchidananda. At the same time this oneness will not preclude relations of the divine soul with God, with its supreme Self, founded on the joy of difference separating itself from unity to enjoy that unity otherwise; it will not annul the possibility of any of those exquisite forms of God-enjoyment which are the highest rapture of the God-lover in his clasp of the Divine.”¹¹

Supermind as the Real-Idea

To the supramental consciousness, the world is not a play of cosmic Imagination, a fantasia of the Infinite imposed on the blank indeterminable of his own eternal pure existence. It is imperishably aware that the entire manifestation of the universe is, in its first movement, the manifestation of Sachchidananda through its own powers of the supramental consciousness, — the powers of comprehension, of apprehension and of projection.

This vision is distinguishable from that obtained in the philosophies which recognize Mind alone as the creator of the worlds or accept an original principle with Mind as the only mediator between it and the forms of the universe. These philosophies may be divided, as Sri Aurobindo points out, into the purely noumenal and the idealistic. The purely noumenal recognize in the cosmos only the work of Mind, Thought, Idea: but Idea may be purely arbitrary and have no essential relation to any real Truth of Existence; such Truth, if it exists, may be regarded as a mere Absolute aloof from all relations and irreconcilable with a world of relations. On the other hand, the idealistic interpretation supposes a relation between the Truth behind and the conceptive

phenomenon in front, a relation which is not merely that of antimony and opposition. The supramental vision of the world that Sri Aurobindo presents goes farther in idealism; here the manifesting and conceptive Supermind or Supramental Idea is not mental in character; it is neither an abstract idea divided from the Reality, nor is it an imaginative idea that constructs a fiction or illusion or hallucination or distorts the Reality. Supermind is not merely the creative Idea but it is far different from and superior to the mental idea. Supermind is, therefore, what Sri Aurobindo calls, the Real-Idea, that is to say, a power of Conscious-Force expressive of real being, born out of real being and partaking of its nature and neither a child of the Void nor a weaver of fictions. Sri Aurobindo has taken the phrase Real-Idea as description of the supermind from the Rig Vedic phrase “*ṛta cit*”, which means the consciousness of essential truth of being (*satyam*), of ordered truth of active being (*ṛtam*) and the vast self-awareness (*br̥hat*) in which alone this consciousness is possible. The supermind is thus conscious Reality throwing itself into mutable forms of its own imperishable and immutable substance. The world is, therefore, in the words of Sri Aurobindo, “not a figment of conception in the universal Mind, but a conscious birth of that which is beyond Mind into forms of itself.”¹²

The forms and expressions that are being manifested in the world are supported by a Truth of conscious being; that Truth expresses itself in them, and the knowledge corresponding to the truth thus expressed reigns as a supramental Truth-Consciousness or Real-Idea organizing real ideas in a perfect harmony. This is the status of the world in the supramental realm.

It is true that the world of our ordinary experience, the

world of Matter, Life and Mind, does not have any explicit supramental organization and harmony; but that world cannot be truly explained or known, if we consider Mind as the creative force of the world and if we do not attempt to understand and know this world as an expression of Truth-Consciousness cast into the mental – vital – material mould through an inferior consciousness and partial expression which strives to arrive in the mould of a various evolution at that superior expression of itself already existent to the Beyond-Mind. That inferior consciousness through which the world of our ordinary experience is expressed can also be understood and explained only if it is derived and derivable from the supramental Truth-Consciousness.

PART TWO

Supramental Vision of the Supreme Reality: Indeterminability of the Absolute

Let us first begin with the supramental vision of the ultimate reality. In the supramental realization, the ultimate reality is found to be indeterminable; this indeterminability has two senses; in the first sense, the reality or the absolute is seen to be not limitable or definable by any one determination and by any sum of determinations; in the second sense, the Absolute is seen to be not bound down to an indeterminable vacancy of pure existence. Thus the indeterminable is a source of all determinations, and its indeterminability is a natural and necessary condition both of its infinity of being and its infinity of power of being; it can be infinitely all things because it is no thing in particular and exceeds any definable totality. As Sri Aurobindo explains, it is this essential indeterminability of the Absolute that translates itself into negative positives and their affirming positives, and thus we have a series of positive and negative descriptions of the Absolute which always remains indeterminable. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“It is this essential indeterminability of the Absolute that translates itself into our consciousness through the fundamental negating positives of our spiritual experience, the immobile immutable Self, the Nirguna Brahman, the Eternal without qualities, the pure featureless One Existence, the Impersonal, the Silence void of activities, the Non-being,

the Ineffable and the Unknowable. On the other side it is the essence and source of all determinations, and this dynamic essentiality manifests to us through the fundamental affirming positives in which the Absolute equally meets us; for it is the Self that becomes all things, the Saguna Brahman, the Eternal with infinite qualities, the One who is the Many, the infinite Person who is the source and foundation of all persons and personalities, the Lord of creation, the Word, the Master of all works and action; it is that which being known all is known: these affirmatives correspond to those negatives. For it is not possible in a supramental cognition to split asunder the two sides of the One Existence, — even to speak of them as sides is excessive, for they are in each other, their co-existence or one-existence is eternal and their powers sustaining each other found the self-manifestation of the Infinite.”¹³

Yogic Experiences during Mind's passage towards Supermind

If we ask as to how we can come to know the Absolute and its Supramental consciousness and power, the answer is that yoga makes possible our passage from our consciousness to the Supermind and to the Absolute. In the yogic passage from the level of the mind towards the supramental status, it is affirmed, these negating positives and affirming positives are, at first, normally experienced, each in exclusive separate cognition, or if not in any extreme exclusivism, but in separate cognitions; they begin to fuse themselves as we rise higher until in the supramental cognition they are seen in each other and their one-existence is found to be natural. In fact, at one of the important stages of the transition from the mental to the supramental, Sri

Aurobindo points out, one most liberatingly helpful, if not indispensable, experience that may intervene is the entry into a total Nirvana of mentality and mental ego, a passage into the silence of the Spirit. In any case, in the integral yoga, the realization of the pure Self and the Silence of the Spirit must always precede the transition to that mediating eminence of the consciousness from which a clear vision of the ascending and descending stairs of manifested existence is commanded and the position of the freed power of ascent and descent becomes a spiritual prerogative.

Again, there are three important varieties of yogic experience on the basis of which the rival philosophies of Vedanta have come to be formulated; these are found to be, in the supramental consciousness, reflections that are obtained during the transition from the mind to the supermind; these reflections correspond to the three statuses of the supermind. The first status of the supermind, as has already been noted, is that of an equal self-extension of Sachchidananda, all-comprehending, all-possessing, all-constituting. In this status, all is one, not many; there is no individualization. As Sri Aurobindo points out, it is when the reflection of this status of the supermind falls upon our stilled and purified mind and self that we lose all sense of individuality; for there is no concentration of consciousness there to support an individual development; at this stage, therefore, the experience and the realization of the acosmic Absolute is obtained. It is in the second poise of the supermind that consciousness concentrates itself to support individual development by a sort of apprehending consciousness, which is itself a secondary faculty of comprehending consciousness. In the second status of the supermind, on account of the functioning of the apprehending conscio-

usness, the universal Divine would know all soul-forms as itself and yet establish a different relation with each separately and in each with all the others. Sri Aurobindo points out that if our purified mind were to reflect this secondary poise of Supermind, our soul could support and occupy its individual existence and yet even there realize itself as the One that has become all, inhabits all, contains all, enjoying even in its particular modification its unity with God and its fellows. At this stage, therefore, the experience and realization of the individual and its inalienable relationship of Identity and Difference is obtained, — the experience and realization that is formulated in the Vedantic philosophy of Qualified Monism. In the third status of the supermind, the individual concentration no longer stands at the back, as it were, of the movement, but it projects itself into the movement so as to be in a way involved in it. It is this tertiary poise that would account for a sort of fundamental blissful dualism in unity, — no longer unity qualified by a subordinate dualism. If this status gets reflected on the purified mind, it would get translated as the experience and realization of blissful dualism. It is His reflection that would explain the truth and the validity of the Dualistic philosophy of the Vedanta. Again, there is the pure unitarian consciousness of Sachchidananda, which is distinguishable from even the first and primary poise of the supermind; that unitarian consciousness is a Timeless and Spaceless concentration of Sachchidananda in itself, in which Conscious-Force does not cast itself out into any kind of extension, and if it contains the universe at all contains it in eternal potentiality and not in temporal actuality. If this unitarian consciousness can get reflected in the Silent Mind, then the corresponding experience and realization could

form the basis of the philosophy where an exclusive emphasis is laid on the sole truth of the unitarian consciousness.

In the light of the supramental realization of the integral yoga, Sri Aurobindo sums up as follows how human mentality, in its passage upwards from the Mind to the Supermind, lays an exclusive emphasis on one side of spiritual experience, and how ultimately the position of integrality removes the necessity of exclusiveness:

“It is indeed only when our human mentality lays an exclusive emphasis on one side of spiritual experience, affirms that to be the sole eternal truth and states it in the terms of our all-dividing mental logic that the necessity for mutually destructive schools of philosophy arises. Thus, emphasising the sole truth of the unitarian consciousness, we observe the play of the divine unity, erroneously rendered by our mentality into the terms of real difference, but, not satisfied with correcting this error of the mind by the truth of a higher principle, we assert that the play itself is an illusion. Or, emphasising the play of the One in the Many, we declare a qualified unity and regard the individual soul as a soul-form of the Supreme, but would assert the eternity of this qualified existence and deny altogether the experience of a pure consciousness in an unqualified oneness. Or, again, emphasising the play of difference, we assert that the Supreme and the human soul are eternally different and reject the validity of an experience which exceeds and seems to abolish that difference. But the position that we have now firmly taken absolves us from the necessity of these negations and exclusions: we see that there is a truth behind all these affirmations, but at the same time an excess which leads to an ill-founded negation. Affirming, as we have done,

the absolute absoluteness of That, not limited by our ideas of unity, not limited by our ideas of multiplicity, affirming the unity as a basis for the manifestation of the multiplicity and the multiplicity as the basis for the return to oneness and the enjoyment of unity in the divine manifestation, we need not burden our present statement with these discussions or undertake the vain labour of enslaving to our mental distinctions and definitions the absolute freedom of the Divine Infinite.”¹⁴

Supermind and Levels of Consciousness Beyond Supermind

It may be argued that the supramental cognition is, after all, not the final truth of things. It may be contended that the supramental plane of consciousness is an intermediate step between mind, on the one hand, and the complete experience of Sachchidananda on the other. It may, therefore, be urged that in the greatest heights of the manifested Spirit beyond the supramental plane, existence would not at all be based on the determination of the One in multiplicity, and it would manifest solely and simply a pure identity in oneness. In reply to this argument, Sri Aurobindo points out that the supramental Truth-Consciousness would not be absent from these planes, for it is an inherent power of Sachchidananda. Sri Aurobindo acknowledges that in the complete experience of Sachchidananda, determinations would not be demarcations, but they will be plastic, interfused, each a boundless finite. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

“For there all is in each and each is in all radically and integrally, — there would be to the utmost a fundamental awareness of identity, a mutual inclusion and interpenetration of consciousness: knowledge as we envisage it

would not exist, because it would not be needed, since all would be direct action of consciousness in being itself, identical, intimate, intrinsically self-aware and all-aware. But still relations of consciousness, relations of mutual delight of existence, relations of self-power of being with self-power of being would not be excluded; these highest spiritual planes would not be a field of blank indeterminability, a vacancy of pure existence.”¹⁵

Supermind and Ignorance

But all Yoga presupposes the present status of the individual in the state of ignorance from which the individual is striving to liberate himself. Thus there has been this problem of how and why the individual has lapsed from the supramental consciousness and, how and why there is this vast phenomenon of Inconscience and how and why the inconscient undergoes the evolutionary process at the summit of which the humanity stands today in the grip of Ignorance with all its consequences. This is a bewildering question, and even though we find, in the past traditions, clues and hints of the answer, the riddle seems to have remained unresolved. Indeed, in one prominent line of argument, it has been held that Ignorance, avidya, and the cosmic illusionary power, Maya, which is the parent of avidya, are an inexplicable mystery; but it is argued that that mystery, which perplexes the human mind, ceases to bewilder, — not because the mystery is resolved, but because it stands dissolved when the human mind falls completely silent in the ineffable experience of the Absolute. Here there is no reference even to the Maya and avidya, which in reality never existed.¹⁶ The untenability of this answer, — the truth of it, truth behind it and the error in it, — has been studied by

Sri Aurobindo, and an important part of Sri Aurobindo's "*The Life Divine*" has been devoted to this study. In terms of the integral yoga, where the integral reality is realized as the Supreme Object of knowledge, knowing which everything becomes known, it is found that Ignorance and Inconscience are neither inexplicable nor an original mystery. According to the integral yoga of the supermind, the Ignorance and the Inconscience are not eternal, their origin can be traced, their rationale can be comprehended, and their root cause can be removed as a result of which, not only can the supramental consciousness be attained but also manifested, individually as well as collectively in the earth-consciousness.

PART THREE

Insights from the Veda and the Upanishad

At the same time, it must be mentioned that we have, in the Veda and the Upanishads, as also in the Gita, great insights which can aid us in exploring this aspect of the integral yoga.

(a) Ancient explorations had discovered that all aspects of the world-experience have their fundamental truth in the Supreme Existence. Even the aspect of the power of the Inconscience which seems to be an opposite, a negation of the eternal Reality, it still corresponds to a Truth held in itself by the self-aware and all-conscious Infinite. The Veda had discovered the Inconscience and there is, the image for it in the Veda of 'the infinite rock' that symbolizes the inconscience, and it is affirmed that when the infinite rock is shattered, the seeker uncovers "The Sun dwelling in the darkness".¹⁷ It is found that the world's heart is Joy, and Joy dwells in the depths of all things, "the well of honey covered by the rock".¹⁸

This discovery is an important clue, and this is confirmed by Sri Aurobindo, when he points out that when we realize the supramental consciousness, we find that among its innumerable powers and innumerable possibilities of its manifestation, it has also a power of plunging the consciousness into a trance of self-involution, a self-oblivion of the Spirit veiled in its own abyss where nothing is manifest but all is inconceivable and can emerge from that

ineffable latency. Sri Aurobindo states:

“In the heights of Spirit this state of cosmic or infinite trance-sleep appears to our cognition as a luminous uttermost Superconscience: at the other end of being it offers itself to cognition as the Spirit’s potency of presenting to itself the opposites of its own truths of being, — an abyss of non-existence, a profound Night of inconscience, a fathomless swoon of insensibility from which yet all forms of being, consciousness and delight of existence can manifest themselves, — but they appear in limited terms, in slowly emerging and increasing self-formulations, even in contrary terms of themselves; it is the play of a secret all-being, all-delight, all-knowledge, but it observes the rules of its own self-oblivion, self-opposition, self-limitation until it is ready to surpass it. This is the Inconscience and Ignorance that we see at work in the material universe. It is not a denial, it is one term, one formula of the infinite and eternal Existence.”¹⁹

(b) The Vedic seers, who had discovered the supermind, were conscious of the supermind as a divine self-manifestation and looked on it as an imperishable greater world beyond our lesser world, a freer and wider plane of consciousness and being. They described the first step of manifestation as the truth-manifestation, and they described it as the seat or own home of the Truth, the vast Truth or the Truth, the Right, the Vast (*satyam*, *rtam*, *bṛhat*). They also described it as the Truth hidden by a Truth where the Sun of Knowledge finishes his journey and unyokes his horses, where the thousand rays of consciousness stand together so that there is That One, the supreme form of the Divine Being.²⁰ This supramental world, which is imperishable, does not get abolished or attenuated, simply because there is

in one of its poises a movement in which a certain operation of consciousness separates itself for purposes of self-oblivion and enters into the abysmal trance of the inconscience. The self-oblivion of the Inconscience cannot and does not abolish the supramental world, which is imperishable; that is not cognized by the Inconscience, but the supermind cognizes it, stands behind it, it is even involved in it. That is the reason why the Vedic Rishis, even while attaining the supramental world were aware of the world in which we live, and they declared it to be a mingled weft in which truth is disfigured by an abundant falsehood, *anṛtasya bhūreh*.²¹ They pointed out that the light has to be born of its own vast force out of an initial darkness of sea of Inconscience, which they called '*apraketam salilam*'. The Vedic seers had seen two sides of existence and seen behind them the One Reality, and therefore the bridging of the gulf between these two sides of existence was forecast in the mystic parables of the Veda, such as those of the Angirasa Rishis.

The Vedic view of Knowledge and Ignorance

(c) In the Veda, we find the distinction between *acitti* and *citti*. *Acitti* stands for ignorance which is the unconsciousness of the Truth and Right, and *citti*, in contrast, signifies knowledge or a consciousness of the truth and the right, *satyam ṛtam*. As Sri Aurobindo explains: "Ignorance is the absence of the divine eye of perception which gives us the sight of the supramental Truth; it is the non-perceiving principle in our consciousness as opposed to the truth-perceiving conscious vision and knowledge (*acitti* and *citti*). In its actual operation this non-perceiving is not an entire inconscience, the inconscient sea from which this world has

arisen (*apraketam salilam*), but either a limited or a false knowledge, a knowledge based on the division of undivided being, founded upon the fragmentary, the little, opposed to the opulent, vast and luminous completeness of things; it is a cognition which by the opportunity of its limitations is turned into falsehood and supported in that aspect by the Sons of Darkness and Division, enemies of the divine endeavour in man, the assailants, robbers, coverers of his light of knowledge.... This idea of the Vedic mystics can in a more metaphysical thought and language be translated into the conception that the Ignorance is in its origin a dividing mental knowledge which does not grasp the unity, essence, self-law of things in their one origin and in their universality, but works rather upon divided particulars, separate phenomena, partial relations, as if they were the truth we had to seize or as if they could really be understood at all without going back behind the division to the unity, behind the dispersion to the universality. The knowledge is that which tends towards unification and, attaining to the supramental faculty, seizes the oneness, the essence, the self-law of existence and views and deals with the multiplicity of things out of that light and plenitude, in some sort as does the Divine Himself from the highest height whence He embraces the world.”²²

Upanishadic view of Knowledge and Ignorance

(d) In the Upanishads, the original Vedic terms are replaced by new terms, *vidyā* and *avidyā*. With the change of terms, *vidya* or knowledge came to mean the knowledge of the One and *avidya* or ignorance came to mean the knowledge of plurality, multiplicity or of the divided Many divorced from the unifying consciousness of the One Reality.

Thus, the word Knowledge and Ignorance came to stand against each other in sharp opposition, and Ignorance came to be regarded as of no or little significance in the pursuit of Knowledge. There is, however, a reference in the Upanishads where the words Knowledge and Ignorance had less trenchant opposition. We have in the Isha Upanishad the following three verses:

“Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Ignorance, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Knowledge alone.”

“Other, verily, it is said, is that which comes by the Knowledge, other than that which comes by the Ignorance; this is the lore we have received from the wise who revealed That to our understanding.”

“He who knows That as both in one, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, by the Ignorance crosses beyond death and by the Knowledge enjoys Immortality”.²³

These verses show that he who follows after the Knowledge only enters as if into a blinder darkness than he who follows after the Ignorance and that the man who knows Brahman as both the Ignorance and the Knowledge, as both the One and the Many, crosses by the Ignorance, by the experience of the Multiplicity, beyond death and by the Knowledge enjoys Immortality. In other words, the Upanishad expounds an integral view of the One and the Many, of the One and the All, and of the Knowledge and the Ignorance, where the experience of the multiplicity has significance and role to play in the pursuit of the knowledge and of immortality, since the experience of the multiplicity enables one to cross beyond death, although it is only by the Knowledge of unity and oneness that one can enjoy

immortality. But what is that Knowledge where the experience of the multiplicity has significance? What is the state of the Knowledge and what is the content of that knowledge? The state of true Knowledge and all that comes to be known of Reality in the state of Knowledge are described in the following three verses:

“But he who sees everywhere the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self, shrinks not thereafter from aught.”

“He in whom it is the Self-Being that has become all existences that are becomings, for he has the perfect knowledge, how shall he be deluded, whence shall he have grief who sees everywhere oneness?”

“It is He that has gone abroad – That which is bright, bodiless, without scar of imperfection, without sinews, pure, unpierced by evil. The Seer, the Thinker, the One who becomes everywhere, the Self-Existent has ordered objects perfectly according to their nature from years sempiternal”.²⁴

We get in these verses a comprehensive statement of the status of *vidyā* or knowledge as a status of comprehensive knowledge (*vijnānataḥ*) as also of the comprehensive Object of knowledge. It is clear that *vidyā* is not merely the knowledge of the One but knowledge of the One as present in all existences and of all beings in the One and, still more, of the Self-Being that has become all existences that are Becomings. That status is described as the status of the perfect knowledge. Similarly, the object that is known in that status of perfect knowledge is comprehensive and integral. In the next verse, that object is described at once as It and as He. That object of knowledge is the pure immutable, since it is bright, bodiless, without scar of imperfection, without sinews and therefore it does not pour out Power, does not

dispense Force in multiple channels, does not lose it here, increase it there; it is without nerves or force and it is unpierced by evil, since it is unmodified. At the same time, it is He that has gone abroad, and he is known in the status of *vidyā* as the self-existent (*swayambhūḥ*) who orders objects perfectly according to their nature by taking three stands, — first as *Kavi*, the Wise, the Seer, second as *Manīṣi*, the Thinker who distributes the Seer's vast unities and all-containing comprehensiveness in terms of detailed determinations and discriminations, and third as *Paribhū* who eventuates everywhere and manifests the realm of becomings and eventualities.

(e) The Upanishadic view of knowledge is that of a status of consciousness in which the One and the Many are not separated from each other but where the Many issue from the One, which, even though transcendental of the Many, manifests the Many as inherently present and yet transcended in the One. In this view, Knowledge reveals the integral reality which is at once immutable and mutable who are both synthesized in supreme integrality, identical with the Reality which is described in the Gita as *kshara* (mutable), and *akshara* (immutable), and *uttama* (supreme).

(f) But in due course of time, the distinction between the Knowledge and the Ignorance became more separative. Ignorance came to be regarded as erroneous knowledge of the Many divorced from the true knowledge of the One; it also came to be regarded as a creative power of the false appearance of the Many and multiplicity. Knowledge came to mean the knowledge of the One in the presence of which the manyness and multiplicity which is falsely created by Ignorance vanishes up to such a vanishing-point that it cannot even be referred to in any manner.

Analysis of Knowledge and Ignorance in the light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

According to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, there is no doubt that the Supreme Reality, which is supposed to be fully conscious and which is supposed to be the only Reality and the only ground of everything that is there in the world, including the phenomenon of Ignorance, must surely know itself and the cause of ignorance, and therefore there is no ground to despair or to deny our capacity of knowing that supreme reality and the original cause of the ignorance. It is to be underlined that Ignorance is not, as it is often assumed or conceived or presented, the power that creates multiplicity. Multiplicity, according to Sri Aurobindo, is inherent in the ultimate oneness of the ultimate reality; it is not created by the Ignorance.

- (i) Firstly, Ignorance is, as emphasized by Sri Aurobindo, the act of ignoring the unity behind the multiplicity, — the multiplicity that becomes manifest as a result of an operation of the triple status of the Supermind. This is the character of the involutionary movement of the Ignorance.
- (ii) Secondly, this involutionary ignorance is to be distinguished from that ignorance which emerges by the ascending evolutionary process from the Inconscience; the evolutionary ignorance is characterized by a groping consciousness, limited consciousness that wanders in the tangled field of multiplicity; it mistakes one for the other, and, since in the beginning and for a long time, it remains remote from the idea and experience of unity and oneness which are always present at the origin and everywhere, — although constantly ignored, — it fails to arrive at the

real understanding of what is really real and the relationship between the ultimate reality, the original multiplicity which emerges from that ultimate reality, and the multiplicity which is perceived by the ignorance in the process of its groping for knowledge and truth; it remains throughout its groping movement a parent of error or even of falsehood. Indeed, the errors committed by the groping movement of ignorance constitute various kinds of partialities, half views, hallucinations and illusions. Errors, falsehoods and illusions are, thus, according to Sri Aurobindo, to be acknowledged and to be remedied. But in the light of this acknowledgement, illusoriness is a part of human experience of the world, but illusion is not the very character of multiplicity and the world of multiplicity.

It has been argued that ignorance is the perception of multiplicity as independent of oneness of the Ultimate Reality; but it is further urged that when multiplicity is viewed as grounded in ultimate oneness, there remains no multiplicity, and it is then recognized as an erroneous illusion, which never existed and which could have never existed. But in the light of Sri Aurobindo's analysis of Ignorance, it may be admitted that Ignorance can be corrected by Knowledge in which multiplicity is realized to be grounded in the ultimate unity and oneness, but in the state of Knowledge what evaporates necessarily is not multiplicity but the error of thinking and believing that multiplicity exists as the only existence without any grounding in the ultimate oneness and unity. In the integral knowledge, the attainment of which is inherent in the groping and ascending movement of Ignorance, the ignorant perception of multiplicity of the world vanishes,

but at the same time the multiplicity of the world is seen with freshness of luminosity where not only the unity and oneness are seen but there is a further perception of the flooding of the knowledge of multiplicity of the world in its fullness and its right significance. That knowledge of the world and of its significance provides to the yoga of Sri Aurobindo a new aim and a new key for its integrality.

(iii) Thirdly, behind the various layers in the human consciousness, there are, as noted above, not only the operations of the Involutionary Ignorance and of Inconscience; there are also lower states of subconsciousness which have evolved from the Inconscience. Again, there are, what Sri Aurobindo calls the subliminal levels of consciousness, of the inner physical self, inner vital self and inner mental self (those which are called in the Taittiriya Upanishad, *annamaya*, *prāṇamaya* and *manomaya*),²⁵ the origin of which is not in the Inconscience but in the pressure from the involutionary worlds on the evolutionary movement. There are also several layers of what can be called upper superconscient ends, the origin of the operations of which in us needs to be explored. However, totality of our being of which we are normally aware has one overarching thrust, namely, the evolutionary thrust. It may be said that the evolutionary thrust of our groping consciousness is a special characteristic of the human Ignorance. Sri Aurobindo explains the totality of what we are normally aware as also of what lies below, behind and above that totality as follows:

“We might say then that there are three elements in the totality of our being: there is the submental and the subconscient which appears to us as if it were incon-

scient, comprising the material basis and a good part of our life and body; there is the subliminal, which comprises the inner being, taken in its entirety of inner mind, inner life, inner physical with the soul or psychic entity supporting them; there is this waking consciousness which the subliminal and the subconscious throw up on the surface, a wave of their secret surge. But even this is not an adequate account of what we are; for there is not only something deep within behind our normal self-awareness, but something also high above it: that too is ourselves, other than our surface mental personality, but not outside our true self; that too is a country of our spirit. For the subliminal proper is no more than the inner being on the level of the Knowledge-Ignorance luminous, powerful and extended indeed beyond the poor conception of our waking mind, but still not the supreme or the whole sense of our being, not its ultimate mystery. We become aware, in a certain experience, of a range of being superconscient to all these three, aware too of something, a supreme highest Reality sustaining and exceeding them all, which humanity speaks of vaguely as Spirit, God, the Oversoul: from these superconscient ranges we have visitations and in our highest being we tend towards them and to that supreme Spirit. There is then in our total range of existence a superconscience as well as a subconscious and inconscience, overarching and perhaps enveloping our subliminal and our waking selves, but unknown to us, seemingly unattainable and incommunicable.”²⁶

- (iv) Fourthly, it may be mentioned that Ignorance is not the state of complete darkness, and it is thus distinguishable from the Inconscience. Even the complete darkness of the

inconscience is a state of deep slumber having in its deepest depths the workings of the supermind which are held back but which are still supportive and even generative of whatever is inevitable and indispensable for the maintenance of the abysmal sleep of the inconscience and whatever is allowed by that sleep to evolve out of that sleep. That there is intention and secret intelligence in the workings of the Inconscience becomes more and more detectable not only in the workings of the human consciousness which has evolved from the Inconscience but much more luminously as the human consciousness crosses the boundaries of ignorance and enters and masters the various domains of what may be called the Integral Knowledge. Just as the inconscience is a dark veil behind which the supermind is at work, even so, Ignorance as perceived at work in the human consciousness is an evolutionary veil, which is capable of growth and development and eventually capable of being radically or fully removed. The groping consciousness of Ignorance has its thrust towards Knowledge, even though its road lies through the process of groping which necessitates passage through errors and even falsehoods, even those errors and falsehoods which are illusions or generators of illusions; it may be said that the ignorant human consciousness has in its operations not only the phenomena of non-observation but even of mal-observation. Ignorant consciousness is not only incapable of observing or experiencing the totality of multiplicity but even of admitting that incapacity. Even when it develops a conception of totality or universality, even of oneness or unity behind the multiplicity, it is incapable of any concrete experience of universality or

transcendental oneness. The result is that the ignorant human consciousness comes to think that the limited multiplicity which it observes and experiences or which it manipulates for pragmatic results is all that is there, and if there is something beyond its field of experience of multiplicity, it could not be of any radically different nature. But still, within the province of the Ignorance, there is accumulation of different degrees of knowledge and increasing capacity of testing by means of which error can be increasingly diminished or eliminated. It is with the growth of expansion of experience and knowledge of various degrees of probabilities and certainties that one can begin to live and experience what lies behind the surface waking consciousness. One comes to discover the astonishing phenomena of the subliminal consciousness in which complexities of the subtle physical consciousness, inner vital consciousness and inner mental consciousness can be experienced and studied. One even comes to acknowledge that there are inner treasures of knowledge, will and feelings of which one can learn by means of what is called in yoga the process of inward concentration.²⁷

PART FOUR

Journey of Evolutionary Ignorance towards Knowledge: Journey of Yoga

The human ignorant journey that turns inwards is a reversal of the involutionary movement of Ignorance which was a downward looking movement of consciousness speedily separating itself from the integral consciousness of unity and differentiations resulting in ignoring all that is behind that movement and in exclusive concentration on the workings of energy up to such an acute point that the consciousness becomes totally identified with the workings of energy. In contrast, this inward-looking (*antarmukha*) concentration recovers increasingly the distinction between the workings of energy in work, on the one hand, and those workings of energy in consciousness, on the other, that can stand apart and observe and even intelligently master the energy in work. This is the starting-point of a genuine yogic movement which, when pursued thoroughly, has immense consequences for the attainment of true knowledge of the totality, universality, unity and oneness, and even for eventual invasion on all the products of Ignorance and elimination of their errors and illusions for purposes of what may be called integral transformation of the workings of the consciousness and energy of the world of our ordinary and ignorant experience.

Discoveries of the Yogic Science: Order of the Worlds and Order of States of Consciousness

As one moves more and more inwards, one discovers, according to yogic science, that the physical universe and our terrestrial world is only one of several layers of the world in which one can come to live simultaneously. The knowledge of the supra-physical worlds and their order can be found recorded in the Veda and the Upanishad. Hence, the Katha Upanishad states: “They who dwell in the ignorance, within it, wise in their own wit and deeming themselves very learned, men bewildered are they who wander about stumbling round and round helplessly like blind men led by the blind. The childish wit bewildered and drunken with the illusion of riches cannot open its eyes to see the passage to heaven: for he that thinks that this world is and there is no other, comes again and again into Death’s thralldom”²⁸. According to the yogic science, there exist the subtle physical world and the vital world and the mental world and even higher worlds, the world of the Overmind, the world of the Supermind, and still the worlds of Sachchidananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss). One also discovers that, as one begins to live more and more inwardly, one can attain to higher and higher states of consciousness, and one can enter and dwell in the higher supra-physical worlds.

Description of Four states of Consciousness in the Mandukya Upanishad: Yogic Terms of States of Ignorance and Knowledge²⁹

Mandukya Upanishad speaks of the surface waking consciousness in which we ordinarily live as the state of wakefulness (*jāgarita*), where one feels and enjoys gross

objects of our physical world. This state is distinguished from the state of inward consciousness, the state of yogic dream (*swapna*), where one feels and enjoys subtle objects. There is a third state, the state of sleep (*supta*). That dream consciousness and this sleep consciousness are not states of ordinary dream and sleep, but of increasingly inner yogic states of consciousness. The dream consciousness that is spoken of here opens up subtle faculties of consciousness by which subtle objects of the subtle worlds are experienced and enjoyed. The dream consciousness opens up doors of what Sri Aurobindo calls the worlds of subliminal consciousness. There is a complete difference between dream-state of yoga and the physical-state of dream. The ordinary dream-state belongs to the physical mind; in the dream-state of yoga the mind proper and inner mind are at work liberated from the immixture of the physical mentality. In the yogic dream-state, the mind is in a clear position of itself, and stands in contrast with the incoherent jumble of the dreams of the physical mind; there is coherence in the yogic dream-state. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

“The dreams of the physical mind are an incoherent jumble made up partly of responses to vague touches from the physical world round which the lower mind-faculties disconnected from the will and reason, the *buddhi*, weave a web of wandering phantasy, partly of disordered associations from the brain-memory, partly of reflections from the soul travelling on the mental plane, reflections which are, ordinarily, received without intelligence or coordination, wildly distorted in the reception and mixed up confusedly with the other dream elements, with brain-memories and fantastic responses to any sensory touch from the physical world. In the Yogic dream-state, on the other hand, the mind

is in clear possession of itself, though not of the physical world, works coherently and is able to use either its ordinary will and intelligence with a concentrated power or else the higher will and intelligence of the more exalted planes of mind. It withdraws from experience of the outer world, it puts its seals upon the physical senses and their doors of communication with material things; but everything that is **proper** to itself, thought, reasoning, reflection, vision, it can continue to execute with an increased purity and power of sovereign concentration free from the distractions and unsteadiness of the waking mind.

“...It is quite possible indeed to be aware in the dream-trance of the outer physical world through the subtle senses which belong to the subtle body;....

“The experiences of the dream-state are infinitely various. ...it is able to establish connection with all the worlds to which it has natural access or to which it chooses to acquire access, from the physical to the higher mental worlds. ...It is able first to take cognizance of all things whether in the material world or upon other planes by aid of perceptible images, not only images of things visible, but of sounds, touch, smell, taste, movement, action, of all that makes itself sensible to the mind and its organs. For the mind in Samadhi has access to the inner space called sometimes the *cidākāśa*, to depths of more and more subtle ether which are heavily curtained from the physical sense by the grosser ether of the material universe, and all things sensible, whether in the material world or any other, create reconstituting vibrations, sensible echoes, reproductions, recurrent images of themselves which that subtler ether receives and retains.

“It is this which explains many of the phenomena of clairvoyance, clair-audience, etc; ... But the powers of the dream-state do not end here. It can by a sort of projection of ourselves, in a subtle form of the mental or vital body, actually enter into other planes and worlds or into distant places and scenes of this world, move among them with a sort of bodily presence and bring back the direct experience of their scenes and truths and occurrences. It may even project actually the mental or vital body for the same purpose and travel in it, leaving the physical body in a profoundest trance without sign of life until its return.”³⁰

Our subliminal being to which we can have access more readily in the yogic dream-state, is not, like our surface being, an outcome of the evolutionary energy of the Inconscient. It is a meeting place of the consciousness that emerges from below by evolution and the consciousness that has descended from above for involution. Hence, there is a consciousness which has a power of direct contact with the universal, unlike the mostly indirect contacts which our surface-being maintains with the universe with the sense-mind and the senses.

As Sri Aurobindo explains: “The subliminal has the right of entry into the mental and vital and subtle-physical planes of the universal consciousness, it is not confined to the material plane and the physical world; it possesses means of communication with the worlds of being which the descent towards involution created in its passage and with all corresponding planes or worlds that may have arisen or been constructed to serve the purpose of the re-ascent from Inconscience to Superconscience. It is into this large realm of interior existence that our mind and vital being retire when

they withdraw from the surface activities whether by sleep or inward-drawn concentration or by the inner plunge of trance.”³¹

According to the Mandukya Upanishad, there is, apart from the waking and dream-state, the sleep-state. The description of this state makes it clear that it is not the sleep-state of the physical mind but the yogic sleep-state. The Upanishad states: “When one sleeps and yearns not with any desire, nor sees any dream, that is the perfect slumber. He whose place is the perfect slumber, who has become Oneness, who is wisdom gathered into itself, who is made of mere delight, who enjoys delight unrelated, to whom conscious mind is the door, Prajna, the Lord of Wisdom, He is a third. This is the Almighty, this is the Omniscient, this is the Inner Soul, this is the Womb of the Universe, this is the Birth and Destruction of creatures.”³²

It is significant that the sleep-state is described as Prajna, the Master of Wisdom and Knowledge, Self of the Gnosis, and as Ishwara, the Lord of being. As Sri Aurobindo explains, the words dream and sleep used in Upanishads are nothing but an image drawn from the experience of the normal physical mind with regard to planes in which it is not at home. To the normal mind all that exceeds its normal experience but still comes into its scope, seems as dream; but at the point where it borders on things quite beyond its scope, it can no longer see truth even as in a dream, but passes into blank incomprehension and non-reception of slumber.

Subliminal consciousness opens itself up to larger worlds of the subtle-physical, vital and mental worlds, but the experiences of these worlds are similar to the experiences which come under the scope of our ordinary physical, vital,

mental consciousness. Hence, the experiences of subliminal consciousness can be said to be experiences of yogic dream-state. Just as in ordinary dream-state, objects are cognized, not through sense organs, but by direct contact, even so the objects of the subliminal consciousness in yogic dream-state are also cognized by direct contact or intimate direct contact. The experiences of the subliminal consciousness can aid the seeker in developing a perfect power of concentrated self-seclusion and ever deeper vision and identification. These experiences, therefore, could be a great prelude to entry into superconscience where one can experience increasingly the powers and manifestations of the diversity behind which unity becomes more and more prominent. And, if by Knowledge, we mean the knowledge of diversity as rooted in unity and in the ultimate Oneness, then one can say that the yogic dream-state can become a prelude to yogic sleep-state and even of still transcendental state (*turiya*). Thus, while the ordinary waking state, where only multiplicity or part of multiplicity is seen and experienced, is a state of Ignorance, the subliminal consciousness or the yogic dream-state can be regarded as a state of Knowledge-Ignorance, and the experiences of the yogic sleep-state and of still higher state, which the Upanishad describes as *turiya*, can be considered to be experience of Knowledge. In that light, one can gradually pass or evolve from Ignorance to Knowledge, and one can see in that passage how one can pass into Knowledge proper.

And yet this is an incomplete account of Ignorance, since we still need to add one extremely important factor, namely, that of the phenomenon of identification, which is central to the evolutionary processes of Ignorance.

Ignorance and Identification: Analysis of Ego-Sense: Surface Consciousness, Subconscious and Subliminal³³

In the human consciousness, there are several knots of identification, but the principal knot of identification is that of the self with the non-self. This identification becomes more and more visible with the growth of individuality during the course of the process of evolution starting from the inconscience. The material existence has only a physical, not a mental, individuality. It is only when evolution proceeds to develop forms of life and forms of mind that individuality begins to appear. This individuality takes the form of the mental, vital and physical ego-sense. Developing from inconscience to self-conscience, from nescience of self and things to knowledge of self and things, the Mind arrives thus far that it is aware of all its superficially conscious becoming as related to a sense of "I". That "I" partly identifies itself with the conscious becoming, partly thinks of it as something other than the becoming and superior to it, even perhaps eternal and unchanging. In the last resort, by the aid of its reason which distinguishes, in order to coordinate, it may fix its self-experience on the becoming only, on the constantly changing self and reject the idea of something other than it as a fiction of the mind; or it may fix its self-experience into a direct consciousness of its own eternal being and reject the becoming, even when it is compelled to be aware of it, as a fiction of the mind and the senses or the vanity of a temporary inferior existence.

Psychologically, however, there is in mental being a growing sense of "I" which continues to identify itself with what can be called non-self. That state of identification with the non-self is not something fixed and unalterable; it

fluctuates; in itself the “I” or the ego-sense is a finite knot in the movement of evolving Prakriti which performs the function of coordination, but it is so engaged in its task of coordination that it is only from time to time that it can draw back from its coordinating activity, and wonder about itself as to what it really is. It really does not know that it is only a coordinating sense operating as a cog in the huge machine of evolving universal Prakriti; watching its own activity of coordination it feels itself to be superior to the movements that it happens to coordinate, and observing itself superficially and finding itself all alone in the domain in which it is coordinating whatever comes within the purview of its observation, it begins to regard itself as independent of all the rest and even begins to behave and act as if it is a sovereign and independent free self. The ego-sense is felt to be identified with that operation of coordinating activity over which it appears to be the sovereign master. In reality, however, there is no such thing as a finite which is truly independent of all the rest. This sense of independence or ego-sense is only a sense, resulting from a state of ignorance, — a result of the finite knot of universal Prakriti looking at itself within a limited field in which it sees nothing else than itself as a sole coordinating agency of all that it surveys and observes. As a result, as the limited field in which the ego-sense is operating becomes more and more expanded, its own boundaries of its sovereignty begin to fluctuate and fade away; but then it begins to identify itself with a new and larger field, and this process of identification continues almost indefinitely. The ego identifying itself with the not-self, the ego viewing itself as independent and free, and the ego gradually expanding its fields of identification — all these are movements of errors born of ego’s ignorance of

what it truly is. In a sense, the ego-sense lives in a state of self-contradiction: it constantly shrinks from others and yet it constantly aims at expanding itself and enlarging its identification with larger fields of not-self.

A point is reached in the evolutionary process when one begins to realize that our waking mind and ego are only a superimposition upon a submerged, and subliminal self or inner being, which has a much vaster capacity of experience. This impels a journey of self-discovery in which we begin to enlarge our knowledge of the subliminal self, corresponding to yogic dream-state, and, at first, we conceive it as something that includes in it what is our lower subconscious and upper superconscious ends. It is only when our self-discovery becomes more and more precise that we begin to distinguish between the subliminal proper and sub-conscience. And if we ask as to what exactly is our sub-conscience, we may note, first of all, that it is principally our awareness of our body and our awareness that we have of our physical existence. To begin with, we find ourselves largely identified with our body, and yet we find that most of the operations of our own body are really subconscious to our mental being. Similarly, even though we may find ourselves identified with vitality working in our body, we are only partly aware of its operations. We find that our mind identifies itself to a certain extent with the movements proper to physical life and body and annexes them to its mentality. But we can discover that life and body have a consciousness of their own, which is obscure, limited and automatic. That awareness is submental; but we can also travel below the vital or physical substratum; it is there that we find the true subconscious; this subconscious is not identical with inconscience, but it is the inconscience

vibrating on the borders of consciousness, "sending up its motions to be changed into conscious stuff, swallowing into its depths impressions of past experience as seeds of unconscious habit and returning them constantly but often chaotically to the surface consciousness, missioning upwards much futile or perilous stuff of which the origin is obscure to us, in dream, in mechanical repetitions of all kinds, in untraceable impulsions and motives, in mental, vital, physical perturbations and upheavals, in dumb automatic necessities of our obscurest parts of nature."³⁴

This description of subconscious shows how the subliminal is clearly distinct from the subconscious. In contrast to the subconscious, the subliminal self is in full possession of a mind, a life-force, and a clear subtle-physical sense of things. It has the same capacities as our waking being, a subtle sense and perception, a comprehensive extended memory and an intensive selective intelligent will, self-consciousness; but even though of the same kind, they are wider, more developed, more sovereign. It is only subconscious in the sense of not bringing all or most of itself to the surface; it works behind the veil unless the veil is removed by power of yogic concentration. The subliminal may actually be described more accurately as a secret intraconscient and circumconscient rather than subconscious.

PART FIVE

Discovery of the Psychic Entity

But even deeper than the subliminal, there is in us an inmost being, which Sri Aurobindo calls psychic entity or soul and which the Katha Upanishad describes as “the Purusha that is no larger than the thumb of a man and who is seated in the midst of our self” (*aṅguṣṭamātrah puruṣo madhye ātmani tiṣṭati*).³⁵ The psychic entity supports the submental, the subconscious, the conscious, and the subliminal. The discovery of the psychic entity is of capital importance in our journey of self-knowledge. It is the source of true individuality, entirely distinct from the ego-sense, and it is that entity which represents in our evolutionary movement the individual Divine which is known in the Indian system of yoga as Jivatman, and which, as Sri Aurobindo has explained, is the Supreme Himself in His individuation which takes place in the second poise of the supermind. It is that Jivatman which has been described in Katha Upanishad as the eater of sweetness, and about which the following has been stated in that Upanishad:

“He that has known from the very close this Eater of sweetness, the Jiva, the self within that is lord of what was and what shall be, shrinks not thereafter from aught nor abhors any. This is That thou seekest”.³⁶

Again, it is the Jivatman that has been described in the Gita as the eternal portion of the Supreme, *mamaivāmsō jīva-loke jīvabhūtāḥ sanātanaḥ*,³⁷ and which is also descr-

ibed as *parāprakṛtir jīvabhūtā*, the higher supramental Nature which manifests the Jiva.³⁸

As Sri Aurobindo points out, it is the individual being of ours by which ignorance is possible to self-conscious mind, but it is also that by which liberation into the spiritual being is possible and the enjoyment of divine immortality.³⁹ It is the individual being, represented by the psychic entity⁴⁰ that, impelled by the Supreme Will, plunges into the inconscient, and leads the individual evolution, which also contributes to general or universal evolution; it is that which assumes in its Purusha consciousness the various formations that evolve from the inconscient nature in its evolutionary process; it is the individual being who in the human consciousness is found to have assumed in its Purusha consciousness various beings corresponding to the physical, the vital, the mental and the psychic; it is that which is capable of developing and formulating, by overcoming the Ignorance, the supramental being and even the bliss being. It is these states of the Purusha which are described in the Taittiriya Upanishad as *annamaya puruṣa*, the physical being, *prāṇamaya puruṣa*, the vital being, *manomaya puruṣa*, the mental being, *viśvānānamaya puruṣa*, the supramental being, and *ānandamaya puruṣa*, the bliss being. It is the individual being that accepts the identification, by means of exclusive concentration of consciousness, with the physical, vital and mental consciousness as also with the egoistic consciousness. The fall of the individual being in inconscience and its raising up the evolutionary forms of matter, life and mind is seen, when the higher knowledge arrives eventually, to be intentional. The individual slowly individualizes the forms that are evolved from the Inconscient by the process of evolution, and the intention is to manifest higher and higher forms of consciousness, including the

supramental and still beyond, and to bring about the embodiment of those higher levels of consciousness into fully individualized mind, life and body. It is with this purpose that the individual, who is identified by exclusive concentration of consciousness with the ascending forms produced by the evolutionary movement that slowly seeks to find its heaven of joy and light even in the oppositions offered by the terms of embodied material existence; and it accepts the process of struggle in order to discover its true self and nature and develop even in the material body a temple of the Divinity. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

“That purpose for which all this exclusive concentration we call the Ignorance is necessary, is to trace the cycle of self-oblivion and self-discovery for the joy of which the Ignorance is assumed in Nature by the secret spirit. It is not that all cosmic manifestation would otherwise become impossible; but it would be a quite different manifestation from the one in which we live; ... Not to return as speedily as may be to heavens where perfect light and joy are eternal or to the supracosmic bliss is the object of this cosmic cycle, nor merely to repeat a purposeless round in a long unsatisfactory groove of ignorance seeking for knowledge and never finding it perfectly, — in that case the ignorance would be either an inexplicable blunder of the All-conscient or a painful and purposeless Necessity equally inexplicable, — but to realise the Ananda of the Self in other conditions than the supracosmic, in cosmic being, and to find its heaven of joy and light even in the oppositions offered by the terms of an embodied material existence, by struggle therefore towards the joy of self-discovery, would seem to be the true object of the birth of the soul in the human body and of the labour of the human race in the series of its cycles. The

Ignorance is a necessary, though quite subordinate term which the universal Knowledge has imposed on itself that that movement might be possible, — not a blunder and a fall, but a purposeful descent, not a curse, but a divine opportunity. To find and embody the All-Delight in an intense summary of its manifoldness, to achieve a possibility of the infinite Existence which could not be achieved in other conditions, to create out of Matter a temple of the Divinity would seem to be the task imposed on the spirit born into the material universe.”⁴¹

In the human consciousness, the individual soul has risen up to mental level; and since this consciousness is embodied in physical, vital and mental complex, it (the soul) is identified through its Purusha consciousness with the body, with the vital consciousness and power, and the mental consciousness and power as also with the fluctuating egoistic consciousness by process of various degrees of exclusive concentration of consciousness; but this concentration is not involutory but evolutionary, and therefore, in this concentration, there is also a thrust towards knowledge and thrust towards the removal of the veil of Ignorance, — the veil that is created and sustained by exclusive concentration of consciousness. In order that that exclusive concentration of consciousness can be removed, the conscious Force being in us uses the same power of exclusive concentration, but in a reverse direction, and in a growing manner of integrality. And that is the essential process of integral yoga. There is, first, the movement of quieting the frontal movement of Prakriti in the individual consciousness, and in this movement, there is an exclusive concentration increasingly on the concealed inner being, on the Self or on the true inmost psychic being, Purusha, so that the same may be

disclosed. But while this is being done, the movement need not remain in this opposite exclusiveness; there is, therefore, the movement towards the resumption of integral consciousness or a global consciousness; this movement can then embrace manifestation with a larger consciousness free from the previous limitations. It is on these movements, that the integral yoga and its methods have been built.

Reality of the Individual: Problem of Ignorance, Bondage and Liberation

It will be seen that in this view of the Ignorance, multiplicity is not the creation of the Ignorance, since the Many and the All are inherent in the Supreme Oneness, and they manifest through the dynamic power of the Supreme and they are all comprehended in the manifestation of the supramental consciousness. Again, in this view of the Ignorance, multiplicity and infinity and eternity of space and time are not unaccounted and mysteriously projected on the Spaceless and Timeless Reality.

In the Advaitic theory of Maya, the individual soul is one with the Supreme, its sense of separateness ignorance, escape from the sense of separateness and identity with the Supreme its salvation; but if this account corresponds to the truth of the Reality, a question can be asked as to who profits by the escape from the sense of separateness. It cannot be that the Supreme Self profits from it, for it is supposed to be always and inalienably free, still, silent and pure. Nor does the world profit, since according to this view, that remains constantly in the bondage and is not freed by the escape of any individual soul from the universal Illusion. If it is the individual soul that profits from the escape, then there must be some distinctive reality of the individual soul. But

according to the Advaitic Mayavada, the individual soul is an illusion and non-existent except in the inescapable mystery of a cosmic power or Maya, which is also ultimately non-existent. In this view, therefore, we are led to conclude that there are illusory non-existent souls who are suffering from illusory non-existent bondage in an illusory non-existent and inexplicable world, and the supreme good that these non-existent souls have to pursue is to escape from their bondage to Ignorance, which illusorily afflicts the individual souls, which really do not exist in reality. It is even declared as a last word of the Knowledge, "There is none bound, none freed, none seeking to be free."

It is true that the separative consciousness by means of which the individual conceives of its individuality as a separate fact in the totality or as divided from the oneness of the supreme reality is an act of the ignorance. The individual making itself the center of its own universe instead of knowing itself as one concentration of the universal is also an act of the Ignorance. It is also true that the Ignorance is the parent of the sense of separation and division in the individual consciousness; but it is important to make a distinction between separateness or division, on the one hand, and differentiation, on the other. It may be said that the differentiation is not by itself a result of the operation of the Ignorance. It is the sense of separateness or division which is caused by the process of the ignorance. The supreme reality is One without the second, but what is meant by the One is not a mathematical integer, which is more than zero and less than two. As Sri Aurobindo points out, oneness is complex-simple and it is the supreme object of knowledge because when that oneness is known, all the differentiations that constitute the complexity of the One are also known as

differentiations proceeding from the One. Of that supreme object of knowledge, Sri Aurobindo states:

“It is the cosmic and the supracosmic spirit, the supreme Lord, the supreme Self, the supreme Purusha and 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 forever.”⁴²

In the supramental vision of the supreme reality, differentiations of names and forms, differentiations among individuals and differentiations between the individual and the universal and the transcendental do not contradict or abridge the overarching unity and the transcendental oneness. But it is true that there is, at a certain stage, in the functioning of the supramental consciousness and action in its third poise, particularly in its acutest operation, — the operation of the consciousness that can properly be called Mind (since Mind is, according to Sri Aurobindo, the final operation of the Supermind) — the overpowering predominance of differentiations, and, if it is so willed, there can intervene at that stage the operation of exclusive concentration of consciousness on diversity which can build a veil between the underlying sense of unity and the overpowering sense of diversity. It is that veil which is, according to Sri Aurobindo, the veil of ignorance; it is by the operation of ignorance that the sense of differentiations can be turned into a sense of divisions, although in actuality real divisions can never occur. But that sense of division, if it continues to operate, the error of division and separateness

can culminate in the production of the inconscience, and that inconscience, evolving under the evolutionary force working from within itself and also assisted by all that is behind the involutionary movement, can culminate, as it has, into human consciousness which is the field of evolutionary Ignorance groping towards the recovery of all that is involved in it or recovering all the Knowledge which is at work within, behind and above it. In the light of this conception, ignorance cannot be regarded as the creator of differentiations but only as a creator of the sense of separateness and the sense of division. Ignorance is the parent of the error and illusion of separateness and division, since in reality, nothing can be separated and divided from the original Oneness; but Ignorance is not the parent of differentiations themselves, since they are inherent in the original oneness, and the supramental consciousness is creative of the rich play of unity and differentiations, as can be seen in Sri Aurobindo's description of the triple status of the supermind to which we have referred earlier.

The Ignorance commences its involutionary process by downward looking Mind (at the stage of the final operation of the third poise of the Supermind) with exclusive concentration of consciousness on diversity while ignoring the unity, which is always present behind it; this exclusive concentration of consciousness creates a wall or a veil between the supramental consciousness and the mental consciousness. This movement culminates, ultimately, in the state of inconscience; from that state, there is an upward evolutionary process. This evolutionary process develops the human consciousness; it is here that we find the individual soul identified with a particular temporal and spatial action which is only a part of its own total being. This ignorance is

farther deepened by the self-identification with the body. In our depths, our being knows itself as more than the body and is capable of a less materialized action. But, externally, the surface consciousness can see things only as they present themselves to it from outside or else as they rise up to its view from its separate temporal and spatial consciousness; it is not conscious of its other selves except by the outward indications they give of their existence. But there is in the human consciousness clearer reflective mentality by means of which one becomes capable of the recovery of the inner spirit. But even in the pure mentality, there is still the veil between the mental and supramental action. As Sri Aurobindo points out, “an image of the Truth gets through, not the Truth itself.”⁴³

In the human consciousness, however, the veil of the Ignorance can be rent and the divided mind overpowered, and it is possible then for the mind to become silent and passive in order to have the action of the Real-Idea or of the Supermind. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

“There we find a luminous mentality reflective, obedient and instrumental to the divine Real-Idea. There we perceive what the world really is; we know in every way ourselves in others and as others, others as ourselves and all as the universal and self-multiplied One. We lose the rigidly separate individual standpoint which is the source of all limitation and error. Still, we perceive also that all that the ignorance of Mind took for the truth was in fact truth but truth deflected, mistaken and falsely conceived. We still perceive the division, the individualising, the atomic creation, but we know them and ourselves for what they and we really are. And so we perceive that the Mind was really a subordinate action and instrumentation of the Truth-

Consciousness.”⁴⁴

The conclusion at which we arrive is that the Ignorance is the Mind separated in knowledge from its source of knowledge, which gives a false rigidity in a mistaken appearance of a position. Hence, there is an element of error in all human knowledge, and as Sri Aurobindo states:

“Similarly our will, ignorant of the rest of the all-will, must fall into error of working and a greater or less degree of incapacity and impotence; the soul’s self-delight and delight of things, ignoring the all-bliss and by defect of will and knowledge unable to master its world, must fall into incapacity of possessive delight and therefore into suffering. Self-ignorance is therefore the root of all the perversity of our existence, and that perversity stands fortified in the self-limitation, the egoism which is the form taken by that self-ignorance.”⁴⁵

Sevenfold Ignorance

If this ignorance is analyzed fully, it will be found, as Sri Aurobindo has shown, that the evolving human ignorance is sevenfold. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“If we look at this Ignorance in which ordinarily we live by the very circumstance of our separative existence in a material, in a spatial and temporal universe, we see that on its obscurer side it reduces itself, from whatever direction we look at or approach it, into the fact of a many-sided self-ignorance. We are ignorant of the Absolute which is the source of all being and becoming; we take partial facts of being, temporal relations of the becoming for the whole truth of existence, — that is the first, the original ignorance. We are ignorant of the spaceless, timeless, immobile and immutable Self; we take

the constant mobility and mutation of the cosmic becoming in Time and Space for the whole truth of existence, — that is the second, the cosmic ignorance. We are ignorant of our universal self, the cosmic existence, the cosmic consciousness, our infinite unity with all being and becoming; we take our limited egoistic mentality, vitality, corporeality for our true self and regard everything other than that as not-self, — that is the third, the egoistic ignorance. We are ignorant of our eternal becoming in Time; we take this little life in a small span of Time, in a petty field of Space, for our beginning, our middle and our end, — that is the fourth, the temporal ignorance. Even within this brief temporal becoming we are ignorant of our large and complex being, of that in us which is superconscient, subconscient, intraconscient, circumconscient to our surface becoming; we take that surface becoming with its small selection of overtly mentalised experiences for our whole existence, — that is the fifth, the psychological ignorance. We are ignorant of the true constitution of our becoming; we take the mind or life or body or any two of these or all three for our true principle or the whole account of what we are, losing sight of that which constitutes them and determines by its occult presence and is meant to determine sovereignly by its emergence their operations, — that is the sixth, the constitutional ignorance. As a result of all these ignorances, we miss the true knowledge, government and enjoyment of our life in the world; we are ignorant in our thought, will, sensations, actions, return wrong or imperfect responses at every point to the questionings of the world, wander in a maze of errors and desires, strivings and failures, pain and pleasure, sin and stumbling, follow a crooked road, grope blindly for a changing goal, — that is the seventh, the practical ignorance.”⁴⁶

Liberation of the Individual and Status of Integral Knowledge⁴⁷

We who are subject to this sevenfold ignorance are, in reality, true individuals. The true individual is, according to Sri Aurobindo, the eternal portion of the Supreme Reality, a conscious being who is for our valuation of existence a being of the Eternal in its power of individualizing self-experience; it is a concrete being who, on arriving at the liberation, enjoys immortality. In the state of that knowledge in which the individual enjoys immortality, the individual realizes himself in the world and the world in him, he realizes God in him and he in God, not meaning thereby that God depends for His existence on him (man), but that He manifests himself in that which He manifests within Himself; the individual finds himself existing in the Transcendent but he also finds that all the Transcendent is there concealed in the individual. The individual realizes himself one with God in his being and yet he can have relations with Him in his experience. The individual, — the liberated individual, — can enjoy the Divine in His transcendence, unified with him, and enjoy at the same time the Divine in other individuals and His cosmic being.⁴⁸

The true individual *realizes* what he truly is when the veil of ignorance is removed. That veil of ignorance, it is found, was assumed by him for a purpose, which he detects by an evolutionary process. The entire process of the recovery of the self-knowledge and unity with the universal and transcendental Reality and the eventual manifestation of the intended manifestation of the divine will in the physical life consists of the most difficult endeavour, and that process is the process of the integral yoga. This task culminates in

manifestation of the divine will in physical life, and in this task, the importance of the individual is critical. As Sri Aurobindo states:

“The human being is here on earth the highest power of ...the individual, for he alone can work out at its critical turning-point that movement of self-manifestation which appears to us as the involution and evolution of the divine consciousness between the two terms of the Ignorance and the Knowledge. The power of the individual to possess in his consciousness by self-knowledge his unity with the Transcendent and the universal, with the One Being and all beings and to live in that knowledge and transform his life by it, is that which makes the working out of the divine self-manifestation through the individual possible; and the arrival of the individual, — not in one but in all, — at the divine life is the sole conceivable object of the movement. The existence of the individual is not an error in some self of the Absolute which that self afterwards discovers; for it is impossible that the absolute self-awareness or anything that is one with it should be ignorant of its own truth and its own capacities and betrayed by that ignorance either into a false idea of itself which it has to correct or an impracticable venture which it has to renounce. Neither is the individual existence a subordinate circumstance in a divine play or Lila, a play which consists in a continual revolution through unending cycles of pleasure and suffering without any higher hope in the Lila itself or any issue from it except the occasional escape of a few from time to time out of their bondage to this ignorance. We might be compelled to hold that ruthless and disastrous view of God’s workings if man had no power of self-transcendence or no power of transforming by self-knowledge the conditions of the play

nearer and nearer to the truth of the divine Delight. In that power lies the justification of individual existence; the individual and the universal unfolding in themselves the divine light, power, joy of transcendent Sachchidananda always manifest above them, always secret behind their surface appearances, this is the secret intention, the ultimate significance of the divine play, the Lila. But it is in themselves, in their transformation but also their persistence and perfect relations, not in their self-annihilation that that must be unfolded. Otherwise there would be no reason for their ever having existed; the possibility of the Divine's unfolding in the individual is the secret of the enigma; his presence there and this intention of self-unfolding are the key to the world of Knowledge-Ignorance."⁴⁹

Theme of Liberation in the Indian Systems of Yoga

The theme of the liberation of the individual may be regarded as a central theme of the Indian systems of yoga, and most systems of Indian philosophy maintain that their chief aim is centered on liberation or moksha. There is also the famous adage that the end of true Knowledge is liberation, *sā vidyā yā vimuktaye*. All yogic disciplines of India maintain that a stage comes in human life, sooner or later, when one begins to suspect one's ignorance and one's state of bondage, accompanied by a growing aspiration to remove ignorance and to attain to liberation and perfection.

It has been rightly observed that a special characteristic of ignorance is that it does not suspect itself. To discover that one is ignorant is itself a sign of a certain growth of knowledge. It is only at that stage that one begins to ask some of the deepest questions about the riddle of the world and the

intricacies of varieties of relationships in which one is entangled in one's commerce with the outer world.

At a farther stage, one is led to enquire into the questions as to whether sorrow and suffering, disabilities and death, dualities and incapacities can truly and effectively be removed altogether. The question, "What am I?", assumes then great prominence, and one is led to a quest of the most Ultimate or of Something in which all afflictions and incapacities can be extinguished permanently.

A special feature of Indian philosophy is that it measures its own relevance in terms of the answers it provides to existential questions relating to bondage and quest for liberation. And, while the Indian philosophical enquiry has its own supreme theoretical and logical heights, the ultimate test that it imposes upon itself is not merely that of logical consistency and comprehensiveness but also its ability to show the way to liberation from delusion and sorrow and even to total collective welfare by attainment of states and powers of perfection.

In general, the Indian yogic disciplines maintain that the state of bondage is marked by identification of the experiencing consciousness with the instruments and objects that constitute for the experiencing consciousness its world of experience.⁵⁰ Different systems of yoga use different terms for the experiencing consciousness and for the experienced world. According to one system, the experiencing consciousness is called Purusha and the experienced world is called Prakriti, and it is maintained that the identification of Purusha with Prakriti constitutes state of bondage; according to another system, the individual soul, which is called Jiva, when identified with the mind and other

instruments and objects of knowledge, is said to be in the state of bondage; according to a third system, the individual soul or Jiva is nothing but a temporary conglomeration of perceptions and images which by repetitive actions create an apparent sense of self or ego-sense which identifies itself with body, life and mind and with various objects or selective objects of experienced world, which, in turn, are also conglomerations of perceptions and impressions. There is yet another view according to which the individual soul, which is in some way dependent on supreme reality, and which, when instead of dwelling in that Reality, identifies itself with the instruments of experience and objects of the experienced world, gets into the state of bondage.

Among these and similar views, what is commonly emphasized is that there are two elements in the psychology of bondage. These are: desire and ego-sense. All systems of yoga are fundamentally different ways by which desire and ego-sense can be eliminated. Again, all yogic systems agree that the state of liberation is attained when desire and ego-sense are annihilated or extinguished.

All yogic systems consider the state of bondage to be the result of Ignorance, which causes the confusion between the real and unreal, super-imposition of the unreal on the real, or super-imposition of the not-self on the self, or perception of fleeting impressions or illusions which are extinguishable but are not yet extinguished. The question as to how ignorance can be removed has been answered differently by different systems of yoga, although they have also some common elements.

According to Raja yoga, ignorance can be eliminated by means of cessation of modifications of consciousness as a

result of disciplined pursuit of eight-fold path consisting of processes of purification, self-control and concentration leading up to Samadhi or yogic trance in which the mind is completely stilled. According to Jnana yoga, the intellect should be so trained that it can distinguish between the real and the unreal, and with the help of intellectual conviction of this distinction, one should follow up positive and negative lines of concentration, such that one dissociates oneself from identification with the unreal or not-self and arrives at identification with the Real or Self. According to Bhakti yoga, the individual needs to turn the entire complex of the emotional being in spirit of worship, adoration, service and love for the supreme Reality; and, by constant indwelling in the supreme Reality or rather in the supreme Person one gets dissociated from everything else with which one was earlier identified. According to Karma yoga, the discipline consists of a gradual elimination of desire and egoism, — which are normally intertwined strongly with action, — by means of a gradual process in which one dissociates oneself from fruits of action and later on from the sense of doership of action, and finally, one becomes a mere vehicle of action proceeding from the Supreme Reality. In the yogic system of Jainism, the discipline consists of dissociating Jiva from Matter by means of gradual or rapid exhaustion of action, karma, with the help of various practices that underline rigorous practice of truthfulness, non-violence, continence, non-covetousness and burning away of all attachments to possessions. In the yoga of Buddhism, the process of yoga consists of the eight-fold path, namely, of the practice of right beliefs, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct, right mode of livelihood, right effort, right mindedness and right rapture. There are also many other systems of yoga which

emphasize disciplines of body, or of life-force and mind or else they combine various systems of yoga in some kind of synthesis. There are, of course, claims and counterclaims, in regard to superiority of one system over the other, but, as stated above, they all agree that the state of liberation is impossible without the elimination of desire and ego-sense.

The state of the liberated soul or the state of liberation has been described variously. But there are two important characteristics of this state which are commonly to be found in all these descriptions. Firstly, the state of liberation is a state of recovery — recovery of a state which was always in a state of freedom. It is said that it is a state of Nirvana or of Purusha or Brahman which is forever free. Secondly, it is a state beyond the mind consciousness, which could be defined as consciousness that is discursive, successive, and centered on apprehensive as opposed to comprehensive point of view. If this state of liberation is that of consciousness or knowledge or bliss or all of them together, it is other than what it is at the mental level. It is fundamentally a state of stillness or peace that transcends understanding or of resignation or surrender, or of all of them together, and if there is any movement or dynamism or action, it is a movement of soul's relationship of unity and harmony of all things in transcendence or with transcendental and universal Reality or Being. In that state of freedom, the soul may merge into the infinite Being or choose to dwell in union with the Supreme Being, and in that case, at the fall of the body, all connections with Nature or Prakriti are cut off without any possibility of return. However, as long as the bodily life continues, the psychology of a liberated soul is so poised that the inner freedom from the bondage is not lost even when outer activities of Prakriti of the body, life and mind continue

by the momentum of the past. At the same time, even in the outer Prakriti, desire and egoism are annihilated, and the activities of the gunas, as understood in the terminology of Sankhya philosophy, are harmonized in such a way that the sattwa predominates and rajas and tamas are subordinated, and all the three gunas reflect or carry out in spite of their inherent limitations, something that reflects the state of the liberated soul.

Among the numerous experiences which have been described in respect of the state of liberation, there are three experiences which are frequently mentioned, and each one of them appears as an experience that excludes the other two.

The first of these experiences is that of the soul as Purusha in a state of silent witness that stands unaffected by the determinations which were earlier imposed upon it by the power and action of Prakriti. The second experience is that of an overwhelming awakening to Reality when the thought is stilled, when mind withdraws from its constructions and when one passes into a pure Self-hood void of all sense of individuality, empty of all cosmic contents. If the spiritualized mind then looks at the individual and the cosmos, they appear to it as an illusion, the scheme of names and figures and movements falsely imposed on the sole reality of the Self-Existent; or even the sense of Self becomes inadequate. Both, knowledge and ignorance, disappear into sheer consciousness and consciousness is plunged into a trance of pure superconscious existence or even existence ends by becoming too limiting a name for that which abides solely forever. There is only a timeless Eternal, a spaceless Infinite, the utterness of the Absolute, nameless peace and overwhelming single objectless ecstasy. The third experience is that of the omnipresent Divine Person, Lord of the real

Universe and the Lord of the supreme Shakti, of which the individual soul is a center without circumference or a portion or a child of the Supreme Divine Lord that lives by mutuality with all and in utter ecstasy of union with the Lord and His Shakti.

There is also, it is claimed, an experience in which all the above three experiences are transcended into something that can be described as a *śūnya* or a Nihil, which is also sometimes described as Permanent. Again, there is an affirmation of a supramental and integral experience in which all these experiences are held simultaneously and where the Supreme is realized, as in the Gita, as Purushottama in His absoluteness and Integrality, at once kshara and akshara Purusha, the static and dynamic Purusha. This experience answers the great pronouncement of the Upanishads where the Supreme is described at once as Brahman or Atman, Purusha and Ishwara.

Liberation and Perfection

In the Indian yogic tradition, there appears to be a distinction between liberation and perfection, although these two terms are often understood to be interchangeable. Nonetheless, when we study the Vedic concepts of liberation and immortality, the Gita's concept of *sādharmya* in connection with perfection of Karma yoga, as also the Tantrik view of siddhis or accomplishments, including those of mental, vital and physical being, we are obliged to bring out full value of the idea of perfection as distinguished from that of liberation.

The Vedic yoga may be looked upon as an earliest synthesis of the psychological being of man in its highest

flights and widest rangings of divine knowledge, power, joy, life and glory with cosmic existence of the gods, pursued behind the symbols of the material universe into those superior planes which are hidden from the physical sense of the material mentality. The crown of this synthesis is to be found in the experience of the Vedic Rishis, which was transcendental and blissful in whose unity the increasing soul of man and the eternal divine fullness of the cosmic godheads meet perfectly and fulfil themselves. This experience culminates in the ascent to the plane of Supermind or truth-consciousness, and the physical consciousness becomes so vast that the truth-consciousness can visit it. The Vedic Rishis have called that state the state of immortality. The Rishi Parashara speaks of the path which leads to immortality in the following words:

“They who entered into all things that bear right fruits formed a path towards the immortality; earth stood wide for them by the greatness and by the Great Ones, the mother Aditi with her sons came or, manifested herself for the upholding.”⁵¹

Commenting on this, Sri Aurobindo states:

“That is to say, the physical being, visited by the greatness of the infinite planes above and by the power of the great godheads who reigned 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. This is the Vedic immortality.”⁵²

Upanishads also speak of immortality, and when we study these great books of profound masters of spiritual knowledge, we find that, starting from the crowning

experiences of liberation and perfection of the Vedic seers, they arrive at a high and profound synthesis of spiritual knowledge; they 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.

The Gita is essentially a restatement of the ideas of liberation and perfection that we find in the Veda and the Upanishads, but which, as Sri Krishna points out in the fourth chapter, were lost. At the same time, the Gita starts with synthesis of yoga contained in the Veda and the Upanishads, and on that basis, builds another harmony of three great means and powers, love, knowledge and works, through which the soul of man can directly approach and cast itself into the eternal. And it opens up the doors by which the Spirit can take up the individual into the universal Power of higher supramental Nature, Para Prakriti. As a result, the Gita presents not only the ideal of *sālokya mukti*, liberation of the individual arriving at the same plane in which the supreme Lord dwells, and *sāyujya mukti*, the liberation by which the individual soul is united with the Supreme Lord or Infinite Existence, but also the ideal of *sādharmya mukti*, the liberation and perfection of the lower nature of life and mind by infusion into it of the divine nature, the Para Prakriti, — the divine Aditi of the Veda. The Tantrik yoga has also developed methods of far richer spiritual conquest that would enable the seeker to embrace the whole life in his divine scope as the cosmic Plane of the Divine. In other words, it grasps that idea of the divine perfectibility of man, which was possessed by the Vedic Rishis.

PART SIX

Review of the Gains of the Earlier Systems of Yoga

Against this background, there was a need to review the entire fund of knowledge pertaining to the nature of liberation and perfection as also to the Spirit, Supermind, Mind, Life and Matter. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, as a result of a vast research, the dimensions of which covered all the planes of existence and intricate secrets of psychology, occultism and spirituality, have provided new answers regarding the issue of the ideals of liberation and perfection. Some of the important points that emerged from this great research work, and which are relevant to our immediate purpose here can be summed up as follows:

Victory of the Vedic Rishis

In the history of Indian *yōga*, the richest treasure of knowledge can be found in the Veda, particularly in regard to the integral vision of the ultimate reality and in regard to the discovery of supermind, which was termed as *ṛta cīt* or Truth-Consciousness. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had, on their own, discovered the supermind, and because of that discovery, they were able to decipher the Vedic symbolism and discover the golden knowledge of the supermind in various hymns of the Veda. The question was the method that was adopted by the Vedic Rishis and the extent to which the discovery of the supermind was developed and applied. According to Sri Aurobindo, the Vedic Rishis or their forefathers had individual attainment, and although they

followed the method of ascent to supermind, the maximum point which they reached was that of the attainment of widening of physical consciousness so that the body could become the vehicle of receiving the supermind. Sri Aurobindo also points out that the reception of the supermind resulted in the breaking of the limits of the physical being and its opening out to supramental light. It was this attainment of the wideness of the physical being which the Vedic Rishis termed as the attainment of the state of immortality. According to Sri Aurobindo, although this was a very high attainment, it was not enough for fulfilling what Sri Aurobindo discovered to be the intention of the Supramental Divine Will for the next step in the evolution on the earth. According to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, what is aimed at by the evolutionary force in the human species is the accomplishment of fixing of the supramental consciousness in the physical being and not merely of attainment of the universalisation or vastness of the physical being. In this connection, the following statements of the Mother, in an answer to a question of a disciple (Satprem), are both pertinent and important:

Satprem: *About the discovery of the supermind in the Veda and by Sri Aurobindo. There is something that I don't quite grasp.*

The Mother: "Because in the Veda it's incomplete. ...

"According to what Sri Aurobindo saw and what I saw as well, the Rishis had the contact, the experience – how to put it? ... A kind of lived knowledge of the thing, coming like a promise, saying, 'THAT is what will be.' But it's not permanent. There's a big difference between their experience and the DESCENT – what Sri Aurobindo calls 'the descent

of the Supermind': something that comes and establishes itself. ...

...What the Rishis had was a sort of promise – an INDIVIDUAL experience.”⁵³

Again, what the Mother told Satprem a few days later is also illuminating:

... “It is by rising to the summit of consciousness through a progressive ascent that one unites with the Supermind. But as soon as the union is achieved, one knows and one sees that the Supermind exists in the heart of the Inconscient as well.

When one is in that state, there is neither high nor low.

But GENERALLY, it is by REDESCENDING through the levels of the being with a supramentalized consciousness that one can accomplish the permanent transformation of physical nature.

(This can be experienced in all sorts of ways, but what WE want and what Sri Aurobindo spoke of is a change that will never be revoked, that will persist, that will be as durable as the present terrestrial conditions. ... ‘permanent.’)

There is no proof that the Rishis used another method, although, to effect this transformation (if they ever did) they must necessarily have fought their way through the powers of inconscience and obscurity.”

“Yes, the Rishis give an absolutely living description ... – as soon as you descend into the Subconscient: all these battles with the beings who conceal the Light and so on. I experienced these things continually at Tlemcen and again with Sri Aurobindo when we were doing the Work – it’s raging quite merrily even now!

“As soon as you go down there, that’s what happens – you have to fight against all that is unwilling to change, all that dominates the world and does not want to change.”⁵⁴

The Vedic quest and attainment of immortality is not merely concerned with liberation but also with perfection, although the ideal of perfection envisaged by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is quite new. The Vedic attainment where the physical being becomes widened or universalized on the visitation of the supermind as also the victorious battles of the Vedic Rishis with the opposing subconscious forces, — these achievements have remained an epical victory in the Indian tradition of yoga. This victory was recovered, but only rarely in such experiences and realizations which have been recorded in the Upanishads and in the Gita.

Attainment of the Upanishads

The spiritual substance of the Veda appears to have been captured in the Upanishads. The ancient psychological science and art of spiritual living that are to be found in the Veda as a body of inspired knowledge, but yet insufficiently equipped with intellectual and philosophical terms, are restated in a language that can be grasped more readily by philosophical intellectuality; and yet, the movement of life and the large breath of the soul that have been described in wide largeness, freedom, flexibility, fluidity, suppleness and subtlety have been absent in the later systems of philosophy. The Veda was at once a Book of Knowledge and a Book of Works; and while the great quest of Vedic Rishis aimed not only at liberation from our present bonds and littleness, but also at arriving at larger perfection, the later philosophies gradually narrowed down to become the means only of attaining liberation as the one supreme good.

The more ancient Upanishads kept close to the Vedic ideal of perfection and immortality, but the later Upanishads tended gradually towards a more restricted aim. It also came to be maintained that one could wander about the ranges of the supermind while living in the body or connected with the physical world, that connection with the body and the physical world need to be cast off in order to cross the gate of the supermind where one can realize the Immortal, the Spirit, the Self undecaying and imperishable. It is even pointed out that the seeker of the Brahman or of the highest Self arrives at world-distaste, since not by work done one reaches Him who is Uncreated.⁵⁵

Sri Aurobindo has discerned the increasing over-emphasis in the later Upanishads on the goal of transcendence and liberation from the bondage of the body, life and mind as compared to the balance and harmony that marked the characteristic note of the earlier Upanishads where the Vedic aim of perfectibility was restated in its fullness. According to Sri Aurobindo, that over-emphasis on the salvation of the individual and the rejection of the cosmic and physical life, has been the cause of much of the gradual decline of Indian vigour and vitality in the later centuries of Indian history. As Sri Aurobindo states:

“Now certainly there is an emphasis in the Upanishads increasing steadily as time goes on into an over-emphasis, on the salvation of the individual, on his rejection of the lower cosmic life. ...It does not exist in the earlier Vedic revelation where individual salvation is regarded as a means towards a great cosmic victory, the eventual conquest of heaven and earth by the superconscient Truth and Bliss, and those who have achieved the victory in the past are the conscious helpers of their yet battling posterity. If this earlier note is

missing in the Upanishads, then, — for great as are these Scriptures, luminous, profound, sublime in their unsurpassed truth, beauty and power, yet it is only the ignorant soul that will make itself the slave of a book, — then in using them as an aid to knowledge we must insistently call back that earlier missing note, we must seek elsewhere a solution for the word of the riddle that has been ignored. The Upanishad alone of extant scriptures gives us without veil or stinting, with plenitude and a noble catholicity the truth of the Brahman; its aid to humanity is therefore indispensable. Only, where anything essential is missing, we must go beyond the Upanishads to seek it, — as for instance, when we add to its emphasis on divine knowledge the indispensable ardent emphasis of the later teachings upon divine love and the high emphasis of the Veda upon divine works.”⁵⁶

The Synthesis of Yoga in the Gita

There came to be developed, in the later history of Indian yoga, the great synthesis of yoga in the Gita, which is the greatest gospel of divine works. The quintessential aims and methods of Karma yoga that were greatly emphasized in the Veda and also in the earlier Upanishads were reiterated with great emphasis and assured mastery. In doing so, the quintessentials of the knowledge of the ultimate Reality that have been richly described in the Veda and which were articulated with great clarity and refined language that could be more readily accessible to philosophy in the Upanishadic concepts of Brahman, Purusha, Ishawara, got reiterated and were given in the Gita the foundational position in regard to the methods and aims of its synthetic yoga. The Gita also brought into the forefront the yoga of divine love and discovered the principle of self-surrender which is essential

for the right relationship between the human soul and the Divine Lover; this principle of self-surrender was found to be the sovereign means of the fulfillment of divine knowledge and divine works.

The supreme secrets of the Vedic and Upanishadic knowledge came to be clearly restated in the Gita, and the mystery and the wonder that are associated with the knowledge of the ultimate reality constitute the essential aspects of the descriptions of the secret nature of the ultimate reality that we find in the Gita. The culminating point of this knowledge is, in terms of the Gita, the knowledge of Purushottama and Para-prakriti.⁵⁷

A central objective to be fulfilled by the practice of the synthesis of Gita's yoga is that we, as individuals, have a central role, and that we are here to move inwardly towards a greater consciousness and a supreme existence, not by a total exclusion of our cosmic nature, but by a higher and spiritual fulfillment of all that we now essentially are. There is to be a change from our mortal imperfection to a divine perfection of being. Sri Aurobindo explains the essential foundation of this complex aim as follows:

“The first idea on which this possibility is founded, is the conception of the individual soul in man as in its eternal essence and its original power a ray of the supreme Soul and Godhead and here a veiled manifestation of him, a being of his being, a consciousness of his consciousness, a nature of his nature, but in the obscurity of this mental and physical existence self-forgetful of its source, its reality, its true character. The second idea is that of the double nature of the Soul in manifestation, — the original nature in which it is one with its own true spiritual being, and the derived in which it

is subject to the confusions of egoism and ignorance. The latter has to be cast away and the spiritual has to be inwardly recovered, fulfilled, made dynamic and active. Through an inner self-fulfilment, the opening of a new status, our birth into a new power, we return to the nature of the Spirit and re-become a portion of the Godhead from whom we have descended into this mortal figure of being.”⁵⁸

In the object of the yoga that is placed before us in the Gita we find a greater affirmation; the object is not merely of liberation of the individual from the ignorant mind, life and body with which it has become identified by its descent into Nature or what the Gita terms as *Apara Prakriti* or lower nature, but the utilization of the attainment of liberation as a step towards the movement by which hierarchies of mind, overmind and supermind are attained, so that one is enabled to manifest the higher nature, divine nature or *Para Prakriti*. The Gita replaces the obsessive idea of self-annulment of nature by the principle of self-fulfilment in divine Nature.

There is, according to the Gita, the normal phenomenon of the individual in the state of its entanglement and identification with the body, life and mind, the three cords of Nature, which are riddled with *sattwa* (principle of light and harmony), *rajas*, (the principle of dynamism), and *tamas*, (the principle of resistance, limitation and inertia), all of which are at play in disproportionate prominence. This nature has been called, in the Gita, eight fold *Prakriti* (*aṣṭadhā prakṛti*),⁵⁹ since it consists of earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and ego. This *Prakriti* is *aparā prakṛti*, and it is described as the lower nature of the Supreme, which is derived from the higher nature of the Supreme, *Para Prakriti*. It is declared that this *Para Prakriti* is the origin of the *Apara Prakriti* and is manifest in the individual or *Jiva*, since all the

Jivas are the becomings of the Para Prakriti, even while they are eternal portions of the Supreme Being.⁶⁰

If the individual, [who is the eternal portion of the Supreme, and who has been constituted by the higher Nature (Para Prakriti), which is expressive power of the Supreme] is found to be entangled in Apra Prakriti, which is itself derived from Para Prakriti, there must be a profound significance of that entanglement, and it cannot be exhausted by a mere return of the individual from its entanglements to a state of freedom or liberation from the entanglement where it can become one with the Supreme by self-annulment or merger (*sālokya mukti*), or by Nirvana or self-extinction or by attainment of a state of union with the Supreme (*sāyujya mukti* or *sāmīpya mukti*). The Gita, therefore, in search of the fulfillment of that significance, develops in its later chapters, particularly in its last six chapters, the possibility, not only of the recovery of the individual in its source,—the Supreme being (Purushottama) and Para Prakriti, but also of manifesting that Para Prakriti in actual action and work in the world. This is the reason why there is so much of insistence in the Gita of a progressive development of tamas and rajas into sattwa, into a state of *triguṇātita*, the state of transcending the three-fold Apra Prakriti, and on manifestation of those elements which are directly expressive of Para Prakriti, namely, swabhava and swadharma, shraddha or faith which is the essential nature of the individual being or Purusha, divine nature (*daivi bhāva*), action that involves giving (*dāna*), sacrifice (*yajna*) and austere process of concentration (*tapas*), and inner renunciation of desire (*tyāga*) instead of renunciation of action itself (*sannyāsa*).⁶¹ The Gita puts forward the attainment of divine nature (*madbhāva*),⁶² and of perfection of manifesting the law of the divine nature (*sādharmyam*),⁶³

as the goal for the individual after the attainment of liberation from its entanglement with *Apara Prakriti*. And the method that the Gita proposes for this attainment is that of complete surrender to the Supreme.⁶⁴ The Gita, in placing this higher goal restates the goal that was sought after by the Rishis of the Veda and of the earlier Upanishads, namely, the attainment of the supramental nature.

Indeed, just as Sri Aurobindo and the Mother pointed out the incompleteness in regard to the Vedic goal and Vedic conquest, even so, they have pointed out also the incompleteness in regard to the highest possible fulfilment that has been described in the Gita. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

“The greatest gospel of spiritual works ever yet given to the race, the most perfect system of Karmayoga known to man in the past, is to be found in the Bhagavad Gita. In that famous episode of the Mahabharata the great basic lines of Karmayoga are laid down for all time with an incomparable mastery and the infallible eye of an assured experience. It is true that the path alone, as the ancients saw it, is worked out fully; the perfect fulfilment, the highest secret is hinted rather than developed; it is kept back as an unexpressed part of a supreme mystery. ...The Gita at its cryptic close may seem by its silence to stop short of that solution for which we are seeking; it pauses at the borders of the highest spiritual mind and does not cross them into the splendours of the supramental Light. And yet its secret of dynamic, and not only static, identity with the inner Presence, its highest mystery of absolute surrender to the Divine Guide, Lord and Inhabitant of our nature, is the central secret. This surrender is the indispensable means of the supramental change and, again, it is through the supramental change that the dynamic

identity becomes possible.”⁶⁵

One of the most important elements of knowledge relating to the objects and methods of yoga, particularly in connection with liberation of the soul and attainment of perfection, is connected with the distinction between Purusha and Prakriti. In the synthesis of yoga that we find in the Gita, this distinction is of pivotal importance, and although its roots are to be found in the Veda and the Upanishads, the clarity and complexity of this distinction that we find in the Gita is perhaps unparalleled. According to the Gita, the individual Purusha can rise above the rungs of the body, life and mind, the present formation of lower Prakriti (Apara Prakriti), and he can be established permanently into the spiritual status of the immobile witness or imperturbable Silence or in relationship and union with Purushottama in any one of his cosmic or transcendental poises, akshara or kshara or both; but, as in the Veda and the Upanishads, so in the Gita, there is a higher possibility of rising still upwards in the higher ranges of Para Prakriti and even of recreating the lower Prakriti, Apara Prakriti, into increasingly luminous image of Para Prakriti. In the Bhagavad Gita, this entire process of rising upwards towards higher nature and into the realms of higher nature and even of recreating the lower nature in the image of higher nature by the method of complete surrender to the Purushottama is indicated through its concept of *triguṇātītā* (a state of transcendence of the three gunas of tamas, rajas and sattwa). But, as Sri Aurobindo points out, the possibility of recreation of the lower nature in the image of the high nature is rather hinted but not worked out. As Sri Aurobindo points out,

“The Gita at its cryptic close may seem by its silence to stop short of that solution for which we are seeking; it pauses

at the borders of the highest spiritual mind and does not cross them into the splendours of the supramental Light.”⁶⁶

As in the Veda and in the Upanishad, so also in the Gita there is, Sri Aurobindo points out, the idea of the higher levels of knowledge of the supermind (rita-chit, Aditi, Shakti, Para Prakriti). But the road by which the lower nature can be transformed into the higher nature was found by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to be blocked, and it can be said that the mighty effort of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother was centered on breaking and surmounting that block. The novelty of the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother lies precisely in this effort and its victorious accomplishment.

What would be the realized condition of consciousness and power when lower nature comes to be recreated and transformed by the higher nature is briefly described by Sri Aurobindo in the language appropriate to the Gita’s synthesis of yoga as follows:

“When we grow into the spirit, this Dharma or inferior law of Nature is replaced by the immortal Dharma of the spirit; there is the experience of a free immortal action, a divine illimitable knowledge, a transcendent power, an unfathomable repose. ...”⁶⁷

In other words, the Sattwa is transformed into divine illimitable Knowledge, rajas is transformed into transcendent power and free immortal action, and tamas is transformed into unfathomable repose.

Contribution of the Tantra

An extremely important element in the fund of the spiritual knowledge accumulated in the past related to the theme of liberation and perfection consists of the aims and

methods of the Tantra. The Tantra aims at integration of the heightened perfections of the powers of the instruments of the being as also of the cosmic enjoyment through these instruments. The Tantra not only aims at *mukti*, liberation, but also at *bhukti*, enjoyment; and since that enjoyment cannot be perfect without arriving at the perfection of the powers of the being, it also puts forward the aim of perfection. That in the human being and in the universe there are two poles of being whose essential unity is the secret of existence and that is the supreme affirmation of the Tantric yoga. These two poles of being can be variously termed, such as Lord and Supreme Mother, Shiva and Shakti. Shakti is the power of Shiva or rather Shiva is Shakti, considering their essential unity. It is Shakti that has manifested in the universe and, at the human level, we experience Her as Nature or energy that is seen to be active in body, life and mind. The distinction of the method of the Tantra is to raise the nature of Shakti that is dormant in man so that it manifests itself as the unveiled power of the Spirit. The important point of the synthesis of the Tantra is that it is the whole nature that Tantra gathers up for the spiritual conversion. It includes, therefore, in its synthesis of yoga the ideal of the perfection of the body, and for that purpose, it begins with Hathayoga; it pursues the forceful hathayogic processes and the hathayogic science of the nervous centres, chakras; the hathayogic processes aim at the gradual opening up of the nervous centers starting from the lowest, which is called *mūlādhāra*, in which the supreme shakti is found to be coiled; the hathayogic process aims at awakening that shakti coiled up in the *mūlādhāra*, and by means of the process of awakening, that shakti is uncoiled in a spiral movement similar to that of the serpent. That is the reason why the

shakti is called kundalini or serpentine energy. The awakened shakti passes systematically from the lowest *mūlādhāra* and crosses through the intermediate centers up to the highest point or the topmost level of the brain and opens up the brain centre, which is called the centre of thousand-petalled lotus, *sahasrāra*. When the shakti opens up the thousand-petalled lotus, she attains her union with the Supreme Lord. In this process, Tantra utilizes the system of the operations of the subtle body and subtle elements of consciousness; here the Tantra aims at purification of the operations and at the unification of these operations by the processes of meditation and concentration by the utilization of the methods of Raja yoga so as to attain to the states of Samadhi. The Tantra also aims at purification and development and perfection of the intellect, will-force, and the motive power of devotion by resorting to the processes of Jnana yoga, Karma yoga and Bhakti yoga. Tantra goes even farther and it subjects the main springs of human quality, desire and action to an intensive discipline; as a result, it seeks to attain the soul's mastery over human motives, and it also aims at the elevation of these motives to a diviner spiritual level as its final utility. Finally, since it does not aim merely at liberation (mukti) but also cosmic enjoyment of the power of the spirit (bhukti), the tantrik system is rendered much bolder and larger than the Vedantic schools of yoga.

The vast fund of the knowledge of the Tantric yoga is assimilated in Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's synthesis of yoga. But even though it includes the aims of the Tantra, its initial stress falls upon the methods of the Veda, the Upanishads and the Gita. As a result, in Sri Aurobindo's synthesis of yoga, raising of the powers of the human

consciousness towards their heights is sought to be effected by the operation of the Purusha consciousness or Brahman consciousness; and as the yogic processes progress farther, the principle of surrender to the Shakti or Divine Mother which is so central in the Tantra also becomes central; there is, however, full recognition that the shakti is the power of Purushottama and is herself Purushottama. In the Tantra, the initial stress is on starting from the bottom, and there is a rise on the ladder through grades of ascent upward to the summit; in Sri Aurobindo's synthesis of yoga, the emphasis is upon man as a spirit in mind much more than a spirit in body, and it assumes in him the capacity to begin on that level; hence, this new synthesis of yoga aims at spiritualizing man's being by the power of the soul in mind, and the method is to open the soul in mind directly to a higher spiritual force and being and to perfect by that higher force so possessed and brought into action the rule of his nature. In order to work out this process, this synthesis of yoga utilizes powers of soul in mind (which are those of the quest of knowledge, the quest of heroism, the quest of harmony and the quest of perfection), and turns the triple key of knowledge, work and love in the locks of the Spirit. As a consequence, the hathayogic methods can be dispensed with, although there would be no objection to their partial use. The methods of Raja yoga also would enter in but only as an informal element. The methods of this yoga aim at all the perfections that are aimed at in the Tantra but they even go beyond. These methods are so conceived as to constitute the shortest way at the largest development of spiritual power and being and divinize by it a liberated nature in the whole range of human living. Moreover, in Sri Aurobindo's synthesis of yoga, the spirit in man is regarded not as solely an individual being

travelling to a transcendent unity with the Divine, but a universal being capable of oneness with the divine in all souls and in his all-nature with all the practical consequences.

Sri Aurobindo acknowledges that there are a thousand ways of approaching and realizing the Divine and each way has its own experiences which have their own truth. The important thing that is stressed is that one should follow one's own way well and thoroughly and arrive at the integrality of the path of ascent to the supermind and of descent of the supermind for the total transformation of the mind, life and body. In pursuit of this process, Sri Aurobindo acknowledges the contributions that can be made by the yogic systems which are at the back of all religions as also those which are independent of any religion. Sri Aurobindo also acknowledges the subtlety and complexity that are available in several exclusive systems of yoga, and underlines the importance of new elements which those systems of yoga have discovered and realized.

A special emphasis is, however, made on the discovery of the psychic entity and of the utilization of the powers of the psychic entity that have been discovered in various systems of the yoga of Divine Love. In fact, in the synthesis of yoga of Sri Aurobindo, the yoga of the psychic entity plays a major role, and a great stress is laid right from the beginning on the awakening of the psychic being, and on the psychisation and psychic transformation of Nature. That, again, is supplemented and perfected by the processes of spiritual and supramental transformation of Nature.

PART SEVEN

The Aim of Integral Liberation and Integral Perfection

Against this background, it may be said that Sri Aurobindo's synthesis of yoga does not aim merely at the liberation of the individual or of the individual Purusha from the ignorance which appears to be inherent in the Nature of Prakriti; it also aims at the liberation of the Prakriti itself from its bondage to ignorance by eliminating all that appears to be inherent in it but which is not really so; since Prakriti of the three *guṇas* is derived from supramental Para Prakriti, it can be liberated from its own limitations and transformed into Supramental Nature. Sri Aurobindo thus speaks of the liberation of the soul from Nature and of the liberation of the nature of Prakriti from its own limitations; it proposes integral liberation and integral perfection.⁶⁸

Liberation of the soul is usually sought by withdrawal from the action of lower nature or by attainment of mastery over the lower nature. The liberation of nature from its own limitations is effected when it is found that the three *gunas* of Prakriti are basically derived from the essential powers of the Divine, and therefore, these three *guṇas* can come to be held in some kind of harmony under the preponderance of *sattwa* *guna* in the state of liberation of the soul or realization of immutable spirit; but they can even be uplifted by supramental transformation from their limitations and rendered into their supernal equivalence of the Divine

supramental nature. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

“Tamas in the spiritual being becomes a divine calm, which is not an inertia and incapacity of action, but a perfect power, *śakti*, holding in itself all its capacity and capable of controlling and subjecting to the law of calm even the most stupendous and enormous activity: Rajas becomes a self-effecting initiating sheer Will of the spirit, which is not desire, endeavour, striving passion, but the same perfect power of being, *śakti*, capable of an infinite, imperturbable and blissful action. Sattwa becomes not the modified mental light, *prakāśa*, but the self-existent light of the divine being, *jyotiḥ*, which is the soul of the perfect power of being and illumines in their unity the divine quietude and the divine will of action. The ordinary liberation gets the still divine light in the divine quietude, but the integral perfection will aim at this greater triune unity.

“...The integral liberation comes when this passion for release, *mumukṣutva*, founded on distaste or *vairāgya*, is itself transcended; the soul is then liberated both from attachment to the lower action of nature and from all repugnance to the cosmic action of the Divine. This liberation gets its completeness when the spiritual gnosis can act with a supramental knowledge and reception of the action of Nature and a supramental luminous will in initiation. The gnosis discovers the spiritual sense in Nature, God in things, the soul of good in all things that have the contrary appearance; that soul is delivered in them and out of them, the perversions of the imperfect or contrary forms fall away or are transformed into their higher divine truth, — even as the gunas go back to their divine principles, — and the spirit lives in a universal, infinite and absolute Truth, Good, Beauty, Bliss which is the supramental or ideal divine Nature. The

liberation of the Nature becomes one with the liberation of the spirit, and there is founded in the integral freedom the integral perfection.”⁶⁹

Integral Perfection: Six Elements

As stated elsewhere, Sri Aurobindo analyses the ideal of perfection as consisting of six elements. The first element of perfection is that of perfect equality and perfect action of equality. The second element of perfection is attained by raising all the active parts of the human nature to that of higher condition of working pitch of the power and capacity on which they become capable of being divinised into true instruments of the free, perfect, spiritual and divine action. This would mean the perfection of the powers and capacities of the mind, the vital and the physical. This would also imply the perfect dynamic force of the temperament, character and inmost soul-nature which would result in what Sri Aurobindo calls the perfection of the four-fold personality, the personality of knowledge, of strength, of harmony and love and of perfection of skill and service. This movement is further strengthened by the faith in the divine Power of Shakti to replace the limited human energy so that it may be shaped into the image of and filled with the force of greater infinite energy. The third element of perfection is, according to Sri Aurobindo, the evolution of the mental into the supramental Gnostic being which would progressively take up all the terms of intelligence, will, sense-mind, heart, the vital and sensational being and translate them by a luminous and harmonizing conversion into a unity of the truth, power and delight of a living existence. The next element of perfection is that of the Gnostic perfection in the physical body. The fifth element is arrived at when the perfection of

the body is pushed to its highest conclusion which, according to Sri Aurobindo, brings in spiritualizing and illumination of the whole physical consciousness and divinizing of the law of the body. Finally, the sixth element is that of the perfect action and enjoyment of being on the supramental Gnostic basis. And this integrality of perfection would mark the status of the siddha or perfected soul who will live in union with the Purushottama in the fullness of spiritual being, consciousness and bliss of Sachchidananda or eternal Brahman. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“The Siddha or perfected soul will live in union with the Purushottama in this Brahmic consciousness, he will be conscious in the Brahman that is the All, *sarvam brahma*, in the Brahman infinite in being and infinite in quality, *anantam brahma*, in Brahman as self-existent consciousness and universal knowledge, *jñānam brahma*, in Brahman as the self-existent bliss and its universal delight of being, *ānandam brahma*. He will experience all the universe as the manifestation of the One, all quality and action as the play of his universal and infinite energy, all knowledge and conscious experience as the out-flowing of that consciousness, and all in the terms of that one Ananda. His physical being will be one with all material Nature, his vital being with the life of the universe, his mind with the cosmic mind, his spiritual knowledge and will with the divine knowledge and will both in itself and as it pours itself through these channels, his spirit with the one spirit in all beings. All the variety of cosmic existence will be changed to him in that unity and revealed in the secret of its spiritual significance. For in this spiritual bliss and being he will be one with That which is the origin and continent and inhabitant and spirit and constituting power of all existence.

This will be the highest reach of self-perfection.”⁷⁰

The integrality of perfection cannot remain confined to the individual, but it would extend progressively to the development of the collective divine life on the earth. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“The divinising of the normal material life of man and of his great secular attempt of mental and moral self-culture in the individual and the race by this integralisation of a widely perfect spiritual existence would thus be the crown alike of our individual and of our common effort. Such a consummation being no other than the kingdom of heaven within reproduced in the kingdom of heaven without, would be also the true fulfilment of the great dream cherished in different terms by the world’s religions.

“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.”⁷¹

But this great consummation of perfection that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have placed before humanity has involved the development of the new processes of ascent into various planes of the superconscient and of the descent of the highest level of the superconscient, namely of the supermind, into the inconscient so as to transform it. All these new processes, always incorporating into them all the relevant fund of knowledge gathered in the past, provide us the real kernel of the new synthesis of yoga, which Sri Aurobindo has expounded in *‘The Life Divine’*, *‘The Synthesis of Yoga’*, *‘The Supramental Manifestation upon the Earth’*, *‘Savitri’*, and this has been recorded as worked out in detail by the Mother in thirteen volumes of *‘Mother’s Agenda’*.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- ¹ Vide, Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, particularly, *Letters on Yoga* [Vols. 23-24, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL), 1971, Pondicherry], and Sri Aurobindo's *The Synthesis of Yoga* (SABCL, Vols. 20-21, 1971, Pondicherry).
- ² Vide, Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL, 1971, Vol. 18, Chapters XIII, XIV and XV.
- ³ Ibid., p. 312.
- ⁴ Vide, Ibid., pp. 311-2.
- ⁵ Ibid., p.122.
- ⁶ Vide, *The Secret of the Veda*, SABCL, Vol. X10, 1971, p. 34. Sri Aurobindo's discovery of the supermind was, thus, prior to his knowledge of what the Veda had contained of that highest faculty of consciousness and power. He 'did not learn of it from the Veda, but based upon his discovery, he deciphered the Vedic knowledge of the supermind, which had been lost since millennia.
- ⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, 1971, p. 124.
- ⁸ Vide, Ibid., p. 125.
- ⁹ *Bhagavad Gita(BG)*, Chapter VII.4,5.
- ¹⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, 1971, pp. 146-8.
- ¹¹ Ibid., pp. 156-7.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 117.
- ¹³ Ibid., pp. 316-7.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 149.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p.320.
- ¹⁶ Vide, Ibid., Book II Part One, Chapters IV-XIV.
- ¹⁷ *Rig Veda (RV)*, III. 39.5.
- ¹⁸ *RV*, II. 24.4.
- ¹⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL, 1971, Vol. 18, pp. 318-9.
- ²⁰ Vide *RV*, V.62.1. In this verse, the word Sun symbolizes supramental

truth- consciousness where all the multiple rays of light and knowledge are united in a vast comprehensiveness. Reference to the truth hidden by the truth indicates the transition from the overmind to the supermind. The same idea of the Truth hidden by the truth and the same idea of the supermind in which all the multiple rays of light are held together in comprehensiveness is to be found in the following verses of the Isha Upanishad:

“The face of Truth is covered with a brilliant golden lid; that do thou remove, O Fosterer, for the law of the Truth, for Sight. O Fosterer, O sole Seer, of illumining Sun, O power of the Father of creatures, marshal thy rays, draw together thy light; the Luster which is thy most blessed form of all, that in Thee I behold. The Purusha, He am I.” (Verses 15.16)

Once again, it will be seen that these two verses speak of the face of Truth as covered with a brilliant golden lid, even as the face of the supramental consciousness is covered with the overmental consciousness, which can be compared to a brilliant golden lid. These verses also indicate the yogic effort of the Seer to cross the overmind so that he can realize the supramental law of the Truth-Consciousness. It can also be seen that it is in the illumining Sun that the scattered rays of light of lower levels of consciousness are drawn together in the supreme supramental light, since the supramental consciousness is totally comprehensive. Finally, it is in the supramental light that the Supreme, the Purusha, the One without the second, is beheld.

In the inner sense of the Veda, Surya or the Sun represents the supramental illumination which exceeds mind and forms the pure self-luminous Truth of things. The same sense of the Sun is carried also in the Upanishads. As in Veda, so in the Upanishads, the principal power of the Sun is self-revelatory knowledge and it is termed “Sight”. As in the Veda, so in the Upanishads, the realm of the Sun or supramental consciousness is described as the Truth, the Law, the Vast. He is the Fosterer or Increaser, for he enlarges and opens man’s dark and limited being into a luminous and infinite consciousness. He is described as the sole Seer, Seer of Oneness and Knower of the Self, who leads the seeker to the highest Sight. He is Yama, Controller or Ordainer; for he governs man’s action and manifested being by the direct Law of the Truth, *satya-dharma*, and therefore the right principle of our nature, a luminous power proceeding from the Father of all existence; he reveals himself as the divine Purusha of whom all beings are the manifestations. His

rays are the thoughts that proceed luminously from the Truth, the Vast, but become deflected and distorted, broken up and disordered in the ranges from the overmind to the mind. They form there the golden lid which covers the face of the Truth. The seer, the Rishi, who seeks the supermind prays to Surya to cast them into right order and relation and then draw them together into the unity of revealed truth. The result of this inner process is the perception of the oneness of all beings in the divine Soul.

²¹ RV, VII.60.5.

²² Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL, 1971, Vol. 18, pp. 489-90.

²³ *Isha Upanishad*, 9, 10, 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 6, 7, 8.

As in the Veda, so in the Upanishads, there is a clear distinction between *kavi*, the seer, and *manīṣī* the thinker. The word 'seer' indicates the divine supramental Knowledge which by direct vision and illumination sees the reality and the principles and forms of things in their true relations. On the other hand, the word Thinker refers to the laboring mentality, which works from the overmental and mental consciousness. The Supreme Reality, visioned supramentally, is at once the impersonal Brahman, bodiless and pure, and the Ishwara, the dynamic lord, who spreads out and becomes everywhere and orders objects comprehensively and perfectly according to their nature. The manifestation is seen, first, in a comprehensive consciousness of the Seer and then further manifested downward by lower functionings of consciousness; thus the entire world of manifestation is seen as a ladder from the highest to the lowest and spread out in the one self-existent Brahman.

The integrality of the supramental vision of the ultimate reality is reiterated in all the principal Upanishads. Shvetaswatara Upanishad describes the ultimate reality as "The One, without form and hue; and He, by Yoga of His own might, became manifold." Addressing that reality, the Upanishad says: "Thou art woman and Thou art man also; Thou art the boy, or else Thou art the young virgin, and Thou art yonder worn and aged man that walkest bending upon a staff. Lo, Thou becomest born and the universe groweth full of Thy faces." (IV. 1, 3)

The Mundaka Upanishad describes the integral ultimate reality as follows:

"He who is the Omniscient, the all-wise, He whose energy is all made

of knowledge, from Him is born this that is Brahman here, this Name and Form and Matter. ... This is That, the Truth of things: as from one high-kindled fire thousands of different sparks are born and all have the same form of fire, so, O fair son, from the immutable manifold becomings are born and even into that they depart. He, the divine, the formless Spirit, even He is the outward and the inward and he the Unborn; He is beyond life, beyond mind, luminous, Supreme beyond the immutable." (I. I. 9, II. I. 1, 2)

Speaking of the integral knowledge of the ultimate reality as we find it in the Upanishads, Sri Aurobindo states:

"The Upanishads affirm that all this is the Brahman; Mind is Brahman, Life is Brahman, Matter is Brahman; ... Brahman is the Consciousness that knows itself in all that exists; Brahman is the Force that sustains the power of God and Titan and Demon, the Force that acts in man and animal and the forms and energies of Nature; Brahman is the Ananda, the secret Bliss of existence which is the ether of our being and without which none could breathe or live. Brahman is the inner Soul in all; it has taken a form in correspondence with each created form which it inhabits. The Lord of Beings is that which is conscious in the conscious being, but he is also the Conscious in inconscient things, the One who is master and in control of the many that are passive in the hands of Force-Nature. He is the timeless and Time; he is Space and all that is in Space; he is Causality and the cause and the effect: He is the thinker and his thought, the warrior and his courage, the gambler and his dice-throw. All realities and all aspects and all semblances are the Brahman; Brahman is the Absolute, the transcendent and incommunicable, the Supracosmic Existence that sustains the cosmos, the Cosmic Self that upholds all beings, but It is too the self of each individual: the soul or psychic entity is an eternal portion of the Ishwara; it is his supreme Nature or Consciousness-Force that has become the living being in a world of living beings. The Brahman alone is, and because of It all are, for all are the Brahman; this Reality is the reality of everything that we see in Self and Nature. Brahman, the Ishwara, is all this by his Yoga-Maya, by the power of his Consciousness-Force put out in self-manifestation: he is the Conscious Being, Soul, Spirit, Purusha, and it is by his Nature, the force of his conscious self-existence that he is all things; he is the Ishwara, the omniscient and omnipotent All-ruler, and it is by his Shakti, his conscious Power, that he manifests himself in

Time and governs the universe. These and similar statements taken together are all-comprehensive: it is possible for the mind to cut and select, to build a closed system and explain away all that does not fit within it; but it is on the complete and many-sided statement that we must take our stand if we have to acquire an integral knowledge." (Sri Aurobindo, SABCL, Vol. 18, pp. 324-5)

The integrality of the Ultimate Reality that we find in the Veda and the Upanishads is reiterated in the philosophy and yoga of the Gita. The Ultimate Reality, according to the Gita, is One but complex and integral and this integrality is the highest object of knowledge and manifestation which we can attain by transcendence of the mental consciousness and by rising into various higher and highest levels of consciousness corresponding to the overmental and supramental consciousness. The principal ideas of the Gita which are woven into its complex harmony can be considered to be the enduring truths of spiritual experience, verifiable facts of our highest psychological possibilities, which no attempt to read deeply the mystery of existence can afford to neglect. As Sri Aurobindo points out, the wide, undulating, encircling movement of the exposition of the ideas of the Gita manifests a vast synthetic consciousness and a rich integral experience. It moves upwards from the lower nature, *Apara Prakriti*, to the higher peaks of supramental nature, which is called *Para Prakriti*. It recognizes the experiences of the Sankhyan Purusha as also the experience of Vedantic Brahman and Ishwara, — the experiences that one can attain when one crosses the level of the Mind; but it also rises much farther in the supramental consciousness of *Para Prakriti* in which all these experiences get integrally related and transcended. As a result, it maps out, but does not cut up or build walls or hedges to confine our vision. Describing the synthetic and integral view of reality and its integral monism, Sri Aurobindo states as follows:

"The thought of the Gita is not pure Monism although it sees in one unchanging, pure, eternal Self the foundation of all cosmic existence, nor Mayavada although it speaks of the Maya of the three modes of *Prakriti* omnipresent in the created world; nor is it qualified Monism although it places in the One his eternal supreme *Prakriti* manifested in the form of the Jiva and lays most stress on dwelling in God rather than dissolution as the supreme state of spiritual consciousness; nor is it Sankhya although it explains the created world by the double principle

of Purusha and Prakriti; nor is it Vaishnava Theism although it presents to us Krishna, who is the Avatar of Vishnu according to the Puranas, as the supreme Deity and allows no essential difference nor any actual superiority of the status of the indefinable relationless Brahman over that of this Lord of beings who is the Master of the universe and the Friend of all creatures. Like the earlier spiritual synthesis of the Upanishads this later synthesis at once spiritual and intellectual avoids naturally every such rigid determination as would injure its universal comprehensiveness. Its aim is precisely the opposite to that of the polemist commentators who found this Scripture established as one of the three highest Vedantic authorities and attempted to turn it into a weapon of offence and defence against other schools and systems. The Gita is not a weapon for dialectical warfare; it is a gate opening on the whole world of spiritual truth and experience and the view it gives us embraces all the provinces of that supreme region.” (Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, SABCL, Vol. 13, p. 6)

In the supramental view, the ultimate reality which the Gita presents to us is Purushottama, who is both static and dynamic and reconciles the inactive Brahman and the dynamic Ishwara. The Purushottama is described by the Gita as follows:

“There are two purushas as far as this world is concerned: kshara (mobile) and akshara (immobile). All these existences of the world are called kshara; and kutastha (immobile) is called akshara. The Highest Purusha is different from these two. He is called the Supreme Being, who though immutable, permeates the three worlds, and is the Lord and controls and sustains them.” (*Bhagavad Gita*, XV.16, 17, 18)

This Purushottama is both the unmanifest and the manifest, and all manifestation proceeds from the Divine Nature. The Divine Nature is described in the Gita as Para Prakriti. This Para Prakriti is distinguished from Apra Prakriti, the lower nature. The lower nature consists of matter, life and mind, and the higher nature transcends the limitations of the mind and it is through the higher nature that Purushottama manifests in the world and as the world but the world of our experience is normally limited to be the world of Matter, Life and Mind; but this is not the entirety of the world. There are higher planes of the world, and Para Prakriti is seen manifest as a supramental world. An important aspect that is explicitly stated in the Gita is that of the higher nature which has manifested as the individual soul (*jīva bhūtā*). Sri Krishna,

the teacher of the Gita, who is described as the Avatar of the Supreme, describes the idea of lower nature and the higher nature and their interconnection in the following words:

“Earth, water, fire, ether, mind, intellect and ego — this is the eight-fold Prakriti, which is My nature. That is My lower nature, O Mighty-armed Arjuna! Other than this, know My higher nature which has manifested as the individual souls, and it is that higher nature by which this entire world is sustained. ... O Arjuna, there exists nothing else that is higher than Me. All this is woven upon Me like rows of gems upon a string.” (Ibid., VII.4, 5, 7)

The reality of the individual soul and its relationship with the higher Nature is further elaborated in XV.7 where it is pointed out that it is the eternal portion of the Purushottama himself that has become the individual in this world of individual souls (*mama eva amśaḥ sanātanaḥ*).

Integral reality that is presented in the Gita is thus the transcendental, who abiding in himself inactively, manifests dynamically by his all-pervading and all-creative divine nature, and is thus universal who puts forth his eternal portion as individual souls through higher Prakriti. The integralism of the Gita thus places the complexity of the relationship between the transcendental, the universal and the individuality in its full complexity.

²⁵ Vide, *Taittiriya Upanishad*, Brahmanandavalli, chapters I-V.

²⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL, 1971, Vol. 18, pp.560-1.

²⁷ Tapas and Ignorance:

An important concept that is centrally related to the phenomenon of the Ignorance is that of Tapas. Again, this concept is to be found as far back as Veda. (Vide, for instance, the Rigvedic ‘*aghamarsāna mantra*’ RV X.190.)

Tapas means literally heat, but in due course of time, it came to mean every kind of energism, askesis, austerity of conscious-force acting upon itself or its object. As Sri Aurobindo points out, absolute consciousness is in its nature absolute power; the nature of Chit is Shakti: Force or Shakti concentrated and energized for cognition or for action is a realizing power effective or creative; it is the power of conscious-being dwelling upon itself and bringing out, as it were, by Tapas, the heat of its incubation, the seed and development of all that is within it or of all

its truths and potentialities. Chit-Shakti by the means of Tapas has created or rather manifested the universe. Tapas is the nature of action of consciousness, and in the indivisible Existence, the power of integral consciousness is the integral Tapas. It may, therefore, be said that it is by energy of Tapas that the dispensing of Force of being in the world-action is accomplished; but the force of Tapas can be of various degrees, and it is by the energy of Tapas that the drawing back of that force of being is accomplished. In the integrality of the Chit-Shakti, Tapas manifests as power of concentration, and this concentration can be varied and the supreme integrality holds all the states of powers of concentration of consciousness together as a single indivisible being looking at all itself in manifestation with a simultaneous self-vision. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

“The concentration may be essential; it may be even a sole indwelling or an entire absorption in the essence of its own being, a luminous or else a self-oblivious self-immersion. Or it may be an integral or else a total-multiple or a part-multiple concentration. Or it may be a single separative regard on one field of its being or movement, a single-pointed concentration in one centre or an absorption in one objective form of its self-existence. The first, the essential, is at one end the superconscient Silence and at the other end the Inconscience; the second, the integral, is the total consciousness of Sachchidananda, the supramental concentration; the third, the multiple, is the method of the totalizing or global overmental awareness; the fourth, the separative, is the characteristic nature of the Ignorance. The supreme integrality of the Absolute holds all these states or powers of its consciousness together as a single indivisible being looking at all itself in manifestation with simultaneous self-vision.” (Sri Aurobindo, SABCL, 1971, Vol. 18, pp.582-3)

The process by which the ignorance arises in the unfolding of the supramental consciousness can be traced to the action of Tapas, the power of concentration, which can be total, global, multiple and even exclusive. And in the action of the supramental consciousness, Tapas can act in all manners of concentration, including a concentration of separative or exclusive absorption on a limited field of formations. The basic premise of the explanation of the process of the appearance of Ignorance is that the Divine is an infinite being, and that Infinite Being has a possibility of assuming a poise of exclusive concentration of

consciousness when the Divine in the Oneness manifests the Divine in the Many. It is in the nature of Being to be able to grade and vary its powers of consciousness and determine according to the grade and variation its world or its degree and scope of self-revelation. Among many possibilities of manifestation, there is also the possibility of manifestation where the exclusive concentration of consciousness could operate effectively; and if that possibility is to operate, an effective lid or wall can be erected in such a manner that on the upper side of the lid, the supramental or total concentration of consciousness can continue to operate, while on the other side of the wall the separative and exclusive concentration of consciousness would come into operation. That wall or lid is not brought into being by any external agency, but it is produced effectively by the downward exclusive concentration of consciousness which concentrates more and more fully on multiplicity so that it ignores the underlying unity which is behind its operations; it is that act of ignoring that becomes more and more opaque, and the act of ignoring or ignorance becomes more and more thick.

Sri Aurobindo explains the process of the origin of Ignorance as follows:

“Where does that development take place, in what principle of being does it find its opportunity and starting-point? Not, certainly, in the infinite being, the infinite consciousness, the infinite delight which are the supreme planes of existence and from which all else derives or descends into this obscurer ambiguous manifestation. There it can have no place. Not in the Supermind; for in the Supermind the infinite light and power are always present even in the most finite workings, and the consciousness of unity embraces the consciousness of diversity. It is on the plane of mind that this putting back of the real self-consciousness becomes possible. For mind is that power of the conscious being which differentiates and runs along the lines of differentiation with the sense of diversity prominent and characteristic and the sense of unity behind it only, not characteristic, not the very stuff of its workings. If by any chance this supporting sense of unity could be drawn back, — it is possessed by mind not in its own separate right, but because it has the Supermind behind it, because it reflects the light of the Supermind of which it is a derivative and secondary power, — if a veil could fall between mind and Supermind shutting off the light of the Truth or letting it come through only in rays diffused, scattered, reflected but with distortion and division, then the phenomenon of the Ignorance would

intervene. Such a veil exists, says the Upanishad, constituted by the action of Mind itself: it is in Overmind a golden lid which hides the face of the supramental Truth but reflects its image; in Mind it becomes a more opaque and smoky-luminous coverture. That action is the absorbed looking downward of Mind on the diversity which is its characteristic movement and away from the supreme unity which that diversity expresses, until it forgets altogether to remember and support itself by the unity. Even then the unity supports it and makes its activities possible, but the absorbed Energy is unaware of its own origin and greater, real self. Since Mind forgets that from which it derived, because of absorption in the workings of formative Energy, it becomes so far identified with that Energy as to lose hold even on itself, to become totally oblivious in a trance of work which it still supports in its somnambulist action, but of which it is no longer aware. This is the last stage of the descent of consciousness, an abysmal sleep, a fathomless trance of consciousness which is the profound basis of the action of material Nature.” (Ibid., pp. 592-3)

The abysmal sleep of consciousness is what Sri Aurobindo calls the Inconscience, and it is itself a result of the involutionary ignorance, which has its origin in the last action of the Supermind where the consciousness of diversity is more predominant than the underlying consciousness of unity. That movement is involutionary because it is a movement that falls away from the consciousness of unity on account of the action of Tapas which acts in the operation by its power of exclusive concentration of consciousness on diversity. Again, it is involutionary because this exclusive concentration of consciousness does not and cannot abolish the operation of the unity of consciousness but can only hold it back. This holding back of the integrality of the consciousness of unity results in the process of involution; for involution implies implicit working of consciousness, and even though held back, it supports and manifests to the extent to which the frontal exclusive concentration of consciousness would allow its operation through the opaque wall which it has created by its downward and absorbed look on the diversity of which alone it takes cognizance. At the level of the mind (not the evolutionary mind, but mind, which is above as the last operation of the third status of the Supermind), the involutionary movement of the consciousness becomes gradually more and more ignorant of unity. This involutionary Ignorance, by virtue of its more and more acute action of exclusive concentration of consciousness,

results in the phenomenon of the Inconscience, the complete involution of consciousness, — a complete trance in which consciousness is totally lost.

But still the Inconscience is basically a phenomenon of consciousness and it has involved in it all the powers of consciousness. Hence, Sri Aurobindo describes the Inconscience as follows:

“The Inconscience is an inverse reproduction of the supreme superconscience: it has the same absoluteness of being and automatic action, but in a vast involved trance; it is being lost in itself, plunged in its own abyss of infinity. Instead of a luminous absorption in self-existence there is a tenebrous involution in it, the darkness veiled within darkness of the Rig Veda, *tama āsīt tamasā gūḍham*, which makes it look like Non-Existence; instead of a luminous inherent self-awareness there is a consciousness plunged into an abyss of self-oblivion, inherent in being but not awake in being. Yet is this involved consciousness still a concealed knowledge by identity; it carries in it the awareness of all the truths of existence hidden in its dark infinite and, when it acts and creates, — but it acts first as Energy and not as Consciousness, — everything is arranged with the precision and perfection of an intrinsic knowledge. In all material things reside a mute and involved Real-Idea, a substantial and self-effective intuition, an eyeless exact perception, an automatic intelligence working out its unexpressed and unthought conceptions, a blindly seeing sureness of sight, a dumb infallible sureness of suppressed feeling coated in insensibility, which effectuate all that has to be effected. All this state and action of the Inconscient corresponds very evidently with the same state and action of the pure Superconscience, but translated into terms of self-darkness in place of the original self-light. Intrinsic in the material form, these powers are not possessed by the form, but yet work in its mute subconsciousness.” (Ibid. p.550)

The journey of the evolution that we witness in the world begins from this cosmic abysmal sleep or consciousness, from the cosmic Inconscience; that inconscience, because it is involved consciousness, evolves in gradual developing forms which are capable of manifesting higher and higher degrees of consciousness. As Sri Aurobindo points out, evolution is a word which merely states the phenomenon without explaining it. For there seems to be no reason why Matter should evolve out of the Inconscience and why Life should evolve out of material

elements or Mind out of living form unless Matter is involved in the Inconscience and Life is already involved in matter and Mind in Life. And on the same basis, it would become intelligible why Supermind can evolve in Mind. In this process of evolution, we find that the material existence has only a physical, not a mental individuality. But as the evolution proceeds farther, the phenomenon of individuality becomes more and more visible, and it is in evolution of human consciousness that the body, life and mind within the limits of which the human consciousness seems to be operating in states of great imprisonment of confinement that individuality becomes more and more manifest in particular forms of body, life and mind. Human consciousness is a field of limited functionings of consciousness in which there is, as it grows, increasing pressure towards a real self-knowledge. In technical terms, it can be said that it is the human consciousness progressing towards or groping towards real self-knowledge that can be called evolutionary Ignorance, distinguishable from involutionary Ignorance, which was the parent of the Inconscience. In the working of the evolutionary Ignorance, therefore, there is behind it the entire past history of the involutionary Ignorance, of the Inconscience, of the gradual evolution of consciousness culminating in the imprisoned groping consciousness which tends to enlarge itself by increasing world-knowledge, and along with it increasing pressure towards deeper and deeper self-knowledge.

²⁸ *Katha Upanishad*, I.2.5, 6.

²⁹ Vide, *Mandukya Upanishad*, III.7.

³⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, 1971, Vol. 20, pp. 500-3.

³¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL, 1971, Vol. 18, p. 426.

³² *Mandukya Upanishad*, 5, 6.

³³ Vide, Sri Aurobindo, , *The Life Divine*, SABCL, 1971, Vol. 18, pp. 501-23.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 559.

³⁵ *Katha Upanishad*, II.1.12.

³⁶ Ibid., II.1.5.

³⁷ BG, XV.7.

³⁸ Ibid., VII.5.

³⁹ Vide., Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, 1971, Vol. 20, p. 419.

⁴⁰ Vide, Ibid., *The Life Divine*, Vol. 18, pp. 225-30.

⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 591-2.

⁴² Ibid., *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Vol. 20, p. 283.

⁴³ Ibid, *The Life Divine*, Vol. 18, p. 170.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 171-2.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Vol. 19, pp. 654-5.

⁴⁷ Integral knowledge as described by Sri Aurobindo as sevenfold knowledge, the full statement of which is given in *The Life Divine*, Vol. 19, pp. 726-41.

⁴⁸ In the light of the data of the knowledge gained in the supramental consciousness, it is affirmed that there is a fundamental truth of existence, an Omnipresent Reality, omnipresent above the cosmic manifestation and in it an immanent in each individual; it is further affirmed that there is also a dynamic power of this Omnipresence, a creative or self-manifesting action of its infinite Conscious-Force; finally, it is further affirmed that there is a phase of the movement of the self-manifestation, a phase of descent into an apparent material inconscience, followed by an awakening of the individual evolving out of the Inconscient, and a further evolution of his being into a spiritual and supramental consciousness and power, and into his own universal and transcendental Self and source of existence. It has, however, been argued that, even granting the immanence of the Divine, even granting our individual consciousness as a vehicle of progressive evolutionary manifestation, the individual cannot be accepted as eternal or that there can be any persistence of individuality after the individual has attained liberation from the bondage to ignorance by means of Self-knowledge and unity with the Supreme.

If the difficulty is presented in the context of spiritual experience, it can only be met by a wider resolving experience. The fact is that there is in the domain of spiritual experience a wide variety, and as Sri Aurobindo has explained, as long as spiritual experience takes place at the level of mental consciousness, whether in a state of silence of the mind as in the process of Jnana yoga, or in the mind which is greatly quieted by overwhelming love of the Divine, as in the Bhakti yoga, or as else in the mind which is turned into an unobstructed channel of the Divine

Will, as in the Karma yoga, the Infinite, who is the object with which the unity is experienced or effected, there will remain some kind of remoteness or penultimateness from the experience of the Infinite in its supramental all-comprehensiveness. There have, therefore, been in the history of yoga, claims and counter-claims regarding the nature of ultimate reality, and even claims and counter-claims in regard to the efficacy of the methods which are employed in different systems of yoga. At the same time, there have been also affirmations of supramental experiences as well in which the difficulties of affirmations and negations of spiritual experiences have been met and overcome. There is, for instance, the following statement of supramental experience, in the Isha Upanishad which, in its entire text dwells upon synthesis, integrality and all-comprehensiveness:

“But he who sees everywhere the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self, shrinks not thereafter from aught. He in whom it is the Self-Being that has become all existences that are Becomings, for he has the perfect knowledge, how shall he be deluded, whence shall he have grief who sees everywhere oneness?” (6, 7)

There are several other similar statements in Upanishads and Bhagavad-Gita in which the individual's liberation from bondage has been described, and there is this agreement that in the supramental vision of Reality, persistence of individuality and the eternity of individual stand affirmed.

However, in all the statements of supramental experiences, a distinction is made between the individual and ego, and it is pointed out that the ego is the individual only so long as the true individual is in a state of bondage of ignorance, and that the true individual effects the annihilation of the ego when it recovers its freedom and its true relationship with all other individuals which is not egoistic or self-separative, but of which the essential character is practical mutuality founded in essential unity. As Sri Aurobindo points out, once again, based upon his own supramental experience, this mutuality is founded in unity, and that is the whole secret of the divine existence in its perfect manifestation.

In fact, the entire basis of the integral yoga, which not only aims at the integral realization of the Infinite but also at the full manifestation of the supramental consciousness in Matter and at the total transformation of matter and material life to which the name of the divine life is given,

is to be found in the persistence of the individual even after liberation is attained by unity and self-knowledge.

For the normal Reason, difficulties arise in several ways. First of all, we have to use the word individual and speak of ego as individual and yet distinguish it from what we really mean by real individual. The ego is the sense of finite formation created by the movement of Energy or Prakriti, which, on account of exclusive concentration of consciousness in a limited fluctuating field, considers and has a sense of itself to be an independent observer, initiator and determiner of action within the field that it perceives, — a sense which has nothing corresponding to it in reality, since no finite formation in the movement of Prakriti is or can be independent. The real individual has another connotation as we shall see a little later. Secondly, egoistic consciousness and egoistic sense fluctuates between retaining its limitation and expanding the boundaries of that limitation; but even when it expands, it can never attain its ideal of universality. The ego does not correspond to what is experienced as the true eternal individual or individual soul or individual self. Pointing out that the true individual is nothing of the kind that obtains as individualized mental, vital, and physical being separate from all other beings and incapable of unity with them by its very ego-sense, Sri Aurobindo states that by the true individual is meant “a conscious power of being of the Eternal, always existing by unity, always capable of mutuality. It is that being which by self-knowledge enjoys liberation and immortality.” (*The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 373)

In order to clarify further the concept of true individual, Sri Aurobindo adds: “When we speak of the true individual as a conscious power of being of the Eternal, we are still using intellectual terms, — we cannot help it, unless we plunge into a language of pure symbols and mystic values of speech, — but, what is worse, we are, in the attempt to get away from the idea of the ego, using a too abstract language. Let us say, then, a conscious being who is for our valuations of existence a being of the Eternal in his power of individualizing self-experience; for it must be a concrete being, — and not an abstract power, — who enjoys immortality. And then we get to this that not only am I in the world and the world in me, but God is in me and I am in God; by which yet it is not meant that God depends for His existence on man, but that He manifests Himself in that which He manifests within Himself; the individual exists in the Transcendent, but all the Transcendent is there concealed in the

individual. Further I am one with God in my being and yet I can have relations with Him in my experience. I, the liberated individual, can enjoy the Divine in His transcendence, unified with Him, and enjoy at the same time the Divine in other individuals and in His cosmic being. Evidently we have arrived at certain primary relations of the Absolute and they can only be intelligible to the mind if we see that the Transcendent, the individual, the cosmic being are the eternal powers of consciousness, — we fall again, this time without remedy, into a wholly abstract language, — of an absolute existence, a unity yet more than a unity, which so expresses itself to its own consciousness in us, but which we cannot adequately speak of in human language and must not hope to describe either by negative or positive terms to our reason, but can only hope to indicate it to the utmost power of our language.” (Ibid., pp.373-4)

The normal mind has no experience of these things, although they are powerfully real to the individual who has attained to liberation by unity and self-knowledge. The normal mind may, therefore, well revolt against the above statement of the experience of liberated consciousness and regard it as a mass of intellectual contradictions. Sri Aurobindo has expounded with supreme clarity the argument of the normal reason as follows:

“I know very well what the Absolute is; it is that in which there are no relations. The Absolute and the relative are irreconcilable opposites; in the relative there is nowhere anything absolute, in the Absolute there can be nothing relative. Anything which contradicts these first data of my thought, is intellectually false and practically impossible. These other statements also contradict my law of contradictions which is that two opposing and conflicting affirmations cannot both be true. It is impossible that there should be oneness with God and yet a relation with Him such as this of the enjoyment of the Divine. In oneness there is no one to enjoy except the One and nothing to be enjoyed except the One. God, the individual and the cosmos must be three different actualities, otherwise there could be no relations between them. Either they are eternally different or they are different in present time, although they may have originally been one undifferentiated existence and may eventually re-become one undifferentiated existence. Unity was perhaps and will be perhaps, but it is not now and cannot be so long as cosmos and the individual endure. The cosmic being can only know and possess

the transcendent unity by ceasing to be cosmic; the individual can only know and possess the cosmic or the transcendent unity by ceasing from all individuality and individualisation. Or if unity is the one eternal fact, then cosmos and individual are non-existent; they are illusions imposed on itself by the Eternal. That may well involve a contradiction or an unreconciled paradox; but I am willing to admit a contradiction in the Eternal which I am not compelled to think out, rather than a contradiction here of my primary conceptions which I am compelled to think out logically and to practical ends. I am on this supposition able either to take the world as practically real and think and act in it or to reject it as an unreality and cease to think and act; I am not compelled to reconcile contradictions, not called on to be conscious of and conscious in something beyond myself and world and yet deal from that basis, as God does, with a world of contradictions. The attempt to be as God while I am still an individual or to be three things at a time seems to me to involve a logical confusion and practical impossibility." (Ibid, pp.374-5)

Sri Aurobindo has considered the above argument in detail (*vide The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, ch. 3, (Part I, Vol. II) pp. 375-87.) and pointed out that that argument of the normal reason commits a triple error, the error of making an unbridgeable gulf between the Absolute and the relative, the error of making too simple and rigid and extending too far the law of contradictions, and the error of conceiving in terms of Time the genesis of things which have their origin and first habitat in the eternal. In brief, Sri Aurobindo points out, our mistake lies in defining the absolute by an all-exclusive negation, even when the absolute is in reality a supreme positive and the cause of all positives. Hence, if a positive term is used in regard to the absolute, it should be met by a corresponding negative which brings in the rest of its absolute positivity by which its limitations to the positive statement is denied. The absolute, Sri Aurobindo contends, is not a blank or a zero; it is the infinite Spaceless and Timeless existent, and this existent can properly be described in its large primary relations such as the infinite and finite, the conditioned and the unconditioned; the qualified and the unqualified; in each pair the negative conceals the whole power of the corresponding positive which is contained in it and emerges from it: there is no real opposition. Similarly, Sri Aurobindo points out that in a less subtle order of truth, the transcendental and the cosmic, the universal and the individual, each member of these pairs is contained in its apparent

opposite. In reality, the universal particularizes itself in the individual; the individual contains in himself all the generalities of the universe; the universal consciousness finds all itself that the variations of the numberless individuals, not by suppressing variations; the individual consciousness fulfils all itself when it is universalized in sympathy and identity with the cosmic, not by limiting itself in ego; so too the cosmic contains in all itself and each thing in it the complete immanence of transcendence; it maintains itself as a world-being by the consciousness of its own transcendent reality, it finds itself in each individual being by the realization of the divine and transcendent in that being and in all existences. Finally, the transcendent contains, manifests, constitutes the cosmos and by manifesting it manifests or discovers its own infinite harmonic varieties. In actual experience, cosmos and individual go back to something in the Absolute which is the true truth of the individuality, the true truth of the cosmic being. There is no gulf between the infinite and finite, no gulf between the transcendental and universal, between the universal and the individual or vice versa. The absolute is the supreme existent so utterly and so infinitely positive that no finite positive can be formulated which can exhaust or bind it down to its definition.

As for the argument which supports itself on the law of contradiction, Sri Aurobindo points out that we can find no solution by an original unreconciled contradiction which is to explain all the rest; at the same time, the human reason is wrong in attaching a separate and definitive value to each contradiction to itself or getting rid of one by altogether denying the other. Sri Aurobindo, however, acknowledges that human reason is right in refusing to accept as final and as a last word the coupling of contradictions which have in no way been reconciled together or else found their source and significance in something beyond their opposition. If the absolute is at once the transcendental, universal and the individual, there is no mutual cancellation because the commonality and individuality are the true eternal powers of essentiality; that is why we see that there is everywhere an essentiality of things, a commonality of things, and individuality of things, and we find essentiality transcends both commonality and individuality, and yet the three together and not one by itself are the eternal terms of existence. Sri Aurobindo acknowledges that a diamond and a pearl, each belongs to its own class, and a diamond is a diamond and a pearl is a pearl. But each has properties and elements which are common to both and others, which are common to material things in general, and we get back to the very basis and

enduring truth of all material things only when we find that all are the same thing, one energy, one substance, and that if we can gain that knowledge and control of the elements and common properties of the class to which they belong, we may arrive at a power of either making a diamond or a pearl at our pleasure. To see superficially the transcendental, the universal and the individual in complete isolation of each other, we may perhaps succeed in discerning distinctiveness of each, but that distinctiveness does not abrogate the essential unity in which all three find their right relationship, where essentiality is the source and cosmic and individuality are true and eternal powers of essentiality. Thus, we find the source and significance of the universe and the individual in essentiality which is beyond their distinctiveness and opposition.

In regard to the argument that if the transcendental, cosmic and the individual are conceived as Unity, then unity was perhaps and will be perhaps, but it is not now and cannot be so long as cosmos and the individual endure, Sri Aurobindo points out that that argument is an attempt to effect a reconciliation or explanation of the original contradictions of existence by taking refuge in our concept of Time. In reply to that argument, Sri Aurobindo points out that Time, as we know or conceive it, is only our means of realizing things in succession, it is a condition and cause of conditions, it varies on different planes of existence, it varies even for beings on one and the same plane. In other words, Time is not Absolute and cannot explain the primary relations of the Absolute. These primary relations work themselves out in detail by Time and seem to our mental and vital being to be determined by it; but that seeming does not carry us back to their sources and principles. "We make the distinction of conditioned and unconditioned," Sri Aurobindo points out, "and we imagine that the unconditioned became conditioned, the Infinite became finite at some date in Time, and may cease to be finite at some other date in Time, because it so appears to us in details, particulars or with regard to this or that system of things. But if we look at existence as a whole, we see that infinite and finite co-exist and exist in and by each other. ... The first source and the primary relations lie beyond our mental divisions of Time, in the divine timelessness or else in the indivisible or eternal Time of which our division and successions are only figures in a mental experience. ... We see then that there are three terms of the one existence, transcendent, universal and individual, and that each of these always contains secretly

or overtly the two others. The Transcendent possesses itself always and controls the other two as the basis of its own temporal possibilities; that is the Divine, the eternal all-possessing God-consciousness, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, which informs, embraces, governs all existences." (Ibid., pp.384-6)

⁴⁹Ibid., Vol. 18, pp. 386-7.

⁵⁰One of the most important elements of knowledge relating to the objects and methods of yoga, particularly in connection with bondage and liberation of the soul and attainment of perfection, is connected with the distinction between Purusha and Prakriti. In the synthesis of yoga that we find in the Gita, this distinction is of pivotal importance, and although its roots are to be found in the Veda and the Upanishads, the clarity and complexity of this distinction that we find in the Gita is perhaps unparalleled. In the Veda, we have in the legend of Shunahshepa, a revelatory parable in terms of which the distinction between Purusha and Prakriti can be clearly derived. Shunahshepa is described as a victim to the sacrificial post, who was bound by three ropes or cords; the bondage of Shunahshepa is symbolic of the bondage of the human soul or individual Purusha; the three ropes represent, respectively, limited mind, inefficient life, and obscure physical mentality; these three ropes may also be regarded as the ropes of Prakriti with its threefold qualities of sattwa, rajas and tamas. It is significant that the method by which Shunahshepa attains his liberation from the bondage of three ropes consists of his concentration and prayer to Varuna, a cosmic power and being of the Supramental consciousness, who is described as one "who puts on his golden robe of light and whose scouts are all around" (RV, I.25.12, 13). In the Vedic yoga, the method of liberation and perfection was largely the method of seeking help of the gods who represented the supramental consciousness and power. In other words, the Vedic yoga sought to remedy the problems connected with ignorance and bondage and their consequences in the light of the supramental knowledge which the Vedic Rishis had acquired.

In due course, it appears that another method also was employed; and in the Kena Upanishad, it is clearly mentioned that there are two methods. It is mentioned in that Upanishad (II.1): "If thou thinkest that thou knowest it (Brahman) well, little indeed dost thou know the form of the Brahman. That of It which is thou, that of It which is in the gods, this thou hast to think out. I think It known." Elaborating upon these two

methods, we find in verses four and five the following:

“Now this is the indication of That, — as is this flash of the lightning upon us or as is this falling of the eyelid, so in that which is of the gods. Then in that which is of the Self, — as the motion of this mind seems to attain to That and by it afterwards the will in the thought continually remembers It.” (Kena, IV.)

In other words, the Upanishadic yoga continues to employ the Vedic method of concentration on the cosmic powers of the supramental consciousness (or of the consciousness of the gods), but the other method is also added, viz., that of concentration on the self of the living and thinking creature, the human being. In fact, these two methods do not appear to be alternative methods, but both these methods are utilized in an integrated manner.

Sri Aurobindo, while explaining the first method, states as follows:

“The cosmic functionings through which the gods act, mind, life, speech, senses, body, must become aware of something beyond them which governs them, by which they are and move, by whose force they evolve, enlarge themselves and arrive at power and joy and capacity; to that they must turn from their ordinary operations; ... What happens then is that this divine Unnameable reflects Himself openly in the gods. His light takes possession of the thinking mind, His power and joy of the life, His light and rapture of the emotional mind and the senses. Something of the supreme image of Brahman falls upon the world-nature and changes it into divine nature.” (Ibid., Vol. 12, p. 221.)

Explaining further the landmarks of this process of realization, Sri Aurobindo states:

“All this is not done by a sudden miracle. It comes by flashes, revelations, sudden touches and glimpses; there is as if a leap of the lightning of revelation flaming out from those heavens for a moment and then returning into its secret source; as if the lifting of the eyelid of an inner vision and its falling again because the eye cannot look long and steadily on the utter light.” (Ibid., Vol. 12, p. 221)

As Sri Aurobindo explains further, it is by repetition of these touches and visitings from the Beyond that one realizes in the cosmos itself and in all its multiplicity the truth of the One besides whom there is no other or second.

While explaining the other method, namely, the method of discovering the Supreme through concentration on the Self of the human being, Sri Aurobindo states as follows:

“This the self of man, since it is the essentiality of a mental being, will do through the mind. In the gods the transfiguration is effected by the Superconscient itself visiting their substance and opening their vision with its flashes until it has transformed them; but the mind is capable of another action which is only apparently movement of mind, but really the movement of the self towards its own reality. The mind seems to go to That, to attain to it; it is lifted out of itself into something beyond and although it falls back, still by the mind the will of knowledge in the mental thought continually and at last continuously remembers that into which it has entered. On this the Self through the mind seizes and repeatedly dwells and so doing it is finally caught up into it and at last able to dwell securely in that transcendence. It transcends the mind, it transcends its own mental individualisation of the being, that which it now knows as itself; it ascends and takes foundation in the Self of all and in the status of self-joyous infinity which is the supreme manifestation of the Self. This is the transcendent immortality, this is the spiritual existence which the Upanishads declare to be the goal of man and by which we pass out of the mortal state into the heaven of the Spirit.” (Ibid, p. 224)

When we come to the Gita, it will be found that there is the acceptance and incorporation of the distinction that is to be found in the parable of the two birds, both clinging to the same tree, one eating the fruit of the tree and the other watching but indifferent. This parable is to be found in the Rig Veda itself, (I.164.20), and it is repeated in the Mundaka Upanishad, (III.1.1, 2, 3) and also in Shwetashwatara Upanishad (IV.5, 6, 7, 10). Since this parable forms the basis of the Gita's insistence and development of the distinction between Purusha and Prakriti, it would be extremely useful to study the relevant verses in their original formulation. These verses are as follows, which are taken from the Mundaka Upanishad:

“Two birds, beautiful of wing, close companions, cling to one common tree: of the two one eats the sweet fruit of the tree, the other eats not but watches his fellow.

“The soul is the bird that sits immersed on the one common tree; but

because he is not lord he is bewildered and has sorrow. But when he sees that other who is the Lord and beloved, he knows that all is His greatness and his sorrow passes away from him.

“When, a seer, he sees the Golden-hued, the maker, the Lord, the Spirit who is the source of Brahman, then he becomes the knower and shakes from his wings sin and virtue; pure of all stain he reaches the supreme identity.” (III. I. 1, 2, 3)

In the history of Indian yoga, there was an interval between the period when the principal Upanishads developed and the period to which the episode of the Gita took place. During that interval, one of the principal schools of philosophy which developed was a system of the Sankhyan philosophy. The Sankhyan philosophy seems evidently to have been derived from the Vedic and Upanishadic concepts of Purusha, Aditi, Mahat and several psychological principles such as those of buddhi, manas, and others. But while the Vedic and Upanishadic concept of Purusha is integral in the sense that it included or cohered with the concepts of Brahman and Ishwara, the Sankhyan concept of Purusha is trenchant and even exclusive. Similarly, while the concept of the Vedic and Upanishadic Aditi is integral in the sense that it included and cohered very well with the concepts of Shakti, Prakriti and Maya, the concept of Sankhyan Prakriti is equally trenchant and exclusive. Again, while the Vedic and Upanishadic concepts of the ultimaterality were synthetic and pointed to underlying oneness of the principles of Being and Becoming, the Sankhyan position is dualistic and it explains existence not by one, but by two original principles whose inter-relation is the cause of the universe, — Purusha, the inactive, Prakriti, the active. Whereas the Vedic and Upanishadic concept of Purusha had three dimensions, transcendental, universal, and individual, the Sankhyan Purusha was purely individual, and whereas the Vedic and Upanishadic concept of Purusha was both inactive and active and even beyond, the Sankhyan Purusha who was conceived as a pure conscious Being is immobile, immutable and self-luminous. Prakriti in the Sankhya is not conscious, whereas Aditi, Maya, Prakriti, Shakti are in the Veda and the Upanishads conscious. In the Sankhya, while Prakriti is the Unconscious Energy and its processes, Purusha, the Conscious one, does nothing, but it reflects the action of Energy and its processes; Prakriti is mechanical, but by being reflected in Purusha, it assumes an appearance of consciousness in its activities, and thus there are created

those phenomena of creation, conservation, dissolution, birth and life and death, consciousness and unconsciousness, action and inaction, happiness and suffering. These phenomena are attributed by Purusha, under the influence of Prakriti, to itself although they belong not at all to itself but to the action or movement of Prakriti alone.

Prakriti, according to the Sankhya, is constituted of three Gunas or essential modes of energy. These three gunas are, Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas. Sattwa is the seed of intelligence, and it conserves the workings of energy; Rajas is the seed of force and action; and it creates the workings of energy; Tamas is the seed of inertia and non-intelligence, it is the denial of Sattwa and Rajas and dissolves what they create and conserve. When these three powers of the energy of Prakriti are in a state of equilibrium, all is in rest, there is no movement, action or creation and there is, therefore, nothing to be reflected in the immutable luminous being of the conscious Purusha. But when the equilibrium is disturbed, then the three gunas fall into a state of inequality in which they strike with and act upon each other and the whole inextricable business of ceaseless creation, conservation and dissolution begins, unrolling the phenomena of the cosmos. This continues so long as the Purusha consents to reflect the disturbance which obscures his eternal nature and attributes to himself the nature of Prakriti; but when the Purusha withdraws his consent, the gunas fall into equilibrium and the Purusha returns to his eternal, unchanging immobility; Purusha attains to his liberation from phenomena. This reflection and his giving or withdrawal of consent seems to be the only Powers of Purusha; these powers are attributed to the Purusha by the Sankhya rather inconsistently, because the Sankhyan Purusha is in its nature entirely immobile. The Purusha is, however, conceived in the Sankhya as a witness of Prakriti or Nature by virtue of reflection and the giver of the sanction, *sākṣī* and *anumantā*. According to the Sankhya, Purusha and Prakriti co-exist, and they are the dual cause of the universe, a passive Consciousness and an active Energy.

Indeed, there are certainly plenty of things in the world, which the Sankhya does not explain at all or does not explain satisfactorily; but it has been said that the Sankhyan metaphysical position presents an adequate framework for the phenomena of the bondage of Purusha to Prakriti and of the liberation of the Purusha from Prakriti. The Purusha in the Sankhya is individual, and there is not one Purusha but many

individual Purushas, considering the fact that liberation of Purusha from Prakriti is an individual phenomenon, and this would not happen if there were ultimately only one Purusha. The Sankhya is obliged to concede plurality of Purushas because it is noticed that only a few beings among innumerable millions attain to liberation or move towards it; the rest are in no way affected, nor is cosmic Nature in a play with them inconvenienced when an individual realizes his liberation from Prakriti.

The entire background of the Vedic and Upanishadic experience as also the Sankhyan account of the liberation of the individual Purusha from Prakriti, need to be clearly grasped, if we are to understand the richness of the yogic experience that is described in the Gita. The Gita restates the Vedic and Upanishadic concepts of the ultimate integral reality and while it admits the Sankhyan position in several respects, it modifies it in several important aspects. The gospel of Karma yoga, as laid down in the Gita, would be inadmissible within the limited premises of the Sankhyan metaphysics and the Sankhyan account of the bondage and liberation. If Purusha is in its very nature immobile, the only way by which that immobility would be logically realized would be by way of renunciation of all mobility and action. If all mobility and action belongs to Prakriti or energy, which is fundamentally unconscious, no mobility of action can be consistent with the status of consciousness or knowledge. Similarly, the capital importance that is laid down in the Gita for the path of Bhakti or Divine Love can have no place, if each individual Purusha is independent of all the other Purushas or any Supreme Purusha to whom divine love can be offered and continued to be offered in the state of liberation. The Gita, on the other hand, admits the reality of the individual but it declares its utter dependence on the supreme Purusha and its inalienable unity with all the Purushas or individuals. The Gita's integral yogic experience is therefore articulated in a larger framework.

The first important new element that we find in the Gita is in the conception of Purusha itself. According to the Sankhya, Prakriti conducts her activities for the pleasure of Purusha; but this is basically inconsistent with the Sankhyan position that Prakriti is unconscious and therefore even if it is active, it cannot be for any teleological reason; again, Purusha is entirely immobile and at the most a silent witness; it cannot therefore have any will, and that, too, any will towards pleasure; Prakriti could not therefore be expected to perform her activities for the pleasure of Purusha. The Gita, however, admits the contention that Prakriti does

carry out the will of the Purusha, and therefore it can genuinely be said that the activities of Prakriti depend entirely on the will of the Purusha and for the fulfilment or pleasure of the Purusha. But then the Gita's view of Purusha and Prakriti is quite different from that found in the Sankhya. The Gita admits that wherever there is the movement of Prakriti, there is always behind it the will of the Purusha; in the highest yogic experience which is described in the Gita, this relationship between Prakriti and Purusha is affirmed, but not only between the Prakriti and the individual Purusha, but more fundamentally between, — and here the new elements of the Gita are clearly indicated, — Purushottama and Para Prakriti, which are not two independent principles but which constitute a complex unity of oneness. This implies a radical departure from the Sankhyan metaphysical position and its yogic experience. In the Sankhyan analysis, Purusha and Prakriti in their dualism are the cause of the cosmos; but in the integral philosophy and yoga of the Gita, Purusha or rather Purushottama by His Para Prakriti is the cause of the cosmos.

The Gita affirms the one self immutable, immobile, and eternally free. But these epithets, — immutability, immobility and eternal freedom — are not directly applicable to the individual Purusha but to that status of Purusha which is higher than all that is mutable and mobile and higher than any individual mobility, whether in its eternal freedom or in its temporary bondage. That immutable immobile and eternally free status of Purusha is also referred to in the Gita (which follows the Upanishads), as the Brahman, the reality in its essence which is capable of extension or manifestation and by which all the cosmic manifestation is extended. As in the Upanishad, so in the Gita, the immutable, immobile and eternally free Purusha or Brahman (akśara), is further shown to be a status beyond which there is still a higher status which is realizable and realized, akṣarāt parataḥ paraḥ (Mundaka Up. II.1.2). In other words, the Gita affirms the highest status of Purusha, which is higher than the immobile, which is itself higher than the mobile. That status is named Purushottama. It is the Purushottama, who even while retaining eternal immobility, has the capacity of willing and thus originating the manifestation of his conscious force of which all the cosmic manifestations are various activities. That conscious force is given by the Gita a new name, Para Prakriti, since it is higher and distinguishable from the Prakriti which has been described in the Sankhya. The Gita, while describing and accepting the Sankhyan Prakriti, describes it as

aṣṭadhā Prakriti or Aparā Prakriti (lower nature), since the Sankhyā principle of Prakriti has eight elements, earth, water, fire, air, ether, intellect, mind and ego-sense (VII.4), and because that Prakriti is unconscious and riddled with conflicts of its three guṇas and is thus quite lower than the original Prakriti which is the direct manifestation of the divine consciousness. The ultimate reality is, according to the Gita, the Puruṣa, that is *uttama*, the highest, and can be designated as Puruṣottama because he is the originator by his will of the energy and movement and can live and dwell in that field of energy where that energy works out His Will. Puruṣottama can also be described as parabrahman, because its essence is inextinguishable and because even when that essence is extended in mobility, its immobility remains unalterable; or that *uttama puruṣa* can be described as Parameshwara, because he is forever the lord over all that moves in the cosmos and lord also of the unalterable immobility that still supports equally and impartially and impersonally all that moves in the universe. That ultimate reality has been regarded in the Gita as the one source, without the second, of the plurality of individuals, each of which is a portion of that Supreme Being and which is put forth in manifestation as constituted by the supreme power of the supreme reality, Para Prakriti of Puruṣottama. As the Gita points out in VII.5, Para Prakriti is *Jīvabhūtā*, higher nature of which the individual jīvas are individual becomings. In this light, each jīva can be described as individual Puruṣa, but, unlike Sankhyā Puruṣa, he is an eternal portion of the Puruṣottama (XV.7).

The distinction between Puruṣa and Prakriti is of immense importance for understanding varieties of spiritual experiences which take place in the individual when he rises from Ignorance and enters into the realms of Knowledge. Our normal experience of Puruṣa is that of the Puruṣa-consciousness in the individual soul. According to the Gita, each of us is the individual, and its origin is in the Puruṣottama and Para Prakriti. At that point of origin, the individual soul or *jīvātman* is that of the individual Puruṣa fully aware of his being an eternal portion of the Puruṣottama but manifested through the supramental power of manifestation of the Puruṣottama. The Puruṣa Consciousness, in the individual, experiences in his intimate play with Para Prakriti constant unity, even while there is varying play of diversity. In our lower experience of human consciousness, the individual soul is found in the complex formation of body, life and mind. The body, life and mind are formations of material energy of Prakriti, vital energy of Prakriti and

mental energy of Prakriti; corresponding to these three levels of Prakriti, there are three poises of the Purusha consciousness of the individual. The nature of the Purusha consciousness is that of the originator, witness, support and Lord, enjoyer of the forms and works of Prakriti, but at different levels of the working of Prakriti, Purusha has the consciousness of the giver of the consent to the movement of Prakriti and also of assuming the forms of Prakriti. If the individual has accepted to plunge into ignorance, the Purusha in the individual consents to the play of the ignorance and assumes the forms of ignorance, — physical, vital, mental, — which are presented to it by the Ignorant Prakriti. Hence, the individual in the Ignorance has three poises of the Purusha corresponding to three currents of the formations of Prakriti. In the physical formation of Prakriti, the individual takes the poise of the physical Purusha (*annamaya puruṣa*), in the vital formation of Prakriti, the individual takes the poise of the vital Purusha (*prāṇamaya puruṣa*), and in the mental formation of Prakriti in the human complex, the individual takes the poise of the mental Purusha (*manomaya puruṣa*). But these assumptions of the Purusha corresponding to gradual formations of forms of Prakriti have behind them the consent of the Purusha, and the capital point of importance is that the Purusha has the freedom to withdraw the consent as and when Purusha finds it useful or necessary to withdraw the consent. It can be said that the entire possibility of the yogic endeavour rests upon the freedom of the Purusha to withdraw its consent to remain subjected to lower forms of Apara Prakriti or lower nature of ignorance. If Purusha decides to withdraw its consent, Prakriti, too, manifests activities by which the withdrawal of the Purusha from its subjection to Prakriti is facilitated; if the Purusha decides to rise on the higher rungs of Apara Prakriti and of higher Prakriti or Para Prakriti, then the Prakriti also facilitates the higher ascent of Purusha to higher rungs of Para Prakriti; and even the Para Prakriti, too, offers increasing aid to the Purusha to climb upwards. That is the reason why the Taittiriya Upanishad speaks of higher poises of Purusha of the individual, namely, the poise of *viśvānamaya* Purusha (corresponding to supramental formations of Para Prakriti) and *anandamaya* Purusha (corresponding to the highest bliss forms of Para Prakriti).

In the Bhagavad Gita, the entire fund of spiritual knowledge of the Veda and Upanishad is present. The Bhagavad Gita admits the overwhelming power of the Prakriti and its determinations of ignorance over the Purusha which has consented to the subjection of Prakriti; it

even pronounces an extreme statement in regard to the power of the hold of Prakriti, "All things follow the determinations of Prakriti, of what avail is the movement of self-control?" (III.33). It, nonetheless, lays down its basic principle of yoga in the statement, "It is by the self that the self should be up-raised over the self." (VI.5) According to the Gita, the overwhelming subjection to Prakriti is a result of Purusha's consent to be subjected to Prakriti, but gradually, it can withdraw that consent and rise upward, even liberate himself from subjection to Prakriti.

While explaining the relationship between Purusha and Prakriti, Sri Aurobindo points out:

"Nature acts for the Purusha and by its sanction, for its will and pleasure; the Conscious Being imparts its consciousness to the Energy we call Nature, receives in that consciousness her workings as in a mirror, accepts the forms which she, the executive cosmic Force, creates and imposes on it, gives or withdraws its sanction from her movements. The experience of Purusha-Prakriti, the Spirit or Conscious Being in its relations to Nature, is of immense pragmatic importance; for on these relations the whole play of the consciousness depends in the embodied being. If the Purusha in us is passive and allows Nature to act, accepting all she imposes on him, giving a constant automatic sanction, then the soul in mind, life, body, the mental, vital, physical being in us, becomes subject to our nature, ruled by its formation, driven by its activities; that is the normal state of our ignorance. If the Purusha in us becomes aware of itself as the Witness and stands back from Nature, that is the first step to the soul's freedom; for it becomes detached, and it is possible then to know Nature and her processes and in all independence, since we are no longer involved in her works, to accept or not to accept, to make the sanction no longer automatic but free and effective; we can choose what she shall do or not do in us, or we can stand back altogether from her works and withdraw easily into the Self's spiritual silence, or we can reject her present formations and rise to a spiritual level of existence and from there re-create our existence. The Purusha can cease to be subject, *anīśa*, and become lord of its nature, *īśvara*." (SABCL, 1971, Vol. 18, pp. 348-9.)

⁵¹ RV. I.72.9.

⁵² Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, SABCL, 1971, Vol. 10, pp. 191-2.

⁵³ *Mother's Agenda*, Institut de Recherches Evolutives (I.R.E.), Paris, 1981, Vol. 2, pp. 375-7.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 382-3.

⁵⁵ Vide, *Mundaka Upanishad*, I.2.6,10,11,12.

⁵⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *The Upanishads*, SABCL, Pondicherry, 1971, Vol.12, pp. 231-2.

⁵⁷ It would be useful to state that there have been in the history of thought and spiritual experience, several major descriptions of the supramental vision of the ultimate reality, and in regard to these descriptions, the same perplexity, bewilderment and some kind of unintelligibility can be found. From among many statements regarding the ultimate reality, we may take the following from the Rig Veda, which in the very statement, acknowledges its unintelligibility as far as the intellectual mentality is concerned. In I.170.1, in the colloquy of Indra and Agastya, Indra describes the supramental supreme reality, one without the second, the absolute eternal, as follows:

"It is not now, nor is It tomorrow; who knoweth That which is Supreme and Wonderful? It has motion and action in the consciousness of another, but when It is approached by the thought, It vanishes."

Or let us take the following from the Isha Upanishad, which is also the last part of the Yajur Veda:

"One unmoving that is swifter than Mind, That the Gods reach not, for It progresses ever in front. That, standing, passes beyond others as they run. In That the Master of Life establishes the Waters. That moves and That moves not; That is far and the same is near; That is within all this and That also is outside all this." (4, 5)

Or let us take the following from the Mundaka Upanishad:

"That the invisible, That the unseizable, without connections, without hue, without eye or ear, that which is without hands or feet, eternal, pervading, which is in all things and impalpable, that which is Imperishable, that which is the womb of creatures, sages behold everywhere. As the spider puts out and gathers in, as herbs spring up upon the earth, as hair of head and body grow from a living man, so here all is born from the Immutable..."

He, the divine, the formless Spirit, even He is the outward and the inward and he the Unborn; He is beyond life, beyond mind, luminous, Supreme

beyond the immutable." (I.1.6, 7; II.1.2)

The description of the supreme knowledge, which contains the supreme secret as declared in the Bhagavad Gita, is as follows:

"This entire world is pervaded by Me (the Supreme Reality) in My unmanifest form. All beings abide in Me, but I do not abide in them. And yet these beings do not exist in Me; behold My divine mystery. Although My spirit is a source of all beings and sustainer of the beings, yet I do not abide in them. As the mighty wind moving everywhere abides always in the sky, in the same way you have to realize that all created beings abide in Me." (IX. 4, 5, 6.)

Or, we may take the following statement from the Bhagavad Gita where the supreme reality is described as follows:

"There are two Purushas in this world: kshara, the perishable, and akshara, the imperishable. All these existences of the world are called kshara, and kuṭastha (the unperturbed) is called Akshara. The Highest Purusha is different from these two (Kshara and Akshara). He is called the Supreme Self, who though immutable, permeates the three worlds, controls and sustains them." (XV.16, 17.)

These descriptions of the supreme reality show us that that Reality is supra-intellectual, that it is mysterious and wonderful, and although One and Simple, it is complex. It is true that these descriptions contain apparent self-contradictions, and we find them difficult to grasp intellectually. But the difficulty, when examined more closely, may ultimately be found to be verbal and conceptual rather than real. (For the solution of this difficulty, see Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL, 1971, Vol. 18, pp. 322-87).

⁵⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, SABCL, 1971, Vol.13, p. 275.

⁵⁹ Vide, *BG.*, VII.4.

⁶⁰ Ibid., VII.5 and XV.7.

⁶¹ Vide, Ibid., chapters. XIV to XVIII.

⁶² Ibid., XIV.19.

⁶³ Ibid., XIV.2.

⁶⁴ Ibid., XVIII.66.

⁶⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, 1971, Vol.20, p. 87.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., *Essays on the Gita*, Vol. 13, p.452.

⁶⁸ Vide, Ibid., *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Vol.21, pp. 647-63.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 662-3.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 669-70.

⁷¹ Ibid., Vol. 20, p.44.

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