

DIVINE LIFE : SRI AUROBINDO'S EXPERIENCE*

Divine Life means different things to different people. A highly moral or idealistic life is divine life according to some; for others it is the religious life in which man's consciousness is turned towards God, as a consequence of which one has a certain calm and quietude of mind and life, an inwardness centred in the Deity. It is true the divine life is primarily the inner life, the life of the spirit in which man's spiritual soul and the supreme Spirit are united in some way. This union must have some influence and impact on the outer nature of man though it does not spiritualise it. Nevertheless one who has realized God lives in God in whatever way he may exist in other people's estimation. The divine life may also be understood as existence in some other world where the limitations and imperfections of this earthly life do not oppress the soul of man, where ignorance and error, evil and suffering have no place. In Indian terms, this may be life in *Goloka Vrindavana, Shiva-or Vishnu-or Brahmalo*ka.

Sri Aurobindo's concept of the divine life is much more comprehensive and integral than any position briefly described above. It is not merely the spiritual life lived in the inner recesses of the spiritual soul, nor in any subtle unearthy world. It is certainly not merely moral or religious life. But it is life lived in perfect and integral Knowledge of the supreme Reality both beyond and in this world and the expression of its infallible Will in all activities of mind, life and body. The divine superman will live only for the Divine, but a Divine not aloof from the world but in man and the society and humanity and cosmic Nature. His whole nature will be cast in the mould of the divine Nature. It will be a life of freedom expressed in spontaneous

* Sri Aurobindo is not very widely known in the Western world as a poet, a patriot and revolutionary leader, a mystic philosopher and a writer of rare genius. And only a few among those who have known him have read his works. In this essay many passages, some of them quite long, have been quoted from his works to make its readers familiar with the style of his composition and the substance of his thought. All the references, unless otherwise stated are to *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library* (SABCL). (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972). The first figure in the references indicates the number of the volume and the second the page.

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order of self-existent delight enjoyed in everything that is known as self-manifestation of the Divine. The secular aims of economic justice and political stability, of the enrichment of the mind and enhancement of life and health and vigour of the body will be realized not for their own sake but as elements of a perfected instrumentation of the supramentalised psychic being. Sri Aurobindo had said that we have to make Matter also aware of the Divine. This means a radical transformation of the very substance of the body into spirit-substance and of its suppressed consciousness, which is now inconscient as overtly manifested as luminous awareness of itself as a formation of the Conscious-Force of the Divine. Of course mind and life are also transformed into perfect manifestations of the Supermind and Conscious-Force : Mind will reflect all knowledge, and life will enjoy the delight of existence in everything. This points to integral immortality - immortality not only of the soul but also of mind, life and body. Physical immortality does not mean that the superman will be *obliged* to live in the same body—for that will not be freedom but a fresh bondage—but that the body also will have self-knowledge as the material formation—symbol of God; and self-knowledge is the foundation of immortality. The body will transcend the Laws of Nature—decay, disintegration and death—and become a plastic instrument of the physical-spiritual manifestation of the Spirit. The divine life will be perfect expression of the Truth-Consciousness of the integral knowledge of God achieving his purpose by its own infallible will through the self-existent Love and Bliss which will determine the network of relations, the life of the supramental spiritual beings whose soul, mind and the life and body will be free from Ignorance and act out of a creative dynamic sense of the unity of all that is.

The Movement of Knowledge

Sri Aurobindo saw the movement of knowledge in the following way. At the beginning the self-conscious, awakened human mind, was intuitive and symbolic. It did not use the analytic reason to know the Truth or even the truths of things of this world but knew them directly by means of vision and intuitive apprehension. And it employed ordinary words indicative of physical objects and phenomena for psychological states, movements and experiences. Sri Aurobindo made a fairly detailed exposition of this theory with reference to the Vedas and the Upanishads though in the latter class of literature, the language is less antique and the mentality is at an initial stage of transition from the intuitive to the rational. The Upanishads are not intellectual philosophy in the usual sense of the word but records of many-sided and rich spiritual experiences.

He remarked that scores of philosophies could be constructed out of these writings. This stage, however, was followed by the period of rational philosophy. There was still the explicit acceptance of the authority of the Vedas, for they were regarded as authoritative in respect of truths not belonging to the sensory and mental worlds. But free reign was given to the philosophic reason and the art of logical argument was developed to perfection. Sri Aurobindo says :

Indian philosophy was intuitive in its beginnings, stimulative rather to the deeper vision of things, – nothing more exalted and profound, more revelatory of the depths and the heights, more powerful to open unending vistas has ever been conceived than the divine and inspired word, the *mantra* of the Veda and Vedanta (the Upanishads).¹ When that philosophy became intellectual, precise, founded on the human reason, it also became rigidly logical, enamoured of fixity and system, desirous of a sort of geometry of thought.²

In respect of the Western world, Sri Aurobindo finds the same movement in ancient Greece. The Mystics, the Mysteries came first and were followed by ratiocinative, intellectual philosophy. He says,

To ignore the influence of the mystic thought and its methods of self-expression on the intellectual thinking of the Greeks from pythagoras to Plato is to falsify the historical procession of the human mind. It was enveloped at first in the symbolic, intuitive, esoteric style and discipline of the mystics. . . .³

It may be pointed out incidentally that Sri Aurobindo admired Greek thought very much. "The philosophy and thought of the Greeks is perhaps the most intellectually stimulating, the most fruitful clarities the world has yet had."⁴ He also said that the ancient Greek mind "had a flexibly inquiring logic", "and by this power in it," says he, "it determined the whole character and field of subsequent European thinking".⁵

It may be thought that Sri Aurobindo, being a yogi and a mystic, would deplore this movement of the human mind from the intuitive to the

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1. The word Upanishads within brackets is the present writer's addition to explain the word Vedanta.
 2. *SABCL* 16. 335
 3. *SABCL* 16. 339
 4. *SABCL* 16. 335
 5. *Ibid.*

intellectual. On the contrary, he actually welcomes it. Though he is very positive in thinking that the intellectual reason cannot attain knowledge of the essential truth of things, he nevertheless considers that this movement of the human mind is all to the good and will contribute to the evolution of humanity. What exactly he means by this, we will see later. At the moment let us only say this that Sri Aurobindo looks forward not only to the development in man of new faculties of knowledge but also to the purification and further enhancement of the powers and capacities of knowledge, action and enjoyment man possesses now but of which he is not the master.

Secondly, philosophy being intellectual, ratiocinative and dialectical exploration of abstract ideas is far removed from life. In the Western world specially it has not been a power for life. After saying that the ideas Heraclitus emphasised were general, philosophical and metaphysical, he goes on to ask,

But what is their practical effect on human life and aspiration? For that is in the end the real value of philosophy for man, to give him light on the nature of his being, the principles of his psychology, his relations with the world and with God, the fixed lines of the great possibilities of his destiny.⁶

Most European philosophy suffers from this weakness that "it lives too much in the clouds";⁷ the exclusive seeking of metaphysical truth for its own sake is its be-all and end-all and "therefore it has been a little barren because much too indirect is its bearing on life".⁸ But it was not so always. Much of Greek philosophy sought to be practical guides to life both individual and corporate. "The Greek thinkers pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, the Stoics and the Epicureans had also the practical aim and dynamic Force".⁹ But unlike in India, it acted only on the cultured few. Sri Aurobindo offers an explanation why the influence of Greek philosophy did not touch the ordinary man. He says that Greek philosophy lost "its affiliation to the Mystics and separated itself from popular religion. Consequently it became powerless to enlighten the masses. For "as ordinarily philosophy alone can give light to Religion and save it from

6. *SABCL* 16. 362

7. *Ibid*

8. *Ibid*

9. *Ibid*

crudeness, ignorance, and superstition so Religion alone can give, except for a few, spiritual passion and effective power to philosophy and save it from becoming unsubstantial, abstract and sterile."¹⁰

Sri Aurobindo regrets as a misfortune for both philosophy and religion "when the divine sisters part company." He is quite clear on this that philosophy, though essentially a search for truth, should not only have a message for life but the power to direct it. In its heyday science culminating in victorious materialism did away with the need for philosophy. That happened because philosophy had become too much a thing of abstract and barren ideas ceasing to be what it should be – a "discovery of the real reality of things by which human existence can learn its laws and the principle of its perfection."¹¹

Indian philosophy always regarded the guidance of life as one of its principal, if not the principal, aims. Knowledge of the truth of the ultimate Reality is the means of attaining spiritual liberation—freedom from the wrong apprehension of one's true essential being as that which it is not. The knowledge is intuitive, experiential and not intellectual and speculative. Nevertheless it is knowledge. What is to be noted in this connection is that the ultimate knowledge was reflected in all areas of life and in all activities, individual and collective, of the Indian people. "Indian philosophy", says Sri Aurobindo, "has always understood its double function, it has sought the truth not only as intellectual pleasure or the natural *dharma* (law of nature and function according to nature)¹² of reason, but in order to know how man may live by truth or strive after it, hence its intimate influence on the religion, the social ideas, the daily life of the people, its immense dynamic power on the mind and actions of Indian humanity",¹³ Sri Aurobindo has elaborated this point on a number of occasions and has written at length on how the dynamic vision of the One and its self-manifestation in the world and human life has shaped Indian civilization and culture, and he considered this as one of the chief characteristic merits of Indian philosophy.

Sri Aurobindo was quite alive to the danger of seeking truth for its pragmatic value. He was perfectly aware that such seeking would not attain the desired goal because it would be influenced by the vital aim.

10. *SABCL* 16. 363

11. *SABCL* 15. 71

12. The words within brackets are added by the present writer to explain *dharma*.

13. *SABCL* 16. 362

Our search for truth must be for its own sake but at the same time it is not the final end. Truth must be sought "for its own sake", writes Sri Aurobindo, "and not start with any preconceived practical aim and prepossession which would distort our disinterested view of things; but once found, its bearing on life becomes of capital importance and is the solid justification of the labour spent in our research."¹⁴ And at this point he cites the example of Indian philosophy which successfully searched for truth without any preconceptions and yet applied the knowledge of truth with an astonishing thoroughness.

What is needed for the knowledge of truth is not a keen and powerful intellect but the purified intelligence. Our conscious mentality is an extremely complex thing and unknown to us all kinds of subjective and objective factors influence it despite our best efforts to be intellectually objective and dispassionate. A purified intelligence can enter into the heart of truth because it has no prejudice and passion standing in its path of search for it.

We have said before that Sri Aurobindo considers the philosophical systems as selective constructions of reflective ideas. He justifies the variety of philosophical and religious approaches and statements because "it was necessary that man should find God variously that he might come to know Him entirely."¹⁵ All knowledge and activities of the human mind can be divided into two categories. There is a higher, supreme supra-intellectual knowledge. Its aim is the discovery of the one and Infinite both in its transcendent and universal aspects, as it is in itself and as it is behind all appearances of Nature. Its method is intuition, contemplation, insight and direct contact with the Truth and with the truths of phenomena. The other category is the lower science which is concerned with an outward knowledge of the phenomena, the disguises of the unitive spiritual Reality which appears to us in and through the more exterior forms of the world-manifestation around us.

Sri Aurobindo's preference is clearly for a synthesis of the two kinds of knowledge mentioned above. But to attain the desired synthesis, we need to recognise that "it is when knowledge reaches its highest aspects that it is possible to arrive at the greatest unity. The highest and widest seeing is the wisest, for then all knowledge is unified in its one comprehensive

14. *SABCL* 16. 362

15. *SABCL* 19. 700

meaning." "The seeking for the principles of existence should aim at the direct apprehension of the supreme principle, the Category of categories. There is a single Truth to which all religions are different approaches, a single Reality and all philosophies are divergent view-points looking at different sides of it, there is a supreme science in which all sciences meet. . . . for that which all our mind-knowledge and super-sensuous vision is seeking is found most *integrally* in the unity of God, men and Nature and all that is in Nature."¹⁶

The Integration of All Knowledge as Yoga

The integration of all knowledge is the ideal of Sri Aurobindo. But we have seen that he very strongly believes that truth once found must direct life to find its fulfilment. We have seen too that he is also of the view that Yoga is the way to integral knowledge. However, the yogic knowledge itself is not philosophy which is formulation of experience. The question is what kind or kinds of experience should be the material on the foundation of which the philosopher will build his mansion of thought? Sri Aurobindo makes a strong case for accepting spiritual experience as material of an integral philosophy. He says Yoga is scientific in that it also is based upon observation, experiment, analysis and synthesis of what is observed. It has the same relation with the forces of the psychological states, forces, functions and their mutual relations as the natural sciences have with the physical forces like steam or electricity. Yoga also is a natural science, but the nature here is the inner, subjective nature of man. Yoga, is depth and height-psychology. Sri Aurobindo defines psychology as the science of consciousness and not of mind. Consciousness is a much greater reality than the mind which is only one of its self-formulations. "Consciousness," says Sri Aurobindo, "is not, to my experience, a phenomenon dependent on the reactions of personality to the forces of Nature and amounting to no more than a seeing for interpretation of these reactions. If that were so, then when the personality becomes silent and immobile and gives no reactions, as there would be no seeing or interpretative action, there would therefore be no consciousness. That contradicts some of the fundamental experiences of Yoga, e.g., a silent and immobile consciousness infinitely spread out, not dependent on the personality but impersonal and universal, not seeing and interpreting contacts but motionlessly self-aware, not dependent on the reactions, but persistent in itself even when no reactions take place. The subjective personality itself is only a formation.

16. *SABCL* 19. 701

of consciousness which is a power inherent, not in the activity of the temporarily manifested personality, but in the being, the Self or Pursusha'¹⁷ Sri Aurobindo says that it is a power inherent in existence, in the Self. This is true from the psychological point of view. Metaphysically speaking, the Self is Consciousness; it is, to use the Sanskrit term, *cit*, which is *svayam-prakāśa*, self-luminous. Consciousness is also dynamic, it is a power not only of awareness but also creative self-manifestation; it is *cit-sakti* conscious Force. It can put out of itself thoughts, feelings, wills, reactions all of which are its manifestation but none of which is that. They are forms of consciousness which is their essence. This is another way of saying that the Self, God, the supreme Person is the in most essential Reality of all existences, of all that has become.

Sri Aurobindo looks upon the universe as an evolution from Consciousness and the field of the evolution of consciousness. There is a double evolution, that of the universe from God and that of God in universal Nature. It has been stated by Sri Aurobindo that there are two points of involution—one is the Supermind and the other is the Inconscient. The universe evolves out of the Supermind in which it is insolved. This evolution is properly called involution. Consciousness descends into the universe till it reaches the nethermost point of the process – the Inconscient. Admittedly, descent is an image and is meant to convey the idea that consciousness becomes less than obviously what it essentially is. There is in God, in the conscious Self the inherent power of veiling himself; the capacity to self-limit is an inherent power of consciousness. That there are all kinds of limitation in the world cannot be denied, limitation of knowledge, capacity, enjoyment. What is their origin? Are they the children of some diabolic power or Being perpetually challenging God, or did man bring them into existence by his pride and the defiance of His will, or are they mere illusions mysteriously apparent but never really real? Sri Aurobindo's answer is that these limitations are the results of the process of self-manifestation of the Divine, of his willing assumption of self-limitation. That is a paradox but nevertheless true – the self-manifestation of God is a self-concealing from the part of the one Infinite so that a multitude of finites could be born. God is a multiple Unity, the multiplicity being potentially existent in His being and actually brought into open manifestation by His conscious Force.

Pure Consciousness, sheer uncreative self-awareness, turns itself into a conscious Knower and creative Self-knowledge. This act of God cannot

be regarded as a limitation because there is in it no ignorance of His Being and Nature. Sri Aurobindo calls this self-Knowledge, for want of a better term, the Supermind which he defines as the Divine's knowledge of Himself and his own native power of acting. It is also described by him as God's self-awareness and world-awareness. The combination of the two awarenesses, of self and the world is very significant, for in Sri Aurobindo's vision the Self has become the world. The Supermind is God's omniscience and omnipotence. It is also the consciousness by which God assumes three aspects—Transcendental, Universal and Individual. There is a status of God beyond that of the Self of the universe and the true spiritual self of the individual. The rational mind cannot grasp this One-in-three and three-in-One which is an illogical idea to it, nor is it left to faith to fathom its mystery as best as it can. For Sri Aurobindo this three-fold status of the supreme Unknowable Absolute, self-revealing itself in three aspects is *known* by the supramental knowledge. This is the integral knowledge and the philosophy that formulates the integration of God, Man and Nature.

The Supramental Knowledge

The supermind is not merely the Knowledge of God that God has of himself and his conscious Will. It is also the Divine Being as the seed and the material of the world-tree, its trunk, branches, twigs, leaves and flowers. At the heart of everything that has been, is and will be, there is the supreme spiritual Reality. Sri Aurobindo also describes the supermental gnosis as the Divine *Maya*. The word *Maya* is derived from the root *mā*, to measure, and the supermind is *Maya* because it measures the Immeasurable, limits the Illimitable and materialize the spirit. But it is Divine *Maya* because it has the knowledge proceeding from the knower of the right process of measuring who does not act out of ignorance. The Knowledge includes also the law of the Self's self-manifestation, for however much appearances contradict it, the creation is not a chaos but a cosmos.

We have said above that God has a self-projected individual aspect. Sri Aurobindo describes this aspect both as the Divine as the individual and the individual as Divine. Each individual self knows its identity with the Reality which is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss and its unity-in-distinction and distinction-in-unity with that and regards all other individual selves the same way. This community of free individual spirits is the primary multiplicity. They are the dynamos through whom the Force of Consciousness flows for the manifestation of God as the universe. What

part does the individual spiritual self play in creation which in this philosophy is not bringing out something out of nothing but the manifestation of the unmanifest like sesame oil out of sesame? The individual self, *jivātma*, in Sri Aurobindo's terminology, makes itself an object of its own knowledge holding itself as an object in its own consciousness. There is no division. The individual knows that it is looking upon itself and that the looker-on, the looking and the looked-on are all the same reality. This distinction-in-unity in the knowledge of the individual spirit develops into greater prominence of itself as the object and progressively hardens into division. When this happens, then there is a descent from Knowledge into Ignorance. The self-limitation or delimitation of God now has become actual limitation. The sense of unity is overcome by the sense of separate multiplicity. The Supermind becomes Mind or develops Mind out of itself by limitation. Mind is the instrument of cosmic Ignorance, of the mental *Maya* of which division in consciousness is the sheet-anchor. The individual spirit projects out of itself the mental being or the soul in mind. Thus there is a limitation of being, knowledge and power, for as one's consciousness, so is one's force and energy, while the supramental Will is omnipotent, the mental will is lame and limping and gullible. It does not know what it should do not can it fully achieve what it imperfectly knows or thinks it has to do.

The self-identity of the individual being becomes centred not in the soul but in the ego. It considers itself separate from its Ground of existence, from the cosmos around it and also all other individuals. This separative ego is what we erroneously regard as our true self and follow its interests regardless of the legitimate interests of others. It is true that we are forced to acknowledge their interests and make compromises. But discord and conflict are the badge of our relations with our fellows.

The transition from the integral supramental to the divisive mental consciousness would be too abrupt and logically inconceivable unless there were another level of consciousness which could serve as a link. He calls it the overmind, and describes it as global consciousness. It is aware of the one Truth but it distinguishes it into different aspects. And despite its knowledge of the central Truth, it emphasises one aspect rather than another. Sri Aurobindo says that God does not need to manifest the universe in his Being and that he can be realized as free from his own act of self-revelation. Now this freedom may seem to stress the idea that God is static, passive and uncreative. In the supermind the silence and activity of God are the same Truth. The overmind, however, emphasises either the

static or the dynamic aspect. So also with the self-expressions of the Divine Being as Impersonal or Personal, Transcendent, Universal or Individual the overmental view prefers one to the others. It holds the Truth in its consciousness but makes different formulations possible. Thus it represents the beginning of Ignorance. Knowing, it makes unknowing a potential face which becomes actualised in the Mind which is consciousness based on division and is thus ignorant of the unitary Truth. With regard to the universe the overmind has a global sweep and is described by Sri Aurobindo as cosmic consciousness. If one attains the overmental consciousness, he will know the universe as a system, a whole, a cosmos and not as an unstable patch-work of conflicting parts. He will also know directly the forces and events in the universe.

Sri Aurobindo distinguishes between two levels of cosmic consciousness of which the overmental is the lower. The Existence-Consciousness-conscious Force-Delight-Reality takes three stances from another point of view. As the Self or Atman it passively supports by its presence the cosmic manifestation. It is static and silent and does not do so much as sanction the creative process. That is the function of God as Purusha, Soul or Person who always enjoys the creation though he does not actively control it. It is in this third aspect that the Divine actively directs, controls and carries out the function of self-manifestation as the universe. Of these the second aspect, the Purusha or Soul is the true, primary cosmic consciousness which is spread throughout the cosmos and a person can raise himself to the secondary cosmic consciousness even without realising the Purusha or Person, the Divine as Soul. Sri Aurobindo considers this achievement undesirable and risky because to know a great deal about the cosmos, even directly, without realising the source and sustaining Reality and Force of it can be spiritually disastrous. It can swell the ego into, if we may say so, global proportions. Sri Aurobindo would rather have it that spiritual seekers should realise God in essence, beyond the universe, however partially, before knowing his universe and thus not lose the Noumenon in the phenomena. For God does not live by the world, the world lives by him.

The Evolution of Consciousness

The great theme of Sri Aurobindo's integral philosophy is the evolution of consciousness in the universe. It does not deal with the evolution of more complex living organisms from less complex creatures. That evolution is only a stage in the much wider and complex process, namely, the evolution of consciousness. The supramental Consciousness and Knowledge involved

in the Inconscient is what Sri Aurobindo is primarily interested in his world-view. The process is ultimately guided by the supermind though it is not obvious. It is not so because it is functioning under the conditions dictated by the different emergents like Matter, Life and Mind. The medium in which the divine gnosis acts has its own law which the supermind respects even while changing them. Matter, simply stated, is consciousness which has made itself sensibly apprehensible. In reference to the supermind it was said that it is at the same time knower, knowledge and known. Consciousness turns itself into different kinds of subjects, instruments of knowledge and objects. The senses are one of these kinds of instruments and their object is Matter which is consciousness that has taken physically concrete form. It may be said that Matter is nothing but the quality of perceivedness (by senses) of consciousness.

It is important to remember this concept of Matter in order to understand Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution. The descent and evolution of consciousness into and in Matter is the prelude to the ascent and evolution of consciousness into its own essential reality. This is not an entirely new concept. The doctrines of the Śaiva and Śakta Tantriks in India, and of Plotinus are in essence the same and they expound a similar concept of the supreme Reality. The originality of Sri Aurobindo lies in the idea that consciousness is not only returning to its native status beyond the universe, but it is also in the process of helping the evolution of the different categories through which it descended into the world and in which it became involved. It is not only evolving *out* of them but also *in* them. To employ Sri Aurobindo's terminology, consciousness is emerging out of Matter, Life and Mind to its own spiritual Essence. It is also developing new levels of its own complex and hierarchical self-arrangement in the universe which will actualise potentialities of the different principles of the universal manifestation of Matter, Life, Mind and as a consequence of which they will be transformed into the moulds manifesting God and will not remain, as they are now, as masks hiding his nature.

Sri Aurobindo says that the evolution of consciousness is the result of the process of its ascent and descent. This descent is not the primary one which brought about the universe. Consciousness involved in Matter aspires to liberate itself from the shackles of its material vesture and manifest itself comparatively freely. This aspiration calls down a response from the next higher level of consciousness, namely Life, and the two together are instrumental in releasing existing but unmanifest vitality in Matter.

The manifestation of Life in matter is in Sri Aurobindo's view, one step in the evolution of consciousness in world. "Surely all Life and living creatures, not excepting the tiniest insect, is sensitive and respond to stimulus. The response of course is a sign of the presence of consciousness however inchoate and incapable, the power of which makes it possible. The same double process of ascent and descent brings about the manifestation of latent Mind in living Matter or embodied living creatures. Man appears on the earth scene and civilization and culture take their halting step in the mission towards their labour of refining Mind as a fit vehicle of the further evolution of consciousness in the world.

Man, the mental being, the soul in mind, has achieved marvellous things. The most significant activity, from the spiritual point of view of Sri Aurobindo, is man's search for his true self and fundamental reality of all that is. This seeking gives birth to philosophies, religions, mystic disciplines and yogic practices. They are all Nature's means of opening the mental consciousness to dimensions of being which are man's true environment and of dimensions of knowledge which are the keys to the discovery of different levels of existence. But there is no gainsaying the fact that these new discoveries are partial and therefore, for the most part, inconsistent with each other. The different systems of knowledge of the Truth, even when they are intuitive and experiential, are yet only reflections of insights into some aspects of the Reality. Man's spirituality is mental spirituality.

Sri Aurobindo divides reality into hemispheres — the upper and the lower. The first comprises Existence-Consciousness-Conscious, Force-Delight and the Supermind, and the lower Mind, Life and Matter. In the upper or higher hemisphere there is no Ignorance. The Reality is there self-luminously manifest and the knowledge of Oneness is fully uncovered. The lower hemisphere is a world of Ignorance. There the sense of the One essential Reality of all things is veiled. Nevertheless there is a correspondence between the principles of the two hemispheres. Existence becomes Matter, Consciousness Life and the Supermind. There is also in this world a principle which descends from the Delight of Existence. Sri Aurobindo calls it the psyche or the soul. In its essence it is a spiritual category and is a general principal which in itself is not formed or individualised. In the process of the evolution of consciousness, the psyche or the soul evolves as what Sri Aurobindo describes as the psychic being or psychic personality. The psychic grows into maturity through many lives and also helps the evolution of the mental, vital and psysical being of man. It may be said

to be the meeting point of God and Nature in man. This is why it is the most important principle in Sri Aurobindo's doctrine of spiritual evolution. For, as has been said above, while it itself evolves it also helps the evolution of Mind, Life and body and since its source is the Bliss of existence, it is naturally full of joy and cheer and turned to God and so it can prepare mind, life and body for realising the same values. Of course the psychic, though pure, is not from the beginning free from the natural influences on it of mind, life and matter. It becomes perfect by what is normally a very slow evolution. When it evolves upto the mental level, it becomes the soul in mind or the mental being. Then begins man's search for his essential self, the ultimate Reality and an ideal life.

Problems of Existence as Problems of Harmony

Sri Aurobindo asserts that the evolution of consciousness has not reached its term with the emergence of Mind in the world. The mental consciousness is imperfect, ignorant of the truth of the universe and incapable of controlling or directing life in it. It cannot therefore be regarded as the creator of the world. It has achieved great things in thought, in the creation and appreciation of beauty, in unravelling the mysteries of Nature and mastering some of her forces. Nevertheless it has not been able to solve the problems of individual life, far less that of collective existence, because it does not know its essential truth. But according to Sri Aurobindo Nature intends to solve the problem of life. "All problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony."¹⁸ Nature is labouring to bring about the meeting and reconciliation between apparently opposite principles. Life has evolved out of Matter and we have the physical organism of man which is a marvel. It is true that perfect harmony has not been achieved here, for Life has to leave the body when the physical organism cannot meet its demands or sustain its activities. Unconscious and still inert Matter and sensitive and dynamic Life have been brought together as one sign of the evolution of consciousness. Self-conscious reason and instinctive consciousness inhabiting a physical body also seem to be contradictory principles. Yet Nature has evolved out of instinctive sensitivity mental reason of which man is the vehicle. Here also the reconciliation of apparently opposed principles is not complete. Instinct has not been thoroughly rationalised and man carries in himself the animal in many ways. He despite being endowed with reflective reason hardly knows himself and his complex nature. This lack of self-knowledge prevents him

18. *SABCL* 18. 2

from ordering his life in an ideal way. Indeed there is no consensus as to what is the ideal life. For Sri Aurobindo the ideal life must be a perfect image of the Divine. And God is being, Consciousness, Knowledge, Force, Bliss, universal Self, the essential Reality of all existence. He recognises the fact that however limited mind may be, it is only rational human beings who can even think of what the ideal life may be and make some effort, however feeble, to realise it. The fact that man does strive after an ideal existence shows that there is in the mind another kind of consciousness hidden and involved which prompts it "to reach for the sky". It indicates too that man also harbours deep in his heart a principle, the psychic being, which is in tune with an ideal life of which it has some direct experiences. Crudity and refinement, cruelty and kindness, pettiness and generosity and many other pairs of opposite attributes characterise the same person. Not only that, man seeks to reconcile this conflict within himself. He has erected systems of morals which he hopes will restrain his animal passions and anti-social impulses. He feels the call of a Superman Reality and thus religious are born. He probes deep within himself, discovers unplumbed depths and scales unknown heights in his inner subjective being and thus mystical practices and yogic disciplines are discovered. All this shows that mind is an intermediate level of consciousness and that man is a transitional being.

Sri Aurobind points out that though mind has achieved marvels, it is also at the same time a woefully inadequate instrument for solving the problems of life. This is because mind is in its very nature a divisive consciousness and harmony is an ideal incapable of realization. It erects "moral" systems such as Nazism, which seek to change the very ideal and nature of true ethical values. Religions of peace and brotherhood are organised into militant churches, defence of one's freedom becomes a weapon for subjugating others, devotion to an ideal degenerates into fanaticism. There is a need of a new consciousness which holds the key to the harmony which man seeks. Sri Aurobindo points to the Supermind as that consciousness and asserts that it is preparing to evolve out of the mental consciousness. On an individual level if man can shift his self-identity from his mental ego to the psychic being within him, then he can find a principle of relative harmony within himself which can, to a great extent, resolve the conflict between different parts of his being, between mind, life and body. The psychic being is individual but not ego-based. It is an evolutionary individual formation of the psyche or the soul which is a projection into this world of the Bliss aspect of God. If an individual can

live in the light and by the power of the psychic being in himself, he will see the legitimate interests of others and help them realise their good in harmony with his evolution. But the psychic being is individual and to realise it as one's essential self is not enough. For there is the Self at once universal and essentially the same in all. There is no shadow of division in it. It is by realising this essential Self that the ego can be transcended.

The Variety of Approaches and Visions

But a formidable difficulty faces man here. Even in his spiritual search man remains a mental being. The ordinary human beings dominated by the ego and full of desires for transitory values, almost incurably restless and incapable of one-pointed concentration, cannot realise the Truth. But there are disciplines by which the mind can become free of desires, learn intense concentration, detach itself from the ego and its dualities—pain and pleasure, success and failure, friend and foe etc.—make itself calm and capable of reflecting the Light of the spirit in it and thus know the Self, God, the Absolute. However mental realisations are extremely varied and even contradictory. Even a cursory study of the different great religions will bear this out. Apart from the basic moral principles which are common, in the properly religious dimension, that is to say, in so far as there is an attempt to contact the Truth directly and experientially realise the ultimate Reality, the religions have divergent ideas of the nature of that Reality and the manner in which man realises it. Accordingly, the concepts of *summum bonum* are also extremely varied, even contradictory. In a long passage in *The Life Divine*, his main metaphysical work, Sri Aurobindo has referred to this divergence of religions and philosophies. Some have seen 'the material world as the body of the Divine' or 'Life as a great pulsation of the breath of Divine Existence'. All things have been regarded by some 'as the thoughts of the cosmic Mind', others realise that 'there is a spirit greater than these things, their subtler and yet more wonderful source and creator'. There are philosophies which 'find God only in the inconscient' or 'as the one Conscious in inconscient things or as an ineffable super-conscious Existence.' It has been the standpoint of some that in order to reach That 'we must leave behind our terrestrial being and annul the mind, life and body'; that of others is that, we must 'overcoming division, see that He is all these at once and accept fearlessly the consequences of that vision.' God is worshipped 'with universality as the cosmic Being' or He is limited, as by the positivist, 'in humanity only.' The vision of the timeless and spaceless had led some 'to reject God in Nature and cosmos.' Some adore Him in various strange or beautiful or magnified forms of the

human ego or for His perfect possession of the qualities to which man aspires, His Divinity revealed to them as a supreme Power, Love, Beauty, Truth, Righteousness and Wisdom.' Devotees are those who 'perceive Him as the Lord of Nature, Father and Creator' or 'as Nature herself and the universal Mother.' Still others 'pursue Him as the Lover and attracter of souls or serve him as the hidden Master of all works.' God is seen as One or a manifold Deity, "the one divine man or one Divine in all men" or more largely, as "the one whose presence enables us to become unified in consciousness or in works or in life with all beings, unified with all things in Time and Space, unified with Nature and Her influences and even her inanimate forces."¹⁹ After describing so many different approaches to the myriad-faceted Reality, Sri Aurobindo expresses his own view— "the truth behind must ever be the same because all is the one Divine Infinite whom all are seeking."²⁰ In fact, he welcomes the variety of approaches, visions and realisations. "Because everything is that one there must be this endless variety in the human approach to its possession, it was necessary that man should find God thus variously in order that he might come to know Him entirely."²¹ Nonetheless he says also that he must arrive at the greatest unity of knowledge because that will give it its most comprehensive meaning.

I hope it has been made sufficiently clear that it is not possible to attain this all-comprehensive and unifying knowledge by intellectual speculation. Mind cannot know the Reality, it can only construct a figure, a representation of it. It can feel that there is a consciousness beyond it, even receive some Light from that higher consciousness and have a glimpse of the self-existent Truth. Sri Aurobindo has referred to Bradley and others, who have arrived through intellectual thinking at the idea of an 'Other beyond Thought' or have even, like Bradley, tried to express their conclusions about it in terms that recall some of the expressions in the *Arya*.²² In this connection Sri Aurobindo says that the idea is as old as the Vedas and was repeated in other forms in Buddhism, Christian Gnosticism and Sufism. He points out that originally it was discovered by the mystics following an inner spiritual discipline. But somewhere between the fifth and seventh centuries, philosophers both in the West and in the East began to intellectualise knowledge. In the West when intellectual reason was

19. SABCL 19. 700

20. SABCL 19. 700

21. SABCL 19. 700

22. SABCL 22. 158

accepted as the only or the highest organ for the discovery of Truth, "it began to fade". However, it has, says Sri Aurobindo, "tried constantly to return; the Neo-Hegelians and others (e.g. the Russian Ouspensky and one or two German thinkers, I believe) seem to be reaching after it."²³

In the East the supra-intellectual Truth survived. The reason is that though philosophical reason was cultivated to its utmost capability, it was not accepted as the sole or even the highest means of attaining knowledge of the Truth, the Reality. Spiritual intuition and illumination and experience had the first rank among the instruments of the knowledge of Reality. Intellectual conclusions that contradicted the authority of direct insight and experience were considered to be invalid. It is significant that each system of philosophy has equipped itself with a practical discipline to reach a higher state of consciousness. A philosopher begins with thought and reason but aims at going beyond them to reach a consciousness beyond mind. "Each philosophical founder (as also those who continued his work or school) has been a metaphysical thinker doubled with a yogi. Those who were only philosophic intellectuals were respected for their learning but never took rank as truth-discoverers. And the philosophies that lacked a sufficiently powerful means of spiritual experience died out and became things of the past because they were not dynamic for spiritual discovery and realization."²⁴

In a chapter entitled "The methods of Vedantic Knowledge" in his *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo describes the different means of knowing that man has and can have. His primary aim is not to list and analyse the categories of the philosophical reason like Kant or trace the dialectical method like Hegel, nor does he elaborate the steps of deductive inference etc. Instead he shows the different instruments of knowledge that consciousness has divided in man—the senses, mixed and dependent reason, pure and sovereign reason and intuition. This is a psychological description of the methods of knowledge—psychological rather than merely rational because it surveys the different planes and capacities of consciousness of which psychology is the science. It is no wonder that Sri Aurobindo emphatically holds that "It is only if there is a greater consciousness beyond Mind and that consciousness is accessible to us that we can know and enter into the ultimate Reality."²⁵ He is more specific as regards the particular

23. SABCL 22. 159

24. SABCL 22. 159

25. SABCL 22. 158

level of consciousness which he says is especially relevant to his philosophy and yoga. "It is not by 'thinking out' the entire reality but by a change of consciousness that one can pass from ignorance to the Knowledge—the knowledge by which we become what we know. To pass from the external to a direct and intimate inner consciousness; to widen consciousness out of the limits of the ego and the body; to heighten it by an inner will and aspiration and opening to the Light till it passes in its ascent beyond Mind; to bring down a descent of the supramental Divine through self-giving and surrender with a consequent transformation of mind, life and body—this is the *integral* way to the Truth. It is this that we call the Truth here and aim at in our yoga."²⁶

The Scope of the Integral Yoga

Now let us see what the scope of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is and why it deserves to be described as integral yoga. It will best be described in his own words :

Spirit being the fundamental truth of existence, life can be only its manifestation: Spirit must be not only the origin of life but its basis, its pervading reality and its highest and total result. But the forms of life as they appear to us are at once its disguises and its instruments of self-manifestation. Man has to grow in knowledge till they cease to be disguises and to grow in spiritual power and quality till they become in him its perfect instruments. To grow into the fullness of the divine is the true law of life and to shape his earthly existence into its image is the meaning of his evolution. This is the fundamental tenet of the philosophy of the *Arya*.²⁷

Here we find the ideal of the emerging harmony between Spirit and Life briefly but clearly stated. We also see that Life is not *now* what it should be, at the same time it is meant to be divinised. The forms of life are disguises that veil the Spirit but also instruments of its self-manifestation. The instruments have to be transformed so that they can do what they are intended to, namely, reveal the Spirit in Life perfectly.

26. *SABCL* 22. 160-61

27. *SABCL* 17. 400-01

Sri Aurobindo felt that this truth had first to be worked out from the metaphysical point of view; for "in Philosophy metaphysical truth is the nucleus of the rest, it is the statement of the last and most general truths on which all the others depend or in which they are gathered up. Therefore we gave the first place to the "Life Divine"²⁸ Here he starts with the fundamental ideas of Vedanta; regarding the self and mind and life, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss and the world, knowledge and ignorance, rebirth and the Spirit. But his Vedanta is very different from what it is generally considered to be, namely, a denial of life. He did not follow the line of the great Śankara which ended in creating a trenchant opposition between the Self and the world. He refused to bisect existence into the Self and the not-self God and the world. Instead,

We have attempted on the contrary from its data a more comprehensive Advaita (Monism). We have shown that mind and life and matter are derivations from the Self through a spiritual mind or supermind which is the real support of cosmic existence and by developing mind into that man can arrive at the real truth of the Spirit in the world and the real truth and highest law of life. The Self is *Sachidananda* (*satchit-ananda*, Being-Consciousness-Bliss) and there is no incurable antinomy between that and the world: only we see the world through the eyes of the Ignorance and we have to see it through the eyes of the Knowledge. Our ignorance is only knowledge developing out of its involution in the apparent nescience of Matter and on its way to return to its conscious integrality. To accomplish that return and manifest the spiritual life in human existence is the opportunity given by the succession of rebirth. We accept the truth of evolution, not so much in the physical form given to it by the West as in its philosophical truth, the involution of life and mind and spirit here in matter and their progressive manifestation. At the summit of this evolution is the spiritual life, the life divine.²⁹

We have given this rather long quotation because this passage gives the gist of Sri Aurobind's integral spiritual idealism.

28. *SABCL* 17. 401

29. *SABCL* 17. 401

It has been stated before that Sri Aurobindo strongly holds the view that philosophy should not be merely a theoretical adventure but must give guidance to life. It is true that, as he puts it, the truth of life depends on the truth of being. But he also says that "Truth of philosophy is of a merely theoretical value unless it can be lived."³⁰ How can, the truth worked out theoretically by him in *The Life Divine* be put to practice and lived? *The Synthesis of Yoga* is the companion volume of his metaphysical work. In that work Sri Aurobindo "tried . . . to arrive at a synthetical view of the principles and methods of the various lines of spiritual self-discipline and the way in which they can lead to an integral divine life in the human existence."³¹ It has been said before that Sri Aurobindo was of the view that God is the Self of the universe, that he is immanent in the world. The individual lives in smaller 'universes' around him, - his society, his nation and humanity. Does society feature in Sri Aurobindo's thought? In his work *The Synthesis of Yoga*, he went on to remark that the Yoga could lead one "to an individual self-development". But he felt that "it was necessary to show how our ideal can be worked out in the social life of mankind. In *The Psychology of Social Development* (later published as the *Human Cycle*) we have indicated how these truths affect the evolution of human society."³² But the metaphysical vision extended beyond the human society. And *In the Ideal of Human Unity* we have taken the present trend of mankind towards a closer unification and tried to appreciate its tendencies and show what is wanting to them in order that real human unity may be achieved."³³

Sri Aurobindo has not only thought deeply and creatively about the future of social evolution and the primary and secondary means of achieving human unity, he has also turned his close and insightful attention to art and poetry, education and even physical culture as important elements of the total evolution of man into superman. This has been possible because he sees behind all activities both of Nature and of man the same Force, which is conscious on certain levels of its action. Art, poetry etc. are not yoga by themselves but they can be made the means of opening man's consciousness to higher planes of consciousness and thus turn him to spiritual self-discovery. The integral Knowledge of the spiritual Reality, the supermental apprehension of the universal Lord, reveals to the man who has such

30. *SABCL* 17. 402

31. *SABCL* 17. 402

32. *SABCL* 17. 402

33. *SABCL* 17. 402

knowledge the relation between all that is in Nature including all that is human to their Source, their limitation and their possibilities. This is why, as said above, nothing is to be accepted as it is now at the present stage of evolution and yet nothing is to be rejected from the scheme and process of the self – manifestation of Consciousness in the world. The physical, the vital and the mental being of man, all have a part to play in man's integral evolution because the world is the chosen venue of God's perfect self-revelation. Sri Aurobindo writes :

To know, possess and be the divine being in an animal and egoistic consciousness, to convert our twilight or obscure physical mentality into the plenary supramental illumination, to build peace and self-existent bliss where there is only a stress of transitory satisfaction besieged by physical pain and emotional suffering, to establish an infinite freedom in a world which presents itself as a group of mechanical necessities, to discover and realise the immortal life in a body subjected to death and constant mutation, – this is offered to us as the manifestation of God in Matter and the goal of Nature in her terrestrial evolution.³⁴

This eloquent passage is taken from the first chapter entitled 'The Human Aspiration', of *The Life Divine*. The first paragraph of the Chapter states Sri Aurobindo's idea of the deepest and perpetual aspiration of man. He writes :

The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts, and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation, – for it survives the longest periods of scepticism and returns after every banishment, – is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divinization of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed Bliss, the sense of a secret immortality. The ancient dawns of human knowledge have left us their witness to this constant aspiration; today we see a humanity satiated but not satisfied by victorious analysis of the externalities of Nature preparing to return to its

34. SABCL 18. 1-2

primeval longings. The earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last, — God, Light, Freedom, Immortality.³⁵

The Problem of Evil in the Process of Divinization

The problem of evil is a great question mark on any Monistic philosophy which accepts the reality of the world and holds that it is a manifestation of God. It is even a more acute issue in the integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. He starts with the idea of the Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Brahman of the Vedanta and holds that the world is the self-manifestation of that Reality. Not only that, he further maintains that the manifestation is for delight, that its source is Bliss and its goal too is Bliss. Sri Aurobindo has to answer the question why the manifestation of God at all when he is self-sufficient and perfect? Similar theories maintain that the world is an emanation of the One, the supreme Reality, as for example, as Plotinus holds, or that it is the nature of God to manifest, as the Śaiva Tantric schools say. The other Tantric school, the Śakta, elevates Śakti, the supreme Conscious Force above God. Sri Aurobindo agrees with none of these doctrines. The Divine according to him is absolutely free and is not compelled by anything to manifest himself. The world is not an emanation from God as the rays are emanated from the sun nor is it the nature of God to manifest, and of course God according to Sri Aurobindo, is not subservient to Śakti. Why then manifestation at all? His simple answer is that it is for delight.

This answer is very hard to accept in view of the universal presence of error, evil, pain and suffering in the world. Sri Aurobindo not being an illusionist, does not reject these phenomena as unreal. At the same time he does not accept them as permanent features of universal existence.

It has been said before that according to Sri Aurobindo one of the inherent powers of consciousness is that it limits itself. Ignorance is a development from knowledge by limitation from the point of view of the descent of consciousness. And here lies the key to Sri Aurobindo's answer to the problem of error, evil, pain and suffering. Ignorance is the parent of these phenomena. They are the consequences of the division of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo holds that the problem of evil etc. become impossible to solve on the basis of the idea of an extra-cosmic God by which he means God who is beyond the universe and not immanent in it.

It is utterly unintelligible why such a God would inflict such dire punishments on his creatures for no fault of their own. Sri Aurobindo's idea of God is that He is supra-cosmic, transcendent of the universe. Who is suffering in the last analysis, Sri Aurobindo asks. His answer is that since the Divine is immanent in the universe and thus he is the one knower in all beings, any experience in the world must ultimately be his. So the question why God inflicts punishment on his creatures does not arise.

As far as moral evil is concerned, Sri Aurobindo points out that it is a peculiarly human phenomenon. Neither in physical Nature, nor in the sub-human creation, is there any evil. And it is absent in the world of gods, if there be such beings. Evil is an evolutionary phenomenon and thus it is not a permanent feature of the evolving world. It will be eliminated when there is further evolution of consciousness, when man will live in and through the spirit.

Physical pain and suffering are also the result of the limitation of consciousness giving rise to the division in being. Because one regards the world and one's fellows as not essentially oneself, one thinks that the streams of force one encounters come from the not-self, from 'an other'. And the division of consciousness makes man incapable of meeting pain as one's own. Beside the growth of consciousness enables one to withstand and absorb any force into oneself and eventually it ceases to be painful. Pain, pleasure and indifference are really limited refractions of the Bliss of Existence. It appears as one of the three in accordance with our state of consciousness. With the evolution of consciousness in a certain way, pain, pleasure and indifference are all transformed into Bliss. It is not uncommon that an injured soldier fights on in spite of intense physical suffering or a mother carries on the usual duties when her very son or daughter has died. In these instances the soldier or the mother has changed the inner consciousness in a way which makes them capable of enduring the physical pain or emotional suffering. Thus pain and suffering can be neutralised and according to Sri Aurobindo, they can be turned into joy provided consciousness can be radically changed and its attendant power enhanced. In the community of spiritual superman, pain and suffering and evil will have no place because the mental consciousness will be transcended and life will be one conscious and joyous movement of the essential unitary reality of God, the true common Self of all.

A spiritual society will recognise its members' need for a free atmosphere for their growth. Errors will be committed and mistakes made in

the use of freedom, but it will be recognised that experience is gained through error also, that each member has a divine principle in him or her which they will find out as they evolve and discover its law in their individual and collective life. There will be no dictation to science or philosophy to conform than to religious dogmas or even assuredly to certain spiritual truths. And as with science and philosophy, so with art. The aesthetic being in man can not only be touched by divine afflatus but can rise on its own curve to spiritual possibilities. "The highest aim of the aesthetic being", writes Sri Aurobindo, "is to find the Divine through beauty; the highest Art is that which by an inspired use of significant and interpretative form unseals the doors of the spirit."³⁶ Sri Aurobindo, does not accept the idea that "Art must be religious or not at all" or that "it must be subservient to either utility or scientific truth or philosophic ideas. Art may make use of these things as elements, but it has its own *swadharma*, essential law, and it will rise to the widest spirituality by following out its own natural lines with no other yoke than the intimate law of its own being."³⁷

The Ideal of Human Unity as Life Divine

The principle of freedom will be extended to the lower nature of man though compulsion may seem to be the right method of dealing with it. This is not to say that they will be left to themselves without any attempt to change them. The spiritual aim will not take resort to repression from without but will instead look for a free self-rule and development from within. If we seek the soul and let it guide by its inherent consciousness and knowledge the lower nature will accept that guidance. This is possible because the lower nature is also a formation of consciousness and can become open to the soul's light and power.

Fullness of life and man's being is the goal of the spiritual aim in society. A higher knowledge, intuition and ultimately the supermind working through the individual and social soul will usher in the spiritual society and the human cycle will have reached its aim of perfection.

Sri Anrobindo cast his creative and mystic glance on the largest society, to wit, humanity, to find out what its possibilities were from the point of view of the evolving spirit in the world. Here his main thesis is that Nature is preparing humunity for an eventual unity. Through trials and experiments conditions for this emerging unity are being prepared.

36. *SABCL* 15. 212-13

37. *SABCL* 15. 212-13

Sri Aurobindo from his wide and deep knowledge of history has given many examples of past attempts at unifying people and countries, analyses the causes of their failures and also what they achieved. He recognises the fact that many of these movements were not conscious attempts at achieving unity but the motives were national glory, possession of markets imperial expansion and so on. Nevertheless some of them served to advance the cause of unity. He has laid down the requirements for the achievement of human unity. The main requirement is again psychological and subjective.

Sri Aurobindo is perfectly aware of the formidable obstacles in the path of human unity. Nonetheless, the sense of the need of unity of mankind has been steadily becoming stronger. In his *The Ideal of Human Unity*, he discussed the economic, military and administrative issues of the problem of setting up a World-Government. His treatment of the problems involved shows expert knowledge, optimistic realism and sane judgement. Sri Aurobindo was as great an advocate of a rich and harmonious diversity in unity as a severe critic of dead uniformity. He does not accept at all the idea of a single World State. He is justifiably apprehensive that it will lead to regimentation and efforts to destroy the characteristic qualities and features of different national cultures and ways of life and seek to replace them by a colourless uniformity over the whole world. His preference is for a loose federation of free national states and governments. The problem of stronger and weaker nations and the binding authority of the World Government may raise its ugly head. The importance of the psychological aspect is seen here very clearly. Unity must be a conscious choice and freely and deliberately cherished and pursued. The freedom of none can be sacrificed and only a genuine respect for the liberty of all nations to choose their respective ways of life without however threatening to deny others the same freedom can assure this. The different nations and humanity as a whole must feel the vital need of unity, must feel that it cannot exist without it. A spiritual religion of humanity is needed; humanity must become an object of worship, so to speak. There must be a living, dynamic and conscious acceptance of the idea that all sections of humanity are branches of the one international family.³⁸ It has been said before that Sri Aurobindo is a great believer in

38. *SABCL* 15. 554-55 :

"A spiritual religion of humanity is the hope of the future... there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one... A spiritual oneness would create psychological oneness not dependent upon intellectual or outward uniformity and compel a oneness of life not bound up with its mechanical means of unification... this would be the basis of a higher type of human existence."

freedom of the individual, of society and of nations. Equality and fraternity are equally great ideas and ideals. But if there is too much liberty to be licentiousness on the one hand and persecution of others on the other. Too much equality may end up in doing away with unique and special qualities of individual nations and in the process destroy the richness of life. Fraternity cannot be realised in the absence of a living sense of brotherhood. It is true that the psychological sense of unity will need an outward machinery for it to be realised. But it is also true that a burning sense of the need of unity will help create the machinery.

The integral nature of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is evident from the fact that he gives due place and value to all knowledge, experience, economic and political institutions, cultural movements, religions and philosophies and spiritual disciplines. None of them does he consider as final and absolute, none of them as entirely valueless. For example, he is great believer in and an advocate of individual freedom, yet he says that communism can be a corrective of excessive individualism, on the other hand he does not endorse the deification of the State at the cost of the individual. Money is an important element in his scheme of life but he rejects the motive of production for personal profit. At the same time he believes that capitalism has a place in it for without surplus capital industry, business, trade and commerce will languish. If Democracy can assure the right of all citizens to develop along the lines which their inner nature determines, he is all for it. Yet a cultured aristocracy, not of birth or wealth but of refined and purified intelligence and most of all, of spiritual vision and power should be the natural leaders of a commune of soul-consciousness towards which he believes society is evolving. Morality is his high aim and spirituality transcends morality. It is the direct knowledge of the Self which is essentially free from the tensions and dualities of the moral life. In a chapter entitled "The Evolution of the Spiritual Man" in *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo has stated that four things have helped that evolution. They are religion, occultism, philosophy and spirituality. A word about occultism should be said here. Sri Aurobindo does not mean by it black magic and dabbling in so called miracles. Occultism is knowledge of the secret states, forces and functions of the mind, life and body and their inter-relations. This is necessary if the spiritual aim is not only to realize the Reality but also to transform human nature so that it can manifest the Divine. Religion and philosophy must be spiritualised for them to be able to play their respective roles in the future evolution of man into superman. But spirituality itself, embrac-

ing universal Divine and accepting the individual Self as the Centre of the evolution in this world, will harmonise in one knowledge of God, Man and Nature and all that is contained in Nature. Till now all spiritual experiences have been on one or the other of the planes of mental consciousness touched and suffused by spiritual knowledge, peace, power or joy. It is indisputable that spiritual experiences are extremely varied and spiritual people are of very different types. Sri Aurobindo after pointing out that spirituality is a small kernel when it disengages itself in the consciousness from physicality, vitality and mentality and puts on its own distinctive character. But the kernel grows and begins to live in the spiritual consciousness. Its first formations are evident in the spiritualisation of our natural activities. There is a permeating influence or a even a guidance. There may be a spiritual turn of the thoughts or the emotions or the will or of all three sides of our nature. A spiritualised ethical formation in character is a possible consequence. All this may happen, yet all is not moulded into that experience. These intuitions and illuminations grow in insistence and channelise themselves, and thus there will be a strong inner formation of the being and a claim to govern the whole life and nature. Then begins the spiritual formation of the being, the emergence of the saint, the devotee, spiritual sage, the seer, the prophet, the servant of God, the soldier of the spiritual light, power or ecstasy.³⁹ Sri Aurobindo vividly describes the differences in the spirituality of different types of spiritual people in the following passage:

The sage and seer live in the spiritual mind, their thought or their vision is governed and moulded by an inner or a greater divine light of knowledge; the devotee lives in the spiritual aspiration of the heart, its self-offering and its seeking; the saint is moved by the awakened psychic being in the inner heart grown powerful to govern the emotional and vital being; the others stand in the vital kinetic nature driven by a higher spiritual energy and turned by it towards an inspired action, a God-given work or mission, the service of some divine Power, idea or ideal. The last or highest emergence is the liberated man who has realised the Self and Spirit within him, entered into the

39. SABCL 19. 882

cosmic consciousness, passed into union with the Eternal and, so far as he still accepts life and, action, acts by the light and energy of the Power within him working through his human instruments of Nature. The largest formulation of this spiritual change and achievement is a total liberation of soul, mind, heart and action, a casting of them all into the sense of the cosmic Self and Divine Reality.⁴⁰ The spiritual evolution of the individual has then found its way and thrown up its range of Himalayan eminence and its peaks of highest nature. Beyond this height and largeness there opens only the supramental ascent or the incommunicable Transcendence.⁴¹

It is easy to see that Sri Aurobindo considers these spiritual achievements as partial. At the same time he asserts that they need not always be incomplete and onesided. All of these spiritual experiences can be harmonised and fused into one, if man ascends to supramental consciousness and attains the integral knowledge inherent in it. And if he can bring down its Will one with the Knowledge, his life will enjoy the Divine Bliss in all its movements and the body will establish the peace and joy in its every cells in such a way that their natural decay, disintegration and death will be overcome. To sum up, spirituality has to become supramentalised so that it can transform Life into the Life Divine.

40. Here Sri Aurobindo gives the following foot-note:

“This is the essence of the spiritual ideal and realization held before us by the *Gita*.”

41. *SABCL* 19. 882