FROM MAN HUMAN TO MAN DIVINE

Sri Aurobindo’s Vision of the Evolutionary Destiny of Man

*What now we see is a shadow of what must come.*

– Sri Aurobindo

JUGAL KISHORE MUKHERJEE

SRI AUROBINDO INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF EDUCATION
PONDICHERRY
FROM MAN HUMAN TO MAN DIVINE

Sri Aurobindo’s Vision of
the Evolutionary Destiny of Man
FROM MAN HUMAN TO MAN DIVINE

Sri Aurobindo’s Vision of the Evolutionary Destiny of Man

What now we see is a shadow of what must come.
— Sri Aurobindo

JUGAL KISHORE MUKHERJEE

SRI AUROBINDO INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF EDUCATION.
PONDICHERRY
There is a need within the soul of man
The splendours of the surface never sate;
For life and mind and their glory and debate
Are the slow prelude of a vaster theme,
A sketch confused of a supernal plan,
A preface to the epic of the Supreme.

— SRI AUROBINDO

I know, O God, the day shall dawn at last
When man shall rise from playing with the mud
And taking in his hands the sun and stars
Remould appearance, law and process old.
Then, pain and discord vanished from the world,
Shall the dead wilderness accept the rose
And the hushed desert babble of its rills;
Man once more seem the image true of God.

— SRI AUROBINDO

O Thou who climbedst to mind from the dull stone,
Turn to the miracled summits yet unwon.

— SRI AUROBINDO

(From Sri Aurobindo's Collected Poems, pp. 137, 89 & 164)
This is a companion volume to the other book by the same author, *The Destiny of the Body*, which too has been published by us some time back under the auspices of *Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education*, Pondicherry.

*The Destiny of the Body* dealt with the particular question of the evolutionary possibilities of man’s physical existence including his body.

The present volume, *From Man Human to Man Divine*, widens and intensifies the scope of investigation and treats man as a species in general and studies his lowly past beginnings, his present achievements and failures and, of course, his glorious evolutionary future.

All the human problems dealt with in this book have been thoroughly analysed on the basis of modern knowledge and then their solutions indicated in the light of Sri Aurobindo’s Philosophy of Integralism.

A research publication of this nature and dimension has perforce to draw its sustenance from the ideas and observations of many sages and thinkers. Of course, all these ideas and observations gathered from different sources have been blended by the author into an integrated organic whole. The present work is the result of a very fruitful reading of numerous books, both ancient and modern, of the Orient as well as of the Occident. The author craves the indulgence of any writer whose name he may have inadvertently forgotten to mention in the body of the book in the proper context where the ideas or observations of the writer concerned have been alluded to.

In lieu of an *Index*, the *Contents* itself has been sufficiently expanded to indicate some of the principal topics discussed in the book.

The readers may please note that wherever Sri Aurobindo has been quoted in the book, all the pages indicated, unless otherwise stated, invariably refer to the Centenary Editions of his works.

We are grateful to the Government of India for a financial grant to meet the cost of publishing the present volume.

24 Nov. 1989
CONTENTS

Publishers’ Note vii

Introduction (A View, in Advance, of What the Book is About) xv

I. Man: His Past, Present and Future 1
   In His Own Image 1
   The House of the Spirit 2
   The Theriomorphous vs. the Anthropomorphous 3
   Man the Measure 4
   The Challenge Fails 5
   Swords Are Crossed 6
   Self-Pride Tumbles 8
   Kinsmen of the Past 10
   Man the Marvel 11
   Evolution Becomes Reflexively Conscious 18
   The Flute-Call of the Future 20
   The Seer’s Vision 22
   The Mutant Minority 23

II. Science and Philosophy vis-à-vis 26
   Sri Aurobindo’s Vision of Divine Manhood 26
   Prometheus and Ganymede 26
   New Manifestation 27
   Crisis of Modern Physics 28
   Physiognomy of Science 28
   Physics and Metaphysics 29
   Science and Scientist-cum-Philosopher 30
   Havoc of the Residues 31
   Scientist’s Quest for a Philosophy 32
   Modern Science and Modern Philosophies 33
Reality and the Integral Knowledge 34
Explanation in Science 35
Physics, Mathematics and Reality 37
Physics Axiomatized 37
Double-Pronged Attack 38
Mathematics and the total Phenomenal Reality 40
Reality Evanescent 41
Shifting Sands 42
The Spectre of Janus 42
Mad Hatter's Tea Party 43
The Riddle of the 'Mikros' 43
Reality 'An Sich' v. Reality 'Fieri' 44
Vanitas Vanitatum Knocked Out 46
The Unknown and the Unknowable 47
March of Evolution 49
Integral Yoga 51
New Manifestation 52
Adventure Beckons Science 55

III. Science and Spiritual Knowledge 57
Why Reconciliation? 57
Confrontation of Science and Religion 59
Inhibitions of Ascetic Spirituality 61
An Integral and Dynamic Spiritual Vision 62
Spirituality Reconciled to Science 65
The Common Ground of Essential Attitude 67
The Methodology of Science 69
Science against Spiritual Knowledge:
   Charges and their Refutation 71
The Co-operative Reconciliation 75

IV. Mathematical Culture and Yogic Pursuit 81
Introduction 81
"Mysteria Infiniti" 82
Contents

Reason and Mathematics 86
Crisis of Mathematical Logic 86
Place of Intuition in Mathematics 88
Unity in Diversity 89
Mathematical Knowledge and Scientific Truth 91
Aspects of Mathematical Culture 94
Mathematics and Yoga 98

V. Sight, More Sight...
(The Ascent of Sight as a Faculty of Knowledge) 101
‘Out of Our Thoughts We Must Leap up to Sight’ 101
The Involutionary and the Evolutionary Phases of Manifestation 102
The Progressive Awakening of Consciousness 104
Consciousness and Vision Growing together 106
The Power of Sight-Will 108
The Internal Spiritual Sight (drk-śakti) 113
Hierarchised Luminous Planes of Consciousness 115
The Growth of Light and the Ascent of Sight 116
Sri Aurobindo on the Sight-Attributes of the supernal supra-mental Planes of Our Being 117

VI. Sight Behind Thought 122
The Superiority of ‘Vision’ over Other Senses 123
Limitations of Mind as an Instrument of Knowledge 124
The Supraphysical Sight 125
Pictorial Thinking 126
Intellectus, Ratio and Wisdom 128
Types of Visualisation in the Realm of Philosophical Pursuit 129
Insufficiency of Reason Deprived of an Intuitional Background 135
Uncertainty of Rational Knowledge 136
The Path to True Knowledge 136
VII. The Ascent of Thought and the Ascent of Speech 138
   ‘But Thought nor Word can Seize Eternal Truth’ 138
   The ‘Myth’ of Ineffability 143
   The Ineffable Knowledge 150
   Thought-Knowledge and Spiritual Knowledge 153
   Why Ineffable? 157
   The Ascent of Thought 168
   The Ascent of Speech 175

VIII. Sri Aurobindo and the Crisis of Modern Man 183
   The Age of Anxiety 183
   The Crisis of the Alienated Man 184
   The ‘Free’ Man Protests 187
   Man Looks to Philosophy 188
   Message of Divine Manhood 190
   The World and Its Riddle 191
   Key to the World-Enigma 194
   Evolutionary Significance of Cosmic Existence 198

IX. The Problem of Human Relations 201
   The Dream of Harmony 201
   Trends at War 202
   An Evolutionary Problem 205
   Meaning of World-Existence 210
   The Ascent of Life 214
   Towards the Right Solution 217

X. Man, the Individual and Social Being 219
   (The Malady and Its Cure) 219
   Threefold Urge of All Living Beings 219
   Why Clash and Collision and Disharmony? 220
   The Besetting Problems of Man the Individual 220
   The Individual Self-affirmation and the Self-affirmation of the Collective Being 222
## Contents

The Problems of Living, Individual and Collective, and Their True Solution 222

The New Man 224

### XI. On Physical Transformation

The Importance of the Body 226

The Divine Transformation of the Physical 'Sheath' 227

The Process of Transformation in General: Some Cardinal Points 228

Difficulties Peculiar to the Task of Physical Transformation 230

The Problem and Its Solution 231

The True Foundation is Above While the Branchings are Downward 234

The Wisdom of the Body 237

The Future Evolution of Man 239

The Impact of the Supramental Manifestation on the Form and Function of the Physical Body 240

### XII. The Ever-Ascending March of Man

(Sri Aurobindo on Man's Evolutionary Destiny) 243

### Appendix

Sri Aurobindo on the Task before Humanity 250
INTRODUCTION:
A View, in Advance, of What the Book is About

The book From Man Human to Man Divine bears an unusual title and, as the title indicates, it deals with the evolutionary destiny of man. Man’s past, present and future have been thoroughly discussed here in the wide perspective of the total earthly existence. Some cardinal problems besetting man’s advance in his present evolutionary status have been put into focus, analysed in all their ramifications and then their probable evolutionary solutions delineated, based on the revelations made by the great seer-philosopher Sri Aurobindo. Nothing is here offered as mere dogmatic assertions to be either accepted or rejected according to the predilections of individual readers. Every solution has been presented as the natural and inevitable conclusion to be drawn from the relevant data gathered from different fields. It is for the readers to judge whether the discussions entered into in this book are professionally rigorous, logically valid and honest in presentation. The book is primarily meant for the unbiased and open-minded intellectuals. At every step of its meandering discussions, the book challenges the reader with new and bold and unconventional ideas and invites him to think afresh and then come to his own conclusions. The author will feel his efforts highly rewarded if it is found that he has been able to communicate to even a few of his readers a part of the intellectual thrill he personally experienced while composing the various chapters of this book.

In course of our sinuous discussions and deliberations, we have had to touch upon a great number of connected issues and questions; the unwary reader, while perusing the book for the first time, may feel like counting the individual trees but missing the wood as a whole. To obviate this difficulty we have felt it advisable to prelude the main body of the book with this preliminary chapter “A View, in Advance, of What the Book is About”. A glance through these pages will help the readers to keep track of the central motif of the book through all its multifarious elaboration. This introductory chapter has been constituted of a series of key-passages culled from various chapters of the book.

In our times man has tended to become the central theme of almost all philosophical thinking. The outlook of the present age is
essentially humanistic. The world has become impatient with every system of thought that fails to give primacy to man and his insistent problems.

But what is this human individual? He seems to have a multiple essence. He is in nature; he is in history. He obviously belongs to the material realm but also to the biological; not merely to the biological, but also to the social: he is indeed a socio-moral creature. It may well be that there are other deeper and higher realms to which he belongs, of which he is not aware as yet.

Darwin has taught that man has evolved from the humblest form of life by a process of natural selection that was quite automatic; and, in particular, “instead of Adam, our ancestry is traced to the most grotesque of creatures!” Well, it may very well be so, so far as the past of man is concerned. But what about his future? Looking intently around, a thinking man cannot but be puzzled with a lot of intriguing questions:

Is there at all a meaning behind this colossal world-existence? Of what worth is the individual man in this immense cosmic drama? Does his existence bear any relevance here? Is there any sense and purpose behind the march of humanity, and if so, what is it? What should be the goal of man the individual and of the human race? Is there any truth in the notion of human free-will, or is man a mere creature of circumstances? What is meant after all by God or the Absolute? Does he exist at all? And if he exists, is there any way of contacting him? What should be the proper relation of man the individual to other individuals and to the community of men? How can he realise his age-old dream of three basic harmonies: cosmical harmony between man and world, social harmony between man and man and bio-psychical harmony within man himself? And, finally, what about death, that dreadful, ineluctable eventuality? Does it set to nought and mock with a derisive laughter all the hopes and aspirations, toils and striving of the individual man?

Then, again, it is well understood that man as a species has been the latest and so far the last product of biological evolution. But does he represent absolutely the end-product of it? Has the process of evolution ceased to be operative upon earth? Or, who knows, it is still continuing, albeit in a new form!

Prof. G. R. Harrison remarks in his What Man May Be: The Human Side of Science (p. 125):
“It is not ego-centric on the part of man to consider himself the most highly evolved creature in nature. But any tendency to consider himself its end-product would be short-sighted, for evolution is taking place today faster than ever before. Physical evolution has been almost completely short-circuited by man as applied to himself. But social, emotional and mental evolution are now carrying him on to ever greater complexity and awareness.”

But a further, may be virtually infinite, extension of the social, emotional and mental capacities and capabilities, is that all that is in store for the human race? Can there not be a far more glorious future for our wonderful species? Can there not be a further phase of evolution? Indeed, may we not pertinently raise the query: just as the inorganic phase of evolution was followed by the biological phase wherein ‘life invaded the material sheath’, just as towards the close of the biological phase the cerebral cortex began to be elaborated and with it ‘earth-plasm first quivered with the illuminating Mind’, just as again at the end of the biological phase, with the development of the cerebrum, evolution started on a new course when ‘man was moulded from the original brute’, similarly now, with the attainment of maturity by man, evolution may very well turn another leaf and pass on to an altogether new phase: the supra-mental sector of world-manifestation. For surely man, as he is now constituted, is too imperfect a creature to be deemed the final possible product of evolution. No doubt, man is the crown of all that has been so far done, but creation’s eonine labour cannot be finally justified with him; he can, by no stretch of imagination, be conferred the honour of being Nature’s last poise. And, as Sri Aurobindo has so beautifully put it in Savitri (Book II, Canto V, p. 166).

“... if this were all and nothing more were meant, If what now seems were the whole of what must be, If this were not a state through which we pass On our road from Matter to eternal Self, ... Well might interpret our mind's limited view Existence as an accident in Time, Illusion or phenomenon or freak.”

According to the vision of Sri Aurobindo, man’s importance in the world is that he offers to it that development of consciousness
in which its transfiguration by a perfect self-discovery becomes possible. The real sense of man’s progress does not lie in a mere restatement in slightly different terms of what physical Nature has already accomplished. Nor can the ideal of human life be simply the animal repeated on a higher scale of mentality. Indeed, “Man has seen that there can be a higher status of consciousness than his own; the evolutionary estraus is there in his parts of mind and life, the aspiration to exceed himself is delivered and articulate within him: ... In him, then, the substitution of a conscious for a subconscious evolution has become conceivable and practicable, and it may well be concluded that the aspiration, the urge, the persistent endeavour in him is a sure sign of Nature’s will for a higher way to fulfilment, the emergence of a greater status.” (Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, p. 843)

And what is then that greater status? “The animal is a living laboratory in which Nature has, it is said, worked out man. Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious co-operation she wills to work out the superman, the god. Or shall we not say, rather, to manifest God? For if evolution is the progressive manifestation by Nature of that which slept or worked in her, involved, it is also the overt realisation of that which she secretly is.” (Sri Aurobindo, op. cit., pp. 3-4)

Elsewhere, in his book The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings (Ed. 1989, pp. 300-01), Sri Aurobindo makes the above points more specific. He writes:

“For what is supermanhood but a certain divine and harmonious absolute of all that is essential in man? He is made in God’s image, but there is this difference between the divine Reality and its human representative that everything which in the one is unlimited, spontaneous, absolute, harmonious, self-possessed becomes in the other limited, relative, laboured, discordant, deformed, possessed by struggle, kept by subservience to one’s possessions, lost by the transience and insecurity which come from wrong holding. But in this constant imperfection there is always a craving and an aspiration towards perfection. Man, limited, yearns to the Infinite; relative, is attracted in all things towards their absolute; artificial in nature, drives towards a higher ease, mastery and naturalness that must for ever be denied to her inconscient forces
and half-conscient animals; full of discords, he insists upon harmony; possessed by Nature and to her enslaved, is yet convinced of his mission to possess and master her.”

Sri Aurobindo continues:

“What he aspires to is the sign of what he may be. He has to pass by a sort of transmutation of the earthly metal he now is out of flawed manhood into some higher symbol. For Man is Nature’s great term of transition in which she grows conscious of her aim; in him she looks up from the animal with open eyes towards her divine ideal.”

Thus Sri Aurobindo envisages human evolution to continue with unabated vigour, to continue not merely as a secondary operation confined solely to the outer existence of man but primarily as a qualitative transmutation of his consciousness, leading in the end to the appearance of a new supramental species upon earth. In reality, the earthly manifestation is ever progressive, of which the key-note is the evolution of consciousness with all that it implies; and if evolution is a fact, the present man cannot be its last term, nor can his noetic faculty, Mind, be the supreme possible instrument of knowledge although we men seem at times to think so. For man as he is at present “is too imperfect an expression of the spirit, mind itself a too limited form and instrumentation; mind is only a middle term of consciousness, the mental being can only be a transitional being.” (Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine)

What is more, even at the risk of provoking derisive laughter in some of our readers, we make bold to affirm that the evolutionary movement has very recently taken a saltus; a new principle of consciousness, a higher element has already been in operation in the arena of terrestrial manifestation, one result of which would be that “all the old formulas would be changed immediately and the whole possibility according to the old unfolding would be, one cannot say increased, but supplemented by an almost infinite number of new possibilities, and that in such a manner that all the old logic would become illogical in the presence of the new logic.” (The Mother’s Talk, “The Supramental Manifestation and World-Change”, Mother India, December ’56)

And on this hopeful note does our First Chapter close.
It is not from below but from above, not from outside but from inside, that the new phase of human evolution will be effectively directed. It is not the prior material organisation which will shape and mould the indwelling consciousness; the order will be reversed and it is the new manifesting consciousness which will be the determinant and mould the material substance and its structure.

Surely this appears to be too presumptuous a statement to be accepted easily! - Matter is a function of Consciousness and not the other way round! But is not the whole of modern man's structure of knowledge reared up on the presupposition that Matter, after all, is the foundation? Do we then seek to knock down this very materialistic basis?

And what would be the reaction of modern Science to such epoch-making assertions? We are referring to Science, for in the present period of 'materialist denial', out of which we are just emerging, materialism has based itself almost exclusively on the authority of science; and that too to such an extent as to create the illusion that a truly scientific attitude is synonymous with the materialistic conception of Reality. But is it really so?

The Second Chapter of the present book deals with this very crucial question. There we have sought to follow the evolutionary growth of science as such through all its successive phases of development and tried to show that Physics, that most developed branch of natural science, has already outgrown the phase of materialistic bias and is at present, we venture to hope, ready enough to welcome and receive the illuminating insights offered by the Integral World-Vision of Sri Aurobindo. So far as epistemological and ontological pursuits are concerned, modern science finds itself imprisoned in a blind alley and it is only in the Yoga-Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo that science can discover its true self and true mission.

Reality is eluding the grasp and probe of science in its present development. Someone has remarked that the strength of science lies in its naivety. It started on its journey with complete self-assurance, without burdening itself with metaphysical problems about reality. To it it seemed that everything in this universe could be explained in terms of matter, and is not matter something tangible and immediate?

In a sense it was good that in the beginning of its career science did not concern itself with the problem of reality; for, indeed, if
the scientist had become too self-conscious, he might have lost all his power of forward movement, “like the famous centipede who, after too profound an analysis of his own method of locomotion, found that he could no longer walk!” (Gilbert N. Lewis, *The Anatomy of Science*, p. 1)

But science could not avert for good the day of reckoning. It has at last come face to face with the sphinx of reality, apparently without any chance of solving its riddle. The self-assurance is broken, its pretension to uncover the body of underlying reality is humbled, and as a result agnosticism grows. And note the irony of the situation. At the very moment when science has reached the pinnacle of its practical usefulness, the scientist is altogether disconcerted by questions of fundamental import, questions which shake the very foundations of all scientific ‘knowledge’. It goes without saying that we are here talking about science as a means to acquire knowledge of the reality, and not about its practical results nor about the approximate generalisations it has arrived at, which are no doubt valid in their limited domain.

Modern science has really arrived at a cross-road. To it reality appears to be ever unknowable. Should it then give up the pursuit, essential knowledge being to it unknowable? Or, should it not take a leap into the light, undergo a qualitative metamorphosis and proceed on a path of new adventure? Here comes in Sri Aurobindo with his supreme assurance that “The Unknown is not the Unknowable; it need not remain the unknown for us, unless we choose ignorance or persist in our first limitations. For to all things that are not unknowable, all things in the universe, there correspond in that universe faculties which can take cognizance of them, and in man, the microcosm, these faculties are always existent and at a certain stage capable of development.... Fundamentally, all possible knowledge is knowledge within the power of humanity.” (The Live Divine, p. 13)

But it should at once be emphasised that our way of knowing must be appropriate to that which is to be known; otherwise, what we can at most hope to achieve is only a distant speculation, a figure of knowledge and not veritable knowledge. And let us hasten to add that mind of man is not capable of explaining existence in the universe. For “Mind is that which does not know, which tries to know and which never knows except as in a glass darkly.... Knowledge waits seated beyond mind and intellectual
reasoning, throned in the luminous vast of illimitable self-vision.” (Sri Aurobindo, The Live Divine, pp. 118, 121)

So we see that if we seek an integral knowledge of the integral reality, the only logical course for us is to leave behind us this smoke-covered lamp of our present faculty of knowledge and, instead, awake into a still higher region of consciousness where a supra-intellectual 'seeing' will replace "a seeking Mind".

But at this point the readers may object: Is it not an idle dream to hunt after this super-mind, for how can there be anything higher and greater than man’s mind and reason?

But we should note that Sri Aurobindo is no speculative philosopher. He is not satisfied merely with painting in rainbow colours an aureate picture of the ideal. He is a supreme scientist of life who proceeds to realise the ideal in himself and then to build up an integral method for others to follow. And what is the efficacy of this recommended method called the Integral Yoga of self-transformation? Well, let us listen to Sri Aurobindo himself:

“I must remind you that I have been an intellectual myself and no stranger to doubts – both the Mother and myself have had one side of the mind as positive and as insistent on practical results and more so than any Russell can be. We could never have been contented with the shining ideas and phrases which a Rolland or another takes for gold coin of Truth. We know well what is the difference between a subjective experience and a dynamic outward-going and realising Force. So although we have faith (and who ever did anything great in the world without having faith in his mission or the Truth at work behind him?), we do not found ourselves on faith alone, but on a great ground of knowledge which we have been developing and testing all our lives. I think I can say that I have been testing day and night for years upon years more scrupulously than any scientist his theory or his method on the physical plane.... I know that the Supramental Descent is inevitable – I have faith in view of my experience that the time can be and should be now and not in a later age.” (On Himself, pp. 468-9)

So we say that a positive adventure's call is now beckoning science to transcend its self-imposed present limitations and get transformed into a meta-science which will be the science of the
New Man. As Sri Aurobindo indicates, “it must be a new science not yet developed, which deals directly with the forces of the life-world and of Mind and so arrives at what is beyond Mind: but present-day science cannot do that.” (Letters on Yoga”)

But the readers may ask with some irritation: What is all this talk about present-day science and future science? Science is science and it is bound to be ever the same in its intrinsic nature, and it cannot but be that science, in its very nature and methodology, must perforce be antithetical to the methods of inquiry and exploration as preconised by the mystics and the yogis: science and spirituality will always be at poles apart and as Sri Aurobindo’s revelations arise out of his so-called spiritual knowledge, ipso facto their truth-validity is almost nil so far as the scientists are concerned.

But is it really so? Must science be, by its very nature, unresponsive if not positively hostile to the spiritual vision and interpretation of the world?

The Third Chapter of the present book deals with these and allied questions and purports to demonstrate that a harmonious and fruitful reconciliation between the two disciplines is not merely possible but quite natural and inevitable if only Science and Spirituality, in their extraneous and inessential fortuitous accretions, consent to shed the dead weight of their inhibitions and presumptions. As the Mother has so pertinently pointed out, anything “that keeps to its proper place and plays its appointed role is helpful, but directly it steps beyond its sphere, it becomes twisted and perverted and therefore false.” (Words of the Mother, p. 52)

We have tried to show in course of the third chapter that much of the conflict between Science and Religion is solely due to this overstepping of respective spheres and is therefore devoid of any veritable raison d’être.

Thus the so-called conflict between Science and Spirituality arises from a misunderstanding of each other’s position, role and field of study. And it is not so much on the positive side, on the side of vindication of one’s own right to exist and grow, the conflict is more often on the negative side, – and therefore unnecessary and eliminable, – when one tries to deny the right of existence to the other. And this is nothing but an error of misdirected enthu-
siasm and the folly of the presumptuous vital in man.

The dark doom to which humanity is now apparently hurtling headlong down under the impact of its external opulence and inner penury can be averted only if there dawns in man a greater spiritual consciousness adequate to meet and master the increasing technological potentialities of existence and harmonise them. To quote Sri Aurobindo, “a greater whole-being, whole-knowledge, whole-power is needed to weld all into a greater unity of whole-life.” (The Life Divine, p. 1055)

It is not expected that everybody will be a yogi or everybody a practising scientist. But in order that a few can be effectively the same for the welfare of all and for the general flowering of Science and Spirituality, it is absolutely essential that the collective mind of man accept the simultaneous necessity of both the disciplines, for the eradication of the multipronged ills of man and of his society as evolved at present, also the validity and truth of each of them in its own field of research.

Sri Aurobindo has defined the consciousness of man the mental being as “a many-sided Ignorance striving to become an all-embracing Knowledge.” Yes, ‘striving to become’, but always failing to attain to its cherished end. But why? Because mind-consciousness, the principal instrument of knowledge for man in his presently evolved status, suffers from some basic limitations and inadequacies. Man has to develop a new and greater faculty of knowledge if he would like to reach his goal.

But whatever is this new faculty of greater and more authentic knowledge? It is Sight, in one word. ‘Sight? What do you mean by Sight’, the readers may wonder. Of course, it is not ‘sight’ understood in its ordinary sense. Yet it is no doubt sight in its essential character. As a matter of fact, there are sights and sights of different orders: there is a veritable ascension of sight as a faculty of knowledge. The Fifth Chapter of the present book, “ Sight, More Sight”, devotes itself to the elaboration of this thought-provoking theme and tries to show that seer-knowledge is always much more authentic than the thinking knowledge; a consciousness proceeding by ‘sight’ has a much greater and more direct access to the truth of things than the consciousness relying on the crutches of thoughts and concepts alone.

Thus the commanding word to the jijñāsu or the seeker after
true knowledge on his upward journey to the Vedic ‘Sun of Gnosis’, has always been to replace his “seeking Mind” by the “seeing Soul” and to acquire a new cognitive status in which “sight was a flame-throw from identity.” For then alone will man be made a Rishi or Kavi and no mere thinker, — a Rishi or Seer who, in the words of Sri Aurobindo, “does not need the aid of thought” as “a means of knowledge, but only as a means of representation and expression, — ... If a further extension of knowledge is required, he can come at it by new seeing without the slower thought processes…” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 803)

In his further evolutionary development, man is expected to acquire and put to greater use this ascending faculty of ‘sight’. But it needs no mention that the sight of which we are speaking has nothing to do with mere physical sight. In fact, the operation of ‘sight’ is not confined to physical sight alone. To each plane of consciousness there corresponds a particular strand of sight. Thus, we may possess and utilise a sight in the sense-mind, an emotional sight of the heart, a conceptual sight, a psychic sight, a mental intuitive sight, a spiritualised mental sight, etc., etc.

Thus, with the progressive widening and heightening and deepening of consciousness, ever new vistas of ‘light’ open up before the ascending soul and every step of advance on this ‘path of the Gods’, devayāna, brings in a new ascension of sight, and this process continues till we reach the highest height and the greatest ‘sight’, para drk, the all-embracing, all-relating and all-unifying vision of the supramental infinite consciousness.

Well, since the seeing knowledge, as we have ventured to state, is always more authentic, more compelling and more satisfying than a mere thinking conceptual knowledge, an ever-insistent although mostly unconscious thirst for this ‘vision’, drṣṭi, invariably creates even in man the mental thinker, the exigence of ‘visualisation’ in diverse domains of his intellectual activity. The Sixth Chapter of our book deals with this very interesting phenomenon.

And the next one, Chapter Seven, discusses a basic dilemma confronting man in his ascending march of consciousness. The present man is rightly proud of his power of speech and the power of his conceptual thought. But the Kena Upanishad cryptically declares that “there sight attains not, nor speech attains, nor the
mind.... That which remains unexpressed by the word, that by which the word is expressed, know that indeed to be the Brahman.”

(na tatra caksurgamchati na vāg gacchati no mano... yad vācānabhyuditam yena vāg abhyudyate tadeva brahma tvam viddhi)

This is indeed the dilemma: according to the unanimous assertions made by various seers and mystics, when the direct spiritual Sight is operative in its full potency, the human tongue proves its utter inadequacy to convey the glory and opulence of the Vision; on the contrary, any attempt at mental formulation brings the consciousness headlong down with the inevitable result that the Vision and the original Experience vanish in the process!

But is the fact really so? Can there be any experience (however high and profound, mystical or spiritual that may be), which intrinsically and absolutely defies all expression? Many thinkers would vehemently deny the truth of such an assertion. For according to them, “the limits of my language are the limits of my world”; or, “there is no experience without speech”; or, again, “there is no knowledge without expression, expression is part of the knowing process”.

Well, how to reconcile and heal this dichotomy of positions? For that we have to successively explore the questions:

What is the essential nature of a language? Can thought exist without the clothing of words? Does conceptual thought represent the supreme process of knowledge? Is there any possibility of having knowledge without concepts? What is the relation between logic and reality? Does ineffability imply at the same time unknowability? And is the avowal of ineffability synonymous with vague and confused awareness? etc., etc.

Chapter Seven of our book discusses these questions and tries to show that those thinkers who fail to appreciate the yogis’ position do so because of certain erroneous assumptions, e.g.,

- (i) consciousness must be synonymous with mind;
- (ii) mind is the only possible cognitive instrument available to man;
- (iii) any valid knowledge and conceptual thought-process are inseparable one from the other;
- (iv) there can be no thought without the accompanying corelate of verbal expression;
- (v) anything to be accorded the status of reality must submit itself to the norms of mental logic.
But these assumptions are simply not true. And what is more, the final test of truths... is not reason but spiritual illumination, and a single decisive spiritual experience may undo a whole edifice of reasonings and conclusions erected by the normal logical intelligence.

Also, a genuine spiritual knowledge – and we cannot but insist on this point again and again – is not to be arrived at through a ratiocinative process of thinking or by a logomachy of the logical mind. Spiritual awareness should not be confused with a very subtle and opulent conceptual thought. As Sri Aurobindo has pointed out: “Mental knowledge is not true knowledge; true knowledge is that which is based on the true sight, the sight of the Seer, of Surya, of the Kavi. Mental thought is not knowledge, it is a golden lid placed over the face of the Truth, the Sight, the divine Ideation, the Truth Consciousness. When that is removed, sight replaces mental thought, the all-embracing truth-ideation... replaces the fragmentary mental activity.” (The Upanishads, Part One, p. 96)

But still the question remains: Are thought and speech intrinsically barred from becoming the vehicles of expression of the spiritual Reality? But before we can expect to receive an adequate answer to this question, we must first be clear in our mind about what we mean by ‘thought’ and ‘speech’. For, as our Chapter Seven will show, there are thoughts and thoughts, the verbal conceptual thought being no more than a minor form of them; and there are types of ‘speeches’ far transcending the capabilities of our ordinary human language.

As a matter of fact, with each step of man’s ascension through a graded series of spiritual planes and powers of consciousness, which can lead us through ‘the domains of Other-Mind into the Beyond-Mind’, we encounter a different kind of ‘thought’, different in potency as well as in character. But be it at once noted that even at its supreme elevation, thought will remain a secondary and derivative power at a certain remove from the corresponding spiritual knowledge.

But what about ‘speech’? Has this, too, an ascending march analogous to that of ‘thought’? And how far can it possibly go in its attempt at formulating the ‘ineffable spiritual experience’? Is man justified in his expectation that he will be able to seize reality in its entirety through the mediation of linguistic symbols properly en-
riched? How far does the reach of man-made speech go to express all possible knowledge? And what is the status of the vocal symbols in relation to the reality they claim to embody or express? Are they mere tags, arbitrary substitutional signs, extrinsically related to the object of knowledge? Or, on the contrary, do they inviolably inhere in the reality from which they are inseparable?

For the answers to these and cognate questions, our readers are invited to go through chapter seven of the present book. For, before the New Man appears on the scene and solves these problems in his own way, we men in our actually evolved status must know where we stand.

The next three chapters (Chapters VIII, IX & X) of the book introduce the readers to the discussion of the basic problems that are confronting the man of our age. Man the individual and social being has been suffering from an all-round malaise. And the reason for this is not far to seek. Man is, after all, a transitional being: he is the end-product of animal evolution but he is at the same time the precursor to the advent of divine humanity. Evolution is on the point of entering a new phase with undreamt-of possibilities. The throes of this new creation and of the manifestation of a super-humanity are vibrant everywhere. It is now the darkest night before the emergence of the long-awaited Dawn. And as a result all the inherent problems and discords, disorders and disharmonies, lacunae and limitations of present humanity have come to the fore with the utmost acuity. Their solutions brook no delay or postponement. Earth-Mother is astir with the dream of bringing into the world the divine Child. Evolutionary oestrus is at work for a glorious earthly manifestation. Now, where does man stand at this supreme moment of earthly destiny?

The twentieth century has been called the ‘Age of Human Predicament’. The man of our epoch has been suffering from an all-pervading sense of anxiety with its background of multiform frustration, maladjustment and inner disintegration.

The individual man has become an enigma to himself. He wonders what he is after all. He has been told, for example, that Matter is the basic cosmic reality and Spirit only an epiphenomenon, a self-creation of Matter in the process of its development from the simple to the more and more complex combinations of its constituent elements. He has also been told that he is purely a
mechanical being, a creature made up of automatic reflexes. The problem of free-will has been given a new twist by the assertion that man is not, after all, such a free agent as he has supposed himself to be; he never is and never can be anything except the product of economic determinism.

Modern man is confused in the medley of all these assertions but he is reluctant to accept their implications: he simply protests and protests.

He protests against that sort of logical analysis that purports to declare that he is nothing more than the agglomeration of the factors in which he can be analysed. He protests against all forms of totalitarian philosophy that threaten the dignity, independence and individual value of the human person. He voices his protest against the ‘typing’ of the human being by the society, against impersonal functionalisation of life.

It becomes imperative that man the multi-dimensional being should be treated integrally in all his aspects. But almost everywhere in current philosophical thinking one finds the mistake of the fallacy of reductionism, the mistake of trying to reduce to one aspect all the rest and thus offering an all-too-partial one-sided picture of man. It is no wonder, then, that modern man fails to find his heart’s fulfilment in any of the prevalent philosophies. Indeed, he is haunted by a corroding lack of faith in himself, faith in his destiny and also in the destiny of the world.

Here comes Sri Aurobindo’s Philosophy of Integralism, an integral philosophy of life that embraces in its synthetic sweep Man, Cosmos and the Transcendent. Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga-Philosophy of Divine Humanity offers man a new hope to live by and a glorious ideal to strive after. For, it is not concerned with man in his actuality alone; it concerns itself equally, or even more, with man in his potentiality, with man as he is bound to evolve into. For, it is sure that, although at present hampered and burdened, mental man has still to evolve out of himself the fully conscious being, a divine manhood or rather a spiritual-supramental manhood which shall be the next product of earthly evolution.

Sri Aurobindo’s message represents a forward-looking philosophy that wants to pull man out of the morass in which he has placed himself and spur him on to the marvellous adventure of self-discovery and self-exceeding. And it is, for that matter, no mere system of thought, it is above all a philosophy of action, a
practical guide to integral living. Not only does this philosophy reveal to mankind the resplendent vistas of the future awaiting the probe of aspiring men; but, what is still more important and significant, it shows to anxious humanity the proper path to tread to reach this goal. And this is the theme of our Chapter Eight.

The Ninth Chapter of our book takes up for its study another aspect of man's besetting problems, the problem of human relations.

It is well recognised that ever since the dawn of human history, man has been actuated by a persistent dream of triple harmony: harmony within man himself, social harmony between man and man, and the harmony between man and the world around him. But, alas, all these three basic harmonies have come to appear as so many vain and ineffectual dreams. But why? Why does man human inexorably fail to realise his dreams?

The Ninth Chapter of the present book tries to show that the basic problems of human relations cannot be analysed apart in isolation: they have to be viewed in the wider perspective of the meaning and sense of world-existence and when done so they acquire indeed an altogether novel and significant hue. We have sought to point out how this cosmic perspective not only helps us to unravel the mystery of these problems and understand clearly their true nature and inner significance, but also reveals to us at the same time the only true and perfect procedure for their harmonious resolution.

The readers are referred to this Chapter Nine for a detailed discussion of the questions at issue, also for the way the Philosophy of divine Humanism as propounded by Sri Aurobindo seeks to solve these problems for the New Man. For has not Sri Aurobindo assured us that the destiny of man is to consciously cooperate with the secret nisus of evolution and thus to transmute his own nature and stature into the splendid harmony of a divine manhood?

But whatever may be the prospect for the future, what do we see now all around us? Earth-life appears at first sight to be a vast arena where individuals and collectivities, communities and nations, all are feverishly seeking after self-expression and self-fulfilment. But where is the guarantee that all these diverse self-
affirmations will move in perfect harmony and mutual adaptability? Where is the assurance that the self-affirmation of the individual will not go counter to the self-affirmation of the collective being and vice versa?

Harmony, and not disharmony and discord, should be the keynote of all true living, whether individual or collective. But till this day, man’s attempts at harmonisation have all miscarried and failed. He has tried his hand at a number of remedies, educational, administrative, social and religious, but the disease seems to have defied all palliatives up till now.

But the question is, why so? Why is all this clash and collision and disharmony? What is the root-cause of this ignoble failure on the part of man as a species to organise his individual and collective life on the basis of universal harmony and union? If we really want to reconstruct our society on an ideal basis, we have to touch and tackle the problem at its very root. To manipulate only on the surface without caring to go into the fundamentals of the problem – this is precisely the reason why man has till this day failed in his attempts to usher in a rule of the Spirit upon earth.

The Chapter Ten of this book analyses to its depths this particular problem of man the individual and social being, lays bare the root-causes of the failures of man’s so-far attempted solutions, and then shows how, following the teachings of Sri Aurobindo, the New Man appearing on the earthly scene will tackle and solve this problem to the satisfaction of all.

Then comes our Eleventh and last chapter: “On Physical Transformation”. This chapter deals with a very important question, absolutely central to the destiny of man as an earthly being.

An integral spiritual sadhana should have for its goal not merely the spiritual liberation of some isolated individuals from the shackles of phenomenal Ignorance, avidyā, but the establishment of a divine life upon earth, ihaiva. But since Matter is the foundation of all evolutionary efflorescence of life here upon the terrestrial plane, our physical body assumes a supreme importance in the total scheme of our spiritual achievement. A divine transformation even of our physical sheath, annamaya kośa, is an indispensable concomitant of a truly divine living in the world. But in the actually realised status of consciousness of man the mental being, this transformation can by no means be achieved nor even
initiated on the plane of the material body. For, where is the necessary lever of transformation or the potent agent to effectuate this momentous change?

And is it not a fact that even the states of spiritual consciousness attained so far by the men of the spirit in different climes and times have failed to mould the physical existence of man in the image of divinity? But, what are the basic difficulties which render this task of physical transformation almost impossible of realisation?

The readers are invited to go through our Chapter Eleven for answers to these and allied questions and then for the nature of future achievements that will be brought about by the evolutionary march of man. For, no limit need be or can be put to evolutionary possibilities. Actuality never exhausts the sum of possibilities. And, as Sri Aurobindo has so forcefully pointed out, to argue that something cannot be done because it has never yet been done is to “deny the possibility of changing things and thus of evolution, of the realisation of the unrealised, ... and reduce all to a matter of rigid and unalterable status quo, which is an insolent defiance to both fact and reason (!) and super-reason.”

The Eleventh Chapter seeks to show that when we envisage the ultimate conquest of the present disabilities of man’s physical existence, to be achieved through the process of an evolutionary transfiguration, we are not indulging in a child-soul’s phantasy or its demands for arbitrary miracles nor are we visualising any impossible chimera that goes beyond or outside all forces of Nature. What we are envisaging is the control and conquest of the prevailing determinism of our bodily system by the higher determinism of the supernal grades and powers of our consciousness. And when Supermind, the divine Gnosis, takes charge of evolution, there is absolutely nothing impossible under the Sun:

But more there is concealed in God’s Beyond
That shall one day reveal its hidden face.
Now mind is all and its uncertain ray,
Mind is the leader of the body and life,...
There are greater destinies mind cannot surmise
Fixed on the summit of the evolving Path
The Traveller now treads in the Ignorance,
Unaware of his next step, not knowing his goal.
Mind is not all his tireless climb can reach,
There is a fire on the apex of the worlds,
There is a house of the Eternal's Light.
There is an infinite truth, an absolute power.
The spirit's mightiness shall cast off its mask;
Its greatness shall be felt shaping the world's course.

(Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, Bk. XI, C. 1, p. 704.)
MAN: HIS PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE
(An Essay on the Marvel that is Man)

“It is the Son of Man who is supremely capable of incarnating God.”

(Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine.)

In His Own Image

Homo sapiens, “wise man”: such is the term employed by the modern anthropologist to denote his own tribe, Man, considered as a distinct biological species. And in the coining of this particular nomenclature he is perhaps but echoing the age-old sense of supremacy and self-pride that man has ever displayed since the distant dawn when he first awoke and saw the panorama of creation all around. Is he not “but a little lower than God” if there is at all a Creator God? And God existing, he must have been no doubt His special and privileged creation, as distinct from all other animate creations! He is not a creation of God, he is the work of his predilection!

True, man cannot brush aside altogether the fact that he, too, is a part of the animal realm; in fact, his body is linked to the animal world through the triple bondage of similitude, derivation and dependence. But this notwithstanding he feels all the while that he possesses something else which singles him out from all other animate and sentient organisms. And to this sense of his unique dignity and clear supremacy over earthly creatures, man has given expression in unstinted measure in all his race-stories and mythical accounts of creation.

Thus, according to the ancient Hebrew teaching, apart from man’s ‘body’ that is but ‘dust’ (ephār) and ‘flesh’ (bāṣār), apart from his ‘heart’ (nephesh) that ‘hopes and desponds, fears and longs’, apart even from his ‘mind’ (lēbhābh) that is the seat of

1. Psalms, Bk. VIII-5.
From Man Human to Man Divine

wisdom and thought, man is endowed with the unique principle, ‘spirit’ (rūach), ‘breathed’ into him directly from the Source. For did not God solemnly declare: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let him have dominion over the flesh of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him.”

The uniqueness of human creation, as pointed out in the Creation narratives of the Book of Genesis, is brought forth by the significant utterance that, whereas in the case of both animals and plants, the general formula used is the creation ‘after its kind’ effected through some secondary agency: ‘Let the earth bring forth the living creatures after its kind’, ‘Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life’, in the case of man alone the creation is preceded by the solemn injunction: ‘Let us make man’, and followed by the sublime announcement: ‘And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him.’ Man’s advent is thus purported to be a unique event, a peculiar and special creation, “immediate, personal, direct”.

The House of the Spirit

And what about the very body of man? Is it really nothing but ‘dust’ and ‘flesh’? No, not so by any means. Man has indeed marvelled at his own physical frame and at the curious ingenuoussness of its building. The unique structural disposition with its erect posture and forward and upward looking gaze, this wonderful anatomy provided with two hands and a fine array of fingers – unique endowments nowhere else to be found in the whole of the animal realm – such is then the body of the marvel that is Man, and verily this and this alone deserves to be the noble ‘house of the Spirit’! Thus we see that an Upanishad declares in its parable of creation that when the Self or Spirit created the Gods, they said to Him, “Command unto us an habitation that we may dwell secure.” Then the Spirit decided on life-creation and first formed animal kinds like the cow and the horse. “He brought unto the

2. Genesis 1, 26f.
Gods the cow, but they said, 'Verily, it is not sufficient for us.' He brought unto them the horse, but they said, 'Verily, it is not enough for us.' He brought unto them Man, and they said, 'O well fashioned truly! Man indeed is well and beautifully made.' Then the Spirit said unto them, 'Enter ye in each according to his habitation'.”

And the Gods entered into the human frame for their cosmic functions. This is a clear parable of the creation of more and more developed forms till one was found that was capable of housing a truly developed consciousness; for one must remember in this connection that in the symbolic imagery of the Upanishads, the Gods stand for the powers of consciousness and powers of Nature.

**The Theriomorphous vs. the Anthropomorphous**

And how do the Gods themselves look like in their original stature? Surely they, too, must be human in form! For, to man's conception, what other habitat can possibly be there that is fit to be the robe of the heavenly Beings?

Alone among all earthly creatures, man possesses the gift of making images, i.e., of creating figured representations of beings and objects for an emotional or utilitarian purpose. This implies a unique power of exteriorization as applied to the ocular impressions either real or fictive seized only through the mind's eye. And in the gradual building up of his myths, the earliest man used this power in full to create a vast pantheon of gods who were deemed to be so many supernatural powers definitely superior to and more puissant than man. Here, too, in the evolution of the images of the deities, we witness the spectacle of progressive predominance of human forms, as and when man succeeded in establishing and extending his sway over the environment.

The prehistoric man haunted by the fear of the savage beast strutting in the alien and dangerous world, imaged his gods in the form of animals. Thus among the first idols thus far excavated, representations of animals predominate, as is still the case with uncivilised peoples of to-day. But these theriomorphic images were gradually supplanted first by therianthropic and finally by

3. Aitareya Upanishad, 1.2.
anthropomorphic representations as man began to conceive of the gods as a type of ennobled manhood. At the same time "the animals which originally represented the beings did not entirely disappear from iconography; they became the companions or slaves of the divinities whom they used to embody, e.g., the owl of Athene, the eagle of Zeus, the hind of Artemis, the dolphin of Poseidon, and the dove of Aphrodite. In other cases, the bestial or repugnant forms have been left to evil spirits, the enemies of gods and men."

Man the Measure

So much for the theotropic man. But in the historic period of humanity, man has often tried to assert his autonomy in full. He has established himself as the master of the animals, he has felt himself to be the master of all existence. He has ventured to deny the existence of God and declare himself to be 'the monarch of all I survey'.

Ever since the day when Protagoras, the most famous of the Greek sophists of the fifth century B.C., whom Plato pitted even against Homer as an authority on the education and improvement of mankind, formulated his famous maxim, *Panton chrematon metron anthropos*, "Man is the measure of all things", this formula has continued to enthral a section of humanity as typifying man's mood of perfect autonomy. And this tradition of autonomous man as opposed to the theotropic man has come down even to our day, - or should we not say that this indeed is the prevailing temper of the modern man? For, the problem of man as such has lately become the central theme of all philosophy. The concept of anthropology is invading diverse domains of human knowledge so much so that it is giving rise to many distinct sub-disciplines like physical anthropology and historical anthropology, cultural anthropology and industrial anthropology, psychic anthropology and even philosophical anthropology. This philosophical anthropology and its twin brother existentialism are but modern denominations for a turn of mind as old as philosophy itself.

Modern man has declared a war - or at least he has thought so -
against all notions of trans-empiricism. 'Trans-positive' and 'trans-material' are so many taboos to his conception. He patronisingly laughs at those 'pygmy souls' who still may care to occupy themselves with the problems of God, Immortality and transcendental Liberty! for to him this transcendentalism is nothing but an irrational 'fideism', and his self-appointed mission in life is to prick the bubble of this 'meta-physics' and to replace it by his positivism; but, alas, he too turns out to be a confirmed 'fideist' with this questionable distinction that his fideism is of a scientific brand that frets and fumes in the guise of a 'dogmatic adogmatism'. Amongst these fideisms of the autonomous man, mention may be made here of Historical Materialism, Positivist Sociology, Logical Positivism and finally of Freudian Psycho-analysis which is, to quote the significant remark of Roland Dalbier, “the profoundest analysis of all that, in man, is the least human.”

But let us now withdraw a little into history and place ourselves in the momentous period of mid-nineteenth century to witness the advent of a revolutionary doctrine that would in no time rudely disturb man's sempiternal pride and be the starter on a drama of polemics and fierce intellectual battles the like of which man has rarely seen.

The Challenge Fails

The ancient conception as regards the uniqueness of human creation as distinguished from all other animate creation grew out of man's sense of his clear supremacy among earthly creatures, the dignity of this supremacy seeming to demand a special privileged creation. This conception was first challenged and the idea of evolutionary transformation as opposed to once-and-for-all creation began to be seriously entertained only in the early nineteenth century. The notion of distinct biological species grew up, it is true, in the preceding century. But LINNÉ who was the first initiator of the classification of species declared in the orthodox tradition of the Book of Genesis: "There are as many species as the infinite Being chose to create in the beginning of creation." Although the germs of the idea of transformism could be discerned

5. Ivo Hollhuber, Philosopher C'est Apprendre à être Homme.
even in the eighteenth century in the writings of Buffon in France, Goethe in Germany and Erasmus Darwin in England, these could not prevail against the then current mood of intellectual Europe. It is Lamarck, the disciple of Buffon, who was the incontestable founder of the transformist doctrine. Born in 1744, he had to wait till the end of the eighteenth century and published only in 1809 his masterpiece, Philosophie Zoologique, which was incidentally the first serious scientific formulation of the faith in transformism. But Lamarck’s revolutionary ideas came up against the traditionalist spirit of Cuvier, the then monarch of the biological sciences. To Cuvier the notion of the fixity of the species was almost a matter of creed. So he challenged the doctrine of transformism with all the authority at his command and completely ruined Lamarckism in the eyes of his contemporaries.

Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, a disciple of Lamarck, then took up the issue and joined battle with the redoubtable Cuvier. The drama was enacted in 1830 in the French Academy of Sciences and the now famous controversy raged for almost half a year: it was a duel between the transformist doctrine and the doctrine of the fixity of species. The whole of the scientific world of the epoch reverberated with the echoes of these polemics. Goethe, then of the ripe old age of eighty-one, took the keenest interest in this battle of ideas and, in fact, dedicated to this debate his last work completed in 1832 soon before his death. But, alas, traditionalism triumphed again; Cuvier won the controversy and the majority of the men of science rallied round his banner of orthodoxy. The revolutionary ideas of transformism were soon forgotten and the biologists of the day almost seemed to throw a blanket of oblivion over them. “It was as if all our university professors had drunk the water of the Lethe and completely forgotten that there had been ever in the recent past a serious discussion about transformism.”

Swords Are Crossed

Exactly fifty years had rolled by since the publication of Lamarck’s magnum opus. Then there came a man armed with new evidences

in favour of transformism. We are of course referring to Charles Darwin (1809 - 1882). Darwin was an extremely scrupulous and keen observer. Through his minute observation of the variation of flora in South America and in the Galapagos archipelago, undertaken during the navigational cruise of the Beagle (1831 - 1836), he developed the idea of the general variability of species. Through a chance reading in 1838 of Malthus’ almost forgotten work, An Essay on the Principles of Population (1798), he formulated the concept of natural selection. The artificial selection consciously adopted by the village-folk at Down to rear up better agricultural products appeared to him as only the image of Nature’s selection. Meanwhile almost analogous ideas concerning artificial selection were formulated by A. R. Wallace (1823 - 1913) who expressed these in a letter addressed to the geologist Lyell. At Lyell’s suggestion, Darwin and Wallace read their respective memoirs, in July 1858, at a sitting of the Linnean Society of London. Soon after, in 1859, Darwin published the essence of his ideas in the form of a book: thus was ushered the epoch-making publication, The Origin of Species. Herein, Darwin presented an enormous mass of evidence which made it clear that transformation must have occurred.

The Origin of Species made a tremendous impact on the mind of the day; it created a sensation all around. Polemics raged again; controversies started afresh. Man’s age-old self-pride, protected behind the shields of religious tradition and orthodox reaction, violently opposed this revolutionary doctrine. It was only because man had already travelled long that Darwin escaped the fate that befell Bruno and Galileo. Because of their opposition to the geocentric theory of the universe, hallowed and sanctified by the body of the Church, Bruno was burnt at the stake, and the sixty-seven years old Galileo called before the Inquisition had to indicate his “free and unbiased” willingness to recant, to “abjure, curse, and detest the said heresies and errors and every other error and sect contrary to the Holy Church”, and he had to further agree “never more in future to say or assert anything, verbally or in writing, which may give rise to similar suspicion.” But geocentric cosmology could not prevail for long, and before the blast of the evidences accumulated by Darwin the anthropocentric creed, too, soon dissolved.

It is interesting to note in this connection that in his first pub-
lished book, *The Origin of Species*, Darwin intentionally left aside the problem of the origin of man. But the conclusion he did not want to draw in prudence was forcefully pointed out by T. H. Huxley in England and by E. Haeckel in Germany. At last in 1871, Darwin too did the same in his work entitled *The Origin of Man and Sexual Selection*. But long before this date the real significance of his revolutionary doctrine was patent to all, to friends and foes alike of the idea of transformism: *animal origin of man*! For if the principle of transformation was once admitted, man could not be for long shielded from his animal pedigree. But how revolting and nauseating was the-very idea itself! Surely the protagonists of the doctrine of evolution must be atheists and materialists, immoral heretics in the family of man! And thus arose once again the fierceness of the opposition.

**Self-Pride Tumbles**

It was a crucial moment in the history of human thought. Man was asked to make a radical departure from his traditional idea of himself and of the world-creation. A revolutionary orientation was called for and the very world-existence seemed to be pregnant with a new sense and destiny. But quite apart from these significant implications, scientific as well as philosophical, evolution as a fact could not be challenged for long. Studies of ontogeny in relation to phylogeny, comparative anatomy, animal and vegetable paleontology: all these disciplines joined hands to marshal a remarkable array of testimony that confirmed in the most striking way Darwin's deductions that "the evolutionary advance of a group of animals and plants is brought about by its radiation into a number of separate lines or lineages, in each of which transformation is gradual and tends towards the improvement of the lineage for a particular way of life".7

The present century has witnessed great activity in the field of paleontology, notably in the unearthing and analysis of trends or lineages of fossil animal groups, thus giving us for the first time a reasonably accurate and detailed picture of the actual course of evolution in different groups in various circumstances and in

---

various periods of the earth's history and helping the scientists to construct the genealogical table of evolution.

We cannot but mention here the remarkable fact revealed in the study of individual evolution—otherwise known as embryology or ontogeny—that all creatures, in their development from a single cell to maturity, pass rapidly through the forms of all their biological ancestors. "Each human embryo shows the gill arches of the fish; every unborn whale has its legs." Thus Nature manages to do in a few hours or months a job that took her millions of years for the first time. As pointed out by F. Muller, ontogeny seems to be an abridged recapitulation of phylogeny (past history of the species).

And as regards the animal affinity of man, did not Sir Arthur Keith construct a table to show the intimate kinship of man to the monkeys, more particularly to the anthropoid apes? Out of 1665 anatomical characteristics of men,

312 belong exclusively to man;
396 are common to man and the chimpanzee;
385 are common to man and the gorilla;
354 are common to man and the orang-outang;
117 belong both to man and the gibbon; and
113 are shared with other apes.

This does not mean, of course, that man has actually "descended from the monkeys" as used to be generally believed in the late nineteenth century. In fact, "although specialists agree on the main events of human evolution and their significance, they argue about the precise course of evolution. Has man been separated from the apes and monkeys for many millions of years, or is he a recent arrival, perhaps distinct from the apes for only a million years? Was man ever really an ape or is his origin so remote that his ancestors were more like monkeys? I believe that the close similarity in the arms of man and ape shows that our direct ancestors were arm-swinging apes, perhaps not very different from the living chimpanzee".

Mammals have existed on earth for 60 million years and man’s first mammalian ancestor was a four-footed beast about the size of a rat. In the millennia since then he has developed into the relatively giant biped of to-day. Paws changed to hands and the method of locomotion changed at least twice and perhaps three times. In the phase of primate evolution, the common ancestors to modern man and the present anthropoid apes can be located in a not too distant geological past. In fact, the age of our earth has been calculated to be approximately 1600 million years and the first appearance of life on this terrestrial scene has been dated at 1200 million years ago, whereas the modern man is a very recent arrival barely 70 thousand years old, and even if we consider the extinct species of first true men, that too appeared much less than a million years ago.

The first anthropoids resembling somewhat our present-day gibbons are known to have appeared in the Tertiary, say, two or three million years ago. More recent species like the Sivapithecines and the Neopithecines appeared in the same Tertiary Epoch: some of their features, notably in the structure of the molars, resemble markedly those of men. The remains of the South African apemen (Australopithecines), discovered in 1925, show affinity to human anatomy in the position of their nose relative to the sockets of the eyes.

The fossils belonging to the Quaternary are indeed more human. The most ancient of them all belonging to the Lower Pleistocene was discovered in 1890 in the island of Java: it has been christened Pithecanthropus (literally meaning ‘ape-man’). The thigh-bone of this Java Man was of the human type, indicating its bipedal anatomy.

In 1927, 25 skulls were discovered in the vicinity of Peking in China. These skulls belong to the species now labelled Sinanthropus or Peking Man which appeared in the Mid-Pleistocene about 300 thousand years ago. The skull of the Peking Man was markedly human with certain simian details but the chinless mandible resembled that of the chimpanzee.

We come at last to the Neanderthaloids who first appeared towards the close of the Mid-Pleistocene (about 150 thousand years ago). Beginning in 1856, quite a good number of skeletons
belonging to this group have been discovered till this date, mostly in an intact form. These Neanderthal men may be considered as true men, although still revealing variable but uniformly brutish features. In fact, they belong to a now extinct species of men, which was subsequently exterminated towards the beginning of the Upper Pleistocene by our own species.

Thus appeared on the earthly scene, about 70 thousand years ago, that wonderful creature and the marvel product of evolution, which belongs to the species sapiens, the genus Homo, the family Hominidae, the order Primates, the class Mammalia, the subphylum Vertebrata, and the phylum Chordata of the animal kingdom! Man was at last born!

**Man the Marvel**

"This faint and fluid sketch of soul called man
Shall stand out on the background of long Time
A glowing epitome of eternity."

What a wonder product of evolution was this our Man, chiselled to be in the long run ‘a stepping-stone to conquer heaven’! In more than one respect, he differed intrinsically from all other species that the biological evolution could bring forth before his appearance on the earthly scene. Both in his anatomical structure and physiological functionings as well as in his psychic traits, he marked a radical break with the past. To evaluate man’s worth in this exciting drama of earth-evolution, we should not consider him as he appears now in his polychrome manifestation, but rather look back into the far past and place ourselves in imagination ‘in the prone obscure beginning of the race’ when the human first emerged ‘in the bowed ape-like man’. Let us discuss in turn, although necessarily in a summary way, a few of these salient traits that marked out man as a distinctly superior biological species destined from then onwards to be the ‘dominant type’ in future evolution.

a) Ah! the gift of a couple of hands!

"And instruments were sovereignly designed
To express divinity in terrestrial signs."

Vialleton, the modern protagonist of a separate line of evolution for man, defines him as "an animal erect in posture, possessing two hands and provided with a language." It was indeed a crucial departure when the front paws in animals changed their aspect and became in man the palm of their hands. Man alone developed the unique faculty of turning his hands, palms upwards and palms downwards. This special constitution of the hands along with a set of ten marvellous fingers may well be regarded as the symbol of the supremacy of man. For through this innovation alone accrued two immense gains to the race: Tools and Fire.

b) And, lo, he stood erect!

"He stood erect, a Godlike form and force".

The specialisation of the hands invariably imposed a vertical station upon the human frame. At first it was no more than a trial posture, but the experiment was crowned with so much success that the erect posture became the normal status with men, and this, in its train, brought rich dividends. This vertical station presaged the future glory of man, for, from now on, the upward look became 'native to his sight'; he was no more an earth-gazing animal, he could look up and round, and turned out to be a creature essentially heaven-oriented.

c) “Eyes... front!”

"A Mind began to see and look at forms"

And what a marvellous set of eyes man has got! Indeed, as someone has remarked, no first awareness dawned in a dark and misty world when God said, “Let there be light”, for light was there to

live by, not to see by. Then, in the course of evolution, Nature contrived to create the organ of perception, but for millions of years it remained too imperfect an instrument to offer its possessors any real command of the universe. But finally in man, Nature has managed to move forward the eyes distinctly in front of his face, thus permitting them to fuse in their 'brain switchboard' the images from the two separate eyes into a single picture giving the sense of depth! Forms stood at once in their relief and it was really a significant jump from the primitive condition in which each eye worked relatively separately and saw only black and white into the stereoscopic colour vision we now think normal for man.

This anterior shifting of the eyes coupled with his vertical station has played a considerable role in the evolution of mind. The very constitution and configuration of these eyes helped man to proceed from quality to quantity. Quantification became the regular norm for the race thus making possible the development of mathematics and science. To quote Abel Rey, "It is the organ of vision – and not the auditive, tactile or olfactory sense organs – that has made man the homo sapiens".

d) 'Homo faber' is born!

"He used the powers earth-instruments cannot use". 13

Specialised eyes co-operated with specialised hands and there dawned at last the red-letter day in the calendar of man when he first learnt to chip flints and stones. It was no job for an ape, and herewith the process of change in man took on a new dimension and accelerated. If it were not for tools, mankind might be only a species of tropical bipeds no more successful than the baboons. But with the development of this tool-making ability, man could now exteriorize himself in action. Power was added to vision, and the Homo faber arose from the Homo sapiens in man.

e) The cerebrum, the trump card!

"Man stood erect, he wore the thinker's brow". 14

But man became man, only because he was endowed with the
greatest tool yet developed by Nature in her long course of evol-
ution: the human cerebrum. Indeed, one of the greatest triumphs
of evolution is the elaboration of the ‘electrochemical apparatus’
that has become the human brain. The brain of an ant contains
only about 250 cells, while that of a bee has nearly 900. In contrast,
the human brain contains some 13 thousand million cells!

As regards the brain size, the range in the cranial capacity of
chimpanzees and gorillas is about 325 to 650 cubic centimeters, of
the man-apes of South Africa 450 to 650, of Java Man 750 to 900,
of Peking Man 900 to 1200, but of Homo sapiens from 1200 to
1550!

And as a by-product of this phenomenon, of all creatures man
has the greatest possibility of being educated. As indicated by the
old saying “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks”, dogs more
than 2 years old lose learning ability rapidly, chimpanzees cannot
learn much beyond the age of 12 years, but most humans can learn
up to 40 years, many up to 90 years and more.

Man is indeed man because of his brain and those parts of this
marvellous gift that are more complex in him than those of any
other animal are the ones concerned with memory, with such
symbolic operations as speaking, writing and understanding, with
the solving of problems and with the projection of images. With
the human brain appeared the first “thinking being in an unthink-
king world”.

f) Oh, I am “I”!

“To the Life-Spirit, the individual in whom its potentiali-
ties centre is pre-eminently Man, the Purusha.... He is
conscious Name or Numen accepting and utilising form
as a medium through which Person can deal with
substance.”

One of the greatest developments of evolution has been the
emergence of the human individual as an important and unique
being in his own right, rather than as a member of a swarm of
similar beings. Unlike “ants or bees or maple trees” all of which are
pretty much alike in a species, each human being has a different

15. The Life Divine, p. 46.
personality. "When an ant is killed, he can be replaced by another ant exactly like him: worker ants of a given variety are alike even to their brain patterns. But this is never true of a human being."16

Also, the distinctive character of man is the much greater importance of the exceptional individual. Non-conformism is the brand of the human species. The society turns around the individual virtuoso. Indeed, in the case of man, the individual ‘novation’ always leads the way, institutionalisation follows suit when the society tries to assimilate it through a process of natural ankylosis.

g) The pilgrim of three seas

“A portion of us lives in present Time.”17

Man is an earth-bound creature but possessing two invisible wings: Memory and Imagination. ‘Launched into his small corporeal birth’, imprisoned in his ‘body's house’, he is the first creature to revolt against his bondage and venture to break asunder the stone-walls of the present. Indeed, he is the first creature to escape even partially from being a prisoner of the present. He re-lives his past through his memory, he fore-lives his future through imagination. He hears the fading rumblings of the past, he gazes into the future and dares the still-to-be-born. “Man is the first to realize how far he has come along the path of being alive, and to sense how much more alive he can become. Standing on the highest rung yet built on the ladder of life, faltering frequently, he is yet building still higher sections of the scaffold.”18

h) He babbles and conquers!

"If there had been no speech, neither virtue nor vice could be known, neither the true nor the false, neither the good nor the bad, neither the pleasant nor the unpleasant. Speech alone makes known all this. Meditate upon speech.”19

The day of all days dawned in man’s calendar when he first developed speech as his most direct means of communication; for, this articulated utterance ushered in the birth of true human personality. No animal other than the human possesses a true language which communicates ideas. Though young chimpanzees can take care of themselves much better than human babies of equal age, a chimpanzee can never learn to talk. In contrast, human babies babble at random almost all the kinds of sounds found in known languages.

Man can produce sounds and modulate them purposefully far beyond the ability of any other animal. And he is indeed indebted to his anatomical structure for this wonderful gift of articulated speech. It is the special conformation of his lower jaw-bone coupled with a most supple larynx that has enabled man to develop as a talking animal.

With the development of the spoken language as a great set of symbols followed by the equally important development of its written counterpart, man provided himself with a most potent means for carrying information across time and space. “The bee stores honey for posterity, the bird teaches its young to fly, but what are these compared with the enormous hoards of material and spiritual wealth that man accumulates from generation to generation!” Language provided man with an alternative system to the genes for passing on human characteristics, operating on the social level instead of the molecular. Race memory could thus be supplanted by individual acquisition. Hereditary instinct was replaced by direct transmission and immediate adaptation on the individual level. Language and tradition could create conditioned reflexes in the short span of a few years and these reflexes no longer needed to be hereditary, effected only through an extremely slow process of biological adaptation. The tempo of evolution could thus be greatly accelerated. The exteriorisation of man in the form of hoarded knowledge became the order of the day. *Homo sapiens* took on the lead of the evolutionary march.

i) He twinkles and wonders!

“*A mind looks out from a small casual globe
And wonders what itself and all things are.*”

In man alone, amongst all earthly creatures, 'the interested curiosity' has given place to a 'disinterested curiosity'. In fact, any sign of pure knowledge removed from the field of the concrete and of the necessity for action, is altogether absent in other animals. Every theory of action holds that an organism in need is under tension for satisfying the need. One distinguished group of investigators has found that man, as an animal, could very well "get along with a list of thirty needs or attitudes - the abasive, the achievant, the acquisitive, the affiliative, the aggressive, the ambitious, the autonomous attitudes and so on with twenty-three others". But what characterises man most is that beyond and above the satisfaction of his essentially biological needs, he is seized with the sense of some "golden superfluities". He does not respond only to the "prick of need". He exhibits altogether "gestes inutiles" - a phenomenon that never occurred during the millions of years of evolution preceding him. Before him, only one imperative preoccupation haunted the biological field: battle with one's enemy, struggle against hunger, periodic excretion of the immortal cells that are the gametes, and finally death. But with the appearance of man, 'wonder seized the great automaton' and man manifested some "unnecessary gestures" - unnecessary in the sense that they are not indispensable to the preservation of the species. He became athirst for pure knowledge, beauty beckoned him as the twilight star, he looked out from his earth-born eyes and sang out songs - he knew not why. Look at the wonderful cave-paintings of early men - the Cro-Magnons - who lived more than 30 thousand years ago. In fact, this manifestation of the "golden superfluities" may be considered to mark the most important date in the whole of human history. Man was no longer a mere animal, his life became a "forward-rippling stream".

j) He laughs and weeps!

"Her greatest progress is a deepened need." 23

Finally, man is not only the tool-using creature, he is also the valuing animal, constantly making judgments of "better" and "worse". As Hazlit wrote: man is the only animal that laughs and

From Man Human to Man Divine

weeps, for he is the only animal struck by the difference between what things are and what they ought to be. "Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul": this is the burden of all man's aspiration. "The animal is satisfied with a modicum of necessity; the gods are content with their splendours. But man cannot rest permanently until he reaches some highest good. He is the greatest of living beings because he is the most discontented, because he feels most the pressure of limitations. He alone, perhaps, is capable of being seized by the divine frenzy for a remote ideal." 

Evolution Becomes Reflexively Conscious

The appearance of man upon earth marks a crucial step, a decisive change in the process of the evolution: it is no more a mere continuation of the old lines. Indeed, evolution has got its own evolution. According even to the orthodox scientific view, biological evolution is only one aspect of evolution in general. Our present knowledge forces us to the view that "the whole of reality is evolution – a single process of self-transformation." Let us note that these words come from one of the most eminent biologists of our time, Julian Huxley, who was rightly regarded in the scientific realm as one of the world's foremost authorities on evolution. For the present we are concerned only with the conclusions derived from purely scientific findings. In order to dispel all possible doubts that any bias may very well creep in in the form of a transcendental interpretation – or as the materialist might argue, 'misinterpretation' – of the process of evolution, let us offer the floor to Prof. Huxley and listen to his elaboration of the theme of world evolution and to his evaluation of the advent of man in that wider perspective. Indeed, the rest of this present section is only an adaptation from his interesting paper "Evolution and Genetics".

This universal evolutionary process is divisible into three main sectors or phases – the inorganic or cosmological, the organic or biological, and the human or psychosocial. Each sector has its own characteristic mechanism of self-transformation and its own maximum rate of change and each produces its own characteristic type of results.

The inorganic sector, the largest in spatial extent and in mass, is governed by physical and occasional inorganic chemical interactions. The resulting processes of transformation are in general extremely slow, so that the life-history of a star is to be measured in thousands of millions of years. Finally, the resultant products, always of a very limited variety, never attain to any but very low or simple levels of organization.

In the biological phase the time-scale is relatively shorter – nearly 1200 million years since the first appearance of life on earth. The amount and rate of change produced, however, is immensely greater. Biological evolution has produced organisms as diverse as starfish and roses, men and toadstools, tapeworms and oak trees, birds and bacteria. There are now in existence about a million and a half distinct and separate species of animals and plants, all of them presumably derived from one original form. Most remarkable of all, however, is the rise in the level of organization. Starting with the earliest submicroscopic organisms of the unicellular level, later evolution has managed to elaborate that almost miraculous machinery – the human cerebral cortex – the most complex system of which we have any knowledge.

When we survey the biological panorama as a whole, we see that evolution is from one point of view the progressive realisation of new possibilities of living substance. Further, we are driven to the rather surprising conclusion that some time during the late Cenozoic, probably about five million years ago, all the purely material or physical possibilities of life had been actualized and had reached the upper limit of realization. One major avenue of advance, however, remained – the further realization of mental possibilities. It was this direction which was taken by our earliest hominid ancestors and led to the emergence of our own species as the latest dominant type of evolution.

With the advent of man, evolution on this planet enters the human or psychosocial phase. Man's tool-making capability, his distinctive property of conceptual thought, with its objective correlate in the shape of true speech, assured him his position of biological dominance by providing him with a totally new method of evolutionary change – the method of cumulative transmission of experience. What this exclusively human mechanism of inheritance transmits is not a system of material units as in biological inheritance, but a system of knowledge, ideas and attitudes. We
may sum up the essential difference between the three sectors of evolution by saying that whereas evolution in the biological sector depends on its new property of the self-reproduction of matter, in psycho-social evolution it depends on the self-reproduction of mind.

Let us now close this section with the following pregnant words of Prof. Huxley: "Evolution can be envisaged as a progressive realisation of intrinsic possibilities. Man is the latest dominant type in biological evolution, and the first (and up till now the only) dominant type in psycho-social evolution. His destiny is to act as the agent of the evolutionary process on this planet, by enabling it to realize new and higher possibilities. Biological evolution, though it often displays direction, is directed from behind, by the blind and automatic force of natural selection: psycho-social evolution can be, to a lesser or greater extent, directed from in front, by the anticipatory force of conscious purpose."26

The Flute-Call of the Future

But what should be the exact form of this conscious purpose? "The long-range task of the human species is to establish a fully conscious common purpose, based to the fullest possible extent on scientifically established knowledge."26 And what are after all the findings of modern science? "It is not ego-centric on the part of man to consider himself the most highly evolved creature in nature. But any tendency to consider himself its end-product would be short-sighted, for evolution is taking place to-day faster than ever before. Physical evolution has been almost completely short-circuited by man as applied to himself. But social, emotional, and mental evolution are now carrying him on to ever greater complexity and awareness."27

But a further – may be, virtually infinite – extension of the social, emotional and mental capacities and capabilities, is that all that is in store for the human race? Can there not be a far more glorious future of our wonderful species? Can there not be a further phase of evolution? Indeed, may we not pertinently raise

the query: just as the inorganic phase of evolution was followed by the biological phase wherein ‘life invaded the material sheath’, just as towards the close of the biological phase the cerebral cortex began to be elaborated and with it ‘earth-plasm first quivered with the illumining Mind’, just as again at the end of the biological phase, with the development of the cerebrum, evolution started on a new course when ‘man was moulded from the original brute’ and

> “Across the thick smoke of earth’s ignorance
> A Mind began to see and look at forms
> And groped for knowledge in the nescient Light”,

similarly now, with the attainment of maturity by man, evolution may very well turn another leaf and pass on to an altogether new phase: the supramental sector of world-manifestation. For surely man as he is now constituted is too imperfect a creature to be the final product of evolution. Also, it is all too evident that

> “Ever since consciousness was born on earth,
> Life is the same in insect, ape and man,
> Its stuff unchanged, its way the common route.
> If new designs, if richer details grow
> And thought is added and more tangled cares,
> If little by little it wears a brighter face,
> Still even in man the plot is mean and poor.”

No doubt, man is the crown of all that has been done, but creation’s labour cannot be finally justified with him; he can, by no means, be Nature’s last poise;

> “And if this were all and nothing more were meant,
> If what now seems were the whole of what must be,
> If this were not a state through which we pass
> On our road from Matter to eternal Self,
> ...

> Well might interpret our mind’s limited view

Existence as an accident in Time, Illusion or phenomenon or freak."\[^{30}\]

Who is then there to answer our query? Least of all, the scientist. For, even if he may not become positively hostile and vociferous in his opposition to our suggestion of the fourth phase of evolution, he will certainly remain “mum” over this question, for he cannot possibly venture to overstep his domain of immediately verifiable empirical fact. But there is needed, indeed, such an adventurous probe into the future – may be, into the heart of the imminent future – which stands at our door-step with its golden harvest of the marvellous Dawn. So we have to leave here the scientists' findings and fall back upon the vision of the seer. And whom else can we approach for the necessary Light if not him who has not only demonstrated the theoretical possibility, nay the inevitability, of this supramental phase of evolution, but actually made it his life’s mission to hasten and actualise the glorious day when

“The world’s darkness had consented to Heaven-light
And God needed no more the Inconscient's screen.”\[^{31}\]

Now, what is the destiny of man as envisaged by this supreme prophet of super-humanity? Let us pass on to the consideration of this theme.

**The Seer’s Vision**

According to the vision of Sri Aurobindo, man’s importance in the world is that he gives to it that development of consciousness in which its transfiguration by a perfect self-discovery becomes possible. The real sense of man’s progress does not lie in a mere restatement in slightly different terms of what physical Nature has already accomplished. Nor can the ideal of human life be simply the animal repeated on a higher scale of mentality. Indeed, “Man has seen that there can be a higher status of consciousness than his own; the evolutionary oestrus is there in his parts of mind and life,

[^{31}]: Ibid., Bk. X, Canto IV, p. 664.
the aspiration to exceed himself is delivered and articulate within him: he has become conscious of a soul, discovered the self and spirit. In him, then, the substitution of a conscious for a sub-conscious evolution has become conceivable and practicable, and it may well be concluded that the aspiration, the urge, the persistent endeavour in him is a sure sign of Nature’s will for a higher way to fulfilment, the emergence of a greater status.” 32

And what is then that greater status? “The animal is a living laboratory in which Nature has, it is said, worked out man. Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious co-operation she wills to work out the superman, the god. Or shall we not say, rather, to manifest God? For if evolution is the progressive manifestation by Nature of that which slept or worked in her, involved, it is also the overt realisation of that which she secretly is.” 33 And here Sri Aurobindo sounds a note of warning to the race: “Mind is only a middle term of consciousness, the mental being can only be a transitional being. If, then, man is incapable of exceeding mentality, he must be surpassed and supermind and superman must manifest and take the lead of the creation. But if his mind is capable of opening to what exceeds it, then there is no reason why man himself should not arrive at supermind and supermanhood or at least lend his mentality, life and body to an evolution of that greater term of the spirit manifesting in Nature.” 34

The Mutant Minority

But the question is: who amongst the present mankind are ready to attempt this impossible and dare the Unknown and thus usher in the new creation? For does not the goal held by Sri Aurobindo seem to be too good and too glorious a prospect for humanity to be actualised even in some distant future? - Far be it to speak of an imminent realization. In fact, most men are still very conservative and dominated by social customs. They vegetate mostly around what is in vogue. Their preoccupation with the present possibility is almost absolute. Fear of being called eccentric, i.e., ‘out of the

33. Ibid., pp. 3-4.
34. Ibid., p. 847.
circle’, is in their bones. To both savage and civilized are indeed applicable the lines which Henry Sidgwick composed in his sleep:

“We think so because all other people think so:  
Or because – or because – after all, we do think so:  
Or because we were told so and think we must think so:  
Or because we once thought so and think we still think so:  
Or because, having thought so, we think we still think so.”

Thus, opposition to this ‘new Dawn’s call’ comes from both the ranks of humanity: from the traditional spiritualist as well as from the rationalist. The materialist basing himself on the past animal evolution of mankind ventures to equate man to nothing more than a glorified animal. He tries to explain away all of man’s behaviour as an ingenious extrapolation of animal propensities. What is more, basing himself on the fact that man’s body is after all made up of inorganic matter, he even ventures to pronounce in a desperate mood that man is nothing but a somewhat complex physico-chemical machinery. Did not one biologist jump to the conclusion that ‘love’ is merely manganese when he found that mother mice deprived of this element in their diet no longer paid attention to their offspring? In this connection, G. R. Harrison’s humour is indeed enjoyable: Is pity phosphorous and justice oxygen, simply because without oxygen, phosphorous and some dozens of other atoms, there could not possibly be any life on earth thus debarring the appearance of justice and mercy? 

The orthodox spiritualist is no less dogmatic in his opposition. To him the ideal of supermanhood is nothing but perverse and presumptuous. For firstly, according to him, the Absolute can have no purpose in manifestation except the delight of an objectless self-revelation; secondly, even if there is an evolution, then, man must be the last stage, because through him there can be the rejection of an embodied life and an escape into some heaven or Nirvana.

Sri Aurobindo has discussed in detail and refuted all these arguments. He has proved that to say so is to miss the whole meaning of the terrestrial evolution. In fact, a spiritual unfolding on earth, as distinguished from an escape from this cosmic Lila, is the hidden truth of our birth into Matter and it is fundamentally an evolution of consciousness that has been taking place in Nature.
Who can, in that case, bid her pause at a given stage? “If it be true that Spirit is involved in Matter and apparent Nature is secret God, then the manifestation of the divine in himself and the realisation of God within and without are the highest and most legitimate aim possible to man upon earth.” And Sri Aurobindo assures us that even if man refuses his high spiritual fate, ‘yet shall the secret truth in things prevail.’ And this realisation is not located in some unforeseen future; indeed, the process of supra­mental transformation is already at work. There are even now some ‘sun-eyed children’ of humanity whose wings are daring to cross the Infinite, although their feet may still be ‘steadied upon finite things’. And who does not know that the evolutionary future belongs to the ‘mutant minority’ and never to the ‘vegetative majority’? Moreover, has not the Prophet of the Life Divine declared:

“Even as of old man came behind the beast
This high divine successor surely shall come
Behind man’s inefficient mortal pace,
Behind his vain labour, sweat and blood and tears.
...
Inheritor of the toil of human time
He shall take on him the burden of the gods.”

Well, such is the prophetic Vision of Sri Aurobindo: but, what have science and philosophy to say on this point?

35. The Life Divine, p. 4.
SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY
VIS-À-VIS
SRI AUROBINDO’S VISION OF DIVINE MANHOOD

“Yet was their wisdom circled with a nought:
Truths they could find and hold but not the one Truth:
The Highest was to them unknowable.
By knowing too much they missed the Whole to be known:
The fathomless heart of the world was left unguessed
And the Transcendent kept its secrecy.”

(Sri Aurobindo, Savitri, p. 271.)

Prometheus and Ganymede

The human spirit has ever oscillated between two extreme and opposite ideals. Goethe has well characterised them as, on one side, the ideal symbolised by Prometheus, a passion for ‘Vernunft und Wissenschaft des Menschen allerhöchste Kraft’ (‘the Reason and Knowledge of man the highest force’), and, on the other, a mystic élán towards the Beyond, the Unknown, ‘Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis’ (‘every passing thing is nothing but a symbol’), the ideal of Ganymede. In fact, because of the very biopsychical character of man, existence is ordinarily experienced in such a way that its apparently essential conditions appear as polar opposites, e.g., Spirit-Matter, Reality-Appearance, Faith-Reason, Freedom-Determination, etc. And the two ideals relative to ‘Spirit-Matter-polarity’ (Archie J. Bahm), that have most captivated man’s imagination are the ‘Extreme One-pole-ism’ (one pole of the polarity, Spirit, exists; the other, Matter, does not exist) and the ‘Extreme other-pole-ism’ (the other pole, Matter, alone exists; the one, Spirit, does not exist). “In Europe and in India, respectively, the negation of the materialist and the refusal of the ascetic have sought to assert themselves as the sole truth and to dominate the conception of Life. In India, if the result has been a great heaping up of the treasures of the Spirit, – or of some of
them, – it has also been a great bankruptcy of Life; in Europe, the fullness of riches and the triumphant mastery of this world’s powers and possessions have progressed towards an equal bankruptcy in the things of the Spirit. Nor has the intellect, which sought the solution of all problems in the one term of Matter, found satisfaction in the answer that it has received.” The modern man, “satiated but not satisfied by victorious analysis of the externalities of Nature” and afflicted with a sense of *taedium vitae*, is preparing once again to seek his salvation “not in the kingdom of Caesar which lies outside him, but in the kingdom of God which lies within man.” (Anatol von Spakovsky.)

“Therefore the time grows ripe and the tendency of the world moves towards a new and comprehensive affirmation in thought and in inner and outer experience and to its corollary, a new and rich self-fulfilment in an integral human existence for the individual and for the race”, wherein the eternal aspiration of man upward to the Divine will be related to the “descending movement of the Divine leaning downward to embrace eternally Its manifestation”; and what else, if not Matter, is the mould and condition of this manifestation?

**New Manifestation**

And, in reality, this manifestation is ever progressive, of which the key-note is the evolution of consciousness with all that it implies; and if evolution is a fact, man cannot be its last term, nor can his noetic faculty, Mind, be the supreme instrument of knowledge. For man as he is at present “is too imperfect an expression of the spirit, mind itself a too limited form and instrumentation; mind is only a middle term of consciousness, the mental being can only be a transitional being.” And the Mother declared that this evolutionary movement has very recently taken a saltus; a new principle, a higher element has been brought down into this arena of terrestrial manifestation, one result of which would be that “all the old formulas would be changed immediately and the whole possibility according to the old unfolding would be, one cannot say increased,

but supplemented by an almost infinite number of new possibilities, and that in such a manner that all the old logic would become illogical in the presence of the new logic."

**Crisis of Modern Physics**

Now what would be the reaction of modern science to this epoch-making revelation? We are considering science, for in the recent period of materialist denial, out of which we are just emerging, materialism based itself almost exclusively on the authority of science; and that too to such an extent as to create the illusion that a truly scientific attitude is synonymous with the materialistic conception of Reality.

In the present chapter we propose to show that modern science finds itself imprisoned in a blind alley without any issue of escape and that it is only in the Yoga-Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo that science can discover its true self and true mission. It seems certain that in a not too distant future science is bound to turn to the world-vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and take a new birth in the light of their teachings. This essay is an attempt at providing the argumentative background to this conviction.

**Physiognomy of Science**

Science may be defined as a *nomothetico-experimental* procedure that studies “the regularities observed in normal human sense-perceptions, thereby excluding sub-normal and supra-normal experiences as well as judgments of value that imply non-sensual premisses.” The goal envisaged is a total exploration of matter (the ‘reality’ of matter being implicitly granted), its morphogenesis, structure and energy-transformations. Objectively speaking, the natural sciences are the study of natural phenomena with a view to seek for general a-temporal laws governing this universe for all time.

Now, every phenomenon contains three elements: epistemo-

5. J. G. Bennet, *The Dimensional Framework of the Natural Sciences*. 
logical, ontological and normative, of which function, being and regularity are the three respective characteristic features. All that is ordinarily knowable in phenomena is function: all discursive knowledge of which science is only a specialised form, is thus nothing more than functional correspondence. It does not and cannot tell us anything about being.

Modern science has come to realise that it can never seize the essence of things. It replaces the study of the ontological content of a phenomenon by a functional explanation; but we propose to show, *en passant*, that even this functional knowledge as revealed by science is intrinsically relative and incomplete.

**Physics and Metaphysics**

It is well-known that the intellectual knowledge of Nature has developed from a mainly philosophical physics (e.g., Democritus, Aristotle) to a mainly scientific physics (Galileo, Newton, Lavoisier, Dalton, etc.). The science as developed after the Renaissance, — and which is incidentally one of the greatest achievements of the 17th century, — is a completely a-philosophic discipline, the philosophical convictions of the researching scientist not entering his science as a constitutive part.

But modern physics is a-philosophic not because it is an experimental procedure unlike metaphysics that speculates. Far from it. In reality, modern physics has become highly speculative. Paradoxically enough, the more a science becomes experimental, the more it has to turn speculative; and the reason of it is not far to seek. For, a scientific experiment is seized in its content only in the cadre of a well-constructed theory; now *theorein* and *speculai* come to the same thing. In fact, the highly developed theoretical character of modern physics brings it into close resemblance to the speculative character of philosophy. If physics is not to degenerate into encyclopedic compilation, it should have enough room for theoretical concepts as well as experiments. Now the assumption of the ‘closed’ character of systems that are studied in physics, entails the creation of an ever-increasing number of concepts which, although initially inspired by reality, are nonetheless highly abstract. Someone has styled modern science as a Socratic dialogue with Nature, wherein it is the scientist who ‘does the talking’
and who has to remain content with an occasional cryptic 'yes' or 'no' elicited from the addressee. On the basis of these monosyllabic responses, it is again the scientist who has to build up, step by step, a colossal theoretical structure with concepts and nomenclatures which are his 'free creations' with no guarantee of their correspondence to physical existence an sich ('in itself'). This point is important to bear in mind, if one has to understand the metaphysical predicament of modern science. We shall deal with this point in the section entitled “Reality Evanescent”.

But although modern physics is a highly speculative discipline, - and here it is in company with philosophy, - there exists a fundamental difference between the two. In philosophy one is concerned with the ontological significance, the value of the 'being' of the object studied; the scientist, on the other hand, labours to encompass the totality of phenomena in a relational and functional matrix and in this task he is never guided by his explicit philosophical bias but by the immanent principles of natural science itself.

Science and Scientist-cum-Philosopher

But it is interesting to note that this a-philosophic positive character of modern science has not prevented the man of science from indulging, outside his laboratory, in the pastime of philosophy. It is true that as soon as he enters the portals of science, he has perforce to leave behind his cloak of philosophical bias, - for otherwise the very exigency of scientific discipline will make of him a total failure as a scientist, - but outside the domain of scientific research, he yields, explicitly or implicitly, to an amateurish joy of philosophizing. Did not Ernst Mach note long ago that every philosopher has his own private science and every scientist his private philosophy?

And this has created much confusion in the mind of the layman. For the scientist’s pronouncements as a scientist are not always clearly marked off from those he makes as a philosopher; and, as a result, the reverence and truth-validity usually accorded to the scientific verities are unwittingly transferred en bloc to his philosophic assertions. For the tremendous positive achievements of
science as such endow with an inviolable halo even the a-scientific convictions of the man of science. It is thus that the public mind has been conditioned to accept unquestionably that science verily demands an attitude of atheism, agnosticism and materialist denial. But this is nothing but a sheer erroneous transposition. For, as has been pointed out by the great philosopher-mathe­matician Henri Poincaré, science can never speak in the Imperative, it talks always in the Indicative Mood.

Havoc of the Residues

But there is more to complicate matters. Apart from the philosophic assertions of scientists themselves, professional philosophers too are apt to catch hold of the ephemeral shifting concepts of science and make a fetish of their supposed reality; they then proceed to rear up their own philosophies on the supposedly sound foundations of scientific revelation. But, alas, to the working scientist, these concepts have got no other reality than that of a temporary working mathematical tool; and with the further advancement of theory, he discards these old concepts leaving them to adorn the shelf of petrified mummies, and proceeds to create a set of new concepts in their stead. (Remember in this connection the case-histories of phlogiston in chemistry and ether in physics.) Thus flows on the river of science, but these rejected residues acquire a new reality in the brains of the professional philosophers, – for there is an inevitable time-lag in this process of percolation, – who claim that such and such of their assertions are derived in the light of and supported by the latest (!) scientific discoveries. It is in this perverted way that the so-called modern age has come to lull itself into the conviction that Matter is the basic and unique Reality, and that the Divine, the freedom of the Spirit, the immortality of the Soul are all myths of an unscientific temperament and Honni soit qui trop y pense! Ivo Hollhuber has aptly termed this attitude espièglerie scientifique.

But these denials and speculations, it has to be clearly borne in mind, are not the presuppositions of science as such, but only the ‘bubbles of a moment’ tickling the grey matter of some myope-souls; and the day is not far off when these will perish and pass away, “expunged, annihilated, blotted out”. For “...that cannot
be the final Veda because it does not correspond with the Veda within which all mental knowledge is labouring to bring out; from the moment that this lack of correspondence is felt, a solution, however skillful it may be and however logically complete, has been judged by the eternal Witness in man and is doomed; it cannot be the last word of Knowledge.”

In the present essay we propose to follow the evolutionary growth of science as such and try to show that physics, that most developed branch of natural science, has already outgrown the phase of materialistic bias and is at present ready enough to welcome and receive the illumination offered by the Integral World-Vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Scientist’s Quest for a Philosophy

We have already referred to the phenomenon of a scientist philosophizing outside his laboratory. But what is at the source of this constant philosophic quest in him?

Natural Science is after all an autonomous but limited way of viewing problems. It has a level of abstraction all its own; and as in all cases of abstraction, it too is both complete and incomplete at the same time. “Complete, at least in principle, in so far as the special way of consideration on that level of abstraction does not need any addition for the sake of the problems which arise on that particular level; it is incomplete in so far as even the most elaborate and complete knowledge on that level cannot exhaust all that can be asked about the res.”

Pricked by this realisation that all problems which can be asked about Nature cannot possibly be solved by natural science itself, the scientist tries to complete his knowledge by an appropriate philosophization. In the adolescent period of science he was naturally, albeit mistakenly, puffed up with his immediate achievements in the purely scientific field and believed that he himself would be able to build up a philosophy of his own, based on the mechanistic, deterministic attitude of the 19th century, which would surely and certainly explain away the whole of

reality. And he was helped in this conviction by the fact that with the “methodological exclusion of practically all the purely metaphysical problems of medieval and even ancient philosophies of nature and by a total abandonment of an uncritical search for absoluta,” he could get “countless basic insights into the structure of the physical universe.” (J. Morgan) In his case, unlike in the case of so many metaphysicians, abstractio does not mean separatio, and as a result, although in science one does not even discuss the philosophical questions as to what material reality is or how this reality can be known, “the presuppositions of science incorporated in its general methods effect in the scientist, without his being aware of it, the correct attitude towards material reality and the way it can be known.”8 The immediate successes accruing from this attitude led the scientist to consider his science to be offering a total knowledge of reality. But he extrapolated too much and his exhilarative self-assurance dissipated with the advent of the 20th century. For, as we shall see later on, the advancing tide of scientific knowledge rising in the first half of this century has completely dissolved the scientists’ faith in his capability of comprehending even this material reality – where he was supposed to be ’the monarch of all I survey’ – let alone the total reality of this universe. Reality has slipped past his hold when he thought of almost catching it and a great bewilderment has set in in the field of modern physics in the very period of its stupendous practical success.

Modern Science and Modern Philosophies

In a mood of utter frustration, modern science turns towards modern philosophy for succour and illumination. For, the general belief has been that if science aims at knowledge, it is philosophy which gives us wisdom. But, alas, disappointment meets him here. For, as the reactions of great physicists like Louis de Broglie indicate, the scientists do not find in the speculations of contemporary philosophers an adequate and faithful image of their science. It is to be emphasised that the problem of the scientist is not that he is dubious about the reality of the positive harvest which he has collected from an elaborate investigation and explo-

8. Van Melšen, op. cit.
ration of nature. He is sanguine as ever about his positive achievements; but, in recent times, he has become equally, if not more, convinced about the limited nature of scientific knowledge. And this is at the root of his quest for an integral philosophy which will not annul or deny his positive knowledge but rather complete it by embracing it in a total outlook. But the contemporary philosophies reveal an intrinsic inadequacy in this regard. And this inadequacy in western philosophy is traceable to several instances of misplaced emphasis on the subjective element – “prolongation of the transition which in the West begins with Descartes, becomes crucial in Locke, rises to climax in Kant and Fichte, and is continued in various ways by subsequent thinkers.”

This subjective emphasis is obvious in pragmatism and in its recent version, operationalism, which carries the general principle into physics. In phenomenology, the problems of the external world are put in brackets in order to discover the secrets of the universe in the workings of the mind. “Existentialism, too, is notably self-centred, whether in the work of the socially isolated and disappointed Kierkegaard or the socially indifferent and cynical Sartre. As another example of a lurking subjectivism, we may take logical empiricism. . . . It is a methodology put forward to supplement a metaphysics. In its anxiety to avoid ‘reification’ it has withdrawn into a ‘rarification’ which is even more detached and sterile. The contemporary scene seems to show that philosophy dissipates its energies when it begins to isolate mind from world. Once the process begins, no one knows where to stop – Locke is followed by Berkeley, Berkeley by Hume, Hume by Kant and even Kant by Fichte.”

**Reality and the Integral Knowledge**

Thus we see that modern science is in a fix; it has lost its self-assurance and it has no reverence for the contemporary western philosophies. It seeks a harmonising light and gropes for a solid synthetic vision from which it can look back on itself with an eye of proper reappraisal.

Here comes in Sri Aurobindo’s Philosophy of Integral Reality

with its integral world-vision. And the day does not seem to be far off when the scientists-cum-philosophers will acclaim this as the light which they were so long asking for. In fact, paradoxically enough, it is modern science – and not modern philosophy obsessed by its existentialism, analysis and humanism of which the other name is ‘philosophical anthropology’ – that is more ready to receive the message of the Integral Yoga as given by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. And has not the Mother herself declared that perhaps it is the attitude and outlook in the scientific field rather than in any other that will first get transformed?

Let us now examine how science, through stages of dramatic evolution, has reached this state of inner preparedness to receive the Light of the New Manifestation.

Explanation in Science

We speak of science and we speak of logic; but, as has been justly pointed out by Prof. Robert Lenoble, the purely verbal stability of these two words and the consequent prestige which they acquire in the minds of the uninformed create a great prejudice in favour of the personage (!) called Science; and the modern man is led to believe that “one is either in science or outside it, just as one is either in Paradise or in Hell.” Thus the term “unscientific” has almost come to acquire an abusive connotation.

But a study of the history of science dispels altogether the unjustified charm which the expression ‘scientific explanation’ exerts on so many minds. For this history shows unmistakably that men engaged in the exploration of nature have themselves differed greatly in their objectives, when they have all declared that they were seeking for an explanation of the phenomenal world. In fact the discipline which has culminated in modern physics has passed through five successive stages of growth:

(a) explanation as contemplation of order;
(b) explanation as machine-construction;
(c) explanation as a mechanistic picture;
(d) explanation equated to mathematical formulation;

Aristotle created his logic of classes to contemplate an order in this ‘buzzing, booming’ world: for him explanation was equated to this contemplation of order. But, first with Leonardo da Vinci, and afterwards with Galilei, Mercenne, Roberval and others, explanation took another sense. It was the age of ‘bricoleurs et contre-maîtres’ to whom explanation meant the power of machine-construction. The logic of classes did not suffice any more, one sought for a process of manufacture. In all seriousness, Mercelle declared that we would know what a gnat is, only when we would be able to construct a ‘machine-animal’ which would fly like the insect. And did not Hobbes consider the State as a machina machinarum, and Leibnitz his ‘God’ the ‘Engineer of the World’?

Then came Descartes with his revolutionary conception that explanation means neither contemplation, nor the power of machine-construction, but setting up mathematical formulae. To him bricoler was worth nothing, deduction was everything. He, too, was an ‘engineer’ but one who was bred in the temple of pure mathematics, to wit, geometry; and according to his prescription, no one was entitled to enter the Kingdom of God, who did not possess the knowledge of this divine science, geometry!

Next we arrive at the most fruitful epoch of modern science, the 19th century, of which the representative spirit was Laplace. It was the hey-day of ‘determinism’, ‘principle of strict causality’ and the ‘mechanistic view-point’. According to this view all phenomena in the universe could be reduced to the motion of particles and bodies under the influence of forces; and the ideal description of phenomena was considered to be one which, starting from the complete data with respect to the state of the system in question at a given instant, determined that system’s behaviour at all later moments. This programme of determinism based itself on the principle of strict causality applied to all physical phenomena and since in physics we deal in particular with those aspects which can be expressed in terms of numbers, this causal correlation took the form of mathematical equations. Thus mathematics was supposed to arm the scientist with the magic wand which would completely and absolutely reveal the secret reality of the physical universe. But 19th century science soon met its crisis and had to take note of the limits which nature imposes on it.
Physics, Mathematics and Reality

Whatever be the angle of vision in the metaphysical predilection of an observer, an indubitable fact immediately arises out of even a cursory view of nature: it is the permanence of an over-riding recurring rhythm in the sensate world of becoming and movement. In the absence of this rhythm, nature would have been totally incomprehensible, our memory useless, all science impossible and the activity of man blind and aleatory. Human thought has persistently attempted through various disciplines to catch this rhythm and imprison it in the framework of a precise formulation. And mathematics has come handy to the physicist in this task, so much so that in the early days of his science he almost came to believe that mathematics would unravel inexorably all the mysteries of this universe; nay, he even thought that the objective reality was nothing but an image of mathematical reality and therefore physics could be ultimately reduced to mathematics so that a strict process of deduction could predict all the truths of this manifested existence. But this glory of mathematics was short-lived and the physicist had to assign to it roles of increasingly diminishing importance in the drama of the unfolding of the secrets of reality. Let us examine, in a brief outline, these successive phases of the supposed interdependence of physics and mathematics.

Physics Axiomatized

The tremendous success attending mathematical formulation in the field of physics in the last two centuries led the scientist to believe that it is mathematical verities, first deduced in the mathematical physicist’s brain, that took shape as physical realities later on in the experimental scientist’s laboratory. This claim may seem to be too preposterous, but in the hey-day of mathematical prolificacy of the last century it was really advanced as a promise that the day is not far off when the whole of physics would be axiomatised, thus getting transformed into a branch of purely deductive science, and when all the truths of this universe could be seen in the crystal of a piece of paper helped by the pencil of the mathematician. It was the age of undiluted univocal causal determinism when there existed one and unique personage of the name
of mathematics, absolutely rational in essence and functioning and imperiously self-imposed on the world of 'empiry'. But the crisis soon approached from two different directions and mathematics was brought down from its Olympian pedestal to one step lower in the echelon. What was the nature of this crisis?

Double-Pronged Attack

The crisis came from outside as well as from inside. With the edification of the structure of classical mathematics one was persuaded to think that mathematics could univocally penetrate the deepest truth of interrelations of natural phenomena; and this conviction was one of the factors which created the illusion of the total dependence of the world of 'empiry' on the deductive verities of mathematics. But with the advancement of experimental physics, the scientist soon became aware of the disconcerting fact that the minute and deeper structure of physical phenomena totally transcended the cadre of classical univocal mathematics. An imperative necessity arose of erecting new structures of 'probability mathematics' which were increasingly more delicate in their methods and more general in application. In fact, the physicist quickly gave up the old language of mathematics for his scientific world, and the change from the Newtonian language to the language of quantum physics occurred because "certain things could not be said about physical events in the former which could be said in the latter, and many things that could be said in the Newtonian language turned out to be unverifiable at the subatomic level." Thus it was revealed that although mathematics in one form or another remained an indispensable instrument for the systematisation and explanation of natural phenomena, there was no such thing as Mathematics with a capital M which could be inexorably and uniquely equated to the phenomenal reality: mathematical explanation was "no longer considered to be causal, but relational and repetitive; it was not constitutive but only contributive." Thus the world of 'empiry' reasserted its primacy and mathematics was dislodged from its position of Dieu arbitre!

12. L. O. Kattsoff, Ontology and the Choice of Languages.
And once this scruple for observing correspondence with the 'real' was eliminated, pure mathematicians became prolific in their imagination and created one after another altogether new and diverse structures all logically self-consistent but unrelated to the empirical truths. Absolved of its self-appointed task of becoming monitor of this phenomenal universe, freed from the shackles of 'empirism', mathematics became a pure hypothetico-deductive discipline. And, as we shall see later on, logic was to follow it soon, to such an extent that R. Carnap went so far as to reject all characterization of logic as the *art de penser* or *ars cogitandi*. Any suggestion that the logician is concerned with 'correct or rational thinking' he condemns as 'psychologism'. "Logic", in his view, "is as pure a science as higher geometry. The logician must be left free to indulge his imagination unfettered by any demands but those of consistency; references to 'rational thinking' are as irrelevant to logic as theodolite readings could be to the study of nine-dimensional hyper-space." Thus the two main planks on which the recent period of rationalistic materialism had based itself lost the greater part of their substance. But more bewilderment was to follow to the utter dismay of the mathematical physicists.

Alexander B. Gibson, speaking of the metaphysician's dilemma before the problem of reality, humorously remarked: "it is enough to make a man take to geometry. Triangles do not hit back." But he was a bit indulgent towards the mathematicians. For, alas, triangles did hit them back!

I am referring to the deep crisis through which mathematical thought has been actually passing. This crisis started in the late nineties of the last century and has gradually acquired intensity during the course of this century. It is as regards the very basis of all mathematical structure. To speak adequately about this topic will take us too far. So let us content ourselves with only the remark that mathematicians have become highly critical of the supposedly absolute and rational basis of their own science; the very solidity of the foundation of all mathematical thinking has been rudely questioned and modern mathematics finds itself in a state of utter insecurity.

This double-pronged attack from outside and from inside has left mathematics bereft of all pretensions to provide the all-

sufficient equation to the phenomenal reality. But if mathematics could not dictate its terms to the world of 'empiry', could it not at least, in one form or another, be sufficient to reveal the total secret of nature? Admitting the inevitable parallelism between phenomena and mathematical explanation, it was hoped that mathematics would at least provide the key to the integral solution of the total reality of this universe. But that too was not to be. Let us see why.

Mathematics and the Total Phenomenal Reality

Mathematics transforms all substance into function and thus destroys all substantial relations. In fact mathematical explanation hinges on the relation of equality (or inequality) which is at bottom identity of quantities attached to different numbers and figures. These quantities may be either constants or independent variables or functions. Thus they are abstracted from reality through a process of double abstraction. Mathematics isolates the quantitative even in quality, for the mathematician is indifferent to quality as such. (Juan Zaragüeta.)

Thus, to him, acoustics are reduced to the mechanics of wave-propagation; light is equated to an all-too-limited portion of the total phenomena of electromagnetic undulations, where an electrical vector along with a magnetic vector are supposed to be in periodic fluctuations thus producing an intensity vector, the energy-current of Poynting; heat is, for him, nothing else but a mechanico-kinetostatic phenomenon. What a flat colourless world he lives in!

But one thing is certain: quality can never be equated to quantity, the heterogeneous diversity of the manifested world will never be imprisoned in the homogeneous quantitative framework offered by mathematics. Mathematics will never be able to explain how arrangement of design, quantity and number can be a base for the manifestation of quality and property. As Juan Zaragüeta has aptly remarked that even after analysing the acoustics of a whole orchestra, mathematics will never come to show that it is verily the note la 3 (A of the 3rd octave) that corresponds to 435 vibrations per second.16

So we see that mathematics is lowered another step down: it is neither the unique reality nor the all-sufficient master-key to explain away the mysteries of the phenomenal world. But, after all, does not mathematical physics reveal to us the existence of so many heretofore unknown real entities, such as gravitational force, electrons and a host more? In other words, has not mathematics revealed, albeit partially, the nature of the deeper structure of material phenomena which transcend our immediate sense-perceptions? And does it not lead us to expect that gradually it will come to unfold with unequivocal precision the inmost mystery of reality? Here again the reply is an emphatic 'No'.

Reality Evanescent

Science started as a seeking to know the internal and intimate structure of the reality of things. But it has long since passed the stage in which reality could be confined in the bounds of our sense-perceptions. Positivism, at least as it was expounded by Moritz Schlick, denies all reality to anything other than our sense-data and all that can be directly derived from them. But to the physicist this world of sensory perception is nothing but the superficial level of reality. He accords far greater reality to what has been termed by J. Clay as the “plane of physical reality” and which clearly transcends the reach of our senses. To understand this point, let us go back a little and examine the problem of visualizing the concepts employed in physics.

The experimental data concerning the state of a physical system doubtless have a visual character or, more exactly, are expressible in terms of sense-reactions. This is not only true of the subjective, but also of the so-called objective observations making use of the blackening of photographic plates, the position of mercury columns, pointers of measuring instruments, etc. Moreover, the predictions, made on the basis of such observations, with respect to the future of the system in question, must ultimately be translated into the language of sense-data. But what of the intermediate steps? Should they too be capable of visualization in terms of sense-data? In the light of the achievements of Galileo, Kepler and Newton, it looked, indeed, in the first stages of physics, as if such a requirement could be imposed on the theory. It was the period of 'mechanistic picture' of the universe where all phenomena were to
be reduced to the motion of particles and bodies under the in­fluence of forces. Little by little, however, the concept of force had to give up its primary position and make room for the ‘energy concept’ due to Meyer, Joule and Helmholtz. “With the concept of energy was introduced a quantity which is connected only indirectly with sense experience, which cannot be visualized and which nevertheless, on account of the fundamental property of remaining unaltered during changes in a ‘closed’ system, has a great degree of reality; so great, indeed, that criminal law speaks of the theft of energy and imposes severe punishments on it”. (R. Kronig.)

A further important step in liberating physical reasoning from the corset of mechanistic considerations was taken by Faraday and Maxwell when introducing the ‘field concept’ into the treatment of electrodynamic phenomena. Gradually more and more concepts were introduced, which completely escaped the grasp of immediate palpability and thus a world of “constructs” (Margenau) was built up. And so long as classical physics moved on its one-rail track – we mean, so long as a single accepted theory dominated the field – this world of “constructs” was believed to be of a deeper order of reality than the world of sense-data. In fact, physicists were convinced that they had thus taken cognizance of some real res which although transcending our sense-perceptions, pre-exists all the while. Thus they became hopeful of uncovering more and more the deeper levels of reality of this physical world. But the disillusion was soon to come.

**Shifting Sands**

The first disillusion came when it was discovered that those ‘enti­ties’ which were accorded a solid reality for decades together failed totally to explain the information revealed by the advancing tide of experimental technique. What was adequate for a blurred vision of the dawn became useless in the shine of the morning. (Remember in this connection the case history of phlogiston.)

**The Spectre of Janus**

Again, the same set of phenomena could be explained in terms of
different theories starting from different sets of concepts and each positing the existence of a different substratum of reality. Thus the theory of electricity based on the methods of Faraday and Maxwell considers electricity to be an incompressible fluid filling matter continuously; on the other hand, the electronic theory explains electrical phenomena as consequences of the movement of perfectly discrete elementary quanta otherwise called electrons. But both these theories deduce the same set of general laws, to wit the Law of Coulomb. Another example: light explained by Fresnel as real vibrations occurring in an all-filling medium called ether, and by Maxwell as an electric force, in accompaniment with a magnetic force, acting in what can only by analogy be called oscillations.

**Mad Hatter’s Tea Party**

Sometimes the same entity exhibited altogether different aspects which were incompatible amongst themselves so far as our sensc-relations are concerned. The most striking example was afforded by light which in some phenomena exhibited an undulatory aspect while in some other it had to be considered in a corpuscular form. So it was like the Mad Hatter’s tea-party where tea was served on such and such days and coffee on the rest of the days of the week! (Eddington.) For the real nature of light is hidden from us. We only know its two complementary aspects: wave-property and particle-property. And it is the same thing with electron. (Louis de Broglie, *Matière & Lumière.*) But what is this strange creature, ‘wavicle’, due to? It is the product of a general crisis in modern physics which we shall discuss in the next section.

**The Riddle of the ‘Mikros’**

So long as the physicists were dealing with the macrophysical domain, they could verify their hypotheses on the solid-ground of experimentation; so their ideas and suppositions could be more or less controlled. But as the horizons of scientific information receded farther and farther, they had to grasp the realities of the micro-realm; but in its very nature this domain was trans-empiric and ultra-sensible. As a result, nothing could be directly tested there and the physicist had to send out some long-range antenna in
order to collect and then codify information pertaining to this invisible impalpable world. These antenna were nothing but different forms of analogies among which may be mentioned: (a) Metaphor (e.g., planetary model of the Bohr atom); (b) Metonymy (e.g., the presence of electrons inferred from measurements effected in a Geiger Counter or from the traces they leave in the Wilson Cloud Chamber).

But in their very nature, analogies cannot offer guaranteed truth; and as the front of scientific research recedes farther and farther from the base-line of sense-perception, the physicist finds himself plumped headlong into what has been called by J. Zaraguëta, *terrain hypothétique*. Here, no assertion could be guaranteed, nothing could be held up as definitely true, all was conjecture and reasoned guess. Here, Schrödinger’s enigmatic psi-function and Heisenberg’s frequency matrix go jogging along to the tune of tra-la-la! What represents the true state of affairs – Wave Mechanics or Quantum Mechanics? Or, perhaps, neither of them? For, are they not after all “verbal stenography” of something unknown and, perhaps, for ever unknowable? What an impasse modern physics has arrived at! The self-contradictory *univocité* of classical mechanics is thrown away only to be replaced by the empty symbolism of modern epistemologists!

And all this talk of Schrödinger’s psi-function travelling in n-dimensional Hilbertian phase space, or of 4-dimensional space at each point determinate in terms of quadri-dimensional metric tensor, etc. – is it physics, or meta-physics? geometry, or meta-geometry? (Has not Prof. J. Clay styled modern physics as meta-physiology?)

In fact, all these modern theories are pure metaphysical speculations; their concepts lack visibility, palpability and any possibility of demonstration. And this is not all. When one tries to describe these newly revealed phenomena in a trivalent or polyvalent logic – as has been attempted by Reichenbach – one is moving straight towards meta-mathematics and meta-logic!


So reality is eluding the grasp and probe of science. Someone has

said that the strength of science lies in its naivety. It started on its journey with complete self-assurance without burdening itself with metaphysical problems about reality. To it it seemed that everything in this universe could be explained in terms of matter, and is not matter something tangible and immediate?

In a sense it was good that in the beginning of its career science did not concern itself with the problem of reality; for, indeed, if the scientist had become too self-conscious, he might have lost all his power, "like the famous centipede who, after too profound an analysis of his own method of locomotion, found that he could no longer walk!"18 (Gilbert N. Lewis.)

But science could not avert for good the day of reckoning. It has at last come face to face with the sphinx of reality, apparently without any chance of solving its riddle. The self-assurance is broken, its pretension to uncover the body of reality is humbled; and as a result agnosticism grows. And note the irony of the situation. At the very moment when science had reached the pinnacle of its practical usefulness, the scientist is altogether disconcerted by questions of fundamental import, questions which shake the very foundations of all scientific knowledge. (It goes without saying that we are here concerned with science as a means to get knowledge of the reality, and not with its practical results nor with the approximative generalisations it has arrived at, which are no doubt valid in their limited domain.) Unexpected and innumerable difficulties have cropped up to challenge the truth of all existing scientific theories; doubts have arisen as regards the intrinsic rationality of mathematical thinking; successive crises in the field of atomic and sub-atomic physics have slowly but surely corroded and finally broken asunder the age-old convictions about self-existent objectivity; rationality and determinism can no longer be held up as inviolable principles governing this physical universe. The scientist has been obliged to throw overboard from his language certain of his intuitive postulates and unchallengeable ideas—such as mechanical determinism, the object independent of the observer's experimentation, etc. —so much so that he has lately taken an attitude of extreme diffidence towards all that appeared to him till now as something self-evident and beyond all refutation. And the difficulty is that he cannot afford to change a few concepts without at the same time disturbing a host of others. Thus he is no

longer dead-sure about what reality really is!"  

In desperation some have altogether denied the existence of any reality *an sich* ("in itself"). To them the *res*, the *realitas* is not something stable or complete, but rather *fieri*, dynamic and subject to continuous change. So there can be no conformity with something that is not yet complete. It has now become increasingly apparent that in science we only know certain properties of the *res*, but the *realitas* underlying phenomena escapes us for ever. In fact, the supposed reality, which the human mind through the discipline of science has posited behind the physical phenomena, is considered not at all a fixed entity having a constant significance; it is taken not as persistent being but as perpetual becoming, a varied flux. (J. H. Tummers, *La Physique Théorique N'Explique Pas.*) But this incapability of science to seize the reality behind cannot be an argument for declaring that there is no stable reality as "*das Ding an sich*" ("the thing in itself") or that "reality changes when new discoveries are made. (Margenau.) The present idea is no solution to the problem of reality, nor can it satisfy the inner instinct of the scientist himself; for, behind all scientific research, is there not the presupposition that there is some stable mystery inherent in the physical universe, something as yet unknown but that can be progressively known? For, above all, science has always been considered primarily in its noetic aspect; practical utility comes afterwards as a secondary by-product. It is this very ambition to be a perfect bringer of knowledge that now seems to have been demolished for good.

**Vanitas Vanitatum Knocked Out**

And what has become of the mathematical laws formulated in physics? They, too, are no longer considered to hold out an all-vision revealing the true nature of reality, nor are they deemed inviolable in their nature. "A physical theory is not an explanation." (Duhem.) "A mathematical law cannot reveal the true nature of things; it would be utterly preposterous and foolish to put forward such a claim for it." (Henri Poincaré.) "Putting into equation is no more than an abbreviative form given to language

Science, Philosophy and Sri Aurobindo’s Vision

and logical thought. It cannot offer us anything intrinsic about the external world of reality; it cannot say anything at all about it except in so far as it links itself to reality in docile submission. It is especially about mathematics that one can declare: *naturae non imperaturs nisi parendo* ‘one cannot impose one’s rule on Nature except by obeying it.’”

Thus the phenomehist ambition of science has been bid good-bye. The realist interpretation of scientific knowledge (due, among others, to Bavink and Plank) according to which science is explanatory can no longer hold the day; the theories of science are essentially descriptive. (Bridgeman and the Vienna School.) Science cannot explain reality, it can only describe phenomena and that too in an all-too-limited way; description and not explanation is the only role of science. The modern scientist has come to realise that a fundamental intrinsic imperfection is involved in the very structure of scientific knowledge incapacitating it from comprehending the total reality. For “Our science is no more than a simulacrum of pure intellection. The mode of all rational human knowledge is not *in aliquo* as in the case of a pure spirit, it is *ex aliquo* in a discursive way.... Human reason can seize only a succession of ordinal forms which it can very well classify and systematise, but without ever being able to exhaust all of them, for, in its very nature, it is finite and moves in time. And that is why no mathematico-physical theory will ever be able to take into account the totality of phenomena or utter the last word on the nature of the world.... Also, all discursive thought proceeds through substitution of equivalents; but there is no absolute equivalence in the domain of reality. Thus it lacks the total singular vision of the Real. Mathematico-physical knowledge shares this intrinsic weakness with all other forms of discursive thought.”

The Unknown and the Unknowable

So modern science has come to realise that it cannot, in the very nature of things, offer any essential knowledge about the reality. Although it started with the ambition to dig

“...into Matter’s hard concealing soil,
To unearth the processes of all things done,”¹²²

it discovers now that a more or less probable predictability – and
that too in a highly restricted field – is all that it can possibly offer. Thus explanation in science is no longer ‘revelatory’ but only
‘prognostic’. “Scientific truth is a prediction, or rather a predi­
cation.... Above the subject, beyond the immediate object, modern Science bases itself on pro-ject.”²³

But can the scientific spirit remain contented with this none too
dignified role of

“A bullock yoked in the cart of proven fact”

whose only function is to drag

“...huge knowledge-bales through Matter’s dust
To reach utility’s immense bazaar”?

In fact, science began its journey with a quest to know, to pene­
trate the unknown and -comprehend and interpret the hidden
reality. Primarily, it is a seeking for knowledge rather than an utilitarian spirit, that motivates the march of science. But what do we find at the journey’s end? Science has not been able to offer a
mathesis universalis even for the inanimate material world, let
alone the whole of this universe. To it this immense actuality and
this stupendous becoming is indescribable as a whole. But this
whole is ever impinging on the man of science as on all other
sentient beings, and he cannot brush it aside as something inco­
herent and devoid of all rationale. For this whole is certainly not a
chaos.

“The cosmos is no accident in Time”

and

“There is a meaning in each play of chance”.

To speak mathematically, this universal Becoming is not a ‘scalar’,
it is a multidimensional ‘vector’. “World-existence is the ecstatic
dance of Shiva which multiplies the body of the God numberlessly
to the view: it leaves that white existence precisely where and what

²². The quotations in poetry are all from Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri.
it was, ever is and ever will be." 24 But science has foundered in both the fields: it neither knows the Being, nor can unfold the secret of the Becoming. So the crucial question is: What next?

Modern science is at a cross-road. To it reality appears to be ever unknowable. Should it then give up the pursuit, essential knowledge being to it unknowable? Or, should it not take a leap into the light, undergo a metamorphosis and proceed on a path of new adventure? Here comes in Sri Aurobindo with his supreme assurance that "The Unknown is not the Unknowable; it need not remain the unknown for us, unless we choose ignorance or persist in our first limitations. For to all things that are not unknowable, all things in the universe, there correspond in that universe faculties which can take cognizance of them, and in man, the micro-cosm, these faculties are always existent and at a certain stage capable of development.... Fundamentally, all possible knowledge is knowledge within the power of humanity." 25

March of Evolution

But it should be emphasised at once that "our way of knowing must be appropriate to that which is to be known; otherwise we achieve only a distant speculation, a figure of knowledge and not veritable knowledge.... An ignorant half-knowledge cannot follow the motions of an All-Knowledge." 26 After all, science too has chalked out a special method suited to the task of exploring the physical reality and the potency of this method in its own chosen field has been demonstrated in full. But this very method becomes inapt and valueless when applied to other fields of reality. And there is nothing irrational or amazing in this failure. For "there are different orders of the reality and the conceptions, measures, standards suitable to one need not be applicable to another order.... Our finite knowledge, conceptions, standards may be valid within their limits, but they are incomplete and relative." 27 Thus, to comprehend the total reality, an integral faculty of knowledge is called for; and certainly Mind is too imperfect an

26. Ibid., p. 323.
27. Ibid., p. 328.
instrument to play this role. "Mind is not sufficient to explain existence in the universe.... For Mind is that which does not know, which tries to know and which never knows except as in a glass darkly.... Knowledge waits seated beyond mind and intellectual reasoning, throned in the luminous vast of illimitable self-vision." 28

So we see that if we seek an integral knowledge of the reality, the only logical course for us is to discard this smoke-covered lamp of our present faculty of knowledge and awake into a higher region of consciousness where a supra-intellectual seeing will replace "a seeking Mind". But is it 'practical politics', after all? As an ideal it may be alluring, but has it not been posited that at their best, ideals are fictions; they are abstract, purely conceptual absolutes, which can only be approached 'asymptotically'; in other words, they are unattainable in finite time; and at its worst, what is an ideal if not "a malady of the mind" and "a bright delirium of speech and thought"? So is it not an 'idle gleam' to hunt after this super-mind, for how can there be anything greater than mind and reason?

But this sense of impossibility arises only because it is being tacitly assumed that man with his mind-consciousness is something of the nature of a limit, definitive and eternally stabilised, which can never be transcended. But this idea of the limit and of the impossible grows a little shadowy as soon as we study the evolutionary history of this terrestrial manifestation. In fact, evolution of consciousness much more than a form-evolution, is the key-note of this terrestrial Becoming. "There is a graduated necessary succession in the evolution, first the evolution of Matter, next the evolution of Life in Matter, then the evolution of Mind in living Matter, and in this last stage an animal evolution followed by a human evolution." 29 In reality, a spiritual unfolding on earth is the hidden truth of our birth into Matter, and "if it is fundamentally an evolution of consciousness that has been taking place in Nature, then man as he is cannot be the last term of that evolution: he is too imperfect an expression of the spirit, mind itself a too limited form and instrumentation; mind is only a middle term of consciousness, the mental being can only be a transitional being. If, then, man is incapable of exceeding mentality, he must be sur-

29. Ibid., p. 836.
passed and supermind and superman must manifest and take the lead of the creation. But if his mind is capable of opening to what exceeds it, then there is no reason why man himself should not arrive at supermind and supermanhood or at least lend his mentality, life and body to an evolution of that greater term of the Spirit manifesting in Nature.

Integral Yoga

But how can man open his mind to what exceeds it and is trying to manifest here in earth-nature? If evolution is a fact, does not past history testify to its extremely slow progression? Thus, if the integral knowledge can only come by an evolution of our being and our nature, that would seem to signify an imperceptibly slow process in time such as has accompanied the other evolutionary transformations, and this would postpone this new birth into Light to some indeterminate distant future.

But here again Sri Aurobindo comes in to assure us that this need not be so. For “it must be observed that the appearance of human mind and body on the earth marks a crucial step, a decisive change in the course and process of the evolution; it is not merely a continuation of the old lines. Up till this advent of a developed thinking mind in Matter evolution had been effected, not by the self-aware aspiration, intention, will or seeking of the living being, but subconsciously or subliminally by the automatic operation of Nature.” But with the emergence of man “the evolution has now become conscious and its method and steps need not be altogether of the same character as when it was subconscious in its process. The integral knowledge, since it must result from a change of consciousness, can be gained by a process in which our will and endeavour have a part, in which they can discover and apply their own steps and method: its growth in us can proceed by a conscious self-transformation.”

We should note that Sri Aurobindo is no speculative philosopher. He is not satisfied merely with painting in rainbow colours an aureate picture of the ideal. He is the supreme scientist of life

31. Ibid., p. 843.
32. Ibid., pp. 655-56.
who proceeds to realise the ideal in himself and then to build up an integral method for others to follow. And what is the efficacy of this preconised method called the Integral Yoga? Well, let us listen to him (the scientist might get an abundance of conviction from this significant utterance):

"I must remind you that I have been an intellectual myself and no stranger to doubts — both the Mother and myself have had one side of the mind as positive and as insistent on practical results and more so than any Russell can be. We could never have been contented with the shining ideas and phrases which a Rolland or another takes for gold coin of Truth. We know well what is the difference between a subjective experience and a dynamic outward-going and realising Force. So although we have faith, (and who ever did anything great in the world without having faith in his mission or the Truth at work behind him?) we do not find ourselves on faith alone, but on a great ground of knowledge which we have been developing and testing all our lives. I think I can say that I have been testing day and night for years upon years more scrupulously than any scientist his theory or his method on the physical plane.... I know that the Supramental Descent is inevitable — I have faith in view of my experience that the time can be and should be now and not in a later age."

New Manifestation

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have always declared that the earth-conditions are now ready to receive the supramental Light. In fact, the present-day ills of humanity are only the birth-throes of a new Dawn. Reason has failed as a governor of life; it has miscarried as a noetic instrument. Man has become acutely aware of the limitations and insufficiency under which he is labouring. Whether consciously or unconsciously he is aspiring after a transfiguring transcendence. For he has felt in the depth of his being that

"He is a captive in his net of mind
And beats soul-wings against the walls of life."

Thus the objective conditions favourable for the Descent are already there. But this in itself is a necessary but by no means sufficient factor. For the supramental Descent to occur there must be someone to cooperate occultly with the process and accelerate the march of evolution. What would have normally taken thousands of years should be encompassed in a couple of centuries or so, and this has precisely been the mission of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Single-mindedly they engaged themselves in this supreme task for more than half a century; they have reared up, step after step, the ladder of transcendence and silently worked for the day when the evolution will take the next leap and the new Dawn will be heralded. They have not trumpeted their mission, for in the Mother's inimitable words: "The greatest victories are the least noisy. The manifestation of a new world is not proclaimed by beat of drum."

It was in 1932 that Sri Aurobindo wrote the letter quoted above. The Mother declared in 1956 that what he and she had worked to manifest is not any more a mere possibility lying in the womb of the future but a realised fact. Her actual words are: "The manifestation of the Supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality. It is at work here, and a day will come when the most blind, the most unconscious, even the most unwilling shall be obliged to recognise it."

But the sceptic may raise his eye-brows and interject: "But where is the proof of this divine event! I do not see any signs of it!" Quite so; for in the logic of things he has first to awaken his inner eye before he can expect to take cognisance of this tremendous event; otherwise it would not be supermind but something which could be very well seized by mind. In fact, as Sri Aurobindo has indicated:

"God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep...

And belief shall be not till the work is done."

But this does not mean that the supramental Descent will have no effect on this visible field of manifestation and will remain for ever aloof on the high peaks of mystic halo. Far from it; for it is no static knowledge that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have sought.

34. The Mother's Message on April 24, 1956.
Above all, they have tried to make the supermind overtly operative in earth-nature, because they have seen in their vision that it is the supermind which alone possesses a world-transfiguring Light able to bring the evolutionary march to its cherished goal. Has not Sri Aurobindo declared that "power of self is the sign of the divinity of self, – a powerless spirit is no spirit."\(^{35}\) "If Knowledge brings not power to change the world", then "truth and knowledge are an idle gleam." Incidentally, here again a truly scientific spirit finds its utter fulfilment in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga-Philosophy, for to a man of science too, knowledge divorced from power is not something very much covetable.

Thus we see that as days pass by, the Supramental Manifestation will make its presence increasingly more manifest even to the outward eye; in fact, this descent has ushered in an age of miracles – miracles, we repeat, to a mind

"That sees the empiric fact as settled law", forgetting that laws are nothing but "habits of the world" which can very well be changed, if the Spirit's self-vision and self-determination so will it. Let us listen to the Mother herself about the impact of this Supramental Descent on world-conditions:

"Creation is the result not only of combinations on the surface but also of combinations in the depths of this surface.... Each time a new element is introduced into the sum-total of possible combinations, it is as it were a tearing of its limits; the introduction of something that effaces the past limits, brings in new possibilities into play, multiplies indefinitely the old possibilities.... It is evident that the modern scientific perception is much nearer to something that corresponds to the universal Reality than the perceptions, say, of the Stone Age;... but even this will be completely transcended, surpassed and probably upset by the intrusion of something which was not in the universe and has not been studied so far. This change, this sudden mutation in the universal elements will very certainly bring a kind of chaos in our perceptions, but out of it a new knowledge will arise. That, in a most general way, will be the result of the New Manifestation."\(^{36}\)

---

Adventure Beckons Science

Now, what should science do in this "God's stupendous hour"?
All the three pillars – mathematics, logic and causality – on which
it tried to base its materialistic creed have lost their inviolable
character. The man of science has been forced by the advancing
tide of knowledge to change and reconstruct these again and again
in order to bring them in conformity with the new face of reality
revealed. Science which started with the assumption that Matter is
the sole reality has come to realise its inherent impotency before
the problem of reality and thus, as Sri Aurobindo has put it, "the
rock on which materialism was built and which in the 19th century
seemed unshakable has now been shattered. Materialism has now
become a philosophical speculation just like any other theory; it
cannot claim to found itself on a sort of infallible Biblical author­
ity, based on the facts and conclusions of Science. This change
can be felt by one like myself who grew up in the hey-day of
absolute rule of scientific materialism in the 19th century. The way
which had been almost entirely barred, except by rebellion, now
lies wide open to spiritual truths, spiritual ideas, spiritual ex­
experiences. That is the real revolution.... It is this change which I
expected and prophesied in my poems in the first Ahana volume,
'A Vision of Science' and 'In the Moonlight'."37

Such is the gain derived from the negative side of the situation:
the insufficiency of science in its present form. But a positive
adventure's call is beckoning science to transcend its present limi­
tations and get transformed into a meta-science. "If science is to
turn her face towards the Divine, it must be a new science not yet
developed which deals directly with the forces of the life-world and
of Mind and so arrives at what is beyond Mind; but present-day
science cannot do that."38

And this hope for a meta-science is not at all without basis. For
the spirit of transcendence is active in the heart of science itself.
"When we have proved Matter and realised its secret capacities,
the very knowledge which has found its convenience in that tem­
porary limitation, must cry to us, like the Vedic Restrainers,
'Forth now and push forward also in other fields'.

"If modern Materialism were simply an unintelligent acquies-

cence in the material life, the advance might be indefinitely delayed. But since its very soul is the search for knowledge, it will be unable to cry a halt; as it reaches the barriers of sense-knowledge and of the reasoning from sense-knowledge, its very rush will carry it beyond and the rapidity and sureness with which it has embraced the visible universe is only an earnest of the energy and success which we may hope to see repeated in the conquest of what lies beyond, once the stride is taken that crosses the barrier. We see already that advance in its obscure beginnings."

But is not the very methodology of science antithetical to the Yogic way of acquiring spiritual knowledge? Let us discuss this issue in the next chapter.

III

SCIENCE AND SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE
(An Unnecessary Antinomy and a Harmonious Reconciliation)

"Earth is the Mother and Heaven the Father."
(Rigveda)

"All problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony."
(Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, p. 4.)

Why Reconciliation?

Because of the complexity of his nature and being, man has always felt a double attraction apparently involving some sort of mutual contradiction: the lure of Earth and the call of Heaven. As a result, the human race has ever oscillated between two extreme and opposite ideals. On one side is the Hellenic ideal as taken up by Western civilisation and characterised by the cult of a critical and constructive rationality of which Science is the last outcome and which hopes to make individual men perfected social beings in a perfected economic society. On the other is the Eastern ideal imbued with a spiritual preoccupation, a mystic élan towards the Beyond and Unknown, a search for the self and the inmost truth of being, to which "every passing thing is nothing but a symbol".

An undue over-stress on any one of these ideals to the detriment of the other can only lead to reductivist-omissive fallacy that misses their essential and harmonious compatibility and instead makes of them irreconcilable antagonists. But try as they may, the materialist and the ascetic can silence none of the aforesaid fundamental urges of man for all time, because they correspond to some essential elements of his being. Today, in India, we are on the threshold of a crisis of decision in which is concealed a choice of the nation's destiny: we are in the presence of the two extremes poised for a final confrontation, demanding if possible a harmonious reconciliation, otherwise an irrevocable parting of the ways.
It is well to remember that this confrontation between Science and Spirituality will brook no eclectic compromise nor an uneasy mariage de convenance. What is called for is a deep and true and luminous reconciliation arising out of a mutual comprehension that will give to both “their due portion in Life and their due justification in Thought”, thus relating the eternal aspiration of man upward and inward towards the Divine to his equally abiding drive towards the fullness of life and the triumphant mastery of this world’s powers and possessions.

In our day this sought-after reconciliation has become all the more urgent, for the history of the race during the last half a century has made us poignantly aware that

(i) a sole stress on the economic and material existence of man leads inexorably to the rise in our midst of civilised barbarians so dangerous to the welfare of humanity itself;

(ii) an exclusively rational-scientific secular-material culture creates a dangerous void and imbalance in the subjective sphere of man’s existence, so much so that the man of our epoch, in spite of all possible material comforts and conveniences, has fallen a prey to an all-pervading sense of anxiety with its background of frustration, maladjustment and inner disintegration;

(iii) although Science has brought to man an increasing mastery over his physical surroundings and along with it a growing material power, it has brought, alas, no adequate self-knowledge or self-mastery in the user of that power, the inevitable result being a horrible subjective chaos and the universalised confusion and discord that we witness everywhere;

(iv) Science and technology have made the life of humanity materially one, but have miserably failed to provide with a harmonising light of the spirit that would create in this physical drawing together of the human world a true life-unity, a mental unity or a spiritual oneness. “All that is there is a chaos of clashing mental ideas, urges of individual and collective physical want and need, vital claims and desires, impulses of an ignorant life-push, hungers and calls for life-satisfaction of individuals, classes, nations, a rich fungus of political and social and economic nostrums and notions, a hustling medley of slogans and panaceas for which men are ready to oppress and be oppressed, to kill and be killed, to impose them somehow or other by the immense and too formidable means placed at his disposal, in the belief that it
is his way out to something ideal.”

The dark doom to which humanity is hurtling headlong down under the impact of its external opulence and inner penury can be averted only if there dawns in man a greater spiritual consciousness adequate to meet and master the increasing potentialities of existence and harmonise them. “A greater whole-being, whole-knowledge, whole-power is needed to weld all into a greater unity of whole-life.”

It is in the fitness of things that in India a conscious attempt is being made to harmonise modern science and technology with the age-old spiritual tradition of the land. And if India can find this basis of abiding collaboration between Science and Spirituality, she will not only do service to herself but show the necessary way to the bewildered world at large.

The present essay purports to show that such a harmonious and fruitful reconciliation is not merely possible but natural and inevitable if only Science and Spirituality, in their extraneous and inessential fortuitous accretions, consent to shed the dead weight of their inhibitions and presumptions. So the Mother has said, anything “that keeps to its proper place and plays its appointed role is helpful, but directly it steps beyond its sphere, it becomes twisted and perverted and therefore false.” Indeed, as we shall see in the course of our essay, much of the conflict between Science and Religion is solely due to this overstepping of respective spheres and is therefore devoid of any veritable raison d'être. But before we may arrive at the reconciling solution, we propose first to analyse the reasons, historical as well as metaphysical, that have tended to put Science and Spirituality in two opposite camps; for a problem clearly put and squarely faced often brings its own solution.

Confrontation of Science and Religion

It is not so much spirituality and Yoga as the accredited credal religions that have historically clashed with the spirit and findings of Science. For what characterises a truly spiritual life is a direct

2. Ibid., p. 1055.
contact with the spiritual Reality, a union with the Divine and a living in the Divine Consciousness. Spirituality represents thus an essentially catholic mood, a programme of inner regeneration and finally a realised goal. The spiritual life, as distinguished from a religious life, “proceeds directly by a change of consciousness, a change from the ordinary consciousness, ignorant and separated from its true self and from God, to a greater consciousness in which one finds one’s true being and comes first into direct and living contact and then into union with the Divine. For the spiritual seeker this change of consciousness is the one thing he seeks and nothing else matters”.

Now, the only and true function of a religion is, or should be, to prepare man’s mind and life up to the point – and that in as catholic a manner as possible – where spiritual consciousness can directly take them up and illumine and govern their movements with the all-reconciling light of the spirit. But forgetting this central role and its essentially spiritual core, the religious attitude very soon degenerates in practice into some irrational and superstitious exoteric religionism that vaunts with dogmatic insistence an arbitrary array of theological dogmas, fixed beliefs and creeds, hollow ceremonies and lifeless ritual. And who can deny that, historically and as a matter of fact, religious traditions and orthodox reactions have stood violently in the way of science, burned a Bruno at the stake, imprisoned a sixty-seven years old Galileo, heaped abuses on a Darwin and often represented a force for retardation, superstition and oppressive ignorance. And all this simply because “men in the passion and darkness of their vital nature had chosen to think that religion was bound up with certain fixed intellectual conceptions about God and the world which could not stand scrutiny, and therefore scrutiny had to be put down by fire and sword; scientific and philosophic truth had to be denied in order that religious error might survive”.

It is no wonder that Science with its spirit of free inquiry had to rise in revolt, as a reaction of sheer survival and self-defence, against the silly tenets and crude and inadequate dogmatic notions of popular religions. Science could not but recoil with a sense of estranged indifference, contempt and scepticism from what claims to determine truths even in Science’s own domain by some so-

called sacrosanct and infallible divine authority. This explains the historical hostility of Science and Religion, especially in Europe, which has led to the growth of the modern rationalistic attitude that seeks to make the earthly life our preoccupation and labours “to fulfil man by the law of the lower members divorced from all spiritual seeking.”

Inhibitions of Ascetic Spirituality

Ironically enough, in India, it is not the religions but a widely pervasive variant of metaphysical mood, a mood of ascetic spiritual aberration, that is likely to oppose the efflorescence of Science and the successful exploration and utilisation of Matter and the material world – not of course actively and outwardly as in Europe but in a passively negative and all the more potent way of mortifying the very initiative to scientific research, through the cultivation of a spirit of world-disgust. For the last two thousand years India has lived in ‘the shadow of the great Refusal’ and laboured under the sense of the cosmic Illusion. A supposed metaphysical dualism between Spirit and Matter, Reality and Appearance, has created in the collective Indian mind a feeling of the vanity of earthly existence, of the unimportance of things in Time, of the essential illusoriness of human life and its terrestrial aims and the unreality of the phenomenal world. The garb of the ascetic has been considered to be the highest possible possession of a man, kaupīṇavanta khalu bhāgyavanta!

And if this be the true sense of spirituality and this anti-life attitude its inevitable consequence, this sort of spirituality, however ennobling for some isolated individual men, can have no essential dynamic validity nor any fruitful message for human society in the field of social effort, hope and aspiration. And, of course, it is futile to expect any universal growth of Science in the stifling atmosphere and on the unpropitious soil provided by this dilapidating vairāgya mood.

Fortunately, this anti-life mood and world-disgust, active or veiled, is not at all a necessary concomitant of true spirituality nor, for that matter, does it represent the robust catholicity of ancient

Indian lore which admitted “both the claim of the pure spirit to manifest in us its absolute freedom and the claim of universal Matter to be the mould and condition of our manifestation”, and heroically proceeded to embody here upon earth and not elsewhere, *ihaiva*, a higher consciousness and a spiritually moulded life.

What India wants today is not an obscurantist credal religionism nor the vitalistic occult and pseudo-spiritual practices, but the integral all-embracing dynamic spirituality of the Upanishads and the Vedas whose ancient wisdom, *purāṇī prajñā*, did not make this formidable division between Heaven and Earth, but accorded to both equal love and reverence. The Rishis went so far as to declare that “the Earth is the foundation and all the worlds are on the earth”.

What, then, characterises this dynamic spiritual vision? What is its programme of action for man?

**An Integral and Dynamic Spiritual Vision**

The present appearance of our terrestrial being is a veiled and partial figure, and to limit ourselves to that first figure of the moment, to the present formula of an imperfect humanity, and base our world-conceptions on this appearance alone, as if that were an abiding truth for all times, is to exclude our divine possibilities. We have to bring a wider meaning into our human life and manifest in it the much more that we secretly are. We have to recognise the purport of our whole complex human nature in its right place in the cosmic movement and give its full legitimate value to each part of our complex being and many-sided aspiration; we have to find out the key of their unity as well as their phenomenal difference; and this finding must be by a synthesis and integration.

Now this all-reconciling dynamic integral spirituality posits that:

(i) There is a Permanent above the transience of this manifested world we live in; there exists a supreme consciousness beyond and above this limited consciousness in whose narrow borders we

---

8. Adapted from Sri Aurobindo, mostly in his own words.
grope and struggle at present; there is an Absolute beyond and behind every relative form and figure in this universe.

(ii) This omnipresent Reality is the truth of all life and existence; this Reality of a Being and Consciousness, one and eternal, is behind the appearances of the world; all beings are united in that One Self and Spirit but divided by a certain separativity of consciousness, an ignorance of their true self and Reality in the mind, life and body.

(iii) This absolute Reality is in its nature indefinable; it is beyond the grasp of the ineffectual probe of separative mental consciousness; but there is a spiritual consciousness, a knowledge by identity, – attainable by a certain psycho-spiritual discipline otherwise called Yoga, – that can seize this Reality in its fundamental aspects and its manifold powers and forms and figures; Yoga can help us to remove the veil of separative consciousness and make us aware of the true self, the Divinity within us and all.

(iv) This primary, ultimate and eternal Existence, this Sat, is not merely bare existence, or a conscious existence whose consciousness is crude force or power; it is a conscious existence the very term of whose being, the very term of whose consciousness is bliss. In other words, that which has thrown itself out into forms is a triune Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, Sachchidananda.

(v) This world is real because of the Reality that sustains it, because it is in its essence nothing else than the self-manifestation of the Supreme; but in its actual state strongly marked with inadequacy, imperfection, suffering and evil, it cannot be described as the perfect expression of Sachchidananda.

(vi) The supreme Reality, here in this manifested world, has taken upon itself the aspect of a Becoming in Time and this Becoming is essentially evolutionary in its character with Mind and Man as its highest products so far.

(vii) But Sachchidananda has yet to emerge fully in manifestation; therefore this evolution, this spiritual progression cannot stop short with Mind and with the imperfect mental being called Man; Mind is too imperfect an expression and Man too hampered and burdened a creature to be the last terms of evolution.

(viii) The former steps in evolution were taken by Nature in the plant and animal life without a conscious will or participation; but in men the substitution of a conscious for this subconscious evolution has become conceivable and practicable.
(ix) Indeed the object of man in the world is “to become, to be conscious, to increase continually in our realised being and awareness of self and things, in our actualised force and joy of being, and to express that becoming dynamically in such an action on the world and ourselves that we and it shall grow more and always yet more towards the highest possible reach, largest possible breadth of universality and infinity”.

(x) Since earth-life is thus seen to be not merely a lapse into something undivine, vain and miserable, offered to the embodied soul as a thing to be suffered and then cast away from it, as soon as its own inner evolution or some hidden law of the spirit makes that possible, the motivation for sadhana and the goal of spirituality should not be the drawing away from the world and its activities and a disappearance into far-off heights of the Self or Spirit but rather the invocation and descent of the higher principles here in the bosom of the world itself so that it becomes possible for the human being to find himself dynamically as well as inwardly and grow out of his still animal humanity into a divine race.

(xi) For this to be effectively realisable, man must know that
   a) although he lives mostly in his surface mind, life and body, there is an inner being within him with greater possibilities to which he has to awake and can awake through the process of the psychological discipline of Yoga;
   b) he has to open the ranges of this inner being and to live from there outward, governing his outward life by an inner light and force;
   c) there are states beyond the material, — supraphysical planes and worlds, — which have laws of their own that can be investigated and utilised to the greater advantage of man if only he consents to undertake the study of them in a proper unbiased way;
   d) there are several ranges of consciousness between the ordinary human mind and the supreme Truth-Consciousness and these intervening ranges have to be opened up and can be opened up in the subjective being of man, with all their potencies being actively available in the flowering of human life upon earth.

For the individual to arrive at the divine universality and supreme infinity, live in it, possess it, to be, know, feel and express that alone in all his being, consciousness, energy, delight of being is what the ancient seers of the Veda meant by the Knowledge, *vidyā*, and they recognised that *avidyā ca vidyāliṅgam*. To such a
spiritual vision, positive and dynamic, “all man’s age-long effort, his action, society, art, ethics, science, religion, all the manifold activities by which he expresses and increases his mental, vital, physical, spiritual existence, are episodes in the vast drama of this endeavour... and have behind their limited apparent aims no other true sense or foundation”.

**Spirituality Reconciled to Science**

Such then is the outlook of an integral spirituality that includes and accounts for all so that each truth of experience takes its due place of honour in the whole; it illumines, integralises, harmonises the significance of all knowledge, lower or higher, and gathers together all experience in the truth of a supreme and all-reconciling oneness. This spirituality is bold enough to declare in unequivocal terms that although it is a fact that without *vidyā*, the knowledge of the Oneness, *avidyā*, the relative and separative multiple consciousness, is a night of darkness and disorder, *andham tamah*, *bhūri anṛta*, it is equally true that by excluding the field and operation of *avidyā* as if it were a thing non-existent and unreal, *vidyā* itself becomes a sort of obscurity and a source of imperfection, *bhūya iva tamah*. This spirituality ordains man to cross beyond death through Avidya and enjoy Immortality by the Knowledge, *avidyāyā mṛtyun tirtvā vidyayāmṛtam śnute*. To its vision, Matter too is Brahman, *annam brahma*, and so it does not seek to annul or deny the positive knowledge which Science has gathered from an elaborate investigation and exploration of the processes of life and nature, but only completes it by pointing out that the true foundation is above while the branchings are downward, *ūrdhavudhna nicīna-śākha* (Rig-Veda), *ūrdhamūlo’vākśa-kha* (Gita), so that to know the essential truth of things as distinguished from their phenomenal appearances, one has to probe upward and inward instead of remaining content with only surface scrutiny. Ordinarily it is supposed that when we get to the higher knowledge, the knowledge that seeks to know the truth of existence from within, in its source and reality, by spiritual realisation, the world-knowledge becomes of no concern to us; but “in reality

they are two sides of one seeking. All knowledge is ultimately the knowledge of God, through himself, through Nature, through her works”. And therefore, since all sincere pursuit after knowledge, if not vitiated and coarsened by a too earthward tendency, tends “to refine, to subtilise, to purify the being”, a spirituality turned towards an all-embracing realisation of the supreme here upon earth cannot and will not exclude and throw away the forms and achievements of the so-called lower knowledge, nor will it shrink from the splendid toil and many-sided victory which the Cosmic Spirit has assigned to himself in the human creature. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“All activities of knowledge that seek after or express Truth are in themselves rightful materials for a complete offering; none ought necessarily to be excluded from the wide framework of divine life. The mental and physical sciences which examine into the laws and forms and processes of things, those which concern the life of men and animals, the social, political, linguistic and historical and those which seek to know and control the labours and activities by which man subdues and utilises his world and environment, and the noble and beautiful Arts which are at once work and knowledge, – for every well-made and significant poem, picture, statue or building is an act of creative knowledge, a living discovery of the consciousness, a figure of Truth, a dynamic form of mental and vital self-expression or word-expression, – all that seeks, all that finds, all that voices or figures is a realisation of something of the play of the Infinite and to that extent can be made a means of God-realisation or of divine formation.”

Even after his spiritual attainment, siddhi, a man of integral spirituality will continue to take interest in the knowledge of the world, in the “contemplation of God in Nature”, and his “aim in the sciences that make for knowledge should be to discover and understand the workings of the Divine Consciousness-Puissance in man and creatures and things and forces, her creative significances, her execution of the mysteries, the symbols in which she arranges the manifestation. The Yogan’s aim in the practical sciences, whether mental and physical or occult and psychic, should be to enter into the ways of the Divine and his processes, to know the materials and means for the work given to us so that we

11. Ibid., pp. 132-33.
may use that knowledge for a conscious and faultless expression of the spirit’s mastery, joy and self-fulfilment.”

In spirituality understood in the way as we have ventured to delineate above – and which, we trust, recaptures the spirit of our ancient Indian Wisdom, purāṇi prajñā, lies the harmonising light and law. And the supposed antinomy between Science and Spirituality is at least resolved from the latter’s side. But what about the former? Is Science ready to clasp the hand of co-operation stretched by such a dynamic spirituality? Or will it rather by its very nature remain estranged from all spirituality of whatever sort that may be?

Here, again, our answer is in the negative. But to substantiate our proposition, we must first of all see what Science is, what its methodology, and what the outlook implied in its successful pursuit.

The Common Ground of Essential Attitude

One fact immediately arising out of even a cursory view of nature is the permanence of an over-riding rhythm in the sensate world of becoming and movement. In the absence of this rhythm, nature would have been totally incomprehensible, our memory useless, all science impossible and the activity of man blind and aleatory. Science is the discipline through which man attempts to catch this rhythm and imprison it in the framework of a precise formulation.

Now, all that is ordinarily knowable in phenomena is function and all discursive knowledge of which science is only a specialised form is nothing more than functional correspondence. Science replaces the study of the ontological content of a phenomenon by a functional explanation, and this explanation is sought by the application of both theory and experiment. The explanation in Science is not “revelatory” but “prognostic”: “scientific truth is a prediction, or rather a predication.... Above the subject, beyond the immediate object, modern Science bases itself on project.”

Now it is a striking fact of good augury that a proper pursuit of scientific research calls for and develops in the scientist certain qualities of head and heart, a psychological poise and a certain

global attitude that are at the same time very much needed in the fulfilment of a dynamically positive spiritual seeking. Mention may be made of:

(i) an intense mental concentration that ruthlessly eliminates all idle wandering of mind;
(ii) a boundless patience and an unflagging perseverance in the ceaseless search after truth;
(iii) strength of "character to seek the truth even when we have reason to fear that it will not be to our liking";¹⁴
(iv) "sincerity to accept the truth when this truth happens to contradict all that we have previously professed;"¹⁴
(v) "modesty to recognise that man... must stoop to experiment" to attain to truth;¹⁴
(vi) a spirit of heroic adventure that does not shun problems, rather confronts them with zest only to conquer them;
(vii) a creative imagination eager to strike out new pathways, to open up new vistas and explore new avenues to the unknown and the unconquered;
(viii) determination not to get lost in the diversity of appearances but rather to penetrate deeper and wider into the mystery of things until one gets at the veiled connections and the underlying essential unity (cf. vahunāmekam vijarān vahudhā yah karoti);
(ix) readiness to sacrifice one's time and energy in an attempt to raise, even if a little more, the veil covering the face of truth;
(x) a positive and discriminating and constructive faith that steers clear of the two extremes of superstitious belief and sterile doubt.

It is not without significance that the Mother has remarked: "the method of scientific work is a marvellous discipline. Those who follow it in all sincerity truly prepare themselves for Yoga. It requires but a slight turn, somewhere in their being, which will enable them to come out of their a little too narrow point of view and enter into an integrality which will surely lead them toward the Truth and the supreme mastery."¹⁵

It may be noted in this connection that "Yoga [itself] is scientific to this extent that it proceeds by subjective experiment and bases all its findings on experience; mental intuitions are admitted only as a first step and are not considered as realisation – they must be

confirmed by being translated into and justified by experience.”16 But in order to obviate any possible chance of misunderstanding it must be forthwith stated that “the subjective discovery must be pursued by a subjective method of enquiry, observation and verification; research into the supraphysical must evolve, accept and test appropriate means and methods other than those by which one examines the constituents of physical objects and the processes of Energy in material Nature”.17

Here at this point there is some scope for serious misgivings about the prospect of reconciliation between Science and Spirituality. For, it is generally asserted that the methods adopted by the seekers of Yoga to attain to knowledge as well as the very content of this “knowledge” go counter to the basic methodology of Science and are hence altogether to be put out of court! But these objections are more apparent than real and spring from a superficial view of things and from entire misunderstanding of the case for spiritual seekers. For, what is after all the methodology of Science and, shorn of all appendages, what are its fundamental traits?

The Methodology of Science

Science may be defined as a nomothetico-experimental procedure that studies “the regularities observed in normal human sense-perceptions, thereby excluding the sub-normal and supra-normal experiences as well as judgments of value that imply non-sensual premises”.18

The man of science in practising his art exercises a series of operations, e.g., (a) collecting systematic and unbiased observations with precision; (b) forming hypotheses linking up these observations; (c) testing the validity of these hypotheses by logically deducing from them the possibility of new observations and seeking for their correspondence in further experimentation; (d) alterations being made in the hypotheses and laws already posited, in case of failures in correspondence; (e) building up of a theoretical structure with specialised concepts and nomenclatures, that

will confer the status of a deductive discipline to scientific knowledge already gathered; etc.

Amongst the more important attributes of scientific enterprise mention may be made of the following:

(1) “Natural science is empirical, i.e. it deals only with what has been experienced or may be experienced under an appropriate setup of conditions. No other data are admissible”.¹⁹

(2) “Science is a search for judgments, to which universal assent may be obtained – universal, that is, on the part of those who understand the judgments and their bases.”²⁰

(3) The generalisations of science are never considered to be final or absolute: they are liable to revision as experience enlarges.

(4) The methods to be adopted in the sciences, and also their subject matter, must perforce be such as to admit of the possibility of checking the truth or otherwise of any statement made therein.

(5) Repetition is one of the most potent methods of checking for correctness of any statement. “If a situation cannot be made to repeat, it is commonly regarded as of little or no scientific interest, and none of the usual scientific methods are applicable to it”.²¹

(6) Acceptance of authority is never tolerated as a method in science. “No report of experimental observation or theoretical deduction is scientifically acceptable unless made in such terms that it can be repeated and confirmed by any qualified individual.”²²

(7) The two basic assumptions of science are, according to Planck, the existence of a real outer world independent of our act of knowing, and the impossibility of having any direct knowledge of this world. “This world cannot be disclosed by mere meditation and introspection;... the direct knowledge of the world claimed by the mystic... has no place in a scientific discussion.”²³

(8) No understanding is regarded to be adequate unless and until it “can correctly anticipate what will occur under every conceivable range of circumstances, whether imposed naturally or by artifice”.²⁴

²². Ibid.
Now because of these and related traits of all scientific enterprise, men of science tend to level certain charges against spiritual experiences and realisations. And if Science has to accept Spirituality as a partner in progress, we must take note of these objections and dispose of them, if they are not valid, only after due consideration. And in this task, in order to bring in a certain touch of authenticity, we propose to introduce the words of Sri Aurobindo who is acknowledged by universal consent as one of the greatest mystics and thinkers.

Science against Spiritual Knowledge: Charges and their Refutation

I. Argument: Spiritual experiences are individual and have no general validity independent of the individual seeker's supposed testimony.

Critique: This statement arises out of a complete misreading of facts as they stand. For the truth is that yogic experiences run everywhere on the same lines. "Certainly, there are, not one line, but many, for, admittedly, we are dealing with a many-sided Infinite to which there are and must be many ways of approach; but yet the broad lines are the same everywhere and the intuitions, experiences, phenomena are the same in all ages and countries far apart from each other and in systems practised quite independently from each other."25 The substance of spiritual experience, which takes place always in the inner consciousness, is identical everywhere; only when it gets translated into the external consciousness of the seeker, difference of colour comes in because of the difference of mental language.

II. Argument: Yoga experiences are altogether personal and not validated by the common pool of normal human experiences.

Critique: Obviously it is an absurd standard of reality to assert that only what is or can easily be evident to everybody without any need of specialised training or development, is to be taken as valid, and all else that does not square with the experiences or scope of understanding of average human beings cannot be considered to be true. Such a standard of knowledge is not accepted even in the sciences themselves. Of course, "the greatest inner discoveries, the experience of self-being, the cosmic conscious-

ness, the inner calm of the liberated spirit, the direct effect of mind upon mind, the knowledge of things by consciousness in direct contact with other consciousness or with its objects, most spiritual experiences of any value, cannot be brought before the tribunal of the common mentality which has no experience of these things and takes its own absence or incapacity of experience as a proof of their invalidity or their non-existence. All reality, all experience must indeed, to be held as true, be capable of verification by a same or similar experience; so, in fact, all men can have a spiritual experience and can follow it out and verify it in themselves, but only when they have acquired the capacity or can follow the inner methods by which that experience and verification are made possible."

III. Argument: Since Yogic exploration does not adopt the methodology of Science, it is unscientific and its so-called findings presumably untrue.

Critique: Modern man has been led to believe that “one is either in Science or outside it, just as one is either in Paradise or in Hell!”

Thus the term ‘unscientific’ has almost come to acquire a pejorative connotation. But what is science, after all? It is essentially a methodology devised for and successfully applied to the investigation of an arbitrarily delimited field of enquiry. Now, Yoga also devises a methodology of its own, precise and potent in its own domain. But the methods of Yoga have to be different from those of the physical sciences, since it seeks to identify our inner being with the Reality behind the appearances and see from there the workings of Nature, while Science endeavours to make us aware of the detailed workings and through them get some indirect glimpse of the Reality.

Thus the experiences of Yoga belong to an inner domain, go according to a law of their own and have their own standards of judgment and verification other than those that Science applies in its external objective field. “Just as scientific enquiry passes beyond that of the physical senses and enters the domain of the infinite and infinitesimal about which the senses can say nothing and test nothing,... so also spiritual search passes beyond the domain of scientific or rational enquiry and it is impossible by the aids of the ordinary positive reason to test the data of spiritual

27. Prof. Robert Lenoble.
experience and decide whether those things exist or not or what is their law and nature.” Subjective experiences and supraphysical realities must, by their very nature, be investigated and verified by other than the physical or sense mind, by a method of scrutiny and affirmation applicable to their own domain. And there is nothing unscientific or objectionable in it.

IV. Argument: A spiritual experience cannot be scientifically demonstrated and hence lacks in concrete certitude.

Critique: It has been asserted that although the scientific process is in the last analysis reduced to two main activities, discovery and demonstration, “it is in the process of demonstration that we discern man’s efforts as scientific. Discovery is an art, demonstration makes the science”.

Now, by demonstration the physical sciences ultimately mean “demonstration to the physical senses” – if necessary in a round-about and indirect way and by means of mathematical and technological devices. But the final appeal in the sciences is always to sense-observation. And this because “science can treat the outer world solely on the level of phenomena (‘things that appear’, ‘appearances’) [and] these can appear only to the senses that we possess…. Phenomena must [thus] ultimately be sensed,… though sense-experience may for some sciences (and perhaps eventually for all) be ultimately reducible to scale-readings.”

Now, spiritual and supraphysical experiences cannot of course be demonstrated in this way, for, by their very definition, they transcend the order of physical facts and are not thus physically tangible. But that does not mean in any way that spiritual experiences lack in concrete certitude or are vague, amorphous and open to doubts. They are “not only as concrete but more concrete than anything sensed by ear or eye or touch in the world of Matter; but it is a certitude not of mental thought but of essential experience…. You can much less doubt it or deny it than you can deny or doubt daylight or air or the sun in heaven – for of these physical things you cannot be sure but they are what your senses represent them to be; but in the concrete experience of the Divine, doubt is impossible.”

V. Argument: The objective Reality being the only entire truth

30. Ibid., p. 114.
and an objective knowledge the sole entirely reliable knowledge, the value of spiritual experiences is very doubtful since they are subjective and not objective.

Critique: Apart from the general truth that all knowledge and experience, without any exception, – even of the so-called objective external physical things, – is at bottom subjective, we may ask if Science itself, at the end of its victorious analysis of Matter, has not come to the astonishing conclusion that “precisely beyond our natural perceptual world the very concept of thing can be defined only in relation to the man to whom it appears or who himself makes it... contemporary physics compels the physicist to look upon himself as a subject.”32 The words of Heisenberg, the author of the uncertainty principle, are eloquent on this point:

“...We can no longer consider ‘in themselves’ those building-stones of matter which we originally held to be the last objective reality. This is so because they defy all forms of objective location in space and time, and since basically it is always our knowledge of these particles alone which we can make the object of science.... From the very start we are involved in the argument between nature and man in which science plays only a part, so that the common division of the world into subject and object, inner world and outer world, body and soul, is no longer adequate and leads us into difficulties. Thus even in science the object of research is no longer nature itself, but man’s investigation of nature. Here, again, man confronts himself alone.”33

As a matter of fact, subjectivity and objectivity are not independent realities; the subjective and the objective are two necessary sides of the manifested Reality and of equal value. Only they are of different orders of reality. “The objective and physical is convincing to the physical or externalising mind because it is directly obvious to the senses, while of the subjective and the supraphysical that mind has no means of knowledge except from fragmentary signs and data and inferences which are at every step liable to error.”34 Does not the Kathopanishad point out that in men the Self-Existent has cut the doors of consciousness outward, but a few men turn the eye inward and it is these who see and know the Spirit and develop the spiritual being?

Men of science should note that our subjective movements and inner experiences are a domain of happenings as real as any outward physical happenings, with laws of their own and their special method of scrutiny and affirmation and hence "to refuse to enquire upon any general ground preconceived and a priori is an obscurantism as prejudicial to the extension of knowledge as the religious obscurantism which opposed in Europe the extension of scientific discovery".35

We have come to the end of our survey of the respective standpoints of Science and Spirituality. Because of the inadequacy of space, this survey could not but content itself with the throwing in of some suggestive hints; it does not claim in any way to have disposed of all possible factors of supposed divergence between the two disciplines. But however cursory this survey may have been, it has shown us that the contradictions between Science and Spirituality are most often more apparent than real and hence a luminous reconciliation between them is absolutely a feasible proposition and programme.

The Co-operative Reconciliation

"Half-truth is its own Nemesis. One-sided dogmatism has the opposite dogmatism latent in itself."

The conflict between Science and Spirituality arises from a misunderstanding of each other's position, role and field of study. And it is not so much on the positive side, on the side of vindication of one's own right to exist and grow; it is more often on the negative side, and therefore unnecessary and eliminable, when one tries to deny the right of existence to the other. And this is nothing but an error of misdirected enthusiasm and the folly of the presumptuous vital in man.

A positive spirituality appreciates the worth of the achievements of Science in its own domain: it does not deny the reality of the rich harvest that men of science have gleaned from an elaborate investigation and exploration of physical nature. But Science too, on its part, should not hesitate to admit that "the material universe

35. The Life Divine, p. 650.
is only the façade of an immense building which has other structures behind it”, and that “there are in the universe knowable realities beyond the range of the senses and in man powers and faculties which determine rather than are determined by the material organs through which they hold themselves in touch with the world of the senses.”  

36 For indubitable inner experiences testify to the existence of supraphysical planes of existence having their “universal rhythm, their grand lines and formations, their self-existent laws and mighty energies, their just and luminous means of knowledge.”  

37 And physical sciences should not unduly claim to pronounce anything on these matters for which it has no means of enquiry nor any possibility of arriving at any valid decision.

As a matter of fact, for a harmonious reconciliation between the pursuit of science and the practice of spirituality, it is essential never to lose sight of the fundamental truth that each of them has its own province and its own method of enquiry and each is valid in its own domain. Trouble is bound to arise if there is an unwarranted and illegitimate intrusion of one in the other’s arena. Science cannot dictate its conclusion to the man of Spirit any more than Spirituality has the right to impose its own on the scientist and his work in the domain of the physical. Indeed, as has been mentioned before, the physical scientist probing into phenomena erects formulas and standards based on the objective and phenomenal reality and its processes, while the Yogi or the suprophysical scientist concerns himself with the essential Reality and his deeper probing brings up the truth of Self and Spirit and all possible experiences of the subjective inner domain.

But there need not be any essential contradiction between the results gathered by Science and those obtained by Spirituality in their respective fields – if only one knows how to read and interpret them. After all, the Reality is one and unique everywhere and hence there must be systems of correspondences expressive of a common Truth underlying all the domains of manifestation. Thus the truths of the physical universe can very well throw some light on the phenomena of the inner world and  

vice versa, and the possibility of co-operation between Science and Spirituality in the pursuit after truth remains no longer a fond wish or pious hope. As Sri Aurobindo has so pointedly remarked:

37. Ibid., p. 19.
“Not only in the one final conception, but in the great line of its general results Knowledge, by whatever path it is followed, tends to become one. Nothing can be more remarkable and suggestive than the extent to which modern Science confirms in the domain of Matter the conceptions and even the very formulas of language which were arrived at, by a very different method, in the Vedanta, — the original Vedanta, not of the schools of metaphysical philosophy, but of the Upanishads. And these, on the other hand, often reveal their full significance, their richer contents only when they are viewed in the new light shed by the discoveries of modern Science.”38

One of the encouraging signs of our day conducive to the reconciliation between Science and Spirituality is the growth of a spirit of modesty in the bosom of Science itself, arising out of a sober and mature comprehension of the limited but definite role that it can play. Science has abandoned the claim to put at our disposal a final truth; it knows that it has no means to decide what is the real reality of things; it can envisage only the how and the process of the operations of material Force in the physical front of things, but the essence of things eludes its grasp. Science which started with the assumption that Matter is the sole reality has come to realise its inherent impotency before the problem of the reality of things and thus, as Sri Aurobindo has put it, “the rock on which materialism was built and which in the 19th century seemed unshakable has now been shattered. Materialism has now become a philosophical speculation just like any other theory; it cannot claim to found itself on a sort of infallible biblical authority, based on the facts and conclusions of Science.”39

Gone is the presumptuous conviction that Matter is the basic and unique Reality, and that the Divine, the freedom of the Spirit, the immortality of the Soul are all myths of an unscientific temperament and Honni soit qui trop y pense! Science is now poignantly aware that the world-knowledge it builds up as an abstracted and therefore partial and imperfect knowledge, leaves out much that is refractory to scientific treatment, and even in its delimited field of enquiry, the formulas of Science, although pragmatically correct and governing the practical how of things, do not disclose the intrinsic how or why; “rather they have the air of the formulas

of a cosmic magician, precise, irresistible, automatically successful each in its field, but their rationale is fundamentally unintelligible."40

Evidently, present-day "Science has missed something essential; it has seen and scrutinised what has happened and in a way how it has happened, but it has shut its eye to something that made this impossible possible, something it is there to express. There is no fundamental significance in things if you miss the Divine Reality; for you remain embedded in a huge surface crust of manageable and utilisable appearance."41

Now, to help us to come out of this narrow surface crust and sound the depths and heights of inner and higher spiritual realities and bring their riches into active manifestation in our life, is one of the functions of Yoga and Spirituality. For, to reach a satisfactory solution of the problems, both individual and collective, that are besetting the life of humanity today, men must know not only what Matter is and what its processes and potentialities are, but also spirit and soul and all that is behind the material surface. As a matter of fact, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, if man is not to remain content with his ordinary status of a being of surface ignorance seeking obscurely after the truth of things and collecting and systematising fragments and sections of knowledge, and if he would like his life upon earth to take something of the hue of a life divine, his self-expansion has to proceed on more than one line. "He must know himself and discover and utilise all his potentialities: but to know himself and the world completely he must go behind his own and its exterior, he must dive deep below his own mental surface and the physical surface of Nature. This he can only do by knowing his inner mental, vital, physical and psychic being and its powers and movements and the universal laws and processes of the occult Mind and Life which stand behind the material front of the universe.... He must know also the hidden Power or Powers that control the world... and link [himself] with the Divine and in so doing sublimate the thought and life and flesh so that they may admit the rule of the soul and spirit. But this knowledge must be something more than a creed or a mystic revelation; his thinking mind must be able to accept it, to correlate it with the principle of things and the observed truth of the universe.... But

41. Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga, p. 197.
all knowledge and endeavour can reach its fruition only if it is turned into experience and has become a part of the consciousness and its established operations; an opening up of the spiritual consciousness,... the building of a life and action that is in conformity with the truth of the spirit: this is the work of spiritual realisation and experience."\textsuperscript{42}

And in this all-round fulfilment of man's many-sided aspiration, Science and Spirituality can very well co-operate and offer each other their helping hands, \textit{anyonyabaddhavāhu}. To outgrow their mutual mistrust and popularly supposed conflict, what is needed is the rise of a dynamic spirituality that accepts embodied Life and its all-sided opulent growth as something worthy of pursuit, also the rise of a mood of science that displays an attitude of unbiased humility before truth whenever and in whatever form it may be found, so that the sceptical folly of a so-called scientific attitude does not confront the supernormal experiences of the inner and higher worlds with "the stiletto of doubt and the bludgeon of denial." For it cannot but be stressed to the point of monotonous repetition that what "all our mind-knowledge and sense-knowledge and suprasensuous vision is seeking, is found most integrally in the unity of God and man and Nature and all that is in Nature.... A triune knowledge, the complete knowledge of God, the complete knowledge of himself, the complete knowledge of Nature, gives him [man] his high goal; it assigns a vast and full sense to the labour and effort of humanity. The conscious unity of the three, God, Soul and Nature, in his own consciousness is the sure foundation of his perfection and his realisation of all harmonies: this will be his highest and widest state, his status of a divine consciousness and a divine life and its initiation the starting-point for his entire evolution of his self-knowledge, world-knowledge, God-knowledge".\textsuperscript{43}

It is not expected that everybody will be a yogi or everybody a practising scientist. But in order that a few can be effectively the same for the welfare of all, also for the general flowering of Science and Spirituality, it is absolutely essential that the collective mind of man accept (i) the simultaneous necessity of both the disciplines for the eradication of the multipronged ills of man and


\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 701.
his society, and (ii) the validity and truth of each of them in its own field of search.

And then will surely open the still locked-up gates to the enormous vistas of the future development of man.

As a matter of fact, a sincere and unbiased pursuit of any branch of human knowledge, if not hampered with erroneous preconceptions and ill-founded prejudices, cannot but lead the seeker to the door-step of the integral approach to Reality as propounded by Sri Aurobindo.

We take up here a single case, the case of mathematical culture, to substantiate our point, and the following chapter will be devoted to its detailed consideration.
IV

MATHEMATICAL CULTURE AND YOGIC PURSUIT

Introduction

“Perhaps it is the scientific world that will first get transformed; because that demands a very great sincerity and a great perseverance in effort, and these are indeed the qualities that open the door to a higher life.”

The Mother

It is a curious but significant fact that some of the greatest philosophical thinkers, notably Pythagoras, Descartes, Pascal and Leibnitz, were great mathematicians as well. Some others like Thales, Democritus, Plato, Saint Augustine, Condorcet, Kant, Auguste Comte and Husserl were not professional mathematicians, but their acquaintance with ‘the Queen of the Sciences’ was certainly not negligible. One remembers in this connection a pregnant remark made by Leibnitz: “Mathematicians have as much need of being philosophers as the philosophers have of being mathematicians.” In fact mathematics, that wonderful “distilling alembic in which is received the quintessence of abstraction”1 has been styled the bridge linking philosophic meditation to scientific experimentation. It deals with the most abstract of ideas, remaining at the same time the most potent weapon in the arsenal of technology. This double aspect of ‘the Queen of the Sciences’ confers on one who approaches her in a right spirit the rare boon of enjoying the beneficial fruits both of philosophy and of science, but at the same time helps him to steer clear of the limitations of either. For a mathematician learns by experience that advancing Knowledge should “correct her errors sometimes by a return to the restraint of sensible fact, the concrete realities of the physical world.”2 On the other hand, he equally realises that “To refuse to enquire upon any general ground preconceived and a priori is an obscurantism as prejudicial to the extension of knowledge as the

1. F. Le Lionnais.
religious obscurantism which opposed in Europe the extension of scientific discovery." This dual realisation helps to create in him a harmoniously balanced psychological frame.

If we pass from philosophy to Yoga, we note that a student of mathematics discovers to his agreeable surprise that his previous initiation in the Temple of Mathematics has already given him a psychological poise which is much conducive to the proper appreciation of the philosophy and practice of the Integral Yoga. For, by blending harmoniously an austere exercise of pure reason with the concomitant realisation of the inadequacy of Reason ever to reach the absolute truth, also by forcing its votary to acquire a certain number of essential qualities such as an unalloyed intellectual integrity, a boundless patience and an unflagging perseverance, devotion to truth above everything else, readiness to meet problems in the spirit of an adventurer who is fired with an ardent enthusiasm to march ever forward, mathematics prepares one to approach the path of Yoga in a spirit of heroic humility.

We propose to treat in the present chapter some of the more salient features of a mathematical culture, which stand a mathematician in good stead if he ever turns to Yoga as a sincere aspirant. But in order to dispel a possible misunderstanding, let us add at the very outset that the conclusions regarding mathematics (e.g., all creative mathematicians rely more on intuition than on reason; mathematicians have realised the impotency of Reason to be the arbiter of Truth, etc.) advanced in the course of this essay are all derived from the utterances of eminent mathematicians themselves. In fact, to substantiate these conclusions we shall be drawing freely upon the writings of Henri Poincaré, David Hilbert, Nicolas Bourbaki, André Weil, Arnaud Denjoy, René Dugas, etc.

"Mysteria Infiniti"

"The one becomes Many, but all these Many are That which was already and is always itself and in becoming the Many remains the One."

One of the principal difficulties experienced by man's intellect in the path of Yoga is the apparently paradoxical nature of certain truths revealed to spiritual vision. For, the besetting sin of an arrogant intellect is to try to judge spiritual ideas with the help of a logic based on the finite, but the spirit's logic is essentially a logic of the infinite. This unwarranted extrapolation of the finite logic into the domain of the infinite is bound to create obstacles in the way of comprehending spiritual truths.

To a student of mathematics this miscarriage of finite logic in the sphere of the infinite is not at all a surprise. In fact, the instructive history of his encounter with the infinite in his own domain, accompanied by all sorts of puzzles and paradoxes, invariably engenders in him a sense of caution and humility before the infinite.

To tackle the infinite has been one of the hardest tasks for the mathematician. As Tobias Dantzig aptly remarks, "From the very threshold of mathematics we come up against the dilemma of the infinite blocking like the mythical dragon all entrance to the Magic Garden." Since far past times when Zeno of Elea (c. 450 B.C.) formulated his famous arguments (Dichotomy, Achilles and the Tortoise, the Arrow, the Stadium) which implied that all change and movement are illusory and which came into conflict with the traditional conception concerning the infinitely small and the infinitely large, up to this day which has seen in the shrine of the Cantorian School the birth of the Theory of Aggregates, mathematicians have been ever busy exploring and unravelling the mysteria infiniti. And each time they have endeavoured to apply the logic of the finite, they have discovered to their utter dismay that all sorts of paradoxes crop up in the process. That bizarre statement: "Infinity is where things happen that don't", claimed by W. W. Sawyer to have been made by a perplexed schoolboy, epitomises as well the perplexities of mathematicians before the problem of the infinite appearing in a new guise. Did not De Morgan exclaim that he could believe anything of a function which became infinite?

To give only a few instances showing the utter confusion of mathematicians faced with the failure of the logic of their day, every time they have encountered infinity anew, we may mention the case of the discovery of irrational numbers, which disconcerted

the Pythagoreans so much so that they took a solemn vow not to divulge this intriguing discovery for fear of incurring the wrath of the Supreme Architect; for, to their view, the existence of irrational numbers in the continuum of rational numbers shows a sure sign of imperfection in the creation of the Supreme Being. Remember, too, in this connection that now-famous statement of Leopold Kronecker made at a meeting in Berlin in 1886: "Die ganzen Zahlen hat der liebe Gott gemacht, alles andere ist Menschenwerk." ("The integer numbers have been made by God, everything else is the work of man.")

Consider next the case of fluxions and infinitesimals introduced by Newton and Leibnitz in the building up of the Differential and the Integral Calculus, of which the initial logical difficulties provoked the opposition of George Berkeley and Bernard Nieuwenhijt. Berkeley derided the infinitesimals as "ghosts of departed quantities" and exclaimed: "He who can digest a second or a third Fluxion, a second or a third Difference, need not, methinks, be squeamish about any Point in Divinity."

Now come to the case of the infinite divergent series which seemed in the beginning almost to be a house of miracles, disconcerting even great spirits like Leibnitz and Euler. Remember in this connection the quasi-magical summation of Guido Grandi series which purported to prove that the final result of the summation might equally be zero or a round sum. In fact, logical paradoxes surging up in the process of tackling the infinite divergent series became so great that Abel, that young genius who discovered elliptic integrals, exclaimed in one of his letters, dated 16th January 1826: "The divergent series are the devil's creation, and it is a shame to base on them any mathematical demonstration whatsoever; for while using them, one can draw at will any conclusion one likes."

Let us come down to the present times and consider the case-history of Moritz Cantor's transfinite numbers, those strange mathematical entities which, as the name suggests, are situated on the other side of infinity! The Theory of Aggregates ("Mengenlehre") first developed by Cantor in the course of an essay (A.D. 1883) was a bold and distinct step away from all traditions of the past. With this, Cantor created an entirely new field of mathemat-
matical research; he developed a theory of transfinite cardinal numbers based on a systematic mathematical treatment of the actually infinite. Cantor also defined transfinite ordinal numbers, expressing the way in which infinite sets are ordered. Cantor's ideas were so novel and shocking to the supposed inviolability of all traditional concepts concerning the infinite that they initiated a fierce intellectual battle waged for years in the field of mathematics. Logical difficulties were pointed out in the theory of transfinite numbers, various paradoxes were proposed, notably by Burali Forti in Italy, Bertrand Russell in England, Koenig in Germany and Richard in France. The subject of transfinite numbers is so enthralling that one is tempted to treat it in some detail. But space forbidding, we content ourselves with a bare mention of the fact that faced with the dilemma of the Theory of Aggregates, mathematicians divided themselves into two opposite camps, the "formalists" represented among others by Hilbert, Russell and Zermelo, and the "intuitionists" by Kronecker, Poincaré, Brower and Weyl.

A student of mathematics draws two valuable morals from these episodes concerning the mathematicians' encounter with the infinite: (i) never to extrapolate into the field of the infinite a logic essentially based on the finite; (ii) if our existing intellectual resources get baffled by the apparently paradoxical nature of truths touching infinity, not to cry out in utter despair nor to indulge in a priori condemnation, but rather to accept them in all humility, at least provisionally before one can realise them himself in practice.

And this helps him immensely to appreciate the truth of the following statement: "But what appear as contradictions to a reason based on the finite may not be contradictions to a vision or a larger reason based on the infinite. What our mind sees as contraries may be to the infinite consciousness not contraries but complementaries.... All the intellectual problem and difficulty is raised by the finite reason cutting, separating, opposing the power of the Infinite to its being, its kinesis to its status, its natural multiplicity to its essential oneness, segmenting self, opposing Spirit to Nature."

This incompetence of the finite reason for the task of comprehending the infinite leads us to an enquiry of the status of Reason in that great architecture otherwise called mathematics.

Reason and Mathematics

"It is necessary, therefore, that advancing Knowledge should base herself on a clear, pure and disciplined intellect."\(^8\)

Mathematics is the training ground *par excellence* for developing a clear and disciplined intellect, because a successful pursuit of this Science of relations demands above everything else an intense mental concentration which ruthlessly eliminates all idle wandering of mind. *A peu près* is banished for ever from the kingdom of mathematics, and the very nature of the symbolic language used in this realm forces one to practise an arduous intellectual gymnastic. Here, all scope for self-illusion is immediately rooted out. In fact, an absolute intellectual integrity and a dispassionate exercise of reason are the two basic lessons one has to learn at each step on entering the temple of mathematics. Here, knowledge has to be sought for the sake of knowledge without any ulterior motive, with every consideration put away except the rule of keeping the eye on the subject under enquiry and finding out its truth, its process, its law.

Crisis of Mathematical Logic

"Whether the intellect is a help or a hindrance depends upon the person and upon the way in which it is used. There is a true movement of the intellect and there is a wrong movement; one helps, the other hinders. The intellect that believes too much in its own importance and wants satisfaction for its own sake, is an obstacle to the higher realisation.... Any part of the being that keeps to its proper place and plays its appointed role is helpful; but directly it steps beyond its sphere, it becomes twisted and perverted and therefore false."\(^9\)

We have stated above that the study of mathematics invariably creates an extremely alert and keen intellect: logical rigour is

9. *Words of the Mother (First Series)*, p. 52.
almost another name for mathematics. But if it happens to be a fact that an absolute reliance on the potency of Reason is the only character of mathematics, the study of this Queen of the Sciences would surely prove to be a great hindrance, and not at all an asset, for the aspirant taking up the path of Yoga. For reason is in its very nature only "an imperfect light with a large but still restricted mission" \(^a\), and "it must be exceeded, put away to a distance and its insistences often denied if we are to arrive at more adequate conceptions of the truth of things." \(^b\)

Fortunately for those who drink deep in the fount of mathematics, this problem does not arise at all; for the study of this particular science, if undertaken in a right spirit, creates that happy psychological frame in which, while toning up a keen intellect, one becomes simultaneously aware of the limitations and inadequacy of reason. Mathematicians have long since discarded the arrogant claim of Logic and Reason to be the sole arbiters of all Reality. They are no longer hesitant in admitting the fact that the search of the absolute within the four corners of logic is futile and condemned to an ignoble failure. Modern mathematics is faced with its own uncertainties, it is even haunted by glaring inconsistencies. The attitude of the fanatic who would declare his idea to contain absolute truth has lost ground here. \(^c\) Poincaré, that towering giant of modern mathematics, never got tired of insisting on this fact that even in mathematics there exists something which is other than logic. For, reason unfertilised by intuition is sterile by the very definition of the term. If it knows how to separate the wheat from the tares, it never knows how to create. \(^d\)

But does it even know how to separate the wheat from the tares? If not a creator, can it be adjudged at least a supreme debater who is absolutely certain of his own position? To this question modern mathematics answers with a categorical 'No'. In fact, the advent of the theory of transfinite numbers with all its logical surprises has shattered the previous assumption of the inviolability and the absolute nature of mathematical concepts. Traditional logic has definitely failed before the problems raised by the Cantorian transfinite. "This confusion of reasoning in that

13. René Dugas, *La Mathématique, Objet de Culture*. 
very science which is universally considered to be the surest of all, thanks to its essentially and purely deductive character, shows pointedly the fragility of our strongest certitudes, or rather the relativity of all our logical apparatus and the impossibility of ever affirming that all demonstration vigorously controlled and validated by logic will perforce be free from any error, at least from all serious errors." Modern mathematics has been rudely awakened to the realisation that all our thoughts, even the most rigorous of them, suffer from "an organic and ineluctable frailty." It has faced a situation where

"A doubt corroded even the means to think, Distrust was thrown upon Mind's instruments; All that it takes for reality's shining coin, Proved fact, fixed inference, deduction clear, Firm theory, assured significance, Appeared as frauds upon Time's credit bank Or assets valueless in Truth's treasury." 

Place of Intuition in Mathematics

"The scientist who gets an inspiration revealing to him a new truth, receives it from the intuitive mind. The knowledge comes as a direct perception in the higher mental plane illumined by some other light still farther above." 

Mathematicians have not only discarded the vain hope of enthroning reason as the sole arbiter of Reality and Truth; as an instrument of discovery, too, they rely more on intuition than on a sequential process of ratiocination. Whosoever has studied the history of the growth of mathematics must have unmistakably noticed that all the great turning-points in the progress of this marvellous science are marked with the appearance of brilliant flashes of intuition, this mathematical intuition being "some sort of

15. Ibid.  
17. Words of the Mother, p. 140.
a direct divination anterior to all reasoning.”\textsuperscript{18} And the wonder is that this intuition invariably brings with it appropriate symbols and language for its expression. That is why M. André Weil, the leading light of the polycephalous Bourbaki School, declares: “In mathematics more than in any other branch of knowledge, an idea springs up all armed out of the brain of its creator.”\textsuperscript{19} We may cite as instances the geometrical representation of complex numbers, the introduction of p-adic numbers by Hensel, the Haar measure and the Hilbertian space.

While speaking of the important role played by intuition in the field of mathematical researches, we should not forget to mention a highly remarkable fact. The history of mathematics furnishes many instances in which a great discovery has been made by two different persons independently and almost simultaneously. Take the case of the discovery of descriptive geometry by Pascal and Desargues or of the principles of probability by Pascal and Fermat. Coming to the 18th century we see the birth of Calculus at the hands of Newton and Leibnitz. The 19th century offers the example of almost simultaneous discovery of an interpretation of complex numbers made independently by Wessel, Argand and Gauss. Similarly Hamilton and Grassmann wrote at the same time those papers which were to become the foundation of modern vector analysis. The first two non-euclidean geometries, one by the Hungarian Janos Bolyai, and the other by the Russian Nikolai Lobachevsky “were so nearly alike that they seem like different drafts of the same composition.”\textsuperscript{20} Finally, we witness in the closing years of the last century the independent formulation of the principle of \textit{continuum} both by Richard Dedekind and Moritz Cantor.

We leave it to our readers to offer an adequate explanation of this striking fact and pass on to the consideration of an ideal which is almost the life-breath of all mathematical research.

\textbf{Unity in Diversity}

“What we see everywhere is an infinitely variable funda-

\begin{itemize}
\item [18.] Nicolas Bourbaki, \textit{L'Architecture des Mathématiques}.
\item [19.] André Weil, \textit{L'Avenir des Mathématiques}.
\item [20.] Gilbert N. Lewis, \textit{The Anatomy of Science}.
\end{itemize}
mental oneness which seems the very principle of Nature. The basic Force is one, but it manifests from itself innumerable forces; the basic substance is one, but it develops many different substances and millions of unlike objects.”

A diversity of isolated facts showing no essential unity fails to satisfy a mathematician. His whole attempt is never to get lost in appearances but rather to penetrate deeper and deeper into the mystery of things until he gets at their inmost heart which is Unity. He always seeks for hidden connexions and an underlying unity in all things. “If it were possible to weld together the whole of knowledge into two general laws, a mathematician would not be satisfied. He would not be happy until he had shown that these two laws were rooted in a single principle.”

The classical example of conic sections reveals in an ample way how mathematicians proceed step by step to discover the essential unity holding together disparate entities showing no apparent link.

The introduction of the notion of focus brings an ellipse and a hyperbola under the same roof and a little reflection shows that a circle is nothing but a special case of an ellipse. With the introduction of the directrix along with the notion of eccentricity, the parabola is brought into close relation with the other two curves. Then comes Projective Geometry to throw much more light on the essential likeness of the properties possessed by the conic sections. Finally, Analytical Geometry demonstrates that the general equation of the second degree represents all the conic curves with all their rich diversity and apparent irreconcilability on the surface.

In this context let us consider the case of the Geometry of Transformations. (Note the remarkable word transformation which has a special significance for those who practise the Integral Yoga.) Here is a branch of mathematics which helps the student to appreciate in a profound way the truth of the following statement: “The Self becomes insect and bird and beast and man, but it is always the same Self through these mutations because it is the One who manifests himself infinitely in endless diversity.” For this is a frequent phenomenon in the domain of the geometry of trans-

formations that two figures showing absolutely no similarity in appearance conserve in them an essential oneness. In fact, starting from the one one can very easily pass to the other through a suitable transformation, and for a particular group of transformations one discovers a particular group of properties which remain absolutely invariable however diverse may be the modifications undergone by the figures. To give only a few examples in which an extreme apparent divergence conceals within it a basic oneness revealed by transformation geometry:

A strophoid and a rectangular hyperbola (inversion); the MacLaurin Trisectrix and a folium of Descartes (orthogonal projection); the conchoid of Cappa and a Maschéroni curve; etc.

In conclusion, let us add that this incessant search for unity in diversity should normally create in a student of mathematics a great reverence for the path of Yoga which declares:

"All contraries are aspects of God's face.
The Many are the innumerable One,
The One carries the multitude in his breast."24

Mathematical Knowledge and Scientific Truth

"...No law is absolute, because only the infinite is absolute, and everything contains within itself endless potentialities quite beyond its determined form and course, which are only determined through a self-limitation by Idea proceeding from an infinite liberty within."25

Another psychological benefit which an aspirant derives in full from his previous study of mathematics is his enthusiastic readiness to accept the truth of transformation so important in the philosophy and practice of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. The revolutionary conception that there is nothing sacrosanct and absolute about the so-called laws of nature purported to be discovered by the Experimental Sciences, and that there may equally be other possible 'rules of the game' implying a different type of universe

with a different set of laws, does not appear strange to a mathematician; it may well be so to the so-called experimental scientist who, basing himself on the supposed inviolability of all physical laws, may dub as a chimera all hope of transforming this earth-life.

But, after all, what is a law if not “the habits of the world”? And, while considering “the possible relation between the divine life and the divine mind of the perfected human soul and the very gross and seemingly undivine body or formula of physical being in which we actually dwell,” we should never forget that “that formula is the result of a certain fixed relation between sense and substance from which the material universe has started. But as this relation is not the only possible relation, so that formula is not the only possible formula. Life and mind may manifest themselves in another relation to substance and work out different physical laws, other and larger habits, even a different substance of body with a freer action of the sense, a freer action of the life, a freer action of the mind.”

Here we may digress a little and discuss the role of mathematics in the domain of the exact sciences.

No science is ever called an exact science unless and until it can matematise itself. In fact in its relation to mathematics every science passes through four distinct phases of its growth: (i) empirical, when it collects facts; (ii) experimental, when it starts measurements; (iii) analytical, when it begins to calculate; and (iv) axiomatic, when it finally endeavours to become a deductive science basing itself on mathematical certainty. Mathematics is the model for all exact sciences and Physics is given the most honoured place only because it has succeeded most in matematising itself.

But in this process of matematisation, a developing science erroneously considers the mathematical terms offered by the mathematicians, not as so many symbols or pure ideas, but as images of reality. And as a result, it makes use of that much of mathematics as it considers to reflect adequately the supposedly

28. Ibid., p. 254.
29. Raymond Queneau, La Place des Mathématiques dans la Classification des Sciences.
true reality. Note the irony of the situation when it tries to sermonize and pass its wise (!) verdict that other branches of the mathematical edifice raised by the mathematicians' creative zeal violate reality and are therefore false. But the mathematician enjoys the fun and goes on as ever indulging in the creation of all possible mathematical universes, each logically self-consistent.

For, after all, what is mathematics? It is that particular science which studies the relations between certain abstract entities defined in an arbitrary way; the only restriction imposed on a mathematician's creative imagination is that there should not exist any logical inconsistency and self-contradiction inherent in the agreed initial 'rules of the game', we mean, in the definitions and axioms with which he starts. The building up of the revolutionary non-euclidean geometries illustrates this point in a striking way. Before 1800, it was universally believed that the Euclidean geometry is the one true geometry, something certain and proved. But the great Gauss, that "lonely giant, austere and integral", was the first to believe in the independent nature of the 'parallel postulate', which implied that other geometries based on another choice of axioms were logically possible. But Gauss never published his thoughts on this subject. Then came the epoch-making event in the history of mathematics when Nikolai Lobachevsky and Janos Bolyai openly challenged the authority of two millennia and constructed a non-euclidean geometry which was at first totally ignored because of the influence of the prevailing Kantian philosophy. Finally, Bernhard Reimann arrived on the scene, recognised the importance of this revolutionary idea and himself created, through his general theory of manifolds, many other, so-called Reimannian, geometries.31

Desperate attempts were made by the antagonists to prove the absurdity and logical contradictions of these non-euclidean geometries but all in vain. "Mathematically it is certain that geometries other than that of Euclid are equally possible, physically it may well be that Euclid's geometry is not exactly true of this universe."32

So we see that for a mathematician there is nothing sacrosanct in a particular set of laws as distinguished from another set. He is solely concerned with things which could not be otherwise without

logical contradiction. And this is why the following utterance of Sri Aurobindo comes as a supreme assurance to him:

"But the being and action of the Infinite must not be therefore regarded as if it were a magic void of all reason; there is, on the contrary, a greater reason in all the operations of the Infinite, but it is not a mental or intellectual, it is a spiritual and supramental reason: there is a logic in it, because there are relations and connections infallibly seen and executed; what is magic to our finite reason is the logic of the infinite."

Now we pass on to a close examination of some of the essential qualities invariably created by a study of mathematics. The important thing to note is that these are the very qualities needed in abundance by an aspirant on the path of the Integral Yoga.

Aspects of Mathematical Culture

"The method of scientific work is a marvellous discipline. Those who follow it in all sincerity truly prepare themselves for Yoga. It requires but a slight turn, somewhere in their being, which will enable them to come out of their a little too narrow point of view and enter into an integrality which will surely lead them towards the Truth and the supreme mastery."

The Mother

The study of mathematics, ‘the Queen of the Sciences’, pursued in a right spirit is an exceptionally potent training ground for the impulsive and emotional nature as well as for the mind. For none can ever expect to fare well in this realm of mathematics unless he possesses an all-consuming zeal for knowledge, a profound intellectual integrity, a spirit of heroic venturesomeness and a total consecration to the task in hand.

Mathematical Culture and Yogic Pursuit

a) "MERCHANTS AND SOLDIERS OF LIGHT"

"Near it retreated; far, it called him still."34

"A warrior in the dateless duel's strife."35

A ceaseless search, unalloyed and absolute, for necessary implications and a veritable disdain for all à peu près helps the mathematician to rise far above all sense of utilitarian consideration. He becomes ready to sacrifice all his time and all his energy in an attempt to raise, even if a little, the veil covering the face of truth. He is a "merchant of light" whose voice peals forth: "We maintain a trade, not for gold, silver or jewels, nor for silks, nor for spices, nor any other commodity of matter; but only for God's first creature, which was light."36

Consider only the case-history of the Last Theorem of Fermat. A search for the solution of this problem has been haunting the mathematician for the last three hundred years. And what a heroic creature he is! His patience knows no bounds, his perseverance is almost endless, and that too towards solving a problem pertaining to the Theory of Numbers, which has apparently no application in the field of the practical sciences; at least it is not the pure mathematician who concerns himself with this aspect of the question. (Incidentally, the Theory of Numbers and Topology are the most difficult branches of mathematics.) One after another, mathematicians have come forward, taken up the standard from their fallen predecessors and marched forward in their zeal to "wrest from the Sphinx the secret of his enigma."37 And what an array of great names do we not find in this struggle against the unknown: Fermat, Euler, Legendre, Sophie Germain, Lejeune Dirichlet, Lebesgue, Liouville, Cauchy and Kummer! But no issue is in sight and the battle continues in full earnest against "the problem that seems to have been thrown as an eternal challenge to man's intelligence."38

In fact, a spirit of heroic adventure animates the whole fabric of

34. Savitri, Bk. III, Canto I, p. 305.
35. Ibid., p. 227.
36. Bacon.
37. Théophile Got, le Dernier Théorème de Fermat.
38. Edouard Lucas.
a true mathematician. He never shuns problems, rather welcomes them with zest in order only to conquer them. In fact, “problems are the daily bread for the sustenance of a mathematician.”

According to David Hilbert, the greatest mathematical genius of the present century, “an absence of problems is the sure sign of death”. The attitude of a true mathematician has been mirrored in that popular saying (quoted by W.W. Sawyer): “You have only to show that a thing is impossible and some mathematician will go and do it!” This spirit of meeting the unknown and the unquenched marks out a mathematician who never “shrinks from adventure”, nor “blinks at glorious hope”, nor again tends towards

“Preferring a safe foothold upon things
To the dangerous joy of wideness and of height”

and it proves to be a great psychological asset for him, if he ever enters the path of the Integral Yoga.

b) Place of Imagination in Mathematics

“Imagination called her shining squads
That venture into undiscovered scenes
Where all the marvels lurk none has yet known.”

Karl Weierstrass uttered a great truth when he declared: “No mathematician can be a complete mathematician unless he is also something of a poet.” To seize in full the importance of this statement, we should remember that it comes from the pen of a great mathematician whose fame has been based on his extremely careful reasoning, on “Weierstrassian rigour” as other mathematicians style it. “Weierstrass was the mathematical conscience par excellence, methodological and logical.”

In fact mathematics possesses the alchemic virtue of marrying opposites. While not sacrificing even a bit of extreme logical rigour, it encourages the development of a great play of imagination. He who is not imaginative will never succeed as a mathematician.

41. Ibid., p. 242.
42. Dirk J. Struik.
c) BEAUTY IN MATHEMATICS

"The All-Beautiful is a miracle in each shape."\(^{43}\)

While being an austere intellectual culture, mathematics creates at the same time a high sense of harmony and beauty. All true mathematicians are greatly responsive to harmony of forms and beauty of thoughts. The logical validation of a particular result is not sufficient to content a mathematician; his aesthetic sense must be fully satisfied before he can declare a demonstration truly deserving its name. It has been said that the mathematical works of Abel, that young genius who invented elliptical integrals, are veritable lyrics of sublime beauty.

"As in the case of pure music, great art or great poetry, the emotions evoked by beauty in mathematics are most often of another world, which can never be explained to one who has not felt he illumination in himself."\(^{44}\)

d) FAITH IN MATHEMATICS

"Faith is indispensable to man, for without it he could not proceed forward in his journey through the Unknown; but it ought not to be imposed, it should come as a free perception or an imperative direction from the inner spirit."\(^{45}\)

Contrary to all belief, the study of mathematics does not stifle faith; it is rather the fact that "a new discovery in the field of mathematics is nearly always a matter of faith in the first instance; later, of course, when one has seen that it does work, one has to find a logical justification that will satisfy the most cautious critics."\(^{46}\) The mathematician is essentially a creative creature who is ever eager to strike out new pathways, open up new vistas and explore new avenues to the unknown. And in this élan for creation he is not bound by a priori prejudices. Not without significance did D'Alembert, the leading mathematician of the Encyclopedists,

43. Savitri, Bk. X, Canto 4, p. 663.
44. François Le Lionnais, La Beauté en Mathématiques.
45. The Life Divine, p. 864.
declare: "Allez en avant, et la foi vous viendra." ("March forward, and you will get the faith").

Mathematics and Yoga

"Above mind's twilight and life's star-led night
There gleamed the dawn of a spiritual day." 47

We have made a rapid survey of some of the more salient aspects of modern mathematical thought and have tried to point out their psychological advantage for a student of mathematics, if he ever sincerely enters the path of Yoga.

And, we think, if a mathematician is truly sincere in his own domain and if he follows faithfully the curve of his development, he should not find it at all difficult to come one day to this supreme decision: to enter the path of Yoga. For, if it is true, as has been claimed on their behalf, that the mathematicians are not for the proximate, they seek the ultimate, then they should realise that

"...not by Reason was creation made
And not by Reason can the Truth be seen" 48

For

"In her high works of pure intelligence,
In her withdrawal from the senses' trap,
There comes no breaking of the walls of mind,
There leaps no rending flash of absolute power,
There dawns no light of heavenly certitude." 49

But have not the mathematicians known by experience, as pointed out by one of their greatest leaders, Henri Poincaré, that "there is no such thing as a solved problem, there are only problems more or less solved," For although

49. Ibid., p. 251.
"Each brief idea, a structure perishable,
Publishes the immortality of its rule,"

it has been amply demonstrated many a time in the course of the development of mathematics that

"There is no last certitude in which thought can pause."

For

"It reasons from the half-known to the unknown,
Ever constructing its frail house of thought,
Ever undoing the web that it has spun."

In fact,

"If Mind is all, renounce the hope of Truth.
For Mind can never touch the body of Truth
And Mind can never see the soul of God."

Because

"On the ocean surface of vast Consciousness
Small thoughts in shoals are fished up into a net
But the great truths escape her narrow cast."

But

"Mind is not all his tireless climb can reach,
There is a fire on the apex of the worlds,
There is a house of the Eternal's Light."

And so we say that if a mathematician is really sincere in his pursuit of truth, if he does not want to "turn in a worn circle of

50. Ibid., Bk. II, Canto 6, p. 198.
51. Ibid., Bk. I, Canto 4, p. 69.
52. Ibid., Bk. II, Canto 10, p. 240.
53. Ibid., Bk. X, Canto 4, p. 645.
54. Ibid., Bk. X, Canto 3, p. 626.
55. Ibid., Bk. XI, Canto 1, p. 704.
ideas"56 ever repeating "a circuit ending where it first began", he should be prepared to break asunder the walls of mind and take a leap into the splendours of the Spirit. It is true that "by constant enlargement, purification, openness the reason of man is bound to arrive at an intelligent sense even of that which is hidden from it, a power of passive yet sympathetic reflection of the Light that surpasses it".58 But this cannot be the final goal, and a sincere seeker should not falter at the last step. He should clearly see that

"Its [reason's] limit is reached, its function is finished when it can say to man, 'There is a Soul, a Self, a God in the world and in man who works concealed and all is his self-concealing and gradual self-unfolding. His minister I have been, slowly to unseal your eyes, remove the thick integuments of your vision until there is only my own luminous veil between you and him. Remove that and make the soul of man one in fact and nature with this divine; then you will know yourself, discover the highest and widest law of your being, become the possessors or at least the receivers and instruments of a higher will and knowledge than mine and lay hold at last on the true secret and the whole sense of a human and yet divine living."59

When the 'thick integuments' are removed and the 'luminous veil' is lifted, what is it that replaces our conceptual knowledge with a much more surer and authentic way to the Truth?

The next three chapters attempt to give an answer to this question.

57. Ibid., Bk. II, Canto 6, p. 198.
59. Ibid., p. 114.
V

SIGHT, MORE SIGHT...

(The Ascent of Sight as a Faculty of Knowledge)

"His is a search of darkness for the light.
...
A progress leap from sight to greater sight"

(Sri Aurobindo, Savitri, Part One, pp. 65, 161.)

"All this she saw and inly felt and knew
Not by some thought of mind but by the self.
A light not born of sun or moon nor fire,
A light that dwelt within and saw within
Shedding an intimate visibility,
Made secrecy more revealing than the word:
Our sight and sense are a fallible gaze and touch
And only the spirit's vision is wholly true."

(Savitri, Bk. VII, Canto V, p. 525.)

"Out of our thoughts we must leap up to sight": such, indeed, is the command on all those who would aspire after the pristine glory and the absolute inevitability of true Knowledge; for, then alone, when the

"Mind motionless sleeps waiting Light's birth,"
in that "seeing silence"

"...the Unmanifest reflects his form
In the still mind as in a living glass."

As a matter of fact, since the earliest dawn of his awakened

2. Ibid., Book IV, Canto IV, p. 383.
3. Ibid., Book I, Canto III, p. 32.
thought, in all ages and climes, the call has gone forth from the heart of man for light – the true light, ātma jyotiḥ – and for sight and more of sight, dr̥ṣṭaye. The supreme aspiration of the Upani-

shadic Rishis was to be ever asupta dr̥ṣṭa, “with the eyes unclosed”; and Patanjali went so far as to declare that the fullness of Selfhood lies in the fullness of untrammelled vision, dr̥geva ātma.

Indeed, a deeper perceptive probe is apt to reveal to us that in this world of evolving manifestation, all manifesting units are ‘seeing’ all the time, in various ways and measures and on various levels. This is what is meant by the cryptic Upanishadic utterance: sarvaṁ paśyati, sarvah paśyati (“Everybody is the seer and everybody the seen”). But the clarity, the intensity, the quality and the reach and range of this sight are evidently dependent upon the stage of manifestation so far attained. All are not yet endowed with the ‘divinely perceptive regard’, pracetaḥ in the words of the Vedic mystics. Some are awake, some half awake; some are dreaming and some else are in slumber (cf. Kāni svapanti kānya-

miṅjāgrati katara eṣa devaḥ svapnān paśyati).

As a matter of fact, the totality of manifestation, both in its involutionary and in its evolutionary phases, can be adequately viewed and interpreted in terms of the two cardinal concepts of Light and Sight. What is after all the basic nature of this manifestation? In the epigrammatic words of Sri Aurobindo:

“In a sense, the whole of creation may be said to be a movement between two involutions, Spirit in which all is involved and out of which all evolves downward to the other pole of Matter, Matter in which also all is involved and out of which all evolves upwards to the other pole of Spirit.”

Now, these two phases have been respectively imaged as the ‘closing in’ (nimilana) and the ‘opening out’ (unmilana) of the Eyes of the Supreme. At other times these have been represented as the processes of ‘looking in’ and ‘looking out’ (parāgdr̥ṣṭirun-

mesaḥ pratyagdr̥ṣṭirnimesaḥ). Indeed, the universe is nothing but a self-creative process of the supreme Reality. But the present

5. Rig-Veda.
7. Prashna Upanishad, 4.5.
8. Ibid., 4.1.
10. Tripādāvibhūti-mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad.
cosmic manifestation with the evolving terrestrial cycle as its central and significant element, has for its goal the self-finding of Sachchidananda, of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss absolute, in other conditions than the transcendent supracosmic, and even in the apparent opposites of His being, occasioned by an embodied material existence.

Thus, for divine Sachchidananda to trace the cycle of self-oblivion and self-discovery, the manifestation has taken the shape of a double movement, a prior involution of the spirit followed by a process of evolutionary ascension. Involution is the process of self-limitation by which the universal Consciousness-Force has veiled herself by stages until she assumes the appearance of a dense cosmic Inconscience. We feel tempted at this point to reproduce in full a magnificent passage by Sri Aurobindo, wherein he describes in terms of light and sight and sleep this involutionary plunge of Sachchidananda into the 'vast involved trance' of Matter:

"The supreme and universal Supermind is the active Light and Tapas of the supreme and universal Self as the Lord and Creator, that which we come to know in Yoga as the divine Wisdom and Power, the eternal knowledge and will of the Ishwara.... As we descend nearer to what we are in this world, the presence and action of this self-knowledge narrows but retains always the essence and character when not the fullness of the supramental nature and its way of knowing and willing and acting, because it still lives in the essence and body of the spirit. The mind, when we trace the descent of the self towards matter, we see as a derivation which travels away from the fullness of self, the fullness of its light and being and which lives in a division and diversions, not in the body of the sun, but first in its nearer and then in its far-off rays. There is a highest intuitive mind which receives more nearly the supramental truth, but even this is a formation which conceals the direct and greater real knowledge. There is an intellectual mind which is a luminous half-opaque lid which intercepts and reflects in a radiantly distorting and suppressively modifying atmosphere the truth known to the supermind. There is a still lower mind built on the foundation of the senses between which and the sun of knowledge there is a thick cloud, an emotional and a sensational mist and vapour with here and there lightnings and illuminations. There is a vital mind which is shut away even from the light of
intellectual truth, and lower still in submental life and matter the spirit involves itself entirely as if in a sleep and a night, a sleep plunged in a dim and yet poignant nervous dream, the night of a mechanical somnambulist energy."

Now, following this purposeful involutionary self-withdrawal of Sachchidananda into "the Inconscient's boundless sleep," when Sachchidananda lay self-shrouded in "the inconscient swoon of things", there commenced the obverse manifestation, the inevitable process of evolution, by which the divine Consciousness-Force involved in the form and activity of inert material substance gradually started waking again to bring out by slow degrees all the hidden powers and splendours inherent in "the original self-existent spiritual Awareness." For, a progressive rarefaction of the sleep of consciousness, a gradual unclosing of the lids drooping over the orbs of the spirit dreaming in its body of Matter, resulting in the manifestation of growing intensities of self-awareness and world-awareness, — is this not what the process of evolution signifies in its most fundamental aspect?

Thus the cardinal difference between diverse forms in existence, between plants and animals and men, between inert and inanimate Matter, living physical bodies and a creature like man in whom the mind consciousness has emerged into the open to look around and wonder, lies in the fact of "the more or less involved or more or less evolved condition of consciousness." As a matter of fact, consciousness is quite involved and asleep in a state of self-oblivious absorption in the bosom of the inconscient Matter, "hesitating on the verge between involution and conscious evolution," between a state of profound sleep and "a dim unclosing of the eyes," in the first non-animal forms of life, half-awake and somewhat consciously evolving in "mind housed in a living body," and ultimately destined to be fully evolved and awake "by the awakening of the Supermind in the embodied mental being and nature."

It is amply evident that this progressive awakening of consciousness from out of the original nescience, the starting-point of the

11. The Synthesis of Yoga, pp. 763-64.
12. The expressions put within quotation marks but bearing no specific references are all taken from Sri Aurobindo's Savitri.
14, 15, 16, 17. The Life Divine, p. 630.
evolutionary ascent, has not yet arrived at its noontide effulgence. The cosmic sleep and the somnambulist dream-state of the waking soul has by no means terminated with man and mind-consciousness. As a matter of fact, man's present status is at best a state of half-sleep and a half-waking, a state of veritable somnambulist torpor with "the inconstant blink of mortal sight."\textsuperscript{18} For, from the spiritual point of view, sleep denotes a poise of consciousness in which we are completely ignorant of the fundamental truths of existence, — of existence individual, cosmic or transcendent, — and of the Reality that is at the basis of all things; while the dream-state signifies that particular status in which we may be aware of this "reality" but only in a distorted, disfigured and topsy-turvy way.\textsuperscript{19} Man, thus, proves to be a creature asleep in most parts of his being and dreaming in the little in which he has managed to gain partial awakening. Indeed,

"Our mind lives far from the authentic Light
Catching at little fragments of the Truth,"\textsuperscript{20}

and our normal human awareness which is really no better than "a bright body of ignorance" is, because of the very circumstance of a separative ego-centred existence in a material, spatial and temporal universe, reducible to a state of sevenfold blindness.

Mind-consciousness is thus seen to be only an intermediate stage

"...through which we pass
On our road from Matter to eternal Self,
To the Light that made the worlds, the Cause of things."\textsuperscript{21}

The evolutionary awakening of consciousness has thus still to proceed until the divine Supermind or Gnosis, the Power of Truth-Consciousness ($\text{rta-cit}$) of Sachchidananda, emerges in terrestrial evolution to become the overtly governing principle of embodied material existence. For, then, the manifested being will be in secure possession of an integral consciousness and an integral

\textsuperscript{18} Savitri, Book III, Canto IV, p. 343.
\textsuperscript{19} Cf. anvāthā grhnātāh svapno nidrā tatvamajānatah (Gaudapadacharya, Māṇḍukya-Karikā, 1.15).
\textsuperscript{21} Savitri, Book II, Canto V, p. 166.
Sight and “dwell in the unwalled light of a divine knowledge.” Sachchidananda will in that everlasting Day stand fully revealed in His robe of Matter and

“...Nature steps into the eternal Light.
Then only ends the dream of nether Life.”

But that Golden Dawn, the overt emergence of the Supramental Sun, heralding the annulment of the nescient sleep of Night, is still lying in the womb of the future, although the crimson signs of its imminent advent are already caught by the discerning eyes. But, in the meantime, for the individual pilgrims the journey continues along “the road that winds towards the Sun”; for,

“Night is not our beginning nor our end;
...
We came to her from a supernal Light,
By Light we live and to the Light we go.”

And in this adventure of the Apocalypse to discard our present “time-born eyes” and their “small moment look” and instead grow into divine vision with the divine Eye, divyam caksuh,25 every single experience on the way is “a long march towards Light.”

In this ascent towards the Sun, consciousness and vision grow together, and at each plateau of this ascent, on each level of the hill of our being (adreśa śānu), new vistas of light open to the sight of the aspiring soul. Evidently this light is no ordinary light nor is this sight the mortal vision of the sense-bound mind. It is the supernal light, jyotisām jyotih, and the divine perception, daivya ketu.

The Vedic seers have always sought and eulogised this faculty of constant awakening and growing perceptive vision which they termed as ketu in order to distinguish it from the eye of sense or even of reason (caksuh). This supramental light and sight can be

attained only when we transcend the boundaries of our thought-mind (mano javiṣṭham,\(^{26}\) matiṇāṁ pārāya\(^{27}\)). It is through the fulfilment of this divine vision (ketu) alone that we can expect to be possessed of the happy truths of existence (cikitvīt suṇrtāvāri\(^{28}\)) and transcend the iron-grip of mortality (amṛtamaśnute\(^{29}\)), for this indeed is the vision of the immortality (amṛtasya ketuḥ\(^{30}\)). With the opening of this Supernal Sight, one acquires the perception of the Oneness of all beings (ekatvam anupaśyataḥ\(^{31}\)): one sees no more anything as not-self (nekṣate prthak\(^{32}\)).

To the Vedic mystics (otherwise called the Seers or the Rishis, for they did not think out the truth but rather ‘saw’ it\(^{33}\)), Light and Sight stood thus for supreme powers of manifestation of the Spirit.\(^{34}\) In particular, light (jyotiḥ) symbolised for them all the splendour and glory of the highest reaches of our being. And what about the Sight, the goal of achievement for the Vedic seers? It is, in the esoteric meaning of the Veda, the self-revelatory knowledge of Surya, the Sun-God. “...The Sun-God represents the divine Illumination of the Kavi which exceeds mind and forms the pure self-luminous Truth of things.... His realm is described as the Truth, the Law, the Vast (satyam, r̥tam, bṛhat). He is the Fosterer or Increaser (puṣan), for he enlarges and opens man’s dark and limited being into a luminous and infinite consciousness. He is the sole Seer (ekarṣe\(^{35}\)), Seer of Oneness and knower of the self, and leads him to the highest Sight... The result of this inner process is the perception of the oneness of all in the divine Soul of the Universe”\(^{36}\).

What is important to note here is the spiritual fact that this Sight

26. Rig-Veda, VI. 9-5.
27. Ibid., I. 46-7.
28. Rig-Veda, IV. 52-4.
29. Isha Upanishad, 14.
30. Rig-Veda, III. 61-3.
31. Isha Upanishad, 7.
32. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.
33. Cf. ‘Ṛṣir darṣanāt’ (Yaska’s Nirukta, II. 3.3).
34. Compare: “...All creation is an act of light” (Savitri, Book II, Canto XV).
35. Isha Upanishad, 16.
at its highest is not only revelatory, it is supremely creative at the same time. It is Sight-Will or rather Seer-Will (Kavi-Kratu) in the language of the Vedic mystics. For at that supreme elevation, Will is not divorced from Sight and the effectivity of this Will-Sight is nothing but omnipotent and immediate.

According to the ancient Revelation of the semitic mystics, “God said, Let there be light: and there was light”37. Thus Speech, the Logos, becomes the original determinant. All speech no doubt possesses some creative power and the supreme Speech, the vāk brahma of the Indian mystics, is without question supremely creative. For, in the words of Sri Aurobindo, “the Supermind using the Word is the creative Logos”38. And what is “this all-containing, all-originating, all-consummatting Supermind”39 if not “the nature of the Divine Being, not indeed in its absolute self-existence, but in its action as the Lord and Creator of its own worlds”?40

It is because of this all-determining power of the primal speech (vāk) that the ‘Creator of the Worlds’ (Prajāpati) has been termed in the Rig Veda as the ‘Lord of Speech, the ordainer of everything’ (vācaspatim viśvakarmānām41); for ‘Speech’ is verily His power of creation: Speech is no other than Brahman Himself (yāvad brahma viṣṭhitam tāvatī vāk42.)

It needs no pointing out that this supreme Speech is not the speech as we ordinarily understand by the term. As a matter of fact, according to the Vedic seers, vāk or speech has four statuses (cātvāri vāk parimitā padāni43) of which the first three are concealed from human awareness (guhā trini nihitā neṅgayanti44) and it is only the lowest and the fourth that has come to our ken. The supreme Vak bares Her self only to the inmost perception of the highest seer (uta tasmāi tanvam vi ṣasre") and then reveals Herself

40. Ibid., p. 132.
41. Rig-Veda, X. 81. 7.
42. Ibid., X. 114. 8.
43. Ibid., I. 164. 45.
44. Ibid., 164. 45.
45. The Vaikhari Vāk of the Tantrik lore.
46. Rig-Veda, X, 71. 4.
in his awakened consciousness as the mantra (dhīra manasā vācamakratah”).

And what is this mantra? A mantra indicates a word of power and light, born out of the profound depths and the sublimest heights of the Rishi’s being and consciousness, that proceeds to the inevitable realisation of the truth it symbolises.

This then is the supreme divine Word, the divya vāk or Gaurī of the Rig-Veda, that is reputed to be the original creative Power that builds up the universe of manifestation from out of the nameless Silence. For “it is out of this Silence that the Word which creates the worlds for ever proceeds; for the Word expresses that which is self-hidden in the Silence.”48 It is about this primal vāk that the apostle speaks when he says that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”49

But a deeper probe shows that the really primal originative power of the infinite and omnipotent consciousness is not this vāk or Word but the Power of Sight-Will. For, as Sri Aurobindo has so well put it, “when we say, ‘God said, Let there be Light,’ we assume the fact of a power of consciousness which determines Light out of everything else that is not light; and when we say ‘and there was Light’ we presume a directing faculty, an active power corresponding to the original perceptive power, which brings out the phenomenon and, working out Light according to the line of the original perception, prevents it from being overpowered by all the infinite possibilities that are other than itself.”50 (Italics ours) It is this primal Vision of the Supreme, termed in the Veda as ikṣā or ‘the Power of Sight,’ that is the real determinant of the worlds. And this Sight, as we have pointed out before, is one with Will: ikṣā is at the same time the Truth-Will (satyasamkalpa) and the Will-perception (saṃkalpadarśana). It is thus that the Upanishadic seers, while describing the very first act of creation undertaken by the Supreme, have used the expression sa aikṣata, seyam devatā aikṣata51: the Spirit ‘looked’ and the creation arose with the

47. Ibid., X. 71. 2.
   Compare the Upanishadic revelation:
   Vāk brahma (“The Word is brahman”).
50. The Life Divine, p. 108.
51. Chhandogya Upanishad.
primal splendours of Light (jyotirpakramā tu.\textsuperscript{52})

About this supremely creative self-vision of the “all-creating Eye”\textsuperscript{53} that presides over the worlds of manifestation, Sri Aurobindo writes:

“Every seed of things... is the truth of its own being which this Self-Existence sees in itself, the resultant of that seed of self-vision is the truth of self-action, the natural law of development, formation and functioning which follows inevitably upon the self-vision and keeps to the processes involved in the original Truth. All Nature is simply, then, the Seer-Will, the Knowledge-Force of the Conscious-Being...”\textsuperscript{54}

Thus, “the world expresses a foreseen truth, obeys a predetermining Will, realises an original formative self-vision, — it is the growing image of a divine creation.”\textsuperscript{55} (Italics ours)

Such is then the primal Sight, \textit{parā drk}, the original self-creative Knowledge-Vision of sachchidananda. It is “the intense original Flame”\textsuperscript{56}, the “Fire that is the beginning of the world” (\textit{lokādim agnim\textsuperscript{57}}), that is the fundamental power of the Supermind or divine Gnosis. For, it is the Supermind, otherwise termed by Sri Aurobindo as the ‘Real-Idea’, which represents the nodus of the self-determining creative truth-action and the direct power of manifestation of the All-Existent Transcendence. It is in Supermind that we find “a divine Knowledge one with self-existence and self-awareness and a substantial Will which is in perfect unison with that knowledge, because it is itself in its substance and nature that self-conscious self-existence dynamic in illumined action.”\textsuperscript{58}

But this Self-Existent Sachchidananda is not merely a transcendent supra-cosmic Creator: He Himself has become this universe,

\textsuperscript{52.} Vyasa, \textit{Brahma-Sutra}, I4.9. Compare:
“\begin{quote}
The world is but a spark-burst from its light,
All moments flashes from its Timelessness,
All objects glimmerings of the Bodiless
\end{quote}“ (Sri Aurobindo, \textit{Savitri}, Book VII, Canto VI, p. 184.)

Also: \textit{Katha Upanishad}, V. 15:

\begin{quote}
\textit{tasya bhāsā sarvam idam vibhāti} (“By His shining all this shines”)
\end{quote}“ (Sri Aurobindo, \textit{Savitri}, Book VII, Canto VI.

\textsuperscript{53.} \textit{The Life Divine}, p. 129.

\textsuperscript{54.} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 120.

\textsuperscript{55.} \textit{Savitri}, Book VII, Canto VI.

\textsuperscript{56.} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 120.

\textsuperscript{57.} \textit{Katha Upanishad}, 1.1.15.

\textsuperscript{58.} \textit{The Life Divine}, p. 262.
for He is in the language of the Isha Upanishad paribhuh⁵⁹, “the One who has become everywhere”. The Mundaka Upanishad has this to say about this “Luminous One who is at once smaller than the minutest particle and in whom are set all the worlds and their peoples”⁶⁰:

“That [is] the invisible, that the unseizable,... that which is...eternal, pervading, which is in all things and impalpable, that which is Imperishable, that which is the womb of creatures...”⁶¹

“...This is the mighty foundation and into it is consigned all that moves and breathes and sees. This that is that great foundation here, know, as the Is and Is-not,...greatest and the Most High...”⁶²

Thus, the one and the only Light that is the source, the content and the continent of everything (jyotirekam bahubhyah⁶³) is ever shining even in the blind darkness of Matter (andhecit tamasi jyotiḥ⁶⁴) and to the eyes of intimate vision

“The world quivers with a God-light at its core.”⁶⁵

But how is it then that our eyes do not ordinarily meet this hidden Light (guḍham jyotiḥ⁶⁶) — the Light that is at all time the unique sustainer of everything in this manifest universe? How is it that we, human beings, fail to discover the one Form behind all forms, indeed “the Form that is the One to look on everywhere” (tad asya rūpaṁ pratiṣeṣanāya⁶⁷), for even as one Fire, entering the world, shapes itself to the various forms it meets, so likewise there is one Spirit within all creatures, but it has shaped itself to form and form (rūpaṁ rūpaṁ pratiṣeṣaḥ babhūvā⁶⁸).

This incapacity on our part to vision “the Lustre that is the most

⁵⁹. Isha Upanishad, 8.
⁶⁰. Mundaka Upanishad, II.2.2:
   “yadarcimad yadanubhyo'nu ca
   yasmin lokā nihitā lokinaśca.”
⁶¹ & 62. Ibid., I.1.6. II.2.1 (In Sri Aurobindo’s translation).
⁶². Ibid., Rig-Veda, I.93.4.
⁶³. Ibid., I.100.8.
⁶⁵. Rig-Veda, VII.76.4.
⁶⁶. Ibid., VI.47.18.
⁶⁷. Katha Upanishad, II.2.9.
   “Agniryathaiko bhūvanam praviśto rūpaṁ rūpaṁ pratiṣeṣaḥ babhūvā,
   ekastathā sarvabhūjavāntaraṁ rūpaṁ rūpaṁ pratiṣeṣaḥ bahiśca.”
blessed form of all” (rūparṇ kalyāṇatamam”), that is the supremely desirable of all things (vareṇyam”), lies in the fact that He who is the Luminous, being manifested, has set Himself “close within, moving in the secret heart” (āvih sannihitam guhācaram”) beyond the ken of mortal eyes.

Thus, to be able to see this Splendour of splendours, we are in need of another Light and of another Sight than the ones that we possess at present. For, as the Katha Upanishad says, His abode (dhāma) is a station “where the sun cannot shine and the moon has no lustre: all the stars are blind: there our lightnings flash not, neither any earthly fire. For all that is bright is but the shadow of His brightness”.

And what about the faculty of sight? It is almost self-evident by now that to look at Him in His glory of supernal Light (parājyotih) our normal gaze that is turned outward (parāk-drṣṭi) proves to be utterly inadequate to the task. Hence the Rishis of the Upanishads did never tire in pointing out the insufficiency of our mortal sight in the matter of apprehending the supreme Truths of existence. Thus, the Katha declares that the Purusha “has not set His body within the ken of seeing, neither does any man with the eye behold Him” [Indeed], He is by no means attainable by the mortal eye.” And the Mundaka says that “Eye cannot seize... Him,...only when the inner being is purified by a glad serenity of Knowledge, then indeed, with the eye of meditation, one can behold the Spirit indivisible.”

69. Isha Upanishad, 16.
70. Mundaka Upanishad, II.2.1.
71. Ibid., II.2.1.
   Cf.Sri Aurobindo’s Ilion, p. 108:
   “There our sun cannot shine and our moon has no place for her lustres,
   There our lightnings flash not, nor fire of these spaces is suffered.”
73. Katha Upanishad, II.3.9.:
   “No samdrṣe tiṣṭhati rūpamasya
   na caṇṭuṣā paśyati kaścanaṁ.”
74. Ibid., II.3.12:
   “Prāptum sakyo na caṇṭuṣā.”
75. Mundaka Upanishad, II.2.8.
   “Na caṇṭuṣā grhyate...jñāna-prasādena viśuddha-sattah tam paśyate
dhyāyamāṇaḥ.”
Indeed, in order to have a vision of the Golden Purusha (Hiraṇmaya Puruṣa) who is seated in the heart of every single created object, we have to have our eyes turned inward and upward (avṛttacaksuh, irdha-netraḥ) and plunge our regard into ‘the Blue Infinity’ (nilaṁ parakṛṣṇam).’’

For it is only in this way, when the veil has been lifted from before our eyes, when we are blessed with the gift of ‘divine Sight’ as was Arjuna by the Charioteer of Life79, when we become paśyāḥ or ‘seers’ in the language of the Mundaka Upanishad, that we can expect to have the luminously direct and absolute knowledge of the spiritual verities.

This luminous seizing and contact, this internal spiritual sight, drṣṭi or drk-sakti, “is to the spirit what the eyes are to the physical mind and one has the sense of having passed through a subtly analogous process. As the physical sight can present to us the actual body of things of which the thought had only possessed an indication or mental description and they become to us at once real and evident, pratyakṣa, so the spiritual sight surpasses the indications or representations of thought and can make the self and truth of all things present to us and directly evident, pratyakṣa.”80

It is under the stress of such a supernal sight that the Dravida saint Parakala could exclaim in his hymnal Periya-Tirumozhi: “I have seen, I have seen!” (“Nān kan du-k-konden!”) and the Sufi mystic Abu Said, could throw the challenge: “Of what use is hearsay to one who knows by vision?”

As a matter of fact, this seer-knowledge is always much more authentic than the thinking knowledge; for, a consciousness proceeding by sight has a much greater and more direct access to the truth of things than the consciousness relying on the crutches of thought alone. Indeed, different modes of cognition derive in various degrees from what Sri Aurobindo has called ‘a fourfold

76. Katha Upanishad, II.1.1.
77. Chhandogya Upanishad, 1.6.6.
78. Cf: “We have stripped the veil from thine eyes, and thy sight to-day is keen” (The Holy Koran).
79. Gita, XI.8:

Divyam dadāmi te cakṣuh
paśya me yogamāśvaram.”
80. Mundaka Upanishad, III.1.3.
power of knowledge'. "The original and fundamental way of knowing, native to the occult self in things, is a knowledge by identity; the second, derivative, is a knowledge by direct contact associated at its roots with a secret knowledge by identity or starting from it, but actually separated from its source and therefore powerful but incomplete in its cognition; the third is a knowledge by separation from the object of observation, but still with a direct contact as its support or even a partial identity; the fourth is a completely separative knowledge which relies on a machinery of indirect contact, a knowledge by acquisition which is yet, without being conscious of it, a rendering or bringing up of the contents of a pre-existent inner awareness and knowledge. A knowledge by identity, a knowledge by intimate direct contact, a knowledge by separative direct contact, a wholly separative knowledge by indirect contact are the four cognitive methods of Nature."82 The true knowledge, the essential knowledge, is thus seen to be not merely an intellectual conception of the truth; it is above everything else a "realisation", in the complete sense of the term, – a knowledge by absolute identity, tādātmya-jñāna.

Thus the commanding word to the jijñāsu, the seeker after true knowledge, on his upward journey to the Vedic 'Sun of Gnosis', has always been to replace his "seeking Mind" by the "seeing Soul" and to acquire a cognitive status in which "sight was a flame-throw from identity."83 For then alone will man be made a Rishi or Kavi and no longer a mere thinker, – a Rishi or Seer who "does not need the aid of thought" as "a means of knowledge, but only as a means of representation and expression, –...If a further extension of knowledge is required, he can come at it by new seeing without the slower thought processes..."84

But in his present normal status, man, the mental being, cannot at all command this supreme vision, "the lucent clarity of a pure regard."85 Instead, the human mind, in its search and feeling out for truth, relies at its highest on the staff of support of conceptual thought. And hence

"Our range is fixed within the crowded arc

82. The Life Divine, pp. 524-25.
83. Savitri, Book II, Canto XIV.
85. Savitri, Book II, Canto I.
Sight, More Sight...

Of what we observe and touch and thought can guess
And rarely dawns the light of the Unknown
Waking in us the prophet and the seer.”

But whether we consciously know it or not, we are, let us repeat, ‘sons of Light’ (jyotiśāṁ putrāḥ). Our evolutionary ascent has apparently commenced from the blind immensity of the Inconscient’s Night; but in reality,

“Night is not our beginning nor our end;
...
We came to her from a supernal Light,
By Light we live and to the Light we go.”

And we are in the inevitability of the destined process

“To eternal light and knowledge meant to rise.”

Thus the ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ cannot stop short with the visionless mind’s circumscribed gaze and sooner or later, today or tomorrow, we must come out of

“...the confines of thought
To where Mind motionless sleeps waiting Light’s birth.”

And once we outgrow the “mortal mind’s half-look on things”, we are sure to encounter on our ascending climb a series of hierarchised luminous planes of consciousness that offer the pilgrim soul an ever hightening and deepening power of sight. These planes, “Exposed to the lustre of Infinity,” are in the ascending order:

(i) the Higher Mind, whose action, in terms of the Vedic image of the Sun of Truth, is of the nature of “a composed and steady sunshine”;

86. Savitri, Book I, Canto IV, p. 53.
89. Ibid., Book IV, Canto IV, p. 383.
90. Ibid., Book I, Canto III.
91. Ibid., Book X, Canto IV.
92. The Life Divine p. 278.
(ii) the Illumined Mind, that has for its characteristic action an "outpouring of massive lightnings of flaming sun-stuff";

(iii) the Intuition, which with its faculty of Truth-vision acts as "a projecting blade, edge or point of a far-off supermind light";

(iv) Overmind, which is characterized by an authentic universal gaze but somehow covers with its luminous corona, with its brilliant golden lid (hīrānmayena pātreṇa), the face of the supreme Truth;

(v) and finally the Supermind or Gnosis, the plane of absolute Light and Sight, that transcends altogether the aparārdha or the lower hemisphere of existence.

It is only with the attainment of this divine Supermind that the ascent of Sight can come to its integral fulfilment. For, the supramental or gnostic being, the vijñānamaya puruṣa, "lives in the Sun itself, in the very body and blaze of the true light; he knows this light to be his own self-luminous being and he sees the whole truth of the lower triplicity and each thing that is in it. He sees it not by reflection in a mental organ of vision, but with the Sun of gnosis itself as his eye, — for the Sun, says the Veda, is the eye of the gods."

We have thus come to the end of the elaboration of our chosen theme: the Growth of Light and the Ascent of Sight. We have sought to trace the cycle of the involution of the Sight of Sachchidananda (the nimilana or the ‘closing in’ of the eyes of Lord Shiva according to Indian Puranic mysticism) down to the abysmal Sleep of Matter, followed in its turn by the slow evolutionary ascension of sight and light from Matter to half-lit and half-blind mind of man (the unmīlana or the ‘opening out’ of the eyes of Shiva). We have noted that we are only half way through this ascending march and our climb has to continue till we reach the Solar Supermind and embody its effulgence and power of Sight, even in this material world of ours, even in this very earthly body. The goal set before the seekers of Truth-Light is thus to shoot out of the bounds of mind and rise in consciousness on to the aforesaid

93. Ibid., p. 278.
94. Ibid., p. 948
95. Isha Upanishad, 15.
“radiant altitudes” of the Spirit that are the

“Outskirts and dependencies of the house of Truth,
Upraised estates of Mind and measureless.
There man can visit but there he cannot live.”97

But the time has come when the representative men of the age
have to consciously make these successive ascents and dwell
permanently upon the summit-altitude in the full blaze and glory
of the Sun. And who can make us glimpse, even in the gloom of
our present cabined consciousness, the splendour that we are to
meet when we happen to climb to these supernal planes? It is only
a poet, a supreme Poet, who can fulfil this heavenly role. For, “the
essential power of the poetic word is to make us see, not to make
us think or feel; ... Sight is the essential poetic gift. The archetypal
poet in a world of original ideas is, we may say, a Soul that sees in
itself intimately this world and all the others and God and Nature
and the life of beings and sets flowing from its centre a surge of
creative rhythm and word-images which become the expressive
body of the vision...”98

Such being the case, the veritable poets in the Vedic sense of the
term being the seers and the hearers of the truth (kavayah
satyaśrutayah), can there be any better way of concluding our
present discussion than to cite a few mantric utterances made by
the greatest Seer-Poet of the age? These revelatory verses,
characterizing the sight-attributes of the supernal supra-mental
planes of the Being, are taken from his Savitri, the spiritual epic of
the birth and the growth and the consummating fulfilment of the
divine Flame, an epic which, in the words of the Mother, enshrines
the “prophetic vision of the world’s history, including the an-
nouncement of the earth’s future...”99

**

“Out of the narrow scope of finite thought
At last he wakes into spiritual mind;

99. The Foreword in facsimile to Meditations on Savitri (Pondicherry: Sri
A high liberty begins and luminous room:
He glimpses eternity, touches the infinite,

... 

To join the heights and depths of being in light,
In the heart's cave speaks secretly with God.
But these are touches and high moments lived;
Fragments of Truth supreme have lit his soul,
Reflections of the Sun in waters still.
A few have dared the last supreme ascent
And break through borders of blinding light above,
And feel a breath around of mightier air,
Receive a vaster being's messages
And bathe in its immense intuitive Ray.
On summit Mind are radiant altitudes
Exposed to the lustre of infinity,
Outskirts and dependences of the house of truth,
Upraised estates of Mind and measureless.

... 

A cosmic Thought spreads out its vastitudes;
Its smallest parts are here philosophies
Challenging with their detailed immensity,
Each figuring an omniscient scheme of things.
But higher still can climb the ascending light;
There are vasts of vision and eternal suns,
Oceans of an immortal luminousness,
Flame-hills assaulting heaven with their peaks,
There dwelling all becomes a blaze of sight;
A burning head of vision leads the mind,
Thought trails behind it its long comet tail;
The heart glows, an illuminate and seer,
And sense is kindled into identity.
A highest flight climbs to a deepest view:
In a wide opening of its native sky
Intuition's lightnings range in a bright pack
Hunting all hidden truths out of their lairs,
Its fiery edge of seeing absolute
Cleaves into locked unknown retreats of self,
Rummages the sky-recesses of the brain,
Lights up the occult chambers of the heart;  
Its spear-point ictus of discovery  
Pressed on the cover of name, the screen of form,  
Strips bare the secret soul of all that is.  
Thought there has revelation's sun-bright eyes; 
The Word, a mighty and inspiring Voice,  
Entered Truth's inmost cabin of privacy  
And tears away the veil from God and life. 
Then stretches the boundless finite's last expanse, 
The cosmic empire of the Overmind, 
Time's buffer state bordering Eternity, 
Too vast for the experience of man's soul: 
All here gathers beneath one golden sky:

...

Thought crowds in masses seized by one regard; 
All Time is one body, Space a single book: 
There is the Godhead's universal gaze  
And there the boundaries of immortal Mind:

...

Above the stretch and blaze of cosmic Sight, 
Above the silence of the wordless Thought, 

...

There is a world of everlasting Light, 
In the realms of the immortal Supermind 
Truth who hides here her head in mystery, 
Her riddle deemed by reason impossible  
In the stark structure of material form, 
Unenigmaed lives, unmasked her face and there

...

A cosmic vision, a spiritual sense  
Feels all the Infinite lodged in finite form 
And seen through a quivering ecstasy of light 
Discovers the bright face of the Bodiless —

**

"A mightier race shall inhabit the mortal world. 
On Nature's luminous tops, on the spirit's ground,
The superman will reign as king of life,
Make earth almost the mate and peer of heaven

...
Life's tops shall flame with the Immortal's thoughts,
Light shall invade the darkness of its base.

...
The supermind shall claim the world for Light
And thrill with love of God the enamoured heart
And place Light's crown on Nature's lifted head
And found Light's reign on her unshaking base.
A greater truth than earth's shall roof-in earth
And shed its sunlight on the roads of mind;
A power infallible shall lead the thought,
A seeing puissance govern life and act,
In earthly hearts kindle the Immortal's fire.
A soul shall wake in the Inconscient's house;
The mind shall be God-vision's tabernacle,
The body intuition's instrument,
And life a channel for God's visible power.

...
The spirit's eyes shall look through Nature's eyes,
The Spirit's force shall occupy Nature's force.

...
The Spirit shall be the master of his world
Lurking no more in form's obscurity
And Nature shall reverse her action's rule,
The outward world disclose the Truth it veils;
All things shall manifest the covert God,
All shall reveal the Spirit's light and might
And move to its destiny of felicity.

...
This too shall be; for a new life shall come,
A body of the Superconscient's truth,
A native field of Supernature's mights:
It shall make earth's nescient ground Truth's colony,
Make even the Ignorance a transparent robe
Through which shall shine the brilliant limbs of Truth
And Truth shall be a sun on Nature's head
And Truth shall be the guide of Nature's steps
And Truth shall gaze out of her nether deeps."¹⁰¹

VI

SIGHT BEHIND THOUGHT

“All that escaped conception’s narrow noose
Vision descried and gripped; their seeing thoughts
Filled in the blanks left by the seeking sense.”


“The impersonal truth of things can be rendered into the abstract formulas of the pure reason, but there is another side of truth which belongs to the spiritual or mystic vision and without that inner vision of realities the abstract formulation of them is insufficiently alive, incomplete. The mystery of things is the true truth of things; the intellectual presentation is only truth in representation, in abstract symbols, as if in a cubist art of thought-speech, in geometric figure.”

Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, p. 357.

“A many-sided Ignorance striving to become an all-embracing Knowledge” — such is the definition, as offered by Sri Aurobindo, of the consciousness of man the mental being. Indeed, in the realm of the living, man is distinguished from all other creatures by his insatiable noetic urge. And since in his present normal status, the mental being that man is relies principally on thought for the gathering and the consolidation of his knowledge, he conceives that to be the highest or the main process of knowledge. The intellect of man does not consider that it knows a thing unless and until it has been able to reduce its awareness of it into a system of mental concepts. But, as we have pointed out in the preceding chapter “Sight, More Sight...”, the true knowledge, the essential knowledge is beyond the bounds of any intellectual conception of the truth; it is basically a “realisation”, in the fullest sense of the term. And we all know that the realisation involves the reduction of the object of knowledge into a fact and not merely into an idea. And for this reason the inner

being of man is never satisfied with "...the staple or dry straw of Reason's tilth": its demand is for the concrete. Thus every concept remains incomplete and almost unreal to the deeper part of our nature until it becomes translated into a concrete experience.

But what is the basic trait of this concrete seizing of an object? It is primarily and essentially 'vision'; for, among all the biological species, man is clearly distinguished by the predominant role that sight-perception plays in his noetic framework. As Abel Rey has so aptly pointed out, "It is the organ of vision — and not the auditive, tactile, olfactory sense organs — that has made man the homo sapiens." In fact, "in the physical world there are always two forms of knowledge, the direct and the indirect, pratyakṣa, of that which is present to the eyes, and parokṣa, of that which is remote from and beyond our vision. When the object is beyond our vision, we are necessarily obliged to arrive at an idea of it by inference, imagination, analogy, by hearing the descriptions of others who have seen it or by studying pictorial and other representations of it if these are available. By putting together all these aids we can indeed arrive at a more or less adequate idea or suggestive image of the object, but we do not realise the thing itself; it is not yet to us the grasped reality, but only our conceptual representation of a reality. But once we have seen it with the eyes, — for no other sense is adequate, — we possess, we realise; it is there secure in our satisfied being, part of ourselves in knowledge."  

This essential all-sufficient superiority of 'vision' over other senses (compare the French saying: 'voir, c'est comprendre', 'To see is to understand') has led man to identify knowledge with light and sight in all spheres of comprehension. Thus, Goethe in his last moments calls for light and more light, and the ancient Upanishadic utterance epitomises for ever the ardent prayer of all seekers after the Truth: 'tamaso mā jyotirgamaya', 'lead me out of darkness to light.' It is thus not at all a chance phenomenon that a great number of terms actually used to represent intellectual operations are nothing but so many visual metaphors to wit, 'demonstration' (from L. monstrare: to show), 'theory' (from Gk.

5. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.
Man is thus impelled almost imperatively to fall back upon some imaged background even in the ethereal domains of abstract thought, or rather — we should say — in order to compensate for this very abstractness. And, what is more, if we examine carefully, we shall find that “thought in itself, in its origin on the higher levels of consciousness, is a perception, a cognitive seizing of the object or of some truth of things, which is a powerful but still a minor and secondary result of spiritual vision, a comparatively external and superficial regard... In mind there is a surface response of perception to the contact of the observed or discovered object, fact or truth and a consequent conceptual formulation of it; but in the spiritual light there is a deeper perceptive response from the very substance of consciousness and a comprehending formulation in that substance, an exact figure or revelatory ideograph in the stuff of the being.... Thought creates a representative image of Truth; it offers that to the mind as a means of holding Truth and making it an object of knowledge; but the body itself of Truth is caught and exactly held in the sunlight of a deeper spiritual sight to which the representative figure created by thought is secondary and derivative, powerful for communication of knowledge, but not indispensable for reception or possession of knowledge.”6 (Italics ours.)

As a matter of fact, mind can at best know things only by their surface indications such as superficial characters, forms, functionings, etc., and never in their ‘occult self-being and essence’. And as a result it can never come to any deep and firm experience of Truth. For that, the intellectual mind has to be replaced by a ‘mind of vision’ capable of direct reception of the Truth; conception has to give place to knowledge-vision,’ and the thinker should transform himself into a seer so much so that he shall be able to exclaim:

“My mind transfigures to a rapturous seer.”

(Savitri, Book V, Canto III, p. 408.)

6. The Life Divine, p. 945.
7. Compare: “But thought nor word can seize eternal truth... Out of our thoughts we must leap up to sight” (Savitri, Book II, Canto. XI.)
“But the mind’s ignorance veils the inner sight” (Ibid., Book V, Canto III.)
"The veil is torn, the thinker is no more: Only the Spirit sees and all is known."

(Ibid., Book IX, Canto I, p. 571.)

It needs no mention that the sight of which we are speaking has nothing to do with mere physical sight. In fact, the operation of sight is not confined to physical seeing alone. To each place of consciousness corresponds a particular strand of sight. Thus, we may possess and utilise a sight in the sense-mind, an emotional sight of the heart, a conceptual sight, a psychic sight, a mental intuitive sight, a spiritualised mental sight, etc., etc. Indeed, sight is not, as is so often erroneously held, the result of the development of our physical sense-organs; it is antecedent to it, inherent in the very stuff of consciousness, "not dependent on the circumstance of terrestrial evolution and... can be employed without the use of the physical eye..."

Thus, with the progressive widening and heightening and deepening of consciousness, ever new vistas of light open up before the ascending soul and every step of advance on this 'path of the Gods' (devayāna) brings in a new ascension of sight, and this process continues till we reach the highest sight, para drk, the all-embracing, all-relating and all-unifying vision of the supramental infinite consciousness.

But one question still remains to be answered. Why should this supraphysical sight, this inner and the higher occult-spiritual awareness, be designated 'sight' at all? Without going into the deeper and detailed elucidation of this question — for that will lead us away from the main theme of the present essay — let us content ourselves with the following words of Sri Aurobindo:

"...this luminous seizing and contact that is the spiritual vision, drṣṭi,... is to the spirit what the eyes are to the physical mind and one has the sense of having passed through a subtly analogous process. As the physical sight can present to us the actual body of things of which the thought had only possessed an indication or

8. Sri Aurobindo, Kena Upanishad (1952 ed.), p. 76. (Readers wishing to pursue the point further may consult Chapters VIII and IX of this book).

9. Compare the following expressions occurring in Savitri:

"All-vision" (Book I, Canto III.)
"All-seeing eagle-peaks" (Book I, Canto IV.)
"The all-seeing tops" (Book I, Canto III.)
mental description and they become to us at once real and evident, pyraksa, so the spiritual sight surpasses the indication or representations of thought and can make the self and truth of all things present to us and directly evident, pratyaksa.”10 (Italic ours.)

The present essay is an attempt at showing that, since the seer-knowledge is always more authentic, more compelling and more satisfying than a mere thinking knowledge, an ever-insistent although mostly unconscious thirst for this vision, drṣṭi, invariably creates in man, the mental being, the exigence of ‘visualisation’ in diverse domains of his intellectual activity. It is natural, of course, that this sight-support in the fashion of a chameleon changes its aspect from domain to domain, and even in the same domain from one individual to another; but however covert, camouflaged or transfigured, it is invariably there with its lurking presence. We propose to study this interesting phenomenon in its polychrome manifestation.

It is almost an axiomatic truth recognised on all hands that vision is the principal, if not the unique, point d’appui of a poet. “The essential power of the poetic word is to make us see, not to make us think or feel; thought and feeling must arise out of or rather be included in the sight, but sight is the primary consequence and power of poetic speech.”11

Now the thinker too is often guided in his deliberations by an inner background of specific vision. In fact, the thinker will be able to express the knowledge more and more in proportion as he leans on the inner vision as his secret support. If he happens to be a poet-philosopher, let the thinker in him first of all fall silent in reverent hush12 and let the poet behold and give shape; and once this is adequately done, let the philosopher translate the vision thus gained in terms of conceptual thought. The philosopher Heidegger expressly wanted to do something of the sort - although in his case there was not the fusion of the two personalities in the same individual. In fact, as pointed out by M. Delfagaauw, Heidegger sought to give expression to his essential thought in the form of a commentary on the poet Holderlin.13

12. Compare: “This witness hush is the Thinker’s secret base.”
(Savitri, Book II, Canto XIII, p. 283.)
A profound thinker seeks no doubt the nourishment of his conceptual scheme in the effulgent source of an inner vision. But, what is more interesting, his thinking itself often assumes a pictorial appearance. For, as has been aptly described by M. Masterman-Braithwaite, whenever "we think most deeply, we nearly always throw the whole logical machinery over. At such times we 'doodle', we compare, we 'match', we write down isolated words, we draw pictures on the edges of the paper, we make models. Nor is this a primitive vestigial habit; for recent psychological and ethnological researches show that when we have to act quickly we still, in an only slightly extended sense of the words, think pictorially."

On a close scrutiny we are apt to discover that this principle of imaging or pictorial thinking extends its domain far and wide and penetrates even into the inner recesses of philosophical thinking, so much so that Masterman-Braithwait could not help posing the interesting query:

"The question arises as to whether the same pictorial principle does not often operate in our thinking on a larger scale, even though we may not perhaps have noticed it.... Is it, for instance, upon this same principle that such a composite 'picture' as Spinoza's Ethics is built up? If so, we could talk, in an exact sense, about 'metaphysical picture'.

But why single out Spinoza alone? A perceptive investigation of the process of philosophical inquiry is bound to reveal to us the interesting fact that even in this austere domain of abstract thought and in spite of the apparently wide diversity of approach, it is always a secret sense of visualisation, implicit or explicit or however transfigured in appearance, that plays the dominant role as the underlying support of all philosophers. For, as we shall presently see, in every phase of philosophical deliberation, in the individual comprehensions of 'truth'-ideas, in the process of elaborating them, in communicating them to others as well as in the attempt to demonstrate their validity, the philosophers — to whatever type of school they may belong — are overtly or covertly guided by the insistent need of some sort of visualisation.

Indeed, what the philosophers seek after are supposed to be

15. Ibid., p. 140.
objecta, self-existent truths beyond the mutilating idiosyncracies of individual thinkers\(^\text{16}\) (by the way, does not the term objectum already suggest an exigence for vision-entity, a phenomenon aptly designated by the french neologism, chosification of the image?), and these objecta can only be reached through a progressive process of ever-etherealizing abstraction.\(^\text{17}\) In this field of abstracting operation, the seeker is never checked by the inhibiting injunction Non plus ultra — ‘go no farther'; plus ultra —‘farther beyond' — is the command-word at every step. But, what is remarkable, this abstraction on an ever-ascending scale does never for a moment atrophy the power of vision, nor does it necessarily denude the ‘truth' of all forms. Rather this process liberates the intellect from its preoccupation with the superficial view of things,\(^\text{18}\) awakens it to an acute sense of vision in a new dimension so much so that one feels for certain that one has known a thing only when one has seen it in its essence. Thus an inmost vision becomes the hallmark of guarantee of one's knowledge.

As a matter of fact, every conscientious seeker after knowledge, every ‘lover of wisdom' or philosophos as the Greeks would say, in setting out upon his quest after knowledge, is confronted at each step with the searching query: “How to be sure that the knowledge that I have so far gained is in fact true knowledge?” And, as Spinoza recommended in his De Intellectus Emendatione, before all things means must be devised for the improvement and clarification of the faculty of intellectus. For one must be careful about the distinction between the various forms of knowledge and be satisfied only with the highest and the best. The first kind of knowledge is hearsay knowledge, the second sort comes from vague experience; the third type is that gained through the faculty of ratio, by a process of ratiocination; but, according to Spinoza, the fourth and the highest form of knowledge is that received in intellectus or direct perception and the great philosopher admits ruefully: “The things which I have been able to know by this

\(^{16}\) Cf. the Indian conception about apauruṣeya satya, 'truth impersonal and universal'.

\(^{17}\) A dominant trait of a particular school of classical Indian philosophical inquiry is to indulge in the process of an ever-insistent negation, neti neti ('not this', ‘not this') and thus pass beyond all names and forms, nāma-rūpa.

\(^{18}\) The reader may refer in this connection to the very interesting account of Prajapati-Indra-Virochana Samvad in the Chhandogya Upanishad, VIII. 7-12.
knowledge so far have been very few." This intuitive knowledge, this *scientia intuitiva*, is a perception of things *sub specie eternitatis*, in their eternal aspects and relations, and incidentally, this offers us in a phrase a definition of any true *philosophy* worth the name.¹⁹

For the proper connotation of the technical terms *intellectus*, *ratio* and *wisdom* used above, we may recall the words with which Herbert Read introduces his paper: "The Limitations of a Scientific Philosophy":

"A distinction which runs through the whole development of human thought has become blurred during the past two hundred years. Implicit in all ancient philosophy, acknowledged by medieval scholastics and the natural philosophers of the Renaissance, and even by Locke and Newton, is a difference of kind... between *wisdom* and understanding. By wisdom was meant an intuitive apprehension of truth, and the attitude involved was receptive or contemplative. *Intellectus* was the name given to this faculty in the Middle Ages. Understanding, on the other hand, was always a practical or constructive activity, and *ratio* its name..."²⁰

We may note too in this connection that the Indian term for philosophy is *darśana*, 'Vision', and the Indian conception of a *Rishi* is that of 'one who has seen the truth' and not merely constructed it through the arduous exercise of his noetic apparatus.

This, then, is the *first basic visualisation* encountered in the realm of philosophical pursuit, constituting the diamond core of all true philosophical thinking and invariably sustaining every philosopher in his effort at rearing up the structure of his thought. For in spite of Saint-Exupéry's aphoristic utterance that truth is not what we *discover* but what we *create*, the fact remains that it is always the intuitive vision that precedes the elaboration of the thought-edifice. For all true 'creation' in the field of philosophy has its source in some intuitional core; the intellectual explanation and systematisation bringing in a host of rich ideas is brought about only in the wake of the 'vision suprême', as Henri Sérouya would say. To quote in part from his very interesting paper "La Création en Philosophie":

19. For the main substance of this particular paragraph, vide the chapter on Spinoza in Will Durant's *The Story of Philosophy*.
"In the matter of philosophical creation, it is the intuition and suprasensible vision that represents the unfailing base. All those who have had the rare privilege of having these flashes, this spontaneous vision and this inner flame, to help them in the direct apprehension of the real, will declare in one voice the efficacy of intuition in the case of all true creative spirits, whatever may be the mode of their creation. And by the real I mean the essence of things, all that is in them intrinsic and spiritual. Suppress this intuitional core, this marvellous source of spontaneity, and philosophy loses its living interest in spite of any other value that it may possess... The true philosopher does not invent, even if his system or his conceptions of the universe appear to exhibit an exceptional worth. His originality consists in seeing with his soul's eyes the profound reach of the real, in other words, in a total and adequate vision of the universe."

It hardly needs pointing out that this basic central vision is by no means a superficial physical vision; it is rather a vision of the pure reason and, for those who can ascend still higher up, it is the vision of the spirit. But in philosophical discourses there is always involved a great risk of misrepresentation not altogether avoidable in all situations. Those who have not drilled themselves in the iron discipline of pure intellection are ever apt to fall back unwittingly upon the stratum of ordinary vision of the sensibly concrete—a tendency natural and normal to our sense-bound mind—and thus distort and disfigure the purity of the primal vision.

For, experience shows that in philosophical communication the immediate clarity of the language of discourse is often measured by the facility with which the reader can respond to the situation evoked. And who does not know that the visual response is the most direct of all sense responses? Thus the comprehension of a particular philosophical text is in general commensurate with the facility of its pictorial representation to our mind's eye. And this is true in relation to all types of word-expressions used by the philosopher: those signifying sentiments and feelings as well as those signifying concepts and constructs. In every case, as soon as we encounter any particular word-expression, our first almost instinctive impulse is to paint on our mind's canvas the appropriate scene or situation in which the pronouncement appears to acquire

its supposed relevance. And, in this subtle manoeuvre towards the domain of the concrete, one is supported by all sorts of unexpected aids: the etymology of the word, the syntactical relation of the word-expression, the history of one's subconscious association and acquaintance with the term, and so on and so forth. This then is the second form of visualisation we encounter in the field of philosophy.

Wittingly or unwittingly, some philosophers have utilised this propensity to visualise on the part of their general readers, to drive home forcefully the truths they have glimpsed. Thus, in their philosophical demonstration, they use a wealth of well-chosen images that invariably sway the readers' attention on to the field of the visually concrete. Master tacticians, they wield in philosophy the painter's brush or the poet's quill and thus strive to induce in their readers a sense of the demonstrative veracity of the ideas put forward. To select only a single instance out of a legion, let us listen to Bergson discussing 'Vitality':

"A very small element of a curve is very near to being a straight line. And the smaller it is, the nearer. In the limit it may be termed a part of the straight line, as you please, for in each of its points a curve coincides with its tangent. So, likewise, 'vitality' is tangent, at any and every point, to physical and chemical forces; but such points are, in fact, only views taken by a mind which imagines stops at various moments of the movement that generates the curve. In reality, life is no more made up of physico-chemical elements than a curve is composed of straight lines."

Leaving behind this spectacle of a constant recourse to picturesque language and the insinuation of images and metaphors, let us now pass on to the consideration of a third form of 'chosification' or 'objectification', which, although very subtle, is by no means any less potent in the realm of philosophical pursuit.

It is a common enough experience with many thinkers that instead of offering precise and unequivocal definitions they throw

22. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 31. Compare the following comments offered by Will Durant on Bergson:

"If Bergson is occasionally obscure it is by the squandered wealth of his imagery, his analogies, and his illustrations; he has an almost Semitic passion for metaphor, and is apt at times to substitute ingenious simile for patient proof. We have to be on guard against this image-maker, as one bewares of a jeweller..." (The Story of Philosophy, p. 463.)
in sometimes some striking names and labels and build their word-structure around these self-justifying entities. And these names, in their turn, become gradually ossified, gather some ‘unsubstantial substance’ around them, and generally end in gaining some ill-got ‘thingness’ (choséité being the French neologism) through the process of constant usage. One is thus very soon apt to forget that these terms are nothing but nomina (‘names’) and by no means res (‘things’); and in this way it is not we who embrace the ideas but rather the ideas that embrace us: Illasque (perfectiones) non tam capere quam ab ipsis capi.23

In philosophical discourse we should always bear in mind that to designate is not the same thing as to name. To say that a certain term refers to a particular situation (physical, abstract or fictitious) or, in other words, to give a rule of designation, does not necessarily presuppose any ontological assumption. But because of our almost incorrigible penchant for visualisation we are quite often misled by an unwarranted analogy from the thing-language of every-day life. This attribution of choséité (‘thingness’), and, for that matter, of real existence to the designatum, – ‘the charm of the designatum’ as we might term it, – typifies the third process of visualisation frequently encountered in the domain of philosophy.

Indeed, here in this realm of pure abstraction, nothing is easier than believing that one has understood a point of thought when one has not really understood it. For the philosopher forges a host of terms and these become in the sequel so many starting-points for chains of philosophical argumentation. The reader feels no longer the necessity of going back directly to the source for the proper comprehension of the ideas encountered. Instead, he falls back again and again upon the ‘materialised’ terms which, because of their vicarious ‘thingness’, impart a false sense of clarity and solidity to the demonstration offered.

This third type of visualisation by proxy leads us to the study of another form of visualisation that entails the most serious consequence in the field of the philosophers’ dialogues.

It is indeed a curious phenomenon that the philosophers are not always mutually convincing: what appears as abundantly clear and almost self-evident to one turns out to be nothing more than the

fire-works of verbiage, *flatus vocis*, and an absolute *trompe-l'oeil* to others.

But, for this lack of mutual comprehension, the sincerity of the disputing philosophers need not be doubted. The basic cause of all this disagreement is not far to seek. In fact, as Yvon Belaval has pointed out, every single true philosopher possesses his own 'privileged perception'. Thus while Descartes is endowed with a clear and distinct intuition of the 'soul', his disciple Malebranche misses it altogether. Leibniz, Hume, Maine de Biran differ in their experience of the self. In the red of an arm-chair Husserl grasps the very essence of red, but the nominalists can only shrug at this Husserlian venture. And what to say of the Kantian 'in itself' and "for itself", which for many other philosophers is nothing but predilection for the mysterious? Thus it is that being exasperated by others' inability to comprehend what they have put forth, some philosophers have accused their detractors of 'intellectual blindness' ('cécité intellectuelle').

The proper diagnosis of this strange situation is that every philosopher has got his individual world of vision which is more often than not closed to his fellow-comrades. Here then is the *fourth form of visualisation* one comes up against in the proper appreciation of philosophers' ideas; for each one of them has got his own individual way of looking at things, and this endows a particular philosophical term ("transcendence" or "absolute", for example) with an ever-varying halo proper to the individual thinker. This "scintillation", to use the picturesque expression of M. Jean Wahl, often creates an insuperable obstacle in the way of a proper agreed comprehension of a philosophical text.

This 'selective blindness', the phenomenon of reciprocal miscomprehension and mutually destructive battle of ideas so much prevalent amongst the philosophers, has given rise to what has been termed the 'anarchy of systems'. As a matter of fact, anyone wishing to undertake the study of philosophy is at once struck by an almost unbelievable plurality of systems claiming allegiance in this particular domain of human venture. And what is most disconcerting, these systems are more often than not mutually exclusive. Their incompatibility, at least on the surface, is so much pronounced that their co-existence in the compass of a single unifying system seems well-nigh impossible of achievement. Confronted with this strange situation, the student of philosophy
may easily glide into the mood of absolute scepticism; for, "in view of the enormous variety of opinions, the question should repeatedly arise as to whether in all this welter of names and philosophemes there is any hard truth or whether all is pure error." Did not in ancient times Agrippa and Sextus Empiricus already make use of the phenomenon of \textit{tropos apo tes diaphonias} to support their denial of the possibility of any true knowledge at all?

But on a closer scrutiny of the situation we shall find that what is disconcerting is not so much the multiplicity of systems as the diversity of the various 'starting visions' ('visions de départ', as one Dutch thinker has styled it) that are at the bottom of these different systems. And what is still more intriguing is the fact that the builders of particular systems do rarely take the trouble of explaining expressly these basic 'points of view' or how they arrived at these for the first time. But it is precisely on this that everything else hinges; for once we admit the truth-validity of these basic presuppositions arising out of the initial visional core, we are slowly but surely led to the very same conclusions as derived by the philosopher in question. In fact, as Prof. J.P.A. Mekkes has pointed out, whether one examines the doctrines of the scholastic philosophy or those of modern idealism, whether one approaches the different phenomenological schools or the diverse schools of existentialism, everywhere one encounters a semblance of self-evidence that leaves the reader in a state of utter confusion. Without any shadow of doubt the whole course of philosophical argumentation is fashioned to demonstrate the merit and inviolability of the dominant vision of the system concerned. And, indeed, (this is what most puzzles the tyro) it is next to impossible to detect any lacuna, the absence of even a single link, in the long chain of rigorous reasoning that leads us from the first premiss of the central vision of the philosophical system up to its periphery. But there precisely hangs the ticklish question: "How is it that there exists an almost unbridgeable chasm between the different starting visions? Why is it that the only possible contact

25. 'Anarchy of Systems' (\textit{Pyrrh}, \textit{Hipot.}, I. 164.)

Compare the Sanskrit proverb:
'Nāsau munir yasya mataṁ na bhinnam ('There is no sage whose opinions do not differ from those of others').
between them happens to degenerate into fierce polemics, but at
the end of all this fury and logical battle one finds that the initially
adopted points of view remain intact in their mutual isolation?"\textsuperscript{26}

The answer is not far to seek. As a matter of fact, because of its
sole reliance on the supposed all-sufficient autonomy of reason,
certain intrinsic limitations are bound to plague and circumscribe
all philosophical thought — philosophical thought, we hasten to
add, as it is understood in our day. For, reason left to itself,
without a flaming intuitional background to support and guide it,
can never be creative or sure of its gaze. In fact,

"In her high works of pure intelligence,
In her withdrawal from the senses' trap,
There comes no breaking of the walls of mind,
There leaps no rending flash of absolute power,
There dawns no light of heavenly certitude.
A million faces wears her knowledge here
And every face is turbaned with a doubt.
All is now questioned, all reduced to nought.

* 
There is no summit on which she can stand
And see in a single glance the Infinite's whole."\textsuperscript{27}

And this insufficiency of reason as a means to authentic knowledge
arises from the fact so often missed that reason in itself is almost a
neutral instrument. As Sri Aurobindo has so trenchantly put it:

"It can in its nature be used and has always been used to justify
any idea,... In philosophy it gives equally good reasons for monism
and pluralism or for any halting-place between them, for the belief
in Being or for the belief in Becoming, for optimism and pessi-
mism, for activism and quietism. It can justify the most mystic
religionism and the most positive atheism, get rid of God or see
nothing else.... Ask it not to lean to one idea alone, but to make
an eclectic combination or a synthetic harmony and it will satisfy
you; only, there being any number of possible combinations or
harmonies, it will equally well justify the one or the other and set

\textsuperscript{26} J.P.A. Mekkes, "Critique Transcendantale de la pensée Théorique", Actes
\textsuperscript{27} Savitri, Book II, Canto X, p. 251."
up or throw down any one of them according as the spirit in man is attracted to or withdraws from it."^{28}

This utter dubiousness of rational knowledge has been delineated with such picturesque potency in a passage of *Savitri* that we feel tempted to quote it *in extenso* here:

> "An inconclusive play is Reason’s toil.  
> Each strong idea can use her as its tool;  
> Accepting every brief she pleads her case.  
> Open to every thought, she cannot know.  
> The eternal Advocate seated as judge  
> Armours in logic’s invulnerable mail  
> A thousand combatants for Truth’s veiled throne  
> And sets on a high horseback of argument  
> To tilt for ever with a wordy lance  
> In a mock tournament where none can win."

*  

> Absolute her judgements seem but none is sure;  
> Time cancels all her verdicts in appeal.  
> Although like sunbeams to our glow-worm mind  
> Her knowledge feigns to fall from a clear heaven,  
> Its rays are a lantern’s lustres in the Night;  
> She throws a glittering robe on Ignorance."^{29}

Such being the case it is illusive to consider that the thought-knowledge gained through the mediation of reason can ever embody any definitive truth of things: it has neither any access to the root of things nor for that matter can it embrace the totality of their secret mysteries. In reality, if we examine carefully, we shall find that intuition and not reason is *always* our first guide. "Intuition always stands veiled behind our mental operations. Intuition brings to man those brilliant messages from the Unknown which are the beginning of his higher knowledge. Reason only comes in afterwards to see what profit it can have of the shining harvest."^{30}

This preconises the path we should follow if we would seek after

true knowledge: we must step back from the arena of conceptual thought and rely instead more and more on revelatory vision and luminous insight. But since this inner illumination is in the nature of things progressive and the long path of advance stretches from the first glimmer of imperfect sight to the summit-sight of Supermind or the divine Gnosis, we should not be too easily duped or satisfied with the torch-flares of wayside stations but ever push forward, dive inward and soar upward in order to complete and perfect our visonial knowledge by new seeings gained on higher and higher plateaus of our being. We should constantly aspire with the Vedic Rishi: "O Sun, thou all-seeing Intelligence, may we behold thee bringing to us the great Light, blazing out on us for vision upon vision of the beatitude..." so that at the end of our Journey of Illumination we may exclaim with the Seer Praskanva: \( ud \text{ vayam tamasaspari jyotisaparyanta uttaram, devam devatrd suryam aganma jyotiruttamam } \) ("Beholding a higher Light beyond this darkness, we have followed it and reached the highest Light of all, Surya divine in the divine Being.")

31. Compare:

"There is a deeper seeing from within
And when we have left these small purlieus of mind,
A greater vision meets us on the heights
In the luminous wideness of the Spirit's gaze."

(Savitri, Book II, Canto V, p. 168.)

Also:

"Mental knowledge is not true knowledge. True knowledge is that which is based on the true sight, the sight of the Seer, of Surya, of the Kavi. Mental thought is not knowledge, it is a golden lid placed over the face of the Truth, the Sight, the divine Ideation. When that is removed, sight replaces mental thought, the all-embracing truth-ideation, Mahas, Veda, Drsti, replaces the fragmentary mental activity." (Sri Aurobindo, Isha Upanishad, pp. 166-67.)

33. Rig-Veda, I. 50-10.
"In a complete silence only is the Silence heard; in a pure peace only is its Being revealed. Therefore to us the name of That is the Silence and the Peace."

(Sri Aurobindo, The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 302.)

"There sight attains not, nor speech attains, nor the mind... That which remains unexpressed by the word, that by which the word is expressed, know that indeed to be the Brahman..." (na tatra caksur gacchati na vag gacchati no mano... yad vacanabhyuditam yena vag abhyudyate tadeva brahma tvam viddhi...)

(Kena Upanishad, 3. 4: Sri Aurobindo's translation.)

"The man who findeth God loseth his speech.... Only the Unconscious knoweth this Consciousness." (Man a'rafa Rabba-hu kal-la lesanuhu.... Mahramé in hosh juz bé- hosh n-ist.)

(See Bhagavan Das, The Essential Unity of All Religions, pp. 160-61.)

The truths of the Infinite are not easy to put into words which are finite and coined by a consciousness that blinks with its mortal gaze. It is no wonder that Teachers like Buddha became silent when questioned on the ultimate mysteries by persons psychologically and spiritually ill-equipped to pierce through the quasi-opaque veil of words and comprehend the ineffable X to which these words are but suggestive pointers. Indeed, in all ages and climes men of genuinely high spiritual experiences have again and again avowed their inability to express adequately through man-made speech the contents of their supernormal experience and knowledge. A dumb man seeking to convey through articulate sound the felicity that he enjoys while partaking of honey, mukāsvādanavat: this is how many of them have expressed their sense of discomfiture, face to face with the problem of an adequate verbal communication of their spiritual knowledge. Thus the Indian
mystic Dadu repeatedly avers that a veritable spiritual experience defies all formulation in the conceptual framework of our limited speech-mode, and since there is no commensurability between that and the normal experience of average humanity, spiritual knowledge must be by its very nature ineffable, *kahyā nā jāi.*¹ In the delectable words of the great poet-mystic Tulsi Das:

> **Girā a-naina, naina binu bānī,**  
> **Kehi bidhi anupama jāi bakhānī!**

> “Sightless the tongue is, voiceless are the eyes;  
> How then describe that Experience, all unique!”

This is indeed the dilemma: When the direct spiritual Sight is operative in its full potency, the human tongue proves its utter inadequacy to convey the glory and opulence of the Vision; on the contrary, any attempt at mental formulation brings the consciousness headlong down with the inevitable result that the Vision and the original Experience vanish in the process!

This almost absolute incompatibility of our normal mentality with the highest ranges of spiritual consciousness is strikingly brought out in the following very interesting account of Sri Ramakrishna’s repeated failures to remain physically awake on the summits of realisation, far be it to express what he realised. Swami Saradananda, one of the closest direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and the writer of his authoritative biography, is reporting:

“In how simple terms the Thakur [Sri Ramakrishna] used to explain to us these abstruse truths of spiritual life:

> “Well, something rises from my feet and climbs towards the head. So long as it does not reach the head, I retain consciousness; but as soon as it reaches there, an utter forgetfulness overtakes me — then there is no more seeing or hearing, far be it to speak of talking. Who would speak then? — The very sense of ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ vanishes altogether! I often decide to speak everything to you, all about the visions and experiences that accompany this ascension. So long as that has reached so far [pointing to his heart]

1. See Kshitimohan Sen (Editor), *Dadu.*  
or even so far [pointing to his throat], reporting is possible and in fact I report; but as soon as that transcends this region [pointing to his throat], it seems somebody shuts my mouth and I fail to control my forgetfulness! [Pointing to his throat] When one ascends still farther than this level, no sooner than I contemplate for a moment to speak of the visions and experiences there, the mind immediately shoots upwards and no reporting becomes any more possible!

"Oh, innumerable are the occasions when the Thakur sought to exercise the utmost control over himself so that he could report to us about the types of experiences that one has when the mind transcends the throat-centre but each time he failed! ...one day he emphatically stated:

"'Today I must speak to you everything, not a bit would I hide' — and he started to speak. He could very well speak all about the centres up to the heart and the throat, and pointing to the junction of his eye-brows he said, "Whenever the mind ascends here, the embodied soul has a vision of the supreme Self and goes into Samadhi. Then there exists but a thin transparent veil between the individual Self and the Supreme. And there the soul experiences in this way —' Speaking so far, as soon as he started detailing the realisation of the Supreme, he went into the Samadhi state. After coming out of his trance state, he recommenced reporting again, but again went into Samadhi. After such repeated attempts and failures he spoke to us with tears in his eyes:

"'My sons, my intention is to report to you everything without hiding the least bit of it: but the Mother3 won’t allow me to speak — She completely shuts my mouth!'

"We wondered at this and thought: ‘How strange! It is apparent that he is trying to report and that he is even suffering because of his failure to do so, but he seems to be altogether helpless in this matter — Surely the Mother must have been very naughty indeed! He wants to speak about holy things, about the vision of God, and it is surely odd that She should shut his mouth!’

"We did not know at that time that the mind’s range is indeed very much limited and that, unless one proceeds farther than its farthest reach, one cannot expect to have the realisation of the Supreme! In our innocence we could not understand at that time

3. The ‘Mother’ refers to the Supreme addressed as the Divine Mother.
that out of sheer love for us the Thakur was attempting the impossible!'" (Italics ours.)

Indeed, mystics are universally agreed on the point that with the progressive deepening and heightening of spiritual consciousness the seeker after supernal knowledge honestly feels the total inaptitude of all verbal communication and thus falls mute and speechless. Sri Ramakrishna himself expresses this indubitable fact of all true spiritual experience in the two following parables:

"In the Kirtan the devotee first sings 'Netāi āmar mātā hātī' ('My Netai dances like a mad elephant'). As the devotional mood deepens, he simply sings, 'Hātī! Hātī!' Next, all he can sing is 'Hātī!' And last of all he simply sings, 'Hā!' and goes into samadhi. The man who has been singing all the while then becomes speechless."

"Again, at a feast given to the Brahmins, one at first hears much noise of talking. When the guests sit on the floor with the leaf-plates in front of them, much of the noise ceases. Then one hears only the cry, 'Bring some luchi!' As they partake of the luchi and other dishes, three quarters of the noise subsides. When the curd, the last course, appears, one hears only the sound 'soup! soup!' as the guests eat the curd with their fingers. Then there is practically no noise. Afterwards all retire to sleep and absolute silence reigns."

Here at this point a question may be pertinently mooted: How to know whether the supposed inexpressibility of spiritual experience is not entirely due to the linguistic incompetence of the individual mystic? Is it not conceivable that with greater command over the language-apparatus some other mystic will be in a position to offer us a perfect verbal transcription of the same experience? And, be it noted, by language we do not mean at all the restricted and totally inapt speech-mode of common discourse; we envisage for this purpose any specialized language that might be invented and brought into use in order to mirror faithfully the contents of spiritual knowledge. For, do we not know that there is no such thing as the Language? Indeed, it is rational to admit of the possibility of different types of languages to correspond to dif-

4. Swami Saradananda, Sri Ramakrishna Lila-Prasanga (Gurubhava, Purvvardha), pp. 64-66.
different segments of human experience and activity. Philosophy including Metaphysics, the various Sciences, Mathematics, etc., have thus their particular languages of discourse and investigation; and we know, for example, that "the physicist quickly gives up English as the language of his scientific work, and the change from what might be called the Newtonian language to the language of quantum physics occurred because certain things could not be said about physical events in the former which could be said in the latter, and many things that could be said in the Newtonian language turned out to be unverifiable at the sub-atomic level."7

Thus the contention is: all spiritual experience and knowledge may be after all linguistically represented in favourable conditions, although the choice of the language may be determined by the necessity of the situation.

But, no, when the mystics refer to the ineffable, inexpressible and unformulable, they do not use the terms in any such relative sense. They do stand by the absolute ineffability of the highest and deepest ranges of spiritual experience. Indeed, as Maurice Mehauden has so trenchantly put it:

"The 'Ineffable,' that is to say, the Unutterable, the totally and absolutely Inexpressible, which is therefore 'Incommunicable' in whatever language spoken or not, in whatever expression-mode, philosophical, poetical, aesthetic or symbolic, and that, whatever the potency, the finesse or the acuity of expression attained by the subject who by hypothesis would be the perfect master of all these languages and all these various modes of expression."8

But this view is contested by a significant number of thinkers who would vehemently deny the possibility of any direct and immediate non-symbolic knowledge of the reality, distinct from all other types of normal human knowledge. Thus, in the words of W.M. Urban: "All knowledge to be knowledge must be expressible. That which cannot be expressed cannot be said to be either true or false. All adequate expression, however, must, I shall maintain, be linguistic, for only linguistic communication is ultimately intelligible."9 Elsewhere the same author states:

“Truth, in the last analysis, is immanent in discourse – the sum total of intelligible discourse is the truth. *Veritas in dicto, non in re consistit*."

Before we discuss the points raised by Mr. Urban and offer our comments thereupon it would be better if we state in the first instance the principal arguments that are generally advanced against the notion of the ineffability of mystic-spiritual knowledge.

**The ‘Myth’ of Ineffability**

"*The limits of my language are the limits of my world.*"

(Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

"*Il n'y pas d'expérience sans paroles.*" ("There is no experience without speech.")


"*There is no knowledge without expression. Expression is part of the knowing process.*"

(W.M. Urban, *Language and Reality*, p. 348.)

Here are the main arguments, summarised in their briefest outline, that are supposed to invalidate the claim of verbal inexpressibility and incommunicability of the lofty and profound spiritual experiences:

(i) For all human knowledge, verifiability and communicability are two interlinked and inseparable processes. Whatever cannot be verbally communicated to fellow human beings remains outside the pale of verification and thus ceases to be *necessarily* true or even meaningfully significant: to speak of the ineffability of spiritual truths is almost to speak of something unsubstantial and otiose. In the words of Prof. Urban:

“The limits of my language are the limits of my world. This does not necessarily mean the dogmatic denial of anything beyond that which we can express, but it does mean – and indeed must mean – that it is only about that which can be expressed that questions of truth and falsity can be significantly raised. That being the case, it
is in discourse — and discourse alone — that intelligibility and truth alike can ultimately be found. The totality of intelligible discourse is the truth.”

(ii) We know that to Plato language seemed to be a veil interposed between us and reality, which has to be torn away and cast aside if we would see reality face to face. And in our time Bergson has emphatically put forward the view that our language is by no means moulded on reality and therefore to know reality we must perforce abandon language and the categories generated by language. And since “language, by reason of its lowly origin and nature, is incapable of apprehending and expressing reality... [it] may be used in another way, not to represent, but to bring the hearer to a point where he himself may transcend language and pass to incommunicable insight.” Indeed, for Bergson, reality has to be known by a direct intuition in some sort of a “pure experience” discovered by the stripping off of the veil of speech.

But this intuitional knowledge of which Bergson speaks, this “knowledge by pure acquaintance – pure presentational immediacy” is altogether denied any status of knowledge by the philosophers of language we have been discussing in our essay. Ernst Cassirer dubs it ‘a mythical phase of knowledge’ and others scoff at it as arising from “that crepuscular depth of mind where ‘intuitions’ are supposed to be born, without any midwifery of symbols, without due process of thought.” 

For, according to them, there is no such thing as an intuitional knowledge devoid of all expression: intuition is, indeed, impossible without expression. This thesis of the identity of intuition and expression was first developed by Benedetto Croce in his well-known work Aesthetic or General Linguistic, primarily in connection with aesthetics, but he extended it to cover the entire range of knowledge.

Prof. Urban, amongst others, has taken up the same theme and postulated the principle of the inseparability of language and knowledge. Thus, according to him, “Knowing in any significant sense of the word is inseparable from language; in a very real sense, language creates the world of cognitive meanings.... One

12. Ibid., p. 55.
does not first possess an object in knowing and then expresses the
type of that object in terms of arbitrary and conventional signs,
but the expression is a constitutive part of the knowing itself. It is
this thesis that we wish to maintain.\textsuperscript{14}

(iii) All true knowledge must be at its bottom rational know­
ledge; for, “rationality is the essence of mind, and symbolic
transformation its elementary process.... The very idea of a non­
rational source of any knowledge vitiates the concept of mind as an
organ of understanding. And the sort of ‘intuitive’ knowledge
which Bergson extols above all rational knowledge because it is
supposedly not mediated by any formulating (and hence deform­
ing) symbol is itself perfectly rational.... For rationality is em­
boiled in every mental act.... It permeates the peripheral activities
of the human nervous system, just as truly as the cortical func­tions.”\textsuperscript{15}

Thus, reality being in its nature rational (le réel est rationnel: Hegel) and rationality being the essence of mind the cognitive
medium and, finally, symbolic transformation being the intrinsic
process of this rationality, it follows ipso facto that all significant
knowledge of reality must be expressible through adequate sym­
bols and the system of these symbols will itself constitute the
language of discourse. For, after all, what is a language if not the
symbolic “representation, Darstellung, of one element of expe­
rience through another— the bi-polar relation between the sign or
symbol and the thing signified or symbolized, and the conscious­
ness of this relation.”\textsuperscript{16}

(iv) Because of the principle of symbolic translatibility, an
adequate symbolization of reality in any particular form must be
capable of being transcribed in the framework of conceptual
symbolism, that is to say, of being expressed in conceptual
thought. And thought is essentially inseparable from language
(Worthhaftigkeit des Denkens)\textsuperscript{17}. “When this principle is denied the
denial is,” so is it contended, “founded upon certain equivocations
and errors. It is undeniable that we can think with geometric
figures, algebraic signs, and ideographic symbols — in short,
without any words — but we forgot that these are also languages,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14} W.M. Urban, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 347.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} S.K. Langer, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 80.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} W.M. Urban, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 66.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} See W.M. Urban, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 347.
\end{itemize}
and that if we seek to communicate what we think we cannot do so without resorting at some points to ordinary language." 18 (Was it not Leibnitz who advised to consider as null and chimerical all that could not be ultimately reduced to ordinary language and that, too, in the clearest possible way?) 19

This attitude, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, arises from the fact that "the intellect does not consider that it knows a thing until it has reduced its awareness of it to the terms of thought, not, that is to say, until it has put it into a system of representative mental concepts, and this kind of knowledge gets its most decisive completeness when it can be put into clear, precise and defining speech." 20

(v) Wherever there is any valid fact to report, there must be existent a suitable language to clothe it symbolically. Impossibility of linguistic representation cannot but imply vague and confused awareness. For, as Wittgenstein has put it: "Everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly. Everything that can be said can be said clearly." 21

And what is more, all that cannot be put in the form of well-defined concepts allowing of systematic handling cannot, in truth, possess any validity of cognitive expressiveness; they are to be treated as 'symptomatic expressions' of the subject's emotions, feelings, desires, and what not. Indeed, "everything that is not speakable thought is feeling..." 22 They cannot be subjected to the symbolization of thought: they can but convey the "symptoms of the inner life, like tears and laughter, crooning, or profanity." 23 Has not the well-known linguistic philosopher Rudolf Carnap declared: "Many linguistic utterances are analogous to laughing in that they have only an expressive function, no representative function.... Metaphysical propositions – lyrical verse – have only an expressive function, but no representative function; metaphysical propositions are neither true nor false, because they assert nothing.... But they are, like laughing, lyrics and music, expressive." 24

22. Susanne K. Langer, op. cit., p. 70.
23. Ibid., p. 67.
Consequently, according to logicians who investigate the limits of linguistic expression, “the knowable is a clearly defined field, governed by the requirement of what they call ‘discursive projectibility’.... Nothing that cannot be ‘projected’ in discursive form is accessible to the human mind at all, and any attempt to understand anything but demonstrable fact is bootless ambition.... Outside this domain is the inexpressible realm of feeling, of formless desires and satisfactions,... forever incognito and incommunicado.... From the ineffable sphere nothing but nonsense can be conveyed....”

(vi) Another objection that is raised against the notion of ineffability of mystic-spiritual knowledge is based on the idea of the uniqueness of mind as an instrument of cognition. Since all human knowledge as knowledge, - so is it argued, - has to come through the instrumentality of mind and since mind-consciousness, whether already developed or as yet undeveloped, is essentially the same for all human beings, any knowledge clearly grasped by one subject must be potentially formulative and communicable to all other human beings. For, as has been asserted by Maurice Mehauden:

“The unity of the constitution and functioning of human mind as also that of the human Person stands against the situation that there could be two different types of human knowledge altogether disparate, and which would be:

“On the one hand, the knowledge of what can be expressed and communicated to others...

“and on the other, the knowledge of what has to be excluded from communicability and expression: the so-called ineffable knowledge.

“The notion of ‘the Ineffable’ carries thus in itself a fundamental internal contradiction which would invalidate it whether in relation to the knowledge or to the object of knowledge.”

(vii) But, then, how to explain the fact that the mystics always refer to their experiences and spiritual knowledge as something escaping expression and verbal communication?

The explanation, according to these thinkers, is not far to seek.

The predicament of the mystics arises uniquely from the fact that the knowledge they are referring to is still in a chaotic immature state; with maturation this knowledge is sure to cross the threshold of ineffability and be accessible to proper formulation and communication. Thus, in the words of M. Mehauden:

"The true nature of the Ineffable is revealed in the fact that its incommunicability is linked to a state as yet chaotic: the 'Ineffable' is another name for the psychic lacking in maturity, which, for this very reason, escapes conceptual transcription, without proving in the least that this Ineffable, this Unutterable, this Inexpressible whether partially or totally, temporarily or definitively, would be by nature supernatural and essentially different from other psychic manifestations which, being themselves sufficiently ripe, escape the chaos of fermenting subconscience and thus become communicable."

And the author concludes: "The 'Ineffable' is nothing but the unripe psychic, the amorphous psychic."

Now this non-maturity of the psychic states, which imprisons the subject within the confines of inexpressibility and incommunicability, may be, according to Maurice Mehauden, due to three contingencies:

(a) Either it is just a temporary chaos that reigns amongst the various constitutive elements of the experience;

(b) or, perhaps, the subtlety of the experience transcends the linguistic capability of the particular subject;

(c) or, finally, there is some inherent logical contradiction vitiating any clear formulation of the experience.

In the first case, the inexpressibility is provisional and eliminable with time; in the second case, the ineffability is altogether extrinsic and will vanish with another subject possessing greater expressional competence; and in the third case, inherent logical contradiction turns it into a pseudo-problem. For "the contradictory nature of the constitutive elements would not allow of any clarification or of any precise communication: these elements remain fundamentally irreducible and would end in mutual cancellation if they are pressed to precision."

The sum and substance of all the arguments that have gone

before may be trenchantly put in the following words of Maurice Mehauden:

“There is no veritable ‘Ineffable’ in the sense of any supernormal, supra-mental knowledge: there is only some sort of illusion which might be termed the ‘Ineffable-Pseudo-knowledge’, an illusion that blends in the complacent mystic into what might be called the ‘Ineffable-Fairydom,’ in order to characterise the soul-state of the subject who decorates this state with the epithet ‘Ineffable’ simply because he believes that, thanks to it, he would be able to rise to a supernatural level, or perhaps because he has the actual feeling that he has really risen to that level.”

Such, then, is the critique, formidable in appearance, raised against the very notion of ineffability of any spiritual experience however lofty or profound it may be. But yet the indubitable fact remains that representative mystics of all ages and climes, beginning with the master-mystics of the Rig-Veda and the Upanishads and coming down to those of our own day have repeatedly asserted the utter impotence of man-made words before the problem of expressing the supreme spiritual experiences. They—and some of them are intellectual giants themselves—are all of one accord in declaring that there are orders of mystical knowledge, perfectly cogent and clear in themselves, which would defy all attempts at formulation in any known or unknown or even imaginable human speech, ‘yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasā saha’ (“from where the Speech along with Mind returns baffled.”)

How to reconcile and heal this dichotomy of positions? For that we have to successively explore the questions:

What is the essential nature of a language? Can thought exist without the clothing of words? Does conceptual thought represent the supreme process of knowledge? Is there any possibility of knowledge without concepts? What is the relation between logic and reality? Does ineffability imply at the same time unknowability? And is the avowal of ineffability synonymous with vague and confused awareness? etc., etc.

The Ineffable Knowledge

“There is then a supreme Reality eternal, absolute and infinite... It is indefinable and inconceivable by finite and defining Mind; it is ineffable by a mind-created speech... And yet, though in this way unknowable to us, it is not altogether and in every way unknowable; it is self-evident to itself and, although inexpressible, yet self-evident to a knowledge by identity of which the spiritual being in us must be capable...”

(Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, p. 322)

“Mind is that which does not know, which tries to know and which never knows except as in a glass darkly.

(Ibid., p. 118.)

“Mind is a passage, not a culmination.”

(Ibid., p. 128.)

At the very outset we would like to make one point clear. When the mystics refer to the ineffability of their experience, they do not avow by that any obscure, amorphous or confused state of their knowledge. Far from it: the genuinely spiritual knowledge is the surest of all knowledge and the mystic possessing it harbours not the slightest confusion as regards its status or content. As Sri Aurobindo has so forcefully and beautifully put it:

“The Divine must be... a certitude not only as concrete but more concrete than anything sensed by ear or eye or touch in the world of Matter... When the Peace of God descends on you, when the Divine Presence is there within you, when the Ananda rushes on you like a sea, when you are driven like a leaf before the wind by the breath of the Divine Force, when Love flowers out from you on all creation, when Divine Knowledge floods you with a Light which illumines and transforms in a moment all that was before dark, sorrowful and obscure, when all that is becomes part of the One Reality, when the Reality is all around you, you feel at once by the spiritual contact, by the inner vision, by the illumined and seeing thought, by the vital sensation and even by the very physical sense, everywhere you see, hear, touch only the Divine. Then you can much less doubt it or deny it than you can deny or doubt daylight or air or the sun in heaven – for of these physical
things you cannot be sure but they are what your senses represent them to be; but in the concrete experiences of the Divine, *doubt is impossible,*”[^32] [Italics ours.]

And yet the mystics frankly admit their predicament when they are asked to offer an adequate verbal or conceptual representation of the nature and content of their spiritual knowledge. But this is, be it noted, not because of any lack in precision or clarity of their knowledge, but uniquely due to the insufficiency of mind-made speech as a proper or adequate medium of expression.

But wherein lies this inadequacy and inaptitude? We shall presently discuss this question. But, for the moment, let us tersely specify that the core-problem is the incompatibility of normal mind-consciousness and its constructions with the spiritual order of reality; every other difficulty issues forth from this basic insufficiency, as a necessary consequence. And those thinkers who fail to appreciate the mystics’ position do so because of certain erroneous assumptions, e.g.,

(i) consciousness must be synonymous with mind;
(ii) mind is the only possible cognitive instrument available to man;
(iii) any valid knowledge and conceptual thought-process are inseparable one from the other;
(iv) there can be no thought without the accompanying correlate of verbal expression;
(v) anything to be considered as reality must submit to the norms of mental logic.

Let us examine these assumptions one by one and find out where they stray from the actual reality.

All cognitive consciousness appears to us to be mental at its bottom. But this identification of consciousness with mentality and mental awareness is, to say the least, a most unfortunate misplaced exaggeration creating much confusion of values. Consciousness indicates a self-aware force of existence and our mentality is but an intermediary term of this *cit-śakti* or the universally operative Consciousness-Force. Below mind, consciousness sinks into vital or even physical movements which appear to us as subconscient; it then emerges in mind constituting the specific consciousness of

[^32]: *Letters on Yoga*, p. 168.
man the mental being; but that is not its farthest limit or the highest height. Above mentality it ascends into yet greater supra-mental forms which thus remain for the normal awareness of man altogether superconscient. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“In us consciousness is Mind, and our mind is ignorant and imperfect, an intermediate power that has grown and is still growing towards something beyond itself: there were lower levels of consciousness that came before it and out of which it arose, there must very evidently be higher levels to which it is itself arising. Before our thinking, reasoning, reflecting mind there was a consciousness unthinking but living and sentient, and before that there was the subconscious and the unconscious; after us or in our yet unevolved selves there is likely to be waiting a greater consciousness, self-luminous, not dependent on constructive thought: our imperfect and ignorant thought-mind is certainly not the last word of consciousness, its ultimate possibility. For the essence of consciousness is the power to be aware of itself and its objects, and in its true nature this power must be direct, self-fulfilled and complete...”  

33. [Italics ours] And since in man, in his normal status of awareness, the consciousness is still uncertain, indirect and incomplete, mind cannot be considered to be the instrument of knowledge. As a matter of fact, mind has to remain content with knowing things only by their signs and forms, their properties and functionings, and their relations to other things, but it can never expect to grasp ‘the occult essence and self-being of things’. For, essentially, mind is not a faculty of knowledge, it is an instrument of analysis and synthesis, but never of essential knowledge. It is, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, a faculty for the seeking of knowledge without ever attaining it, a faculty for expressing as much as it can manage to gain of it in forms of relative thought. But “If we would have a greater, a profounder and a real knowledge, – a knowledge and not an intense but formless sentiment such as comes sometimes to certain deep but inarticulate parts of our mentality, – Mind has to make room for another consciousness which will fulfil Mind by transcending it or reverse and so rectify its operations after leaping beyond it: the summit of mental knowledge is only a vaulting-board from which that leap can be taken. The utmost mission of

33. The Life Divine, pp. 1016-17.
Mind is to train our obscure consciousness... to enlighten its blind instincts, random intuitions, vague perceptions till it shall become capable of this greater light and this higher ascension.\(^{34}\)

We thus see that mind represents but a preparatory term of consciousness and the main significance of the whole process of man's highest intellectual activity lies in the fact that it leads him through the mental discrimination to the crucial point where the veil is lifted and he acquires the *sight* to see.

Thus, to assert that what is not known by mind is by nature unknowable or that there can be no knowledge except what is acquired through the agency of mind, is to speak utter nonsense. To quote again Sri Aurobindo:

"The Unknown is not the Unknowable; it need not remain the unknown for us, unless we choose ignorance or persist in our first limitations. For to all things that are not unknowable, all things in the universe, there correspond in that universe faculties which can take cognisance of them, and in man, the microcosm, these faculties are always existent and at a certain stage capable of development. We may choose not to develop them; where they are partially developed, we may discourage and impose on them a kind of atrophy. But, fundamentally, all possible knowledge is knowledge within the power of humanity."\(^{35}\)

Yes, 'within the power of humanity', but not necessarily within the grasp of mind. Indeed, to consider the thought-process to be the highest means of acquiring any valid knowledge and to believe that all knowledge to be brought within the ken of man must have to be reduced to the conceptual form, is, as we shall presently see, one of the besetting superstitions of the rational mind. As a matter of fact, all true knowledge is essentially seer-knowledge: beyond that, knowledge by intimate internal experience; and finally a knowledge by sheer identity.

**Thought-Knowledge and Spiritual Knowledge**

"*Knowledge waits seated beyond mind and intellectual reasoning, throned in the luminous vast of illimitable self-vision.*"

(Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p. 121.)

“A concrete ever deepening wisdom waiting on more and more riches of infinite experience. and not the confident abstract logic of the narrow and incompetent human mind is likely to be the key to a divine supra-human knowledge.”

(Sri Aurobindo, The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 277.)

“The final test of truths... is not reason but spiritual illumination verified by abiding fact of spirit; a single decisive spiritual experience may undo a whole edifice of reasonings and conclusions erected by the logical intelligence.”

(The Life Divine, p. 469.)

The human mind, which relies mainly on thought for the acquirement and holding of knowledge, considers that to be its highest operation: conceptual thought-process is the very staff of support of the mental search after truth. The thought labouring in the logical intellect seems best to fulfil the role of a guide and governor of mental action and thus gives to the mind ‘a sense of sure definiteness, security and completeness in its knowledge’. But, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out: “Mental knowledge is not an integral but always a partial knowledge. It adds constantly detail to detail, but has a difficulty in relating them aright; its wholes too are not real but incomplete wholes which it tends to substitute for the more real and integral knowledge. And even if it arrived at a kind of integral knowledge, it would still be by a sort of putting together, a mental and intellectual arrangement, an artificial unity and not an essential and real oneness. If that were all, the mind might conceivably arrive at some kind of half reflection half translation of an integral knowledge, but the radical malady would still be that it would not be the real thing, not the direct truth, not truth itself in its body and essence.”

If, then, there is a spiritual order of reality not obvious to the senses and reason, atindriyam, it must be sought and known by other means than our intellectual scrutiny. For, in itself, intellec-

tual analysis and synthesis cannot go beyond the stage of ordering of conceptions, – perhaps, at its best, of rightly arranging some true conceptions. But this is not the kind of knowledge aimed at by the men of the spirit. We may even go so far as to state, following the injunction of Sri Krishna in the Gita, that a complete intellectual passivity, the power of dismissing all thought, the power of the mind not to think at all, is demanded of all those who would like to possess the truths of the self. But this luminous mental silence should not be confounded with the subject’s incapacity for thought. To quote Sri Aurobindo:

“This power of silence is a capacity and not an incapacity, a power and not a weakness. It is a profound and pregnant stillness. Only when the mind is thus entirely still, like clear, motionless and level water, in a perfect purity and peace of the whole being, and the soul transcends thought, can the Self which exceeds and originates all activities and becomings, the Silence from which all words are born, the Absolute of which all relativities are partial reflections, manifest itself in the pure essence of our being.”

A genuine spiritual knowledge – and we cannot but insist on this point again and again – is not to be arrived at through a ratiocinative process of thinking or by a logomachy of the logical mind. For it is not a very subtle and opulent conceptual thought, whose other name is spiritual awareness. “The essence of spiritual knowledge is an intrinsic self-existent consciousness; all its action of knowledge, indeed all its action of any kind, must be that consciousness formulating itself. All other knowledge is consciousness oblivious of itself and striving to return to its own awareness of itself and its contents; it is self-ignorance labouring to transform itself back into self-knowledge.”

We thus see that spiritual knowledge, as distinguished from mental knowledge, is not made up of conceptual thoughts or adroitly formulated ideas; it arises clear and precise from a spiritual intuition, from a spiritual experience in the very substance of our consciousness. For, this kind of knowledge is fundamentally a consciousness. Thus knowledge without concepts is perfectly possible and that is a higher type of knowledge into the bargain. To substantiate our point we should like to cite here what the Master-Mystic Sri Aurobindo has written reporting one of his

major experiences:

“My first major experience – radical and overwhelming, though not, as it turned out, final and exhaustive – came after and by the exclusion and silencing of all thought – there was, first, what might be called a spiritually substantial or concrete consciousness of stillness and silence, then the awareness of some sole and supreme Reality in whose presence things existed only as forms, but forms not at all substantial or real or concrete; but this was all apparent to a spiritual perception and essential or impersonal sense and there was not the least concept or idea of reality or unreality or any other notion, for all concept or idea was hushed or rather entirely absent in the absolute stillness. These things were known directly through the pure consciousness and not through the mind, so there was no need of concepts or words or names.”³⁹ (Italics ours)

It is, we repeat, illusive to consider that the thought-knowledge gained through the mediation of reason can ever embody any definitive truth of things: it has neither any access to the root of things nor for that matter can it embrace the totality of their secret mysteries. In reality, if we examine carefully, we shall find that intuition and not reason is always our first guide. “Intuition always stands veiled behind our mental operations. Intuition brings to man those brilliant messages from the Unknown which are the beginning of his higher knowledge. Reason only comes in afterwards to see what profit it can have of the shining harvest.”⁴⁰

For essentially true knowledge we have to step back from the arena of conceptual thought and rely instead more and more on revelatory vision and luminous insight. For

“There is a deeper seeing from within
And when we have left these small purlieus of mind,
A greater vision meets us on the heights
In the luminous wideness of the Spirit’s gaze.”

(Savitri, Book II, Canto V, p. 168.)

Also:

“Mental knowledge is not true knowledge; true knowledge is that which is based on the true sight, the sight of the Seer, of Surya, of the Kavi. Mental thought is not knowledge, it is a golden

40. The Life Divine, p. 67.
lid placed over the face of the Truth, the Sight, the divine Ideation, the Truth Consciousness. When that is removed, sight replaces mental thought; the all-embracing truth-ideation, Mahas, Veda, Drṣṭi, replaces the fragmentary mental activity."

The Vedic mystics (otherwise called the Rishis or the Seers, for they did not think out the Truth but rather 'saw' it) always sought and eulogised this supra-mental faculty of constantly growing inner and higher perception which they termed ketu in order to distinguish it from the eye of sense or even of reason (cakṣu). This luminous seizing of truths, this internal spiritual sight, drṣṭi or drk-sakti, far surpasses the indications or representations of thought and makes the truth of all things directly evident to us, pratyakṣa.

As a matter of fact, this seer-knowledge is always much more authentic than the thought-knowledge; a consciousness proceeding by sight has a much greater and more direct access to the truth of things, than the consciousness relying on the crutches of thought alone. Indeed, different modes of cognition derive in various degrees from what Sri Aurobindo has called 'a fourfold order of knowledge': (i) a knowledge by identity, which is the original and fundamental way of knowing; (ii) a knowledge by direct intimate contact; (iii) a knowledge by separative direct contact; and (iv) a wholly separative knowledge by indirect contact. The true knowledge, the essential knowledge in its pristine purity and potency is thus seen to be not merely an intellectual ideation of the truth; it is above everything else a "realisation", in the completest sense of the term, — a knowledge by absolute identity, tādātmya-jñāna.

And, at bottom, this is the nature of spiritual knowledge, transcending the cannons of mental reason and surpassing the reach of finite thought.

We are now in a position to consider the question of the relation of knowledge and language and show why the content of any major spiritual experience is basically ineffable in any mind-made speech.

**Why Ineffable?**

"He sees the secret things no words can speak...
The idea, the speech that labels more than it lights"

*(Savitri, Book I, Canto IV, p. 50.)*

“All words belong to the world of appearance.
(The Mother, Bulletin, August 1964, p. 91.)

“There are a hundred ways of approaching the Supreme Reality and, as is the nature of the way taken, so will be the nature of the ultimate experience by which one passes into That which is ineffable, That of which no report can be given to the mind or expressed by any utterance.”
(The Life Divine, p. 470.)

Spiritual knowledge, we have had occasion to mention before, is in itself self-luminous, perfectly self-possessed and knowable by a supernormal, suprasensuous and supra-mental way of cognition; but the mystics invariably aver that it is by its very nature unthinkable and ineffable. Thus, the Upanishadic Rishis are never tired of asserting that so far as the ultimate truth is concerned, “speech cannot reach there nor can the mind arrive at it”, “avānmanasagocaram”, “not with the mind has man the power to seize the Truth, no, nor with the words”, “naiva vācā na manasā prāptum śakyo”.43 For, the Goal the spiritual seekers aspire after is “unseen and incommunicable, unseizable, featureless, unthinkable, and unnameable,” “adrśtamavyavahāryam agrāhyam alakṣa­nam acintyam avyapadesyam,”44 It is indeed “the Letterless”, “amātraḥ”45 utterly beyond the grasp of man-made speech.

But why this sentence of impotency passed against all mind-constructed language as a vehicle of communication of spiritual experience? Let us state in brief a few salient factors — the principal amongst them — responsible for this ineffability of mystic knowledge.

(A) Reality is not exhausted by the domain of objective external solidities seized by our normal senses and erroneously considered by our physical mind to be the only order of reality possible. There are different orders of reality of which the so-called objective and physical is only one and a most minor one at that. Our subjective spiritual experiences belong to a domain of happenings as real as — and in a true sense much more real than — the field of outward physical events. Simply because this realm of

43. Katha Upanishad, II. 3.12.
44. Mandukya Upanishad, 7.
45. Ibid., 12.
spiritual reality is beyond the reach of man’s normal experience and the grasp of his surface external perception and cognition, this should not be deemed a mere figment of the mystic’s illusive imagination. But the knowledge of the truths of this domain, otherwise called ‘spiritual knowledge’, has to be gained by other means than the conceptual discursive process of mind: discursive knowledge fails as an organ for grasping reality. It is only by the progressive opening of the consciousness towards spiritual experience and by breaking through the immured confines of our mind that we can expect to attain to these truths of the spiritual and normally superconscient reality. For, “these experiences... are not mental constructions, nor vital movements; they are essential things, not things merely thought but realities, not mentally felt but felt in our very underlying substance and essence.”

And, hence, it is quite easy to comprehend that those who have not, through the vertical leap of their consciousness, received these spiritual verities in their realised knowledge, can never be given any adequate representation of these things, however wide and far they might horizontally stretch their mental awareness. We remember in this connection the witty remark of E. Rosenstock: “He who has never prayed, to him the meaning of the name of God is for ever closed; even if he would search through all the dictionaries!”

Indeed, the content of a spiritual experience cannot be verbally communicated to one who has not lived it. As the Katha Upanishad has so long ago declared:

“The self-born has set the doors of the body to face outwards, therefore the soul of a man gazes outward and not at the self within: hardly a wise man here and there, desiring immortality, turns his eyes inward and sees the self within him.”

(B) Our mind-consciousness suffers from some intrinsic limitations which make it absolutely incompetent to understand the nature or operations of spiritual perception and reception of knowledge. For example, mind as a cognitive medium is basically

48. “parāṇci khāṇi vyaṭrṇat svayambhustasmāt parāṇ paśyai nāntarātman, kaścidhīrāḥ prayagātmānāmadeśad avṛttacaksurāmṛtatvam icchān.”
(Katha Upanishad, II, I.1: Sri Aurobindo’s translation.)
analytic and divisive in its nature. The idea of measure and separation and distinction is inherent in all its operations. Unity and Infinity, the hall-mark of genuinely profound spiritual knowledge, are shadowy to its vision and conception, and hence, as far as the mind consciousness is concerned, what is spiritually perceived as Unity and Infinity remains ipso facto indescribable and incommunicable. As Sri Aurobindo has pointed out:

"Mind can conceive with precision divisions as real; it can conceive a synthetic totality or the finite extending itself indefinitely; it can grasp aggregates of divided things and the sameness underlying them; but the ultimate unity and absolute infinity are to its consciousness of things abstract notions and unseizable quantities, not something that is real to its grasp."49

How then, through the miraculous agency of what kind of mind-made speech, can the mystic expect to convey to the analytical dividing mental consciousness the true nature of the unitary spiritual consciousness in which he lives?

(C) The Absolute, one of the essential goals of all serious and sincere spiritual pursuit, is in itself indefinable by mental reason, and has to be approached through ever growing and heightening and deepening experience alone. Our mind sees only the relatives, it vaguely surmises the existence of something which has to be the truth, the source and the continent of all relatives, yet exceeding them all, however enlarged and global the relative might be. "We see by reason that such an Absolute must exist; we become by spiritual experience aware of its existence: but even when we are most aware of it, we cannot describe it because our language and thought can deal only with the relative. The Absolute is for us the Ineffable."50

(D) The highest spiritual knowledge is something that self-exists always, one and whole, holding Time in its secure grasp, and seeing past, present and future in a single regard. But this trikāladarsitā, this impeccable Vision of eternal simultaneity, is, for mind, something impossible even to conceive of, leave aside to realise. Mind has to think out in sequential steps, necessarily separating what are inseparable in the spiritual regard, thus vitiating the proper comprehension of the reality. We may recall here the enigmatic but pregnant utterance of Rishi Pippalada:

50. Ibid., 376.
"Children of death are the letters when they are used as three, the embracing and the inseparable letters."  

Sri Aurobindo too warns us against the illusion of mind-made speech,52 invented and brought into use by the temporal consciousness of man, when we happen to employ it in order to conceive in terms of Time things that have their origin and spiritual validity only in the Eternal. Indeed, what is meant by 'the awareness of the beginningless, endless, ever-new moment,' a fact of capital importance in the supreme spiritual consciousness, cannot be verbally expressed to one who himself has not experienced that realisation.

(E) Our mental nature and mental thought are fundamentally based on a consciousness of the finite; the supreme spiritual perception is, on the contrary, native to a consciousness of the infinite. Thus the standards and forms of mental cognition and thought are altogether insufficient to judge or appreciate the highest spiritual knowledge. It is, for example, beyond the grasp of mental perception or formulation to understand or describe what Sri Aurobindo has called 'supramental nature'. "A mental description of supramental nature could only express itself either in phrases which are too abstract or mental figures which might turn it into something quite different from its reality... mental ideas and formulations cannot decide anything or arrive at any precise definition or determination; because they are not near enough to the law and self-vision of supramental Nature."53

Thus, when the Mother was asked to give an idea of the true perception of the physical world as viewed through the supramental eye, She had to plead inability to do so. Here are Her own words:

"It is just that which one cannot say! When you have the vision and the consciousness of the order of truth, of what is direct, the direct expression of the truth, you have immediately an impression of something inexpressible, because all words belong to the other domain; all images, comparisons, expressions belong to the other domain.

"I had this great difficulty precisely all the time (it was the 29th February) during which I lived in this consciousness of the direct

51. Prashna Upanishad, V.6 (Sri Aurobindo's translation).
52. See The Life Divine, p. 76.
53. Ibid., p. 966.
manifestation of the Truth, I tried to formulate what I was feeling, what I was seeing – it was impossible. There were no words. And immediately, the mere formula itself caused an instantaneous fall-back into the other consciousness...

"I believe one can say nothing. I do not feel myself capable of saying, because whatever one says means only approximations which are not interesting...

"We are obliged to use words that move, because for us everything moves, but this change of consciousness is not a movement – it is not a movement...So then how can you speak of that, describe that?...

"Even if we say, ‘it is a state taking the place of another’, ‘take the place of’, immediately we introduce movement... all words are like that, what is it we are able to say?” *(Italics ours.)*

(F) Another insuperable difficulty that the mystics have to face, while seeking to give expression to their spiritual knowledge, is that the level of consciousness at which any mental formulation of spiritual experience becomes possible, is far, far below the level at which the experience is actually realised. Thus, our mind-consciousness being as it is at present, – a power and faculty of half-enlightened ignorance, – the very incompatibility of the two levels – the level of experience and that of formulation – renders the mentalisation of spiritual knowledge dead and dry and devoid of all real substance. In one of Her talks with one of Her disciples, the Mother has so beautifully explained this point that we feel tempted to quote from it *in extenso*:

“All that happens to us in the spiritual world, always we have the tendency to translate mentally.... What Sri Aurobindo calls ‘taking mental possession of the experience’... is done, so to say, almost automatically; unfortunately, the best part of the experience escapes always. To keep it intact, one must remain in the state where the experience is not mentalised... But if you want to transform life, if you want the spiritual experience to have an effect on the mind and the vital and the body, upon everyday action, indispensably you have to try to translate it mentally and accept the inevitable diminution until the day when the mind itself will be transformed and be capable of participating in the experience without deforming it....

"This transformation is just the most difficult point for the ordinary mind to accept, because it means that almost the faculty itself must be changed. All the functions have to be changed for the transformation to be possible. And we are so much accustomed to identify the faculty with the function that one doubts whether it is at all possible to think except in the manner in which one thinks ordinarily.

"It is only possible when one has the experience of a complete silence in the mental region and when the spiritual force, with its light and power comes down through the mind and makes it act directly without following its usual method of analysis and deduction and reasoning. All these faculties that are considered as the normal activities of the mind must be stopped and the spiritual Light, Consciousness and Power must be able to express themselves directly without the need of going through these means.

"But before we arrive there, all our experiences in order to reach the external consciousness must needs pass through the ordinary mental method of observation, analysis and deduction, and then the very essence of the experience vanishes, there remains only a kind of very dark bark that has lost all its power of realisation — almost, almost lost.

"For people who have a predominant intellectual activity, this is an almost absolute necessity; they must needs seize everything, all inner experiences, and begin to formulate them. If, besides, they have a power of expression, they try to arrange them in words and phrases. But when you have lived these experiences and when you have perceived this fall, this descending line between experience and expression, you see at each step the profound reality of the experience receding, fading away into the background instead of being in front and dominating the whole being. It recedes slowly and what remains outside is only a kind of dry and cold imitation.... And this power to formulate, you pay dearly for it."55

(Italics ours)

(G) Another interesting feature of all deep spiritual experience places it beyond the pale of mental formulation in self-consistent terms. We are referring to the indefinable nature of the Supreme Reality. Because of its nature of supra-rational inalienable Unity, it is absolutely free from all mental formulations, however com-

prehensive these may be. Thus, when we seek to envisage It by the mind, we have perforce to proceed through an unending succession of separate conceptions and affirmations; yet in the end we come to realise that we have to negate even our largest conceptions and the so-termed most comprehensive experience: the Reality indeed exceeds all definitions.

Thus the ancient sages of India spoke of Brahman, the supreme Reality, both negatively and positively, in apparently contradictory terms. They said of It: ‘neti, neti,’ ‘It is not this, It is not that, It is not anything formable.’ But at the same time they took care to affirm: ‘It is this, It is that, It is all,’ ‘iti, iti’. They spoke of it as ‘the Eternity that is the all-containing ever-new moment’, and ‘the Infinity which is the same all-containing all-pervading point without magnitude.’ Speaking about the Atman or Self, the Katha Upanishad nonchalantly affirms in the same breath: “Finer than the fine, huger than the huge... Seated He journeys far off, lying down He goes everywhere.”56 The Rishi of the Isha Upanishad also speaks in the same vein: “One unmoving that is swifter than the mind... That, standing, passes beyond others as they run.... 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.”57

And we cannot fail to recall in this connection the delectable utterance of Sri Aurobindo:

“It is the cosmic and the supracosmic spirit,... the Ever Unborn who is endlessly born, the Infinite who is innumerably finite, the multitudinous One, the complex Simple, the many-sided Single, the Word of the Silence Ineffable, the impersonal omnipresent Person, the Mystery, translucent in highest consciousness to its own spirit, but to a lesser consciousness veiled in its own exceeding light and impenetrable for ever.”58

Now, how would the logical mind react to these self-contradictory affirmations about the supreme Reality which is, in fact, untranslatable into intellectual terms? The dimensional mind may

56. “anoraniyān mahato mahiyān... āsino dūrānīt vrajati śayāno yāti sarvataḥ.” (Katha Upanishad, 1-2, 20, 21.)
57. “anējadekāṁ manaso javiyo... taddhāvato’nyānatyeti tiṣṭhat... tadejati tannai­jati tad durée tadvantike. Tadantarasya sarvasya tadu sarvasyāsyā bāhyataḥ” (Isha Upanishad, 4, 5. Sri Aurobindo’s translation.)
very well exclaim: "These so-called statements are no statements of fact at all; they signify nothing but arrant nonsense, a froth of mystifying verbiage meaning nothing. For, these declarations of the mystics contradict an incontrovertible fact of existence formulated in the 'Law of Contradictions' which states: 'Two opposing and conflicting affirmations cannot both be true.' Thus, these irreconciliable opposites constitute but a mass of logical contradictions and are hence intellectually false and impossible in reality."

And, then, perhaps with a wise smile, the rational mentality may declare: "Ah, it is for this element of confused thinking, this blissfully chaotic state of awareness harbouring irreconciliable logical opposites, that the mystics plead the ineffability of their experience! Poor souls! they do not know that they are suffering from an illusion."

As a matter of fact, such is the view forcefully expressed by a thinker in the course of his paper "La Notion d'‘Ineffable’ et la Psychologie Comparée des Religions" submitted to the 21st session of the International Congress of Philosophy, held at Brussells in 1953. (The interested reader may consult pages 91-96 of Volume XI of the published Proceedings of the Congress.)

The men of the spirit will simply smile at the presumptuous claim of the logical mind to judge the validity or otherwise of spiritual experiences with the tiny probe of intellectual reason. For anyone having the genuine spiritual knowledge knows for certain that these conflicts of terms referred to above, although appearing so grotesque to the canons of mental logic, are yet accurately expressive of something that the mystics perceive in their spiritual awareness. In the spiritual knowledge of the Reality, there is no mutual cancellation of the statements, no incompatibility: one group of statements is but complementary to the other; it is, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, 'the dual statement of a single inescapable fact by human reason in human language' and this happens, "when mind and speech have passed beyond their natural limits and are striving to express a Reality in which their own conventions and necessary opposition disappear into an ineffable identity." 59

Otherwise, what to the dimensional mind are but irreconciliable

59. The Life Divine, p. 74.
opposites, are “to the constant vision and experience of the supramental Truth-consciousness... so simply and inevitably the intrinsic nature of each other that even to think of them as contraries is an unimaginable violence.”

But how to clothe this vision and experience in man-made speech and how to convey to the mortal mind an adequate representation of this supernal knowledge? That is not possible and, hence, ineffable is its name.

Finally, there is one more factor, perhaps overtopping all others, that makes spiritual knowledge practically ineffable to mind, in the sense of its verbal incommunicability. We are speaking of the disparateness in the fields of experience that the mystics and average men respectively command.

After all, what is a language for? Whatever else language is, one of its principal functions is to establish a meaningful communication between man and man. Now a linguistic communication is evidently a transaction between two parties, who may be conventionally designated as ‘speaker’ and ‘hearer’. Thus the problem of communication resolves itself into two correlative functions of expression and understanding; what the speaker intends to convey and what the hearer interprets to understand. When the intention and the interpretation coincide, the language transaction may be said to be successful.

Now, “a communication or language transaction is nothing but the use of symbols in such a way that acts of reference occur in the hearer which are similar in all relevant respects to those which are symbolized by them in the speaker.”

But this condition is very difficult to satisfy even under ordinary circumstances. Do we not know that all forms of fallacy that are discussed in logic can be reduced to ignorantia elenchi or ‘ignorance of terms’? And did not one great physicist feel exasperated when he saw the philosophers interpreting the language of physics in a way in which it was not intended to be, thus leading to various erroneous conclusions which leave the professional physicists flabbergasted.

60. The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 283.
Now, even if we consider that the 'speaker' on his part, in order to communicate his experiences, has succeeded in creating an ideal language which contains, in the words of W. Sellars, "a designation for every element in every state of affairs, past, present and future; that, in other words, claims to mirror the world by a complete and systematic one-to-one correspondence of designations", how to ensure that the 'hearer' will interpret in the right way the linguistic symbols employed by the 'speaker'?

And this problem of meaning becomes impossible of solution, when we have in view the situation in which the 'speaker' is a mystic reporting about his spiritual experiences and the 'hearer' happens to be a person of normal mental consciousness, having no direct and immediate access to the experiences in question. For, "even when they speak the same language it is a different order of perception to which the language refers, the products of two different grades of consciousness."

Thus there subsists between the two levels of consciousness a yawning gulf that no verbal communication can ever expect to bridge.

We have so far considered the question of the ineffability of spiritual knowledge from the point of view of the verbal incommunicability of the data of this knowledge to a 'hearer' still hooked to the binding-post of conceptual thought erected by the 'mortal mind'. But a question may be mooted: Apart from the extrinsic factor of a particular hearer's incapacity, are thought and speech intrinsically barred from becoming the vehicles of expression of the spiritual Reality?

Before we can expect to receive an answer to this question, we must be clear in our mind about what we mean by 'thought' and 'speech'. For, there are thoughts and thoughts, the verbal conceptual thought being no more than a minor form of them; and there are other types of speeches far transcending the capabilities of our ordinary human language.


64. Letters on Yoga, p. 191.
The Ascent of Thought

“But most her gaze pursued the birth of thought.”
(Savitri, Book VII, Canto VI, p. 538.)

“A wisdom waiting on Omniscience
Sat voiceless in a vast passivity;
It judged not, measured not, nor strove to know,
But listened for the veiled all-seeing Thought”
(Ibid., Book II, Canto XV, p. 300.)

“For Thought transcends the circles of mortal mind,
It is greater than its earthly instrument”
(Ibid., Book II, Canto XI, p. 260.)

The human mind, in its acquisition and deliberation of knowledge, leans so heavily upon the conceptual thought-process that it erroneously considers that to be the highest or at least the main process of knowledge. And so far as the verbal thought is concerned, to many thinkers thought and its corresponding verbal formulation are altogether inseparable—so much are they accustomed to thinking with words. This idea of the all-importance of words (‘words’ in the broadest sense of the term) in the task of comprehending the reality and giving it a thought-form, has been variously expressed by different philosophers. Thus:

“There is no experience without words.”... “There is no such thing as a silent reflection.”... “The competent seizes the essence without the mediacy of any figure, simply by pronouncing it.”... “We pronounce the Universal.”... “The pure Being is uttered.”... “A value is discovered only to a speaking consciousness.”... “There is no thought outside of words.”... “A thought seeking to self-exist, without any accompanying words, would not exist at all.”... “Language does not accompany a thought already made, rather accomplishes it.”... “The word is not the extrinsic sign of the thought; it constitutes the outer existence of the sense.”

Such, then, is the prime importance attached by the rational intelligence of man to thought and its verbal formulation for the reception and possession of knowledge. But to the mystics’ deeper

65. For these expressions, acknowledgement is due to Yvon Bellaval, Les Philosophes et leur Langage, pp. 146, 176, 62, 58, 185, 60.
vision of things, they appear in quite a different light.

In the spiritual order thought is indeed a secondary and by no means an indispensable process. And in its form of verbal thought, it can almost be considered, as Sri Aurobindo has put it, “a concession made by Knowledge to the Ignorance, because that Ignorance is incapable of making truth wholly lucid and intelligible to itself in all its extent and manifold implications except through the clarifying precision of significant sounds; it cannot do without this device to give to ideas an exact outline and an expressive body.”

But, evidently, this verbal garb is for the essential thought-operation only a useful device and machinery; and, since it is a device, it can be very well dispensed with under favourable circumstances – that is to say, when thought leaves the arena of conceptual formulation and ascends to its own higher forms. For, thought in itself, as distinct from its dispensable verbal trappings, is in its origin on the higher levels of spiritual consciousness, not a conception as such but a perception, a regard of the subject upon itself or something of itself as object. To quote Sri Aurobindo:

“In mind there is a surface response of perception to the contact of an observed or discovered object, fact or truth and a consequent conceptual formulation of it; but in the spiritual light there is a deeper perceptive response from the very substance of consciousness and a comprehending formulation in that substance, an exact figure of the revelatory ideograph in the stuff of the being, – nothing more, no verbal representation is needed for the precision and completeness of this thought knowledge.” (Italics ours).

But yet, we must point out, this seeing thought is not essential or indispensable for the reception or possession of spiritual knowledge. Thought, however high or however spiritual in character, is but a minor and secondary result or accompaniment of a deeper spiritual sight-cognition, never a means of acquirement of this knowledge. Thought, a comparatively external and superficial regard of the subject upon itself, “creates a representative image of truth; it offers that to the mind as a means of holding Truth and making it an object of knowledge; but the body itself of Truth is caught and exactly held in the sunlight of a deeper spiritual sight to which the representative figure created by thought is secondary

66. The Life Divine, p. 945.
67. Ibid, p. 945.
and derivative, powerful for communication of knowledge, but not indispensable for reception or possession of knowledge.”68 (Italics ours).

Thus, we have already noted in the description by Sri Aurobindo of one of his major spiritual experiences69 that there was absolutely no need of concepts or words or of any other thought-appendages; for the knowledge was received directly through the pure consciousness and not through the mind. Not merely that: we have seen, too, that any attempt at formulating the experience in terms of thought brings one back to the level of intellection, losing in the process much of the life of the experience.70

But this difficulty intervenes only when one seeks to clothe the spiritual experience in the garb of intellectual thought. But there is another kind of thought – not intellectual in its character – which “springs out as if it were a body or form of the experience or of the consciousness involved in it – or of a part of that consciousness... It has another light, another power in it, a sense within the sense. It is very clearly so with those thoughts that come without the need of words to embody them, thoughts that are of the nature of a direct seeing in the consciousness, even a kind of intimate sense and contact formulating itself into a precise expression of its awareness.”71

As a matter of fact, with each step of our ascension through a graded series of planes and powers of consciousness which lead us through ‘the domains of Other-Mind into the Beyond-Mind’, we encounter a different kind of thought, different in potency as well as in character. Let us follow in brief this march of the ascending Thought.

The normal thought-action of the mind is constituted of a triple motion. First and lowest is the habitual thought mind which itself has two movements: one, a kind of constant undercurrent of mechanically recurrent thought; the other, more actively working upon all new experience and reducing it to formulas of habitual

68. The Life Divine, p. 945.
69. See p. 156 supra.
70. See the Mother's words quoted on p. 163 supra.
71. Letters on Yoga, pp. 176-77.
thinking. A second grade of thinking activity is the pragmatic idea mind that acts creatively as a mediator between the idea and the life-power. The thought is only or mainly interesting to the soul on this mental level as a means for a large range of action and experience. A third gradation of thinking opens in us the pure ideative mind whose whole object is to have the delight of ideation, the search for truth, the effort to know itself and the world. This ideative mind is the highest reach of the intellect acting in its own power and for its own purpose.72

Now, once we cross the confines of the ordinary mind of man, we encounter on our ascending climb a series of hierarchised luminous planes of consciousness serving as links and bridges between the now normal waking mind of non-spiritual humanity and the native heights of pure spiritual being. These planes are in the ascending order:

(i) the Higher Mind; (ii) the Illumined Mind; (iii) the Intuitive Mind; (iv) the Overmind; and finally (v) the Supermind or Gnosis, the plane of absolute and everlasting Light, that transcends altogether the aparārdha or the lower hemisphere of existence.

The Higher Mind is the first plane of spiritual mind-consciousness to which the first ascent out of our normal mentality takes us. This is a Mind of automatic and spontaneous knowledge, knowledge assuming the nature of truth-Thought. For, “its special character, its activity of consciousness are dominated by Thought; it is a luminous thought-mind, a mind of spirit-born conceptual knowledge.”73

The kind of cognition characteristic of the Higher Mind, ‘the spiritual parent of our conceptive mental ideation,’ is the first that we acquire when we rise from the purlieus of conceptive and ratiocinative mind. “But here in this greater Thought there is no need of a seeking and self-critical ratiocination, no logical motion step by step towards a conclusion, no mechanism of express or implied deductions and inferences, no building or deliberate concatenation of idea with idea in order to arrive at an ordered sum or outcome of knowledge.... This higher consciousness is a Knowledge formulating itself on a basis of self-existent all-awareness.... It can freely express itself in single ideas, but its most

72. This particular paragraph is an adapted version of pages 811 and 812 of Sri Aurobindo’s The Synthesis of Yoga.
73. The Life Divine, p. 939.
characteristic movement is a mass ideation, a system or totality of truth-seeing at a single view; the relations of idea with idea, of truth with truth are not established by logic but are pre-existent and emerge already self-seen in the integral whole.... This Thought is a self-revelation of eternal Wisdom, not an acquired knowledge."  

Beyond the plane of the Higher Mind of Truth-Thought lies the plane of the Illumined Mind of Truth-Sight, which works primarily by spiritual vision and not by thought: thought is here only a subordinate and secondary movement expressive of sight. And we know that "a consciousness that proceeds by sight, the consciousness of the seer, is a greater power for knowledge than the consciousness of the thinker. The perceptual power of the inner sight is greater and more direct than the perceptual power of thought: it is a spiritual sense that seizes something of the substance of Truth and not only her figure; but it outlines the figure also and at the same time catches the significance of the figure, and it can embody her with a finer and bolder revealing outline and a larger comprehension and power of totality than thought-conception can manage."  

Thus the Illumined Mind makes accessible to us, through the agencies of truth-sight and truth-light, a power of cognition far greater than that of the Higher Mind. It is a Mind where

"There are vasts of vision and eternal suns,  
Oceans of an immortal luminousness,  
Flame-hills assaulting heaven with their peaks,  
There dwelling all becomes a blaze of sight;  
A burning head of vision leads the mind,  
Thought trails behind it its long comet tail;  
The heart glows, an illuminate and seer,  
And sense is kindled into identity."  

Next in the order of ascension is the Intuitive Mind whose characteristic power is an intimate and exact truth-perception which is much more than mere sight or conception: it is the result of a revealing encounter carrying in it as its natural consequence a truth-sight and truth-conception. "It is when the consciousness of

74. The Life Divine, p. 940.  
75. Ibid., p. 945.  
the subject meets with the consciousness in the object, penetrates it and sees, feels or vibrates with the truth of what it contacts, that the intuition leaps out like a spark or lightning-flash from the shock of the meeting; or when the consciousness, even without any such meeting, looks into itself and feels directly and intimately the truth or the truths that are there or so contacts the hidden forces behind appearances, then also there is the outbreak of intuitive light; or, again, when the consciousness meets the Supreme reality or the spiritual reality of things and beings and has a contactual union with it, then the spark, the flash or the blaze of intimate truth perception is lit in its depths.

The thought, in the Intuitive Mind, is revelatory in character and it proceeds by a fourfold power: “an intuition that suggests its idea, an intuition that discriminates, an inspiration that brings in its word and something of its greater substance, and a revelation that shapes to the sight its very face and body of reality.”

Beyond the plane of the intuitive Mind is a superconscient cosmic Mind which possesses a power of cosmic consciousness, a principle of global knowledge. In the wide cosmic perception of the Overmind

“Ideas are phalanxet like a group of sums;
Thought crowds in masses seized by one regard;
All Time is one body; Space a single book:
There is the Godhead’s universal gaze
And there the boundaries of immortal Mind.”

In the overmind, thought “no longer seems to originate individually in the body or the person but manifests from above or comes in upon the cosmic mind-waves: all inner individual sight or intelligence of things is now a revelation or illumination of what is seen or comprehended, but the source of the revelation is not in one’s separate self but in the universal knowledge.”

The Overmind links the lower hemisphere of knowledge-Ignorance with the supramental Gnosis or Truth-Consciousness, but at the same time veils from our sight the greater Truth of the

77. The Life Divine, pp. 946-47.
78. The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 783.
80. The Life Divine, p. 950.
Supermind. The cosmic Thoughts of this overmental plane of consciousness, proceeding luminously from the truth, constitute the ‘golden lid covering the face of the truth’ (‘hīrāṇmayaṇa pāṭreṇa satyasyāpihitam mukham’: Isha Upanishad, 15.) In order to seize the truth in its unalloyed and unmitigated Glory, we have to make a last supreme ascent in the climb of our spiritual consciousness and break through the shining shield of Overmind into the realm of the immortal Supermind where, to borrow a Vedic image, one does not see the Truth “by reflection in a mental organ of vision, but with the Sun of gnosis itself as his eye.”

An intrinsic and infallible self-illumination, a revelation of light out of itself and not as a delivery out of darkness, a pure awareness of the self-truth of things, not by thought but by identity, a knowledge of the self by the self and in the self, ātmani ātmānam ātmanā: such, then, is the method of cognition of the supramental consciousness.

Now, what is the place or role of thought in the supramental gnosis? Evidently, thought here is merely a derivative movement, not the determining noetic force; an instrument for expression of knowledge, not one for arriving at it. “Thought and speech being representations and not... direct possession in the consciousness are to the supermind a lesser form and, if not filled with the spiritual awareness, thought becomes in fact a diminution of knowledge. For it would be, supposing it to be a supramental thought, only a partial manifestation of a greater knowledge existing in the self but not at the time present to the immediately active consciousness. In the highest ranges of the infinite there need be no thought at all because all would be experienced spiritually, in continuity, in eternal possession and with an absolute directness and completeness. Thought is only one means of partially manifesting and presenting what is hidden in this greater self-existent knowledge.”

We have been discussing the place of thought in the supreme kind of supramental knowing. But before this highest state of cognition is attained, in whose ineffable identity there is no further division between the knower, the knowledge and the known, jñātā, jñānam, jñeyam, thought – and by that we mean of course the supramental thought – plays indeed an important role. For, the

82. Ibid., p. 950.
supramental thought, as Sri Aurobindo has indicated, has three elevations of its intensity: (i) one of direct thought vision; (ii) another of interpretative vision pointing to and preparatory of the revelatory idea-sight; (iii) a third or representative vision. To have a clear grasp of the nature of these levels, let us refer to the words of Sri Aurobindo:

"The supramental thought is a form of the knowledge by identity and a development, in the idea, of the truth presented to the supramental vision. The identity and the vision give the truth in its essence, its body and its parts in a single view: the thought translates this direct consciousness and immediate power of the truth into idea-knowledge and will. It adds or need add otherwise nothing new, but reproduces, articulates, moves round the body of the knowledge.

"Where, however, the identity and the vision are still incomplete, the supramental thought has a larger office and reveals, interprets or recalls as it were to the soul's memory what they are not yet ready to give. And where these greater states and powers are still veiled, the thought comes in front and prepares and to a certain extent effects a partial rending or helps actively in the removal of the veil." [Italics ours]

We have followed the ascending march of Thought in its evergrowing capacity of embodying the spiritual vision of things and seen that, even at its supreme elevation, it remains a secondary and derivative power at a certain remove from the corresponding spiritual knowledge. But what about Speech? Has this, too, an analogous ascending march? And how far can it go in its attempt at formulating the ineffable?

The Ascent of Speech

"He is the Wisdom that comes not by thought, His wordless silence brings the immortal word."

(Savitri, Book XI, Canto I, p. 681.)

83. The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 804.
“High seers, moved poets saw the eternal thoughts

Seized the great words which now are frail sounds caught
By difficult rapture on a mortal tongue.”

(Ibid., Book XI, Canto I, p. 677.)

“Brahman is not, cannot be expressed by the Word...
Brahman is not expressed by speech, but speech is itself
expressed by Brahman.”

(Sri Aurobindo, The Upanishads, p. 171.)

Man is the ‘Linguistic primate’ par excellence. Homo sapiens is
indeed Homo loquax. No sub-human biological species, not
excluding the infra-human primates, exhibits the power of syste-
matizing vocal symbols, whose other name is speech-making. It is
human mind’s characteristic tendency to view reality symbolically
that has led man first to the stage of concept-formation and then to
the actualization of the power to employ vocal symbols to repre-
sent these concepts. For, as has been pointed out by A.D. Ritchie,
“the essential act of thought is symbolization”84. And, so far as
language is concerned, “it is best to admit that language is
primarily a vocal actualization of the tendency to see reality
symbolically, that it is precisely this quality which renders it a fit
instrument for communication.”85

Now, man has sought throughout history a progressively better
adaptation of verbal processes to the world of reality; for, he has
felt that by means of this verbal symbolization, he shall be able to
hold in permanent security all the treasures of knowledge he may
have gained. For, is it not language fulfilling its function of
expression, that “lifts us from the sensible immediacy to the level
of the concept; from the antepredicative to the predicative; from
the pre-reflexive to the reflexive; and, finally, from the instant to
the permanence behind temporality?”86

But the question is: Is man justified in his expectation that he
will be able to seize reality in its entirety through the mediation of
linguistic symbols properly enriched? How far is the reach of man-

86. Yvon Bellaval, op. cit., pp. 198-99
made speech to express all possible knowledge? And what is the status of the vocal symbols in relation to the reality they claim to embody or express? Are they mere tags, arbitrary substitutional signs, extrinsically related to the object of knowledge? Or, on the contrary, do they inviolably inhere in the reality from which they are inseparable? Or, perhaps, they play the role of "insight symbols" that 'do not point to or lead to, but they lead into'.

Before seeking satisfactory answers to these questions, we would at the very outset clear one possible point of confusion. We know that men of spiritual knowledge, in all lands and at all times, have not altogether remained mute and silent; rather, they have sought to disseminate their knowledge far and wide and for that purpose they have employed the verbal medium as one of the most potent means. They have talked about their experiences and that, too, sometimes quite at length. Then why speak of the so-called ineffability of mystic-spiritual knowledge?

Let us suggest a solution to this apparent paradox. The first thing to note in this connection is that the supreme Reality in Itself is, absolutely and under all possible circumstances, ineffable by a mind-created speech, as it is indefinable and inconceivable by finite and defining mind. Thus no mystic would like to claim for himself the doubtful distinction "of sitting down to speak of the Ineffable, think of the Unthinkable, comprehend the Incommunicable and Unknowable."

But apart from this 'ultimate realisation of the ultimate Ineffable', which has to be received directly by an unformulable spiritual experience in the very substance of our consciousness, there are penultimate realisations, so to say, of which some sort of an account becomes possible. Thus, Sri Aurobindo, referring to "an experience in a luminous silence of the mind which looks up into the boundlessness of the last illimitable silence into which it is to pass and disappear," remarks:

"Before that unspeakable experience of the Ultimate or disappearance into it, there is possible a descent of at least some Power or Presence of the Reality into the substance of mind along with a

87. For a discussion of the three types of symbols: (a) extrinsic or arbitrary, (b) intrinsic or descriptive, and (c) insight symbols, see W.M. Urban, Language and Reality, pp. 414-16.
89. Ibid., p. 183.
modification of mind-substance, an illumination of it, and of this experience an expression of some kind, a rendering into thought ought to be possible. Or let us suppose the Ineffable and Unknowable may have aspects, presentations of it that are not utterly unthinkable and ineffable.”

We would like to draw the attention of the reader to the underlined portions of the above citation from Sri Aurobindo, which we have ourselves done in order to emphasise the relative nature of the effability.

But, what is more, even this relative effability can be attained only if we agree to the creation of a plastic logic and a plastic speech. In other words, while using mind-made speech, we must take especial care to steer clear of all rigid definitions and petrified idea-associations. We cannot do better than quote in this connection what Sri Aurobindo has said on this point:

“In order to express this experience or this idea with any nearness a language has to be created which is at once intuitively metaphysical and revealingly poetic, admitting significant and living images as the vehicle of a close, suggestive and vivid indication, – a language such as we find hammered out into a subtle and pregnant massiveness in the Veda and the Upanishads. In the ordinary tongue of metaphysical thought we have to be content with a distant indication, an approximation by abstractions…. The intellect must consent to pass out of the bounds of a finite logic and accustom itself to the logic of the infinite. On this condition alone, by this way of seeing and thinking, it ceases to be paradoxical or futile to speak of the ineffable: but if we insist on applying a finite logic to the Infinite, the omnipresent Reality will escape us and we shall grasp instead an abstract shadow, a dead form petrified into speech or a hard incisive graph which speaks of the reality but does not express it.”

But even at its best, with the utmost plasticity imparted to it, human speech used as a vehicle of spiritual verities, can only be considered as suggestive and perhaps evocative but never representative: it can carry clues and not copies, hints and not photographs, signals and not icons.

At this point the discerning reader may feel intrigued and wonder why, referring to the inaptitude of speech, we have taken

90. Letters on Yoga, p. 184.
91. The Life Divine, p. 323.
care to qualify it with the epithet ‘human’. Does it mean, then, that there are forms of super-human speech bearing superior potencies?

Yes, so it is. When the apostle St. John declares that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”, he is certainly not speaking of any mind-made word we know of. Similarly, when the Vedic mystic affirms that all world is a creation by the Word, he is referring to some supreme form of Speech, the vāk brahma of Indian esoteric schools.

In the words of Sri Aurobindo, “the Supermind using the Word is the creative Logos”. And it is because of this all-determining power of the primal Speech (vāk) that the ‘Creator of the Worlds’ (prajāpati) has been designated in the Rig-Veda as the ‘Lord of Speech, the ordainer of everything’ (vacaspatiṃ visvakarmānam); for ‘Speech’ is verily His power of creation: ‘Speech is no other than Brahman Himself’ (yāvad brahma biṣṭhitam tāvati vāk).

It needs no pointing out that this supreme Speech is not the speech as we ordinarily understand by the term. As a matter of fact, according to the Vedic seers, vāk or Speech has four statuses (cātvāri vāk parimitā padānī) of which the first three are concealed from human awareness (guhā trīni niḥitā neṅgayantī) and it is only the lowest and the fourth that has come to our ken. The supreme Vak bares herself only to the inmost perception of the highest Seer (uto tvasmāi tanvam vi savre) and then reveals Herself in his awakened consciousness as the mantra (dhīra manasā vācamakrata).

And what is this mantra, otherwise called rk, gir and uktha? A mantra indicates a word of power and light, born out of the profound depths and the sublimest heights of the Rishi’s being and consciousness, that proceeds to the inevitable realisation of the truth it symbolises.

94. Rig-Veda, XI, 81.7.
95. Ibid., X. 114.8.
96. Ibid., I. 164. 45.
97. Ibid., I. 164. 45.
98. The vaikhari vāk of the Tantrik lore.
99. Rig-Veda, X. 71.4.
100. Ibid., X. 71.2.
This then is the supreme divine Word, the divyā vāk or Gauri of the Rig Veda, that is reputed to be the original creative Power that builds up the universe of manifestation out of the nameless Silence. For “it is out of this Silence that the Word which creates the worlds for ever proceeds; for the Word expresses that which is self-hidden in the Silence.”

But are we indulging in unnecessary obfuscation when we speak of the superhuman statuses of speech or of the primal Word of Prajapati being the agency for the creation of the world? Surely not: for a fuller acquaintance with the esoteric theory of sound and speech, the reader may be referred to the Commentary V (pages 35 to 41) of Sri Aurobindo’s *Kena Upanishad*. We content ourselves with offering our readers only a few points along with a few citations taken from the above text.

The Upanishads speak of Brahman as being ‘the Speech of our speech’. Evidently, when they do so, they mean a Speech beyond ours, “an absolute expression of which human language is only a shadow and as if an artificial counterfeit.”

In the same way, when the Veda avers that Brahma creates the forms of the universe by the Word, this Word must be taken to be something far, far beyond and above our power of mental construction. Moreover, “human speech at its highest merely attempts to recover by revelation and inspiration an absolute expression of truth which already exists in the Infinite above our mental comprehension.” The most perfect speech so far evolved by man to embody his mystic experiences – the language of the Veda – is one such, for it is “śruti, a rhythm not composed by the intellect but heard, a divine Word that came vibrating out of the Infinite to the inner audience of the man who had previously made himself fit for the impersonal knowledge. The words themselves, drṣṭi and śruti, sight and hearing,... signify, in the esoteric terminology of the hymns, revelatory knowledge and the contents of inspiration.”

Now, what is meant by the creative puissance of the Word? And what is the relation between sound and speech?

According to the mystics there is a creative vibration of sound

behind every formation, to whatever plane of existence it may belong. But this sound may not be necessarily heard by the ‘mortal ears’ nor may it be uttered by the ‘mortal tongue’. As a matter of fact, the sound we ordinarily know of is only the lowest form, on the material plane, of a formative vibration that has its ultimate genesis in the Supreme and which has descended successively through the intervening planes of manifestation. Let us realise then that “a vibration of sound on the material plane presupposes a corresponding vibration on the vital without which it could not have come into play; that, again, presupposes a corresponding originative vibration on the mental; the mental presupposes a corresponding originative vibration on the supramental at the very root of things.” 105

Thus we may say that there are various modes of speech-vibration existing or manifesting on different planes of consciousness. As we are aware of the material mode of sound and speech, so we may come into contact, through the cultivation of spiritual knowledge, with a vital mode of sound and speech, a mental mode of sound and speech, and so on. Generally we employ the material mode of speech even to clothe knowledge that we may gain on other superior planes of existence and consciousness. But now we see that this attempt is bound to meet with partial success: a perfect transcription of experience and knowledge is possible only with a mode of speech appropriate to the plane of experience.

Thus, to express adequately the supramental knowledge, we have to take recourse to what can be called a ‘supramental speech.’ In order to make clear what we mean by this term, also to have some idea about the place and function of speech in the supramental cognition, we quote below in extenso from Sri Aurobindo:

“There is also a speech, a supramental word, in which the higher knowledge, vision or thought can clothe itself within us for expression. At first this may come down as a word, a message or an inspiration that descends to us from above or it may even seem a voice of the Self or of the Ishwara, vānī, ādesā. Afterwards it loses that separate character and becomes the normal form of the thought when it expresses itself in the form of an inward speech. The thought may express itself without the aid of any suggestive or

developing word and only – but still quite completely, explicitly and with its full contents – in a luminous substance of supramental perception. It may aid itself when it is not so explicit by a suggestive inward speech that attends it to bring out its whole significance. Or the thought may come not as silent perception but as speech self-born out of the truth and complete in its own right and carrying in itself its own vision and knowledge. Then it is the word revelatory, inspired or intuitive or of a yet greater kind capable of bearing the infinite intention or suggestion of the higher supermind and spirit…. The supramental word manifests inwardly with a light, a power, a rhythm of thought and a rhythm of inner sound that make it the natural and living body of the supramental thought and vision.\footnote{106} [Italics ours]

But the difficulty with this supramental speech is that it is formed and heard in the intuitive mind or supermind itself and need not at first come out easily into human speech and writing. But Sri Aurobindo has assured us that with the supramental transformation of man’s life and consciousness, and along with them of man’s instrumental potencies, this final hurdle will be crossed, and “this is a part of the needed fullness and power of the integral perfection.”\footnote{107}

The problem of knowledge and communication is not the only problem facing man as a species. He is also confronted with the problem of harmonious living. He wants to live in harmony with himself first of all, then with other individuals and with the society at large and finally with the world in general. But it is a patent fact that he has so far miserably failed in his attempt to do so. But why? What is the nature of the basic malady? And how will the New Man solve this problem in his life? The next three chapters are devoted to the consideration of these very important questions.

\footnote{106. The Synthesis of Yoga, pp. 806-07.}
\footnote{107. Ibid., p. 807.}
VIII

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE CRISIS OF MODERN MAN

The Age of Anxiety

The twentieth century has been called the 'Age of Human Predicament'. The man of our epoch has been suffering from an all-pervading sense of anxiety with its background of frustration, maladjustment and inner disintegration. The art of the time, and more comprehensively its literature, reflect in various ways manifestations of this constant undercurrent of anxiety. Thomas Hardy's novels have given a poignant picture of mankind's predicament in the universe. Hardy saw mankind 'swept from darkness to darkness, like a straw on a torrent, by a ruthless, mysterious and ignoble force.' And W.H. Auden (whose first master was Hardy), in his long poem *Age of Anxiety*, gives this account of modern man:

...crazed we come and coarsened we go
Our wobbling way: there's a white silence
Of antiseptics and instruments
At both ends, but a babble between
And a shame surely.

In fact, those who are born in this age feel the loss of faith; they are the spiritually displaced; they are the culturally uprooted; they are the traditionless. The old gods, the old verities and the old values are dying out. The conventions and convictions of centuries are dissolving like a dream. Faith, hope and charity are held to belong to empty churches. There is a void to-day in men's minds which dogmatic religions are unable to fill. Modern man feels himself to be completely debarred from the transcendent world and from the fulfilment of his metaphysical and religious needs and desires. The consciousness of such an inability induces a crisis of intellectual despair and of metaphysical sickness. Man feels as though paralysed by dread of nothingness. He finds himself to be in a state of giddiness and of a tragic feeling of a situation without issue. It is not without some profound import that T.S. Eliot, the 'dry poet', sings of the spiritual deserts of our time.
In this age of human predicament, in this epoch of spiritual malady, the Heideggerian *Angst* has taken possession of the minds of men. Modern man is verily in a state of utter alienation.

**The Crisis of the Alienated Man**

The man of our epoch has been described as an alienated man. As Frederick Copleston has aptly remarked, modern man is alienated from the Divine; he is alienated from the world around him; he is alienated from the society he lives in; he is alienated even from his own self. God, if He exists, is hidden from him; the physical cosmos is indifferent to him; society is divided and stands always on the brink of an abyss; man is a riddle even to himself and can find in himself no final reassurance.

Modern man is indeed alienated from God. Many people find it very difficult to believe in Him. Some seem to themselves to be conscious of the absence rather than of the presence of God. Even if he exists, He appears to hide Himself rather than reveal Himself. Or perhaps He is doomed to remain for ever the *Deus absconditus*! In despair, modern man cries out with Goetz:

“I implored and begged for a gesture; I addressed my messages to Heaven: no response! Heaven does not know even my name. I used to ask myself all the time: what could I possibly be in the eyes of God? Now I know the answer: Nothing. God does not see me, God does not hear me, God does not know me. Dost thou see this void above our heads? This is God... Dost thou see this pit in the earth? This is again God. Silence, this is God. Absence, this is God. God, it is the loneliness of men... If God exists, man is Nothing.”

In this mood of utter anguish, modern man is taught with insistence in terms of imposing polysyllables that religion is the result of the sense of guilt that arises from the Oedipus Complex and that various major religious notions are 'patently infantile... incongruous with reality.” On the other hand, he is made to believe that:

1. A character in Jean-Paul Sartre's play, *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*.
“Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the kindliness of a heartless world, the soul of souless circumstance. Religion is the opiate of the people. The removal of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for its real happiness... Criticism of religion disillusions man so that he may think, act, and shape the world as one who is disillusioned and come to full understanding, so that he may move on his own axis and thus be his own sun. Religion is but the false sun which revolves round him while he is not yet fully self-aware.”

As a result of all such teachings, the platform of man's faith has collapsed and he is now living in what Martin Heidegger has termed the 'Epoch of Indigence'. In this age of spiritual poverty modern man lives in total oblivion of Divinity, and what is, according to Heidegger, still more tragic is the fact that even the consciousness of this 'absence' of the Divine has progressively volatilised in the hearts of men, so much so that they no longer suffer this sense of want. In Sartrian hyperbole, God is dead to modern man!

Modern man is alienated from the world around him. The physical cosmos seems to him alien in the sense that it is indifferent to man's ideals and hopes and strivings. It is not the geocentric, and indeed anthropocentric, cosmos of earlier days but a vaster universe in which human existence and history appear as transitory and casual events. As a result, modern man suffers from a sense of miserable insecurity in relation to a universe whose awful and indifferent vastness has overwhelmed his imagination through the popularization of the findings of scientists. "Man is in one sense a king and in another sense a castaway. He is a king because he is the highest known being in the universe, and at the same time he is a castaway just because he is unique — man’s wishes, aims, and hopes find no response — no, not even an echo — in the rest of the universe; and, compared with non-human nature's vast, blind momentum, man’s power — even the collective power of human society — is pitifully puny. So this king, with all his unparalleled gifts and potentialities finds himself in the tragic position of being marooned in a kingdom which is not, after all, his own — a kingdom whose ways are not man's ways and whose thoughts, if it

has any thoughts, are not man's thoughts. For man, the world into which he is born without his leave being asked is a world that, for him, is meaningless and merciless."

Modern man fails to grasp the real significance of this unintelligible world and in this heartless cosmos he longs in vain to find a heart.

Yet if man, apparently alienated from God and set in an alien world, turns for reassurance to human society, he finds a riven society, a society divided and in ferment. He sees powerful forces threatening him as a free individual and striving to subject him to a crushing tyranny extending even to the mind. In this age of all-round decomposition, forces are at work that threaten the breakdown of the social structure as he knows it. Modern man can hardly find in society at large and in social tradition a sure answer to the questions which perplex him day and night.

Furthermore, the individual has become an enigma to himself. He has been told, for example, that matter is the unique cosmic reality and spirit only an epiphenomenon, a self-creation of matter in the process of its development from the simple to the more and more complex combinations of its basic elements. Thus, 'consciousness' does not, and cannot, act since it has no energy of its own; it is merely 'given off' by the workings of the brain — the 'ineffectual ghost of an entity.'

He has also been told that he is purely a mechanical being, a creature made up of automatic reflexes. Thus all his apparently purposeful actions are nothing but reflex reactions to stimuli; for, has it not been scientifically demonstrated that a frog could perform apparently purposeful actions even when its brain and with it, presumably, its 'consciousness' had been totally removed? — "a frog with half a brain having destroyed more theology than all the doctors of the Church with their whole brains could build up again!"

Modern man has been reminded that his conscious life is the expression of hidden subconscious drives, impulses and urges, and the self, as it exists for consciousness, is only a composite formed of disparate tendencies.

Then, again, on the threshold of this 'Age of Anxiety', Darwin taught that man evolved from the humblest form of life by a

5. Quoted by John Passmore in Hundred Years of Philosophy, p. 79.
process of natural selection that was quite automatic; and, in particular, "instead of Adam, our ancestry is traced to the most grotesque of creatures."

Finally, the problem of free-will has been given a new twist by the Marxist assertion that man is not, after all, such a free agent as he is supposed to be; he is not altogether the 'captain of his own soul' and capable of making his own choices; for man never is and never can be anything except the product of economic conditions; his philosophy, his code of ethics, his religion, even his tastes and preferences, are not, as he thinks, his free choice, but simply what he must believe because of the environment in which he has grown up.6

All these various assertions have coalesced to undermine man's self-assurance and left him wondering what he really is. But the thinking individual cannot so easily reconcile himself to this vision of man whether it goes by the name of Destiny, Necessity or Scientific Law. Thus modern man breaks out in an unrestrained multi-protest against all that demands his complete and unchallenged submission.

The 'Free' Man Protests

In this background of poor humanity's afflicted will struggling in vain with ruthless destiny, we may recall the attitude of Dostoevsky's hero in *Letters from the Underworld* who refuses to remain passive before the wall that bears the inscription, 'Necessity'; he would rather break his head against such a wall than let it obstruct his path.

Modern man's protest is the free individual's protest against all tendency to depersonalisation. Thus his first protest is against that sort of logical analysis that purports to declare that he is nothing more than the factors in which he can be analysed and whatever is more is just a phantom or at best a quality. Is an active agent nothing more than a quality?

Modern man protests against all forms of monism or totalitarian philosophy that threaten the dignity, independence and individual value of the human person. His is the protest of the personal against the impersonal. He protests against the naturalist's asser-

tion: "You are a transitory resultant of physical process"; he protests again against the absolutist Idealist when the latter declares: "You are an unreal appearance of the Absolute". For both these combine to persuade him that personality is no more than an illusion.

Modern man opposes the Hegelian doctrine that human personality vanishes into the Family, the Community, the Absolute. He detests this 'rarefication of existence', this 'auto-destruction of his personal self'. And in modern times when the absolute supremacy of the State has considerably reduced individual liberty and, in certain countries, the individual citizen has been reduced to serfdom, he protests against the notion that he is nothing more than the meeting-point of social influences and that he would but think and act as society wants him to think and act. Totalitarian attempts to standardise man's thoughts and actions are repugnant to him. He raises his voice of protest when he is told that there can be no rights for the individual, as the individual is nothing; he is 'a multitude of one million divided by one million', and the whole existing generation is only 'manure for the future.'

Finally, modern man voices his protest against the 'typing' of the human being by society. He reacts against that particular view of man and his world according to which individuality is a defect and man discovers his true nature only if he allows himself to be fully absorbed into a function - so becoming a philosopher, a guardian, a citizen. In the modern functionalisation of life, the tendency of the individual is "to appear both to himself and to others as an agglomeration of functions"; a man is not primarily a human person, he is an embodied function, a railwayman, a clerk, a civil servant, a schoolmaster, a trade-union official, whatever it may be. Marxism functionalises man in one way, Freudianism in another; in either case the freedom and uniqueness of the human person are overlooked.

Man Looks to Philosophy

Now in this background of the anguished protest of the 'free' individual against totalitarianism and impersonal functionalisation, to whom or to what should modern man turn for a way of

salvation? Who can offer a message of succour and hope to this alienated individual thrown back on himself and yet unable to find in himself the answers to the problems that beset him?

Belief in traditional religions has waned and this has been followed by doubt concerning the absolute character and universal applicability of religious values and of moral teachings. At the same time it is now realised more clearly than ever that science cannot provide man with a normative morality or with a mystic fervour to lean upon. So, it is no matter for surprise that modern man looks for an integrated view of his whole existence, which would act as a guide not merely for thinking but also for action in this perplexing world.

Indeed, in recent times, man has tended to become the central theme of almost all philosophical thinking. The outlook of this present age is essentially humanistic. The world has become impatient with every philosophy that cannot give primacy to man and his insistent problems.

But what is this human individual? He has a multiple essence. He is in nature, he is in history. He belongs not merely to the material realm but also to the biological; not merely to the biological, but also to the social. For he is indeed a socio-moral creature: he is a member of association, bearing rights and duties. And finally he belongs not merely to the social but also to the spiritual. It may well be that there are other realms to which he belongs, of which he is not aware as yet.

Thus it becomes imperative that man the multi-dimensional being should be treated integrally in all his aspects. But everywhere in current philosophical thinking, whether in Materialism or in Absolute Idealism, in philosophical anthropology or in modern social philosophies, one finds the mistake of the fallacy of reductionism, the mistake of reducing to one aspect all the rest and thus offering an all-too-partial one-sided picture of man. It is no wonder, then, that modern man fails to find his heart’s fulfilment in any of the prevalent philosophies. Indeed, he is haunted by a lack of faith in himself, in his destiny and also in the destiny of the world.

This is an age of unbelief. It is an age not so much unlit by belief as lacking the very capacity to believe. But, as one thinker has pointed out, in this period of all-round disintegration “when life itself has become dim and its very forms are stiffening, there are
always some intense natures to whom it is intolerable that there should not already be new and greater faiths in sight. We are too profoundly religious to be able to endure this precarious predicament."  

**Message of Divine Manhood**

But modern man need not live any more in this 'precarious predicament'. For if we care to look around and scan the horizons of thought, we shall see that there already exists an integral philosophy of life that embraces in its synthetic sweep Man, Cosmos and the Transcendent. This is Sri Aurobindo's Yoga-Philosophy of Divine Humanism.

This philosophy offers man a new hope to live by and a glorious ideal to strive after. For, it is not concerned with man in his actuality alone; it concerns itself equally, or even more, with man in his potentiality, with man as he is bound to evolve into. For it is above all a forward-looking philosophy that wants to pull man out of the morass in which he has placed himself and spur him on to the marvellous adventure of self-discovery and self-exceeding. And it is, for that matter, no mere system of thought, it is above all a philosophy of action, a practical guide to integral living. Not only does this philosophy reveal to mankind the glorious vistas of the future awaiting the probe of aspiring men; but, what is still more important, it shows to blinded humanity the proper path to tread to reach this goal.

The present essay is an attempt to show, although in brief, how all those problems that are troubling most the mind and heart of modern man find their solution in this Philosophy of Integralism. Is there at all a meaning behind this colossal world-existence? Of what worth is the individual in this immense cosmic drama? Does his existence bear any relevance here? Is there any sense and purpose behind the march of humanity, and if so, what is it? What should be the goal of man the individual and of the human race? Is there any truth in the notion of human free-will, or is man a mere creature of circumstances? What is meant, after all, by God or the Absolute? Does He exist at all? And if He exists, is there any way of encountering Him? What should be the proper relation of man

the individual to other individuals and to the community of men? How can he realise his age-old dream of three basic harmonies: cosmical harmony between man and world, social harmony between man and man and biopsychical harmony within man himself? And finally what about Death, that dreadful, ineluctable eventuality? Does it not set to nought and mock with a derisive laughter all hopes and aspirations, toils and strivings of the individual man?

Let us discuss all these and related questions in the light of Sri Aurobindo's thought.

The World and Its Riddle

The very first question that baffles modern man is as regards the meaning of terrestrial life and of human existence. Or perhaps it seems absurd to him to ask for the sense of the world. In fact, Albert Camus, the philosopher of "the absurd", makes this the theme of his philosophy. In his play Le Malentendu, a representative character exclaims: "The world itself is not reasonable and I am entitled to say so, I who have tasted of the world, from creation to destruction." For Camus, as for many other persons of this age, the world and human life are absurd, or at least they appear as absurd, once their irrational and meaningless character is clearly perceived. "Get up, tramway; four hours' work, a meal, sleep, and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday in the same rhythm... One follows this path without difficulty most of the time. One day, however, arises the question 'Why?'" The human reason is naturally impelled to seek for the meaning of the world and of human life and history in particular; but, according to Camus, it can find no meaning in either of them. "This world in itself is not reasonable, one can say that of it. But the absurd is the confrontation of this individual world with the desperate desire for clarity, the appeal of which resounds in the depths of man.... The absurdity arises from this confrontation of the human appeal with the irrational silence of the world.... The irrational, the human nostalgia and the absurd which arises from their tête-à-tête, these are the three personages of the drama."  

But this view of the world is admittedly repugnant to man. In

10. Ibid.
Camus's play *Caligula*, Cherea asserts that he rejects the world as Caligula sees it, "because I want to live and to be happy. I believe that one can neither live nor be happy if one pushes the absurd to all its conclusions.... To lose one's life is a little thing and I shall have the courage to do so if necessary; but to see the meaning of this life dissipated, to see our reason for existing disappear, that is what is unbearable. One cannot live without meaning."\(^{11}\)

But, Sri Aurobindo assures us, human existence, and for that matter world-existence, have an important meaning and aim: they are neither a purposeless illusion nor a fortuitous accident. Nor is world-existence a bundle of illogicalities simply because our mind and reason fail to grasp its total significance. After all, our mind is still an imperfect instrument groping after true knowledge; it is neither global in its operations nor integral in its probe. Human reason accustomed to deal with the finite cuts the whole reality into segments and lays stress, sometimes on one part, sometimes on another, as if they constituted the entire reality. But it is not altogether inconceivable that what appear as contradictions and elements of irrationality to a reason based on the finite and partial view may not be contradictions to a vision or a larger reason based on the infinite. And, as a matter of fact, this cosmos with all its contents has grown out of the action of the Infinite, and the consciousness to which the origin and movement of this colossal phenomenon belongs and to which they stand "as it were automatically justified... is a cosmic and not an individualised human intelligence; it sees in larger spaces, it has another vision and cognition, other terms of consciousness than human reason and feeling."\(^{12}\)

Thus, to understand fully the world-process of the Infinite and the Time-process of the Eternal, to discover the reality and significance of our existence as conscious beings in the material universe, it is altogether imperative that our consciousness outgrows the domain of the finite reason and finite sense and awakens to a global reason and spiritual sense in touch with the consciousness of the Infinite and responsive to the logic of the Infinite, "whose sequences are not the steps of thought but the steps of existence". For then and then alone our way of knowing would be appropriate to that which is to be known and we would come to

see that world-existence is not a mere magic void of all reason; there is a logic in it, because there are relations and connections infallibly seen and executed. But this logic is not of the mind or of the intellect, it is a spiritual and supramental reason that is operative here in this cosmos. In fact, what is magic to our finite reason is nothing but the logic of the Infinite. 13

Now, there have been in the field of thought three main conceptions which we can form of existence. First, the theory of the sole reality of Matter asserts that consciousness is only an operation of material energy in matter, and our existence here is an inconsequential freak of Matter itself or of some Energy building up Matter. There is a blind mechanical necessity of some kind, the nature of which would be that of a fixed processus bound to certain initial and general determinations of which all the rest is the consequence. Second, our existence is the arbitrary fantasy of a supracosmic Creator. A free infinite Being or God somehow or other creates out of something or out of nothing, in reality or only in conception, a world of the necessity of his will in which all things, all creatures are bound as the victims of a necessity, although internal and spiritual, to some kind of arbitrary predestination. Third, world-existence is an inexplicable freak of the Spirit, which possesses no basic reality; it has an illusory significance which vanishes into nothingness as soon as true knowledge dawns.

It is easy to see that all these three conceptions pushed to their logical conclusion deny any essential significance to the world or to human life. In fact, they are only partial approaches and embody partial truths, and therefore cannot take into adequate account or explain the total rhythm of this world-phenomenon. What is needed is some largest Truth in which all these and other seeings find their justification and get reconciled. What is called for is some highest knowledge which illumines, integralises, harmonises the significance of all knowledge and gathers together all experience in the Truth of a supreme and all-reconciling oneness. As we shall see, Sri Aurobindo’s vision of the world and of man answers fully to these demands.

The present appearance of our terrestrial being is a veiled and partial figure, and to limit ourselves to that first figure of the

moment, to the present formula of an imperfect humanity and base our world-conceptions on this appearance alone, as if that were an abiding truth for all times, is to exclude our divine possibilities. We have to bring a wider meaning into our human life and manifest in it the much more that we secretly are. We have to recognise the purport of our whole complex human nature in its right place in the cosmic movement and give its full legitimate value to each part of our complex being, and many-sided aspiration; we have to find out the key of their unity as well as their difference; and this finding must be by a synthesis and integration. But this finding of the sense of human life as well as that of the world-existence — wherein "it is impossible to ignore the drive of set purpose, the guidance of apparent blind tendency, the sure eventual or immediate coming to the target sought"14 — can be made only in the bosom of an integral spiritual illumination. And Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga-Philosophy arises out of such an integral vision and not merely out of an ineffectual speculative mind. Thus, this philosophy embodies not simply a well-reasoned structure of thought but, above all, the Truth of existence.

Let us now see what are these fundamental truths of the reality and its manifestation that Sri Aurobindo’s integral vision reveals to us.

Key to the World-Enigma

“There is a Permanent above the transience of this manifested world we live in;”15 there exists a supreme Consciousness beyond and above “this limited consciousness in whose narrow borders we grope and struggle”;16 there is an Absolute beyond and behind every relative form and figure in this universe. The Non-Being at the one end and the universe at the other are not negations that annul this supreme Existence: they are rather different states of this absolute Real Existence, its obverse and reverse affirmations. This pure Existence, this Brahman, this “omnipresent Reality is the truth of all life and existence whether absolute or relative, whether corporeal or incorporeal, whether animate or inanimate, whether intelligent or unintelligent; and in all its infinitely varying and even constantly opposed self-expressions, from the contradic-

tions nearest to our ordinary experience to those remotest antinomies which lose themselves on the verges of the Ineffable, the Reality is one and not a sum or concourse. From that all variations begin, in that all variations consist, to that all variations return. All affirmations are denied only to lead to a wider affirmation of the same Reality. All antinomies confront each other in order to recognise one Truth in their opposed aspects and embrace by the way of conflict their mutual Unity. Brahman is the Alpha and the Omega. Brahman is the One besides whom there is nothing else existent.”

This absolute Reality is in its nature indefinable: there is no experience by which It can be limited, nor is there any conception by which It can be defined. It is ineffable by mental thought and language; It is beyond the grasp of the ineffectual probe of separative mental consciousness. But there is a spiritual consciousness, a knowledge by identity which can seize this reality in its fundamental aspects and its manifold powers and forms and figures.

This Absolute is then “the ineffable Reality overtopping and underlying and immanent and essential in all that we can call existence or non-existence”. This world is a manifestation of the Real who has created it or rather manifested it in His own infinite Being: the creation is nothing but the manifestation of the Timeless Eternal in Time Eternity. Each thing created is a form of that manifest Divine Existence, each is divine in itself by the spiritual presence within it, whatever its appearance, its figure or character in Nature. The supreme Truth-Aspect thus manifesting itself founds all things and secretly supports and pervades all things. It is “the absolute beginning, end and continent” of everything in manifestation. All relatives, all aspects and all semblances are the supreme Brahman, the Absolute. In fact, Brahman is at once the Transcendent and incommunicable, the supracosmic Existence that sustains the cosmos, the Cosmic Self that pervades all things, but also the self of each individual and can be discovered by the individual even here in the terrestrial embodiment.

But this primary, ultimate and eternal Existence, this Brahman,

18. Ibid., p. 33.
19. Ibid., p. 91.
this Sat "is not merely bare existence, or a conscious existence whose consciousness is crude force or power; it is a conscious existence the very term of whose being, the very term of whose consciousness is bliss.... In other words, that which has thrown itself out into forms is a triune Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, Sachchidananda, whose consciousness is in its nature a creative or rather a self-expressive Force capable of infinite variation in phenomenon and form of its self-conscious being and endlessly enjoying the delight of that variation. It follows that all things that exist are what they are as terms of that existence, terms of that conscious force, terms of that delight of being. Just as we find all things to be mutable forms of one immutable being, finite results of one infinite force, so we shall find that all things are variable self-expression of one invariable and all-embracing delight of self-existence. In everything that is, dwells the conscious force and it exists and is what it is by virtue of that conscious force; so also in everything that is, there is the delight of existence and it exists and is what it is by virtue of that delight."

Thus, the world is real because of the Reality that secretly sustains it; the world is real because it is in its essence nothing else than the self-manifestation of the supreme Brahman. But by no account can it be described in its actual state as the perfect expression of Sachchidananda. In fact, as it is, it is strongly marked with inadequacy, imperfection, suffering and evil. Inconscience and ignorance and not Consciousness; death and impermanence and not the permanent Existence; pain and suffering and not the essential Delight seem to be the very badge of worldly existence. But the question is: do these negative attributes constitute the essential character and the very condition of all manifestation, or are they merely besetting circumstances, phenomena of passage preparing for and leading to some other glorious and perfect expression that is still in the womb of the future? In other words, "Is this world an unchanging succession of the same phenomena always or is there in it an evolutionary urge, an evolutionary fact, a ladder of ascension somewhere from an original apparent Inconscience to a more and more developed consciousness, from each development still ascending, emerging on highest heights not yet within our normal reach. If so, what is

the sense, the fundamental principle, the logical issue of that progression? 21

Now Sri Aurobindo's vision of integral existence testifies to “such a progression as a fact – to a spiritual and not merely a physical evolution.” 22 The supreme Reality, here in this manifested world, has taken upon itself the aspect of a Becoming in Time, and this Becoming is essentially evolutionary in its character. There is a truth of that reality, which is manifesting, working itself out, evolving here, and that is the significance and meaning of our being and life. “The physical evolution is only an outward sign, the more and more complex and subtle development of a supporting structure, the growing exterior metre mould of form which is devised to sustain in matter the rising intonations of the spiritual harmony. The spiritual significance finds us as the notes rise; but not till we get to the summit of the scale can we command the integral meaning of that for which all these first formal measures were made the outward lines, the sketch or the crude notation. Life itself is only a coloured vehicle, physical birth a convenience for the greater and greater births of the Spirit.” 23

The progressive revelation of a great, transcendent, luminous Reality with the multitudinous relativities of the worlds as means and material, condition and field – this, then, is the meaning of the universe. 24 And it is the evolution of consciousness and life as distinguished from form-evolution – that is the real significance of the whole affair; for all this evolution is in its essential truth a growing of the Self in material Nature to the conscious possession of its spiritual being.

But evolution carries with it, in its intrinsic sense, in the idea at its root, the necessity of a previous involution. For the spiritual process of evolution is a self-creation, not a making of what never was, but a bringing out of what was implicit in the Being and inherent in the very beginning. In fact, what is happening in the world is that the ignorance is seeking and preparing to transform itself by a progressive illumination of its darkness into the Knowledge that is already inherent and concealed within it. And in this process of progressive self-revelation, all that evolves already existed involved, passive or otherwise active, but in either

case concealed from us in the shell of material Nature. “Matter could not have become animate if the principle of life had not been there constituting Matter and emerging as a phenomenon of life-in-matter; life-in-matter could not have begun to feel, perceive, think, reason, if the principle of mind had not been there behind life and substance, constituting it as its field of operation and emergent in the phenomenon of a thinking life and body: so too spirituality emerging in mind is the sign of a power which itself has founded and constituted life, mind and body and is now emerging as a spiritual being in a living and thinking body.... Spirit is a final evolutionary emergence because it is the original involutionary element and factor. Evolution is an inverse action of the involution: what is an ultimate and last derivation in the involution is the first to appear in the evolution; what was original and primal in the involution is in the evolution the last and supreme emergence.”

Thus the significance of terrestrial existence is concealed at the outset by the involution of the Spirit, the Divine Reality, in a dense material Inconscience. Here in this material world or at its basis Sachchidananda has hidden himself in what seem to be his opposites: “a Void, an infinite of Non-Existence, an indeterminate Inconscient, an insensitive blissless Zero” out of which everything has to evolve. When this inevitable evolution — this emergence of the involved Being and Consciousness — begins its course of ascent, it first develops, as it is bound to develop in the inverse order, Matter and a material universe; in Matter, Life appears and living physical beings; in Life, Mind manifests and embodied thinking and living beings. Thus also, the Delight of existence involved at the base emerges from the original insentience into the contrary forms of pleasure and pain. And this is the actual state of the evolutionary ascent with Mind and Man as its highest products.

But Sachchidananda has yet to emerge fully in manifestation. Therefore this evolution, this spiritual progression cannot stop short with Mind and with the imperfect mental being called Man. Mind is too imperfect an expression and man too hampered and burdened a creature to be the last terms of evolution. So, in the nature of things, evolution is bound to proceed and bring out in its ascending march a far greater consciousness than what we call Mind, a supreme Truth-consciousness — or what Sri Aurobindo

calls Supermind — that by its manifestation will liberate not partially, not imperfectly as at present, but radically and wholly the imprisoned Divine. This Supermind manifesting the Spirit’s self-knowledge and whole knowledge will bring about, by an inherent necessity and inevitability, the dynamic manifestation here of the divine Existence, Consciousness and Delight of Existence. It is this that is the significance of the plan and order of the terrestrial evolution and it is this necessity that has determined and must determine in future all its steps and degrees, its principles and its process.

Such is then the evolutionary significance attached by Sri Aurobindo to cosmic existence. The self-effectuation of the Spirit in the world, a great and long self-weaving in Time, is the ultimate secret of evolution and inner sense of this universe. For in Sri Aurobindo’s integral vision, it is true that “the supra-cosmic Reality stands as the supreme Truth of being; to realise it is the highest reach of our consciousness. But it is this highest Reality which is also the cosmic being, the cosmic consciousness, the cosmic will and life: it has put these things forth, not outside itself but in its own being, not as an opposite principle but as its own self-unfolding and self-expression. Cosmic being is not a meaningless freak or phantasy or a chance error; there is a divine significance and truth in it: the manifold self-expression of the spirit is its high sense, the Divine itself is the key of its enigma. A perfect self-expression of the spirit is the object of our terrestrial existence.”

And this self-expression of the Spirit in the world has, as we have seen above, three distinct phases: an involution of Sachchidananda in the Inconscience is the beginning; an evolution in the ignorance with its play of the possibilities of a partial developing knowledge and delight is the middle — man’s imperfection is nothing but the sign of a transitional state, a growth not yet completed; finally, a consummation and a supreme fulfilment of the Divine Existence-Consciousness-Bliss in manifestation is the culmination.

To summarise in Sri Aurobindo’s own illuminating words:

“A spiritual evolution, an evolution of consciousness in Matter in a constant developing self-formation till the form can reveal the indwelling spirit, is then the key-note, the central significant

motive of the terrestrial existence. This significance is concealed at
the outset by the involution of the Spirit, the Divine Reality, in a
dense material Inconscience; a veil of Inconscience, a veil of
insensibility of Matter hides the universal Consciousness-Force
which works within it, so that the Energy, which is the first form
the Force of creation assumes in the physical universe, appears to
be itself inconscient and yet does the works of a vast occult
Intelligence. The obscure mysterious creatrix ends indeed by
delivering the secret consciousness out of its thick and tenebrous
prison; but she delivers it slowly, little by little, in minute infini-
tesimal drops, in thin jets, in small vibrant concretions of energy
and substance, of life, of mind, as if that were all she could get out
through the crass obstacle, the dull reluctant medium of an
inconscient stuff of existence. At first she houses herself in forms
of Matter which appear to be altogether unconscious, then strug-
gles towards mentality in the guise of living Matter and attains to it
imperfectly in the conscious animal. This consciousness is at first
rudimentary, mostly a half subconscious or just conscious instinct;
it develops slowly till in more organised forms of living Matter it
reaches its climax of intelligence and exceeds itself in Man, the
thinking animal who develops into the reasoning mental being but
carryes along with him even at his highest elevation the mould of
original animality, the dead weight of subconscience of body, the
downward pull of gravitation towards the original Inertia and
Nescience, the control of an inconscient material nature over his
conscious evolution, its power for limitation, its law of difficult
development, its immense force for retardation and frustration.
This control by the original lnconscience over the consciousness
emerging from it takes the general shape of a mentality struggling
towards knowledge but itself, in what seems to be its fundamental
nature, an Ignorance. Thus hampered and burdened, mental man
has still to evolve out of himself the fully conscious being, a divine
manhood or a spiritual and supramental supermanhood which
shall be the next product of the evolution. That transition will
mark the passage from the evolution in the Ignorance to a greater
evolution in the Knowledge, founded and proceeding in the light
of the Superconscient and no longer in the darkness of the
Ignorance and Inconscience.”

THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN RELATIONS

"All problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony."
(Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, p. 2.)

The Dream of Harmony

Ever since the dawn of human history, man has been actuated by a persistent dream of triple harmony: harmony within man himself, social harmony between man and man, and harmony between man and the world around him. But to the man of our epoch, all these three basic harmonies have come to appear as so many vain and ineffectual dreams. For, as J.W. Krutch has aptly remarked, one of the most shocking features of our age is that “man’s inhumanity to man” has reached what seems almost unparalleled proportions: there has been more violence, more brutality, more cold and calculated cruelty than at any time since the end of the ages we complacently call “dark”. Thus the problem of right conduct of man towards his fellow-beings has assumed a first importance in our epoch.

The same problem of disbalance and disharmony has lately shown itself in an equally acute form also in the relation between the individual and the collectivity. The maladjustment between the individual’s hopes and needs and aspirations and the demands of the organised society has become so much pronounced that the representative man of the century is “constantly (and unsuccessfully) striving to reconcile tendencies towards aggression and yielding; excessive demands on others, and fears of never getting anything; fantasies of boundless power, and feelings of utter helplessness.” Indeed, in this second half of the twentieth century, the problem of community – what it is and how it may be resolved in harmony and perfection – has become a live issue engaging the attention of philosophers and social scientists of diverse views.

The present essay is an attempt to show how in the Yoga-Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo these basic problems of human relations are viewed in the wider perspective of the meaning and sense of world-existence and thus acquire an altogether novel and significant hue. We shall see how this cosmic perspective not only helps us to unravel the mystery of these problems and understand clearly their true nature and inner significance, but also reveals to us at the same time the only, true and perfect way for their harmonious resolution.

**Trends at War**

If we probe deep enough we shall invariably come to see that "all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony."

In the sphere of human relations too – whether between man and man or between the individual and collectivity – the essential problem is of harmonisation between two basic trends of man: the trend to over-accentuated individualisation, the individual's all-imperative impulse towards self-assertion and self-aggrandisement; and the trend to associate with others, the impulse towards cohesion and social solidarity, variously labelled from time to time as “gregarious instinct”, “social instinct”, “phylic force”, “biosocial drive” and “herd instinct”.

Indeed, “the whole process of Nature depends on a balancing and a constant tendency to harmony between two poles of life, the individual whom the whole or aggregate nourishes and the whole or aggregate which the individual helps to constitute. Human life forms no exception to the rule. Therefore the perfection of human life must involve the elaboration of an as yet unaccomplished harmony between these two poles of our existence, the individual and the social aggregate. The perfect society will be that which most entirely favours the perfection of the individual; the perfection of the individual will be incomplete if it does not help towards the perfect state of the social aggregate to which he belongs and eventually to that of the largest possible human aggregate, the whole of a united humanity....

"Therefore at every step humanity is confronted with various problems which arise not only from the difficulty of accord between the interests of the individual and those of the immediate

aggregate, the community, but between the need and interests of the smaller integralities and the growth of that larger whole which is to ensphere them all.”³

Now, confronted with the difficult task of harmonisation between his individualistic trend and his drive towards socialisation, man has laid an exclusive or dominant stress sometimes on the individual, at other times on the collectivity. In the first view wherein emphasis is laid on the individual, the society is considered to exist only as a field of activity and growth for the individual; its sole function is to help the individual to satisfy his needs and interests of all sorts. In the opposite view, the individual’s importance is considered to be secondary; he has to live for the society, for he is only a cell of the group, “he has no other use or purpose of birth, no other meaning of his presence in Nature, no other function.”⁴ We may recall in this connection the rash assertion that there could be no rights for the individual, as the individual was nothing more than “a multitude of one million divided by one million.” But neither of these views is altogether valid and cannot be satisfying to the human being. Of course, this alternation of stress is itself a part of the process of Nature leading to a final solution of the problem. For, as Sri Aurobindo has said: “It is a constant method of Nature, when she has two elements of a harmony to reconcile, to proceed at first by a long continued balancing in which she sometimes seems to lean entirely on one side, sometimes entirely to the other, at others to correct both excesses by a more or less successful temporary adjustment and moderating compromise. The two elements appear then as opponents necessary to each other who therefore labour to arrive at some conclusion of their strife. But as each has its egoism and that innate tendency of all things which drives them not only towards self-preservation but towards self-assertion in proportion to their available force, they seek each to arrive at a conclusion in which itself shall have the maximum part and dominate utterly if possible or even swallow up entirely the egoism of the other in its own egoism. Thus the progress towards harmony accomplishes itself by a strife of forces and seems often to be no effort towards concord or mutual adjustment at all, but rather towards a mutual devouring.”⁵

But somehow or other we have to find a perfect reconciliation between freedom and harmony, unity and diversity, growth of the individual and the development of the social being. For both the individual and the collectivity are fundamental truths of existence. And to curb the freedom of the individual for the sake of social order and stability or to inhibit the growth of the society for the sake of the self-seeking demands of the individual cannot in the nature of things offer any lasting solution. For the inner spirit of man is bound to revolt and break down again and again all compromising structures until the true basis of harmonisation is discovered in principle and applied in practice.

If we turn our gaze from the problem of community to the sphere of man’s relations with other individual men, we come to witness the same tragic spectacle. Here, too, the same maladjustment and disbalance between the two basic drives of man — egoistic self-assertion and self-enlargement matched by an almost instinctive hunger for cohesion and solidarity with fellow-beings — vitiate for ever all human relations. Indeed, a separate being at odds with other separate beings — this is the normal status of the individual man; for he takes his stand on the consciousness of a separate ego and all his reactions arise out of this basic situation. All the divided strainings of individual natures, passions and strifes of separate egos, mutual ignorance and discordant notes, conflicts of minds and hearts and vital temperaments, conflicts even of separate interests: these are but natural and inevitable accompaniments of human relations.6

Such is then the inadequacy and imperfection of all actual human relations. But man cannot for ever remain satisfied with this insecure basis for his social life. But the question is: how to solve this problem of harmonisation? It is evident that an “imposed unanimity of mind and life”, a mechanical organisation of the communal existence, a “rationalised piecing together” of the opposing elements or any other ingenuity of mental, vital or physical construction can never accomplish the perfect harmony. All external attempts at harmonisation are bound to fail, for they miss the true clue to the situation. It is a unifying and harmonising knowledge that can alone find the way. But this knowledge can come to us only if we care to study the true metaphysical

The Problem of Human Relations

significance of the two basic trends of man; and for that, again, we have to go down in thought even to the sub-atomic level of existence; for, as we shall presently see, the problem of human relations is essentially an evolutionary problem intimately linked to the very march of world-existence. In fact, man's problem is by no means an isolated or unique one: it is a significant scene in a cosmic drama, an important link in a developing whole. The two basic drives of man towards cooperation and conflict, individualisation and socialisation with their attendant problems of mutual adjustment are manifestations on the human plane of a dual principle that is operative throughout the whole course of inorganic, organic and biological evolution.

Thus, to understand fully the real import of these two urges, we have to place them against an evolutionary perspective; and to judge adequately the problems of human relations, we have to call in as a witness the whole panorama of life.

An Evolutionary Problem

If we glean and integrate modern scientific findings – whether physical, biological or psychological – we cannot fail to note the striking fact that all this knowledge tends to corroborate in an astonishing way the following basic statement of Sri Aurobindo: "Unity is the very basis of existence. The oneness that is secretly at the foundation of all things, the evolving spirit in Nature is moved to realise consciously at the top; the evolution moves through diversity, from a simple to a complex oneness. Unity the race moves towards and must one day realise. But uniformity is not the law of life. Life exists by diversity; it insists that every group, every being shall be, even while one with all the rest in its universality, yet by some principle or ordered detail of variation unique."8

In fact the whole evolutionary problem turns out to be a various attempt at the harmonious equation of Unity to Diversity, Freedom to Order, Growth to Cohesion. In this connection we may recall a remarkable discovery of modern bio-sociological researches: the universal existence of a double principle of indi-

7. For much of the material in this section, the writer is indebted to Professor Paul Halmos' works, especially to the very interesting book, Towards a Measure of Man.
idual growth and collective cohesion at the basis of all manifestations of life: on all its levels of simple or complex organisation. On one side there is the principle of individual growth entailing self-assertion and separation from ‘others’, on the other is the principle of cohesion implying a basic resistance operating universally in all separation. But what is noteworthy is the fact that this resistance manifests itself not on the plane of individual growth where this growth can be permanently negatived and thus the whole life-process brought to an end, but, rather, it acts as a force seeking restitution for the separation on a higher level of organisation. Thus these two principles, through their mutual opposition and secret cooperation, continue to govern life through all its specialisation on the various levels of evolution.

And what is still more important in the discovery is the fact that in the ultimate analysis this double principle seems to be the manifestation of a basic entelechy of union which has split itself up into the mutually complementary aspects of growth and cohesion at the dawn of organic life and possibly even before that. We say ‘even before that’, for as a matter of fact, there is an unbroken continuity between the living and the non-living, and “if we can pursue our inquiries farther, not obliged to stop short where our immediate means of investigation fail us, we may be sure from our unvarying experience of Nature that investigations thus pursued will in the end prove to us that there is no break, no rigid line of demarcation between the earth and the metal formed in it or between the metal and the plant and, pursuing the synthesis farther, that there is none either between the elements and atoms that constitute the earth or metal and the metal or earth that they constitute. Each step of this graded existence prepares the next, holds in itself what appears in that which follows it. Life is everywhere, secret or manifest, organised or elemental, involved or evolved, but universal, all-pervading, imperishable; only its forms and organisings differ.”

Thus, as Sherington has rightly observed, “when we systematize, the animate falls unconstrainedly into series with the inanimate. The inanimate then becomes merely a special case within the more general.” It is not without reason that A.N. Whitehead included the atomic and molecular aggregates of physics under the

general concept of organism: “Science is taking on a new aspect which is neither purely physical, nor purely biological. It is becoming the study of organisms. Biology is the study of the larger organisms; whereas physics is the study of the smaller organisms.”

We may recall, too, in this connection the significant statement made by W.M. Wheeler in a slightly different context: “There is something fundamentally social in living things; and closer scrutiny shows that this must be characteristic of all life, since every organism is, at least temporarily, associated with other organisms, even if only with members of the opposite sex and with its parents.... We may say, therefore, that the social is a correlate as well as an emergent of all life in the sense in which Morgan speaks of the Mind as being both a correlate and emergent of life.... Indeed, the correlations of the social – using the term in its general sense – even extend down through the non-living to the very atom with its organization of component electrons” (italics ours).

Now, in this uninterrupted inorganic-organic continuity, the fundamental entelechy of union manifests in various ways in the atomic constituents uniting into atoms, atoms uniting into molecules, and the aperiodic organic molecules uniting to form unicellular living beings. These are the first three levels of union in the elaboration of a cosmic evolutionary force. In the fourth level, multicellular organisms grow out of the unicellular creatures of the primeval slime, wherein the principle of cohesion tries to offset the lopsided action of the principle of individuation. For, as Paul Halmos has pointed out, “until multicellular organisms appeared mitosis (i.e. reproduction through cell-division) involved separation of the individual units of life. The evolutionary process would have come to a standstill had there not been a force powerful enough to oppose that separation and dispersion of life in spite of mitosis. No multicellular organism could have come into being without this rebellion against separation and dispersion. One of the two things had to happen: either cell-division ceased to involve separation, or a reunion of separated cells into colonies had to take place. Contemporary microbiology strongly supports the evolutionary hypothesis that both these occurred.” Indeed, in the cellular slime moulds there is first a unicellular stage of separate,
independent cells followed by an aggregation of the single cells that cooperate in the development of one unified structure. "This unusual life cycle is useful in underlying the fact that the borderline between the development of one organism and the association and interaction of numerous organisms is indeed thin, for the slime moulds appear to be doing both. If we examine other lower forms we are repeatedly confronted with the problem of individuality, for there appears to be a continuous gradation from the single-celled individuals through colonies of varying degrees of integration, and finally to multicellular individuals. The problem again arises in animal societies which Emerson14 calls 'superorganisms', and in plants it arises in the compound filamentous forms such as the fleshy fungi"15 (italics ours).

In the fifth level of union, the level of macro-organisms and metazoa, the cohesion is sought on a still higher level that may be described as social. For, in the very nature of the circumstances prevailing, the macro-organisms cannot remain in, or enter into, the inseparable organic bonds accepted by cell-colonies, for instance. Because plants need food and air and animals must move, macro-organisms could not survive in such bonds. Hence arises the well-known phenomenon of universal sociality in all higher organisms. But here, too, subsists the dualism of cooperation-competition. Thus although "...love and sociality, cooperation and sacrifice [are] the highest expression of the central evolutionary process of the natural world",16 this too cannot be denied that "competition and survival of the fittest are never wholly eliminated, but reappear on each new plane to work out the predominance of the higher, i.e. more integrated and associated type, the phalanx being victorious till in turn it meets the legion."17

At last we arrive at the sixth level of union, the level of man, typifying the emergence of conscious mind in evolution. Viewed in the background of phylogenesis discussed above, the so-called social instinct of man appears to be no more than the manifestation of "a perennial and universal principle of union that works on the human level under the double guise of a Principium Sociale

The Problem of Human Relations

and a Principium Individuationis. But the problem of harmonisation has also become more difficult in the case of self-aware man. Already in the case of other metazoa, the fulfilment of the principle of cohesion was made impossible on a purely biological plane. For that the social consciousness had to be created in order to counterbalance the principle of individual growth in isolation. But although this social platform of cohesion might have operated adequately on the animal level, the self-awareness of man the mental being has prevented him from having a spontaneous sociability and a spontaneous cohesion with his fellow-men, thus making the problem of adjustment infinitely more difficult in his case. As a matter of fact, as some social scientists have come to realise, the evolutionary process has not yet reached a stage where it is apparent how cohesion on the level of man should be realized. Most of what is abnormal in the human adjustment process is so on account of the lack of a proper harmonisation. Indeed "abnormality spells either over-socialization or over-individualization. The supremacy of either is a sham supremacy, for a man who is hypersocial without the complementary individuality of a corresponding power of uniqueness and autarchy is not socializing a genuine person but merely goes through the motions of communion whereas the man who strives for an alien uniqueness of individuality without sustaining it by the life-blood of fellowship individuates not a person but a thing." For, to quote Werner Wolff, "when an individual identifies himself to an extreme degree with a group, the effect is that he loses his value. On the other hand, a complete inability to identify has the effect that the environment loses its value for the individual. In both cases the dynamic relationship between individual and environment is distorted."

Such is then the predicament of modern man viewed in the background of the whole panorama of life - a maladjusted being seeking desperately but missing always a true and harmonious adjustment with his fellow-men and with the society he lives in. But what is the fundamental meaning of the dual principle discussed above or its significance in the life of man? In fact, what is the ultimate entelechy that is being worked out in the progres-

19. Paul Halmos, op. cit., p. 84.
sive elaboration of life with man as the latest, but by no means the last, product of evolution?

The man of science is silent here; for basing his findings on outward and visible aspects alone, he can never expect to unravel the true mystery of things. In fact, as Prof. Bernal has pointed out, "the ultimate entelechy of aggregation... remains metaphysical" and in the view of Paul Halmos, "the nature of the ultimate entelechy is such as to be beyond the scope of all our experience, past, present, and probably future."

But the clue to the mystery we must have if we would solve the problems of human relations. Otherwise we, in our philosophical, psychological or sociological researches, may go on for ever groping and probing in blinded darkness but never reaching the true solution. In order to fix rightly the meaning of man’s individual existence and the perfect aim and norm of his society, indeed in order to have a radical solution of all human ills, what is imperatively needed at the moment is a dynamic philosophy of Integral Humanism and to whom else can we turn for this message of fulfilment and practical guidance, if not to Sri Aurobindo, the great Prophet of Divine Humanity?

Meaning of World-Existence

The Yoga-Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo arises out of an integral vision of the Integral Reality. It embodies not merely a well-reasoned structure of thought, but, above all, the fundamental truths of existence.

In Sri Aurobindo’s vision of Integral Reality, the meaning and sense of our world-existence and the significance of the advent of man therein have to be sought in an evolutionary interpretation of the terrestrial existence. But this evolution is primarily and essentially an evolution of consciousness, the form-evolution discovered by modern science being no more than a subsidiary process meant to support the former with a progressively developing “exterior metre mould of form which is devised to sustain in matter the rising intonations of the spiritual harmony.”

In Sri Aurobindo’s view, “an involution of the Divine Existence, the spiritual Reality, in the apparent inconscience of Matter

is the starting-point of the evolution. But that Reality is in its nature an eternal Existence, Consciousness, Delight of Existence: the evolution must then be an emergence of this Existence, Consciousness, Delight of Existence, not at first in its essence or totality but in evolutionary forms that express or disguise it. Out of the Inconscient, Existence appears in a first evolutionary form as substance of Matter created by an inconscient Energy. Consciousness, involved and non-apparent in Matter, first emerges in the disguise of vital vibrations, animate but subconscient; then, in imperfect formulations of a conscient life, it strives towards self-finding through successive forms of that material substance, forms more and more adapted to its own completer expression. Consciousness in life, throwing off the primal insensibility of a material inanimation and nescience, labours to find itself more and more entirely in the ignorance which is its first inevitable formulation; but it achieves at first only a primary mental perception and a vital awareness of self and things, a life perception which in its first forms depends on an internal sensation responsive to the contacts of other life and of Matter. Consciousness labours to manifest as best it can through the inadequacy of sensation its own inherent delight of being; but it can only formulate a partial pain and pleasure. In man the energising Consciousness appears as Mind more clearly aware of itself and things; this is still a partial and limited, not an integral power of itself, but a first conceptive potentiality and promise of integral emergence is visible. That integral emergence is the goal of evolving Nature."

The self-effectuation of the Spirit in the world, its "great and long self-weaving in time", is then the secret of the process of evolution. But what is the essential purpose behind this colossal evolutionary movement? In Sri Aurobindo's vision, if Brahman has entered form, it can only be to enjoy self-manifestation in the "figures of the relative and phenomenal consciousness". And the "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 to find himself in the apparent opposites of his being and his nature that Sachchidananda descends into the material Nescience and puts on its phenomenal ignorance as a

superficial mask in which he hides himself from his own conscious energy, leaving it self-forgetful and absorbed in its works and forms. It is in those forms that the slowly awaking soul has to accept the phenomenal action of an ignorance which is really knowledge awaking progressively out of the original nescience, and it is in the new conditions created by these workings that it has to rediscover itself and divinely transform by that light the life which is thus labouring to fulfil the purpose of its descent into the Inconscience. 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."

Now in the very nature of this world-play of Sachchidananda, the evolutionary ascent has to proceed through the mutual cooperation of the double terms: the universal and the individual. For they are the two essential terms into which the Absolute has descended in manifestation and always indeed they exist for each other and profit by each other. For "universe is a diffusion of the divine All in infinite Space and Time, the individual its concentration within limits of Space and Time. Universe seeks in infinite extension the divine totality it feels itself to be but cannot entirely realise; for in extension existence drives at a pluralistic sum of itself which can neither be the primal nor the final unit, but only a recurring decimal without end or beginning. Therefore it creates in itself a self-conscious concentration of the All through which it can aspire. In the conscious individual Prakriti turns back to perceive Purusha, World seeks after Self; God having entirely become Nature, Nature seeks to become progressively God.

"On the other hand it is by means of the universe that the individual is impelled to realise himself. Not only is it his foundation, his means, his field, the stuff of the divine Work; but also, since the concentration of the universal Life which he is takes place within limits and is not like the intensive unity of Brahman free from all conception of bound and term, he must necessarily universalise and impersonalise himself in order to manifest the divine All which is his reality. Yet is he called upon to preserve, even when he most extends himself in universality of conscious-

ness, a mysterious transcendent something of which his sense of personality gives him an obscure and egoistic representation. Otherwise he has missed his goal, the problem set to him has not been solved, the divine work for which he accepted birth has not been done."

Now if we look at the problem of human relations from this perspective of progressive revelation of Sachchidananda here in this mould of matter, we cannot fail to note that it is nothing but the transposition on the human level of a secret but profound dual urge that is the very constitutive basis of the whole movement. For, whatever comes into form and creation, being in its essence nothing else but the supreme Brahman who is the one without second, is always spurred by the secret Sachchidananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss) that is its true Self to realise at once its all-embracing unity and infinite omnipotence. But these two urges cannot be simultaneously satisfied on the basis of a fragmented consciousness. For the absolute completeness is not feasible in the finite ego-bound individual consciousness concentrated within the limits of the individual formation, because it is alien to the self-conception of the finite. Indeed "though Life is Power and the growth of the individual life means the growth of the individual Power, still the mere fact of its being a divided individualised life and force prevents it from really becoming master of its world. For that would mean to be master of the All-Force." But this too is a permanent undeniable fact of existence that "a physical, vital, moral, mental increase by a more and more all-embracing experience, a more and more all-embracing possession, absorption, assimilation, enjoyment is the inevitable, fundamental, ineradicable impulse of Existence, once divided and individualised, yet ever secretly conscious of its all-embracing, all-possessing infinity. The impulse to realise that secret consciousness is the spur of the cosmic Divine, the lust of the embodied Self within every individual creature; and it is inevitable, just, salutary that it should seek to realise it first in the terms of life by an increasing growth and expansion."

As a matter of fact, the individual's two urges to strive for infinite self-possession and possession of the world and to seek an

integral unity with others in a growing movement of self-giving are the two poles of this unique truth of existence: “the inalienable all-possessing and self-possessing unity of the Divine.” But in the middle terms of evolution, because of the intervention and interference of the self-limiting factor of ego, these two urges cannot be simultaneously satisfied in their infinite extent. Their true solution can be found only when the evolutionary process will arrive at its supreme and glorious end and Sachchidananda will stand revealed in its infinite splendour and bliss even in this manifested existence. But till then the problem of harmonisation is bound to exist always and at every step of the ascent of life, and the progressive elaboration of life is nothing else but an attempt to seek this reconciliation in a more and more luminous way until the final unitary harmony is securely established. But that harmony lies even beyond the reaches of Mind and so man has to progress farther if he would solve his problems of relations. Let us now look at the various attempts at this harmonisation made by Life in different phases of its evolutionary ascent.

The Ascent of Life

In existence, unity is “the master principle of which division is only a subordinate term, and to the principle of unity every divided form must therefore subordinate itself in one fashion or another by mechanical necessity, by compulsion, by assent or inducement.” Thus “the atom, as it is the first aggregate,” is also made by Nature “the first basis of aggregate unities” in the first material status of Life.

“When Life reaches its second status, that which we recognise as vitality, the contrary phenomenon takes the lead and the physical basis of the vital ego is obliged to consent to dissolution. Its constituents are broken up so that the elements of one life can be used to enter into the elemental formation of other lives.”

“We have then two principles in Life, the necessity or the will of the separate ego to survive in its distinctness and guard its identity and the compulsion imposed upon it by Nature to fuse itself with others. In the physical world she lays much stress on the former impulse; for she needs to create stable separate forms, since it is

28. Adapted from chaps. XIX-XXII of The Life Divine.
her first and really her most difficult problem to create and maintain any such thing as a separative survival of individuality and a stable form for it in the incessant flux and motion of Energy and in the unity of the infinite.... But as soon as Nature has secured a sufficient firmness in this respect for the safe conduct of her ulterior operations, she reverses the process; the individual form perishes and the aggregate life profits by the elements of the form that is thus dissolved. This, however, cannot be the last stage; that can only be reached when the two principles are harmonised, when the individual is able to persist in the consciousness of his individuality and yet fuse himself with others without disturbance of preserving equilibrium and interruption of survival."

"The terms of the problem presuppose the full emergence of Mind; for in vitality without conscious mind there can be no equation.... The mental being expressive of soul-consciousness is the nodus of the persistent individual and the persistent aggregate life; in him their union and harmony become possible." "This mental status of life is a condition in which we rise progressively beyond the struggle for life by mutual devouring and the survival of the fittest by that struggle; for there is more and more a survival by mutual help and a self-perfectioning by mutual adaptation, interchange and fusion."

Indeed, in its life-origin, the law of association and "the law of love is the impulse to realise and fulfil oneself in others and by others, to be enriched by enriching, to possess and be possessed because without being possessed one does not possess oneself utterly." Ultimately all problems of life are problems of relations between self and not-self, and these problems can never be adequately solved unless and until one comes to experience the not-self as one's own self. And this is, in essence, what the evolutionary ascent of life is seeking to realise here upon earth: a simultaneous mutual possession of the self and the not-self.

"All the difficult effort of man towards the harmonisation of self-affirmation and freedom, by which he possesses himself, with association and love, fraternity, comradeship, in which he gives himself to others, his ideals of harmonious equilibrium, justice, mutuality, equality by which he creates a balance of the two opposites, are really an attempt inevitably predetermined in its lines to solve the original problem of Nature, the very problem of
Life itself, by the resolution of the conflict between the two opposites which present themselves in the very foundations of Life in Matter” (italics ours). The resolution is attempted by the higher principle of Mind, but Mind in its nature being a separative consciousness cannot solve this problem within its own borders, and the harmony has to be sought in a Power still beyond Mind. “Indeed, the end of the road, the goal itself can only be reached by Mind passing beyond itself into that which is beyond Mind, since of That the Mind is only an inferior term and an instrument, first for descent into form and individuality and secondly for reascension into that reality which the form embodies and the individuality represents. Therefore the perfect solution of the problem of Life is not likely to be realised by association, interchange and accommodations of love alone or through the law of the Mind and the heart alone. It must come by a fourth status of life in which the eternal unity of the many is realised through the spirit, and conscious foundation of all the operations of life is laid no longer in the divisions of body, nor in the passions and hungers of the vitality, nor in the groupings and the imperfect harmonies of the mind, nor in a combination of all these, but in the unity and freedom of the Spirit.”

When we look at the problem of human relations – whether between individual and individual or between individual and aggregate – we thus come to see that in order to solve them integrally “we must arrive at a conscious unity with our fellow-beings and not merely at the sympathy created by love or the understanding created by mental knowledge, which will always be the knowledge of their superficial existence and therefore imperfect in itself and subject to denial and frustration by the uprush of the unknown and unmastered from the subconscious or the subliminal in them and us. But this conscious oneness can only be established by entering into that in which we are one with them, the universal, and the fullness of the universal exists consciously only in that which is superconscient to us, in the Supermind.... The lower conscious nature is bound down to ego in all its activities, chained triply to the stake of differentiated individuality. The Supermind alone commands unity in diversity.” Therefore the emergence of the Supermind in the terrestrial manifestation as the next phase of evolution can alone solve the problems of human relations.
The Problem of Human Relations

The Message of Divine Humanism

We thus come to the inevitable conclusion that the true solution for the problem of harmony can intervene and human relations can be based on a secure and perfect basis, only if we transfer the roots of our relations from the mind, life and body to a greater consciousness above the mind. All relations must be founded on a spiritual intimacy, created in and around the Divine. "The solution lies not in the reason but in the soul of man, in its spiritual tendencies. It is a spiritual, an inner freedom that can alone create a perfect human order. It is a spiritual, a greater than the rational enlightenment that can alone illumine the vital nature of man and impose harmony on its self-seekings, antagonisms and discords. A deeper brotherhood, a yet unfounded law of love is the only sure foundation possible for a perfect social evolution, no other can replace it. But this brotherhood and love will not proceed by the vital instincts or the reason.... Nor will it found itself in the natural heart of man where there are plenty of other passions to combat it. It is in the soul that it must find its roots." 29

Only when the individual discovers his secret Self which is at the same time the Self of all, when he sees the Divine not only in himself but in all others, can true unity between man and man be realised on earth. "For so only can egoism disappear and the true individualism of the unique godhead in each man found itself on the true communism of the equal godhead in the race; for the Spirit, the inmost Self, the universal Godhead in every being is that whose very nature of diverse oneness it is to realise the perfection of its individual life and nature in the existence of all, in the universal life and nature." 30

But does this not seem to be a solution that appears too remote, too chimerical and thus puts off the consummation of a better human society to a far-off date in the future evolution of the race? For it means that an inner change is needed in the very basis of human nature, a change apparently too difficult to be effected or even attempted except by the rare few. But, if Sri Aurobindo’s evolutionary interpretation of world-existence is correct, and if the total emergence of Sachchidananda in manifested nature is the ultimate goal of this evolution, then Nānyah panthā vidyate
ayānāya. 31 “In any case, if this is not the solution, then there is no solution, if this is not the way, then there is no way for the human kind. Then the terrestrial evolution must pass beyond man as it has passed beyond the animal and a greater race must come that will be capable of the spiritual change, a form of life must be born that is nearer to the divine.” 32

But man need not be pessimistic about his fate. For, as Sri Aurobindo assures us, the destiny of man is to consciously cooperate with the secret nisus of evolution and thus to transmute his own texture and stature into the splendid harmony of a divine manhood.

Such is then the glorious message of divine humanism that Sri Aurobindo offers to modern man perplexed and frustrated with manifold ills of human relations. But Sri Aurobindo is not content only with offering this message, for he is not a mere philosopher in the Western sense of the term: he is, above all, the Mahayogi, the supreme Architect of this great divine birth whose advent he has heralded in no uncertain terms in his own personal life. In fact, he has built up a new system of Yoga, the Supramental Yoga, and chalked out ways and means by following which every individual man of our age can realise in his own life and in his communal living the marvellous possibilities that already lie latent in him, – of course, if he chooses to do so and prepares to pay the necessary price in patience, perseverance, but, above all, in sincerity.

31. “There is no other way to the goal”.
Earth-life appears to us to be a vast arena where individuals and collectivities, communities and nations, all are seeking after self-expression and self-fulfilment. Self-possession, self-affirmation and self-expansion constitute the threefold urge of all living beings.

But where is the guarantee that all these diverse self-affirmations will move in perfect harmony and mutual adaptability? Where is the assurance that the self-affirmation of the individual will not go counter to the self-affirmation of the collective being, and *vice versa*?

Rather, one meets the contrary phenomenon all around. We notice clash, discord and disharmony reigning supreme everywhere. Individuals clashing with individuals, communities colliding with communities, nations warring against nations – this is the normal spectacle hailing our eyes.

But certainly this cannot be the ideal way of living. Harmony, and not disharmony and discord, should be the keynote of all living, whether individual or collective. But till this day, man’s attempts at harmonisation have all miscarried and failed. He has tried his hand at a number of remedies, but the disease seems to have defied all palliatives up till now.

In spite of his great and elaborate material civilisation man
has not travelled a whit towards true unity with his fellow-beings. Essentially in his nature he has remained the same uncultured aboriginal lurking stealthily in darkness to prey upon others in order to grow in his own stature. Self-aggrandisement at the expense of all others, this principle still holds its sway over the nature of man. Even in the limited field of his own personal life he has not succeeded in establishing inner concord and harmony.

But the question is, why so? Why is all this clash and collision and disharmony? What is the root-cause of this ignoble failure on the part of man to organise his individual and collective life on the basis of harmony and union? If we really want to construct our society on an ideal basis, we have to touch and tackle the problem at its very root. To manipulate only on the surface without caring to go into the fundamentals of the problem – this is precisely the reason why man has till this day failed in his attempts to usher in a rule of the Spirit upon earth.

Man has persistently dreamt of a perfected life upon earth, but a life attaining perfection must embrace at the same time three distinct perfections: (i) a total self-finding and self-fulfilment of the individual in himself, (ii) an integral flowering of the collective being and (iii) the perfectly harmonious mutual relation between individual and individual, between society and society, and between individual and society. These three perfections are in no way incompatible with one another, rather they constitute one harmonious whole and are the natural corollaries of one single attainment. We shall try to see, in the course of our essay, what that single attainment is. But before that let us examine whether these perfections are feasible, so long as man remains what he is now.

At present man the individual conceives of himself as a separate ego, separated from others, separated even from his own true and permanent self. As a result, he does not know in what consists his true fulfilment. Groping blindly in the world, he is tossed hither and thither by the impact of world-forces. Vain of his freewill, he is merely a tool in the hands of cosmic energies. His nature is too complex for him to grapple with it. In his apparent manifestation he seems to himself to be a multiperson. He has in him a physical being, a life-being, a mental being, all apparently seeking for their separate fulfilment. He is actuated by numberless forces, each of
them straining after its separate satisfaction. The individual feels himself lost in the medley of impulisions. To strike an accord between all these divergent pulls is a task too difficult for his mind to execute. As a result, he suffers from a constant sense of confusion, frustration and friction, and an inner disharmony and disequilibrium.

Throughout his long history man has tried in diverse ways to solve this insistent problem. The best of all his attempts so far has been to try to govern his life with the enlightened reason. But life is not entirely rational, and human vital nature and ego are too strong to be subordinated by the mental reason.

And this is not all. Our surface existence is not the whole of our existence. It is only the summit of an iceberg the major portion of which remains submerged in a vast and obscure subconscious, and thus hidden from the outward view of man. This subconscious is the field of all sorts of blind powerful impulses which surge up now and then to the surface and smash to pieces everything bright and golden erected there in the course of long labour and preparation. So long as this subconscious part of man’s nature remains untackled and untransformed, the individual cannot be made perfect and remoulded ‘in the image of God.’

The second perfection, perfection of the collective being, remains on its part short of attainment, so long as the individuals constituting it remain imperfect themselves. For the collective being has to formulate and express itself through the individuals in order to become conscious, and the community cannot be expected to be perfect except through the perfection of the individuals.

Let us now analyse the possibility or otherwise of the third perfection: harmonious mutual relation between individual and individual and between individual and society. This too is bound to remain an unrealisable chimera until and unless man transcends his present ego-centric nature. For ego means separation, division and fragmentation. The consciousness, knowledge and will of the egoistic individual remain divorced from the consciousness, knowledge and will of all other individuals, and as a result the minds, hearts, lives of the constituting individuals in a human society cannot be perfectly and harmoniously accommodated. Ego misses the truth of the whole and tries to assert itself for the sake of its separate advantage. Consequently life-discord, conflict and disharmony are bound to arise. No amount of political, social or other
mechanical panaceas can solve this problem. The most drastic changes attempted by them will come to naught; for the root-canker of all ills, the ego, is left unscathed. The individual continues still to be governed by vital desires and passions and moved by all sorts of ignorant forces.

Being thus baffled in his efforts to square accounts between his own individual self-affirmation and the self-affirmation of the collective being, man has tried in desperation to cling to one of two extreme views. In one of these views, he has over-emphasised the so-called self-fulfilment of the individual. But if by individual self-fulfilment is meant the satisfaction of one's separative ego, then disunity and discord are sure to crop up. Being spiritually ignorant and unaware of the truth of other individuals, the individual is bound to be anarchic and wound others' interests in order to aggrandise his own blinded ego. Thus he will destroy altogether the very foundation of a successful collective living.

In the other extreme view, the society has been made all in all, the communal ego has been elevated to the status of an uncompromising master at whose altar the individual is forced to immolate himself. But in this way, neither the individual nor the society stands to gain. For the collective consciousness is always less evolved than the consciousness of the best individuals forming it, and the collective being can progress and move onward only through the enlightened consciousness of its individuals. So, if the society tries to crush the individual, it does so only at the risk of the drying up of its own hidden springs of action. It becomes mechanised and all further evolutionary possibility recedes from it.

In fact, we have to seek the solution elsewhere. For we have seen that the malady of the individual is that he has not found his true soul, his divine individuality. Before any attempt at truly perfected living can be taken in hand, the ego has perforce to be dethroned from its present elevated pedestal. But it may be argued that if the ego is abolished, man will lose his individuality à même coup.

But precisely this is an erroneous way of looking at the reality. For the ego is not the individual. The true individuality of man lies in his psychic being, his spiritual individuality, which is preparing through his evolution to emerge in him: its emergence and integral self-manifestation and not the satisfaction of the mere egoistic will-to-live is the true object of individual living.
But since the evolution is progressive, the true person does not at once show himself in the outward nature of the individual. He is now, as it were, the constitutional monarch, and his false deputy, the ego, is governing the nature of man. But the first preoccupation of man should be to discover this secret person and dwell in his consciousness.

But this is not enough. For, ordinarily, spirituality liberates and illumines the inner ranges of the being. But so long as it has to work through the instrumentality of mind, it loses its effectivity and can only influence the outer earth-life but not bring about any radical transformation of life. In order to transform radically a nature created by Ignorance, a higher instrumental dynamis than Mind is absolutely needed. This superior dynamis with perfect effective power has been called by Sri Aurobindo the Supermind. This is a higher Power of the Spirit, which is bound to appear overtly in earth-nature in the inexorable march of evolution. For the terrestrial evolution is essentially an evolution of Consciousness-Force and the oestrus of evolution has by no means stopped with the emergence of man, the mental animal. Life emerged in Matter; Mind has followed Life. But Mind is not the highest possible Power of the Spirit and in the inevitability of things Supermind, the supremely dynamic Gnosis, is bound to emerge in terrestrial evolution and become in time the principal instrumentation of divine manifestation here upon earth.

But wherein lies the essential difference between the nature of Mind as we know it and the nature of Supermind? To put it in brief, mental nature is based on a consciousness of the finite, whereas supramental nature is a consciousness and power of the Infinite. Mind thinks, sees, feels, senses with division and separation as its starting-point, also as its most dominant trait; but Supermind, whose very nature is Truth-Consciousness, bases itself intrinsically and always on the standpoint of essential and inalienable oneness and regards everything, even the most diverse and apparently the most glaring multiplicity and diversity in the light of this oneness. Its will, ideas, feelings, sense are all made of the stuff of oneness and its dynamic action invariably proceeds upon that secure basis.

Supermind being a unitarian, integralising and harmonic consciousness, the supramental being, in contrast with the present mental being, will succeed in founding all his living, whether
individual or collective, on an innate sense and effective realisation of harmonic unity in his own inner and outer life or group life. All other beings would be to him his own selves. He will realise himself to be a soul of the All-Soul, "a centre of differentiation of the one personal Consciousness, a centre of determination of the one total movement". The individual will then know that he is not only himself but also all others, that the total universal movement is one and indivisible and he who is presiding over this cosmic Manifestation is also One and indivisible. To quote from Sri Aurobindo:

"The supramental being in his cosmic consciousness seeing and feeling all as himself would act in that sense; he would act in a universal awareness and a harmony of his individual self with the total self, of his individual will with the total will, of his individual action with the total action.... His cosmic individuality would know the cosmic forces and their movement and their significance as part of himself, and the truth-consciousness in him would see the right relation at each step and find the dynamic right expression of that relation."

Unity, mutuality and harmony will thus be the law of a common collective life. But for that it need not be feared that the group life will be just a white monotone excluding from itself all the manifold richness of a polychrome diversity. Indeed, there will be infinite variation in the manifestation of the individuals constituting a gnostic society; but since each one will be aware of the total truth of things and beings and of their inner self which is also the self of all, this diversity will never clash with the inherent unity of the movement. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

"A supramental or gnostic race of beings would not be a race made according to a single type, moulded in a single fixed pattern; for the law of the supermind is unity fulfilled in diversity, and therefore there would be an infinite diversity in the manifestation of the gnostic consciousness although that consciousness would still be one in its basis, in its constitution, in its all-revealing and all-uniting order."

Thus all problems of living, individual and collective, will then be definitively solved. And we conclude that three movements are necessary for remedying the ills of human life. Firstly, each individual has to awake to his now secret spiritual individuality and

2. Ibid., p. 971.
make it the centre of his living; secondly, he has to open himself fully to the riches of the Spirit above; thirdly, he has to invoke the Supramental Gnosis so that it can come down and transform his nature in its absolute entirety. For Supermind alone has got the requisite power to change human nature down to the subconscient and the inconscient.

But this may sound like a solution ideal but unrealisable. For none of these movements is easy to undertake and fulfil — so it seems at least — even for the rare individuals; so, how can we reasonably expect that the collectivity will either take to or persevere in this attempt?

But the eye of spiritual vision holds out the hope, nay, the assurance that man has reached a crucial point in his evolutionary march, where Supramental Gnosis is in the foreseeable future going to emerge overtly in the earth-nature. The evolutionary nisus is still working and just as it has brought out successively Life and Mind out of the apparently inconscient shell of Matter, so also it is going to release the involved Supermind in the not too distant future. The Supermind from above is not only ready to descend; it has, in fact, already descended into earth-nature. It is now actively at work there and, as a preparatory measure, it is trying to fully awaken a few individuals to the divine possibility upon earth itself and convert their mind, life and body into perfect receptacles and vehicles of manifestation of the Truth-Consciousness. And once this is effected, once the Supramental Power fully takes its stand and gets organised in the nature of a few individuals, it will become operative in the collective life also. And like some dissolving corrosive acid, it will then cut its way through the obstinate obstacles and dark resistances of the present nature of Ignorance and establish its divine reign here upon this earth. And in that divine event lies man’s true fulfilment as an individual and as a race. Nānyo panthā vidyate ayanāya.

But a nagging question may haunt us at this point: Will man’s physical existence too share in the glory of the divine life upon earth? Will the body of man be ever able to liberate itself from all the present frailties and limitations? In which way will the New Man’s body, in its form and functioning, be different and distinguished from the present physical body of man?

Our last chapter seeks to furnish answers to these questions.
ON PHYSICAL TRANSFORMATION*

By Wisdom all these are guided and have their firm abiding in Wisdom. For Wisdom is the eye of the world, Wisdom is the sure foundation.

(Aitareya Upanishad, III.3.)

We want an integral transformation, the transformation of the body and all its activities.

Formerly when one spoke of transformation, one meant solely the transformation of the inner consciousness. One endeavoured to discover in oneself the deeper consciousness and rejected the body and its activities as a burden and a useless thing, so that one might be engaged solely in the inner development. Sri Aurobindo declared that that is not sufficient; the Truth demanded that the material world too should take part in this transformation and become an expression of the deeper Truth. But when this was told to people, many thought that it was possible to transform the body and its activities without troubling oneself at all with what was happening within - which is of course not quite true. Before you take up the work of physical transformation, which is of all things the most difficult, you must have your inner consciousness firmly, solidly established in the Truth...

(The Mother, Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Vol. XV, No. 4, p. 51.)

Our sadhana has for its goal not merely the spiritual liberation of some isolated individuals from the shackles of phenomenal Ignorance but the establishment of a divine life upon earth, ihaiva. But since Matter is the foundation of all evolutionary efflorescence of Life here upon the terrestrial plane, our body assumes a

* This chapter acts as a bridge linking the present volume to the other book by the author: The Destiny of the Body.
supreme importance in the total scheme of our spiritual achievement. For “the body is not only the necessary outer instrument of the physical part of action, but for the purposes of this life a base or pedestal also for all inner action.” So a full play of divine life demands as its essential prerequisite a totally transformed physical body which will as a supple and flawless and transparent instrument respond fully to each and every call of the self-manifesting Spirit. “At present the notation of the body and the physical consciousness has a very large determining power on the music made by this human harp of God; the notes we get from the spirit, from the psychic soul, from the greater life behind our physical life cannot come in freely, cannot develop their high powerful and proper strain. This condition must be reversed; the body and the physical consciousness must develop the habit of admitting and shaping themselves to these higher strains and not they but the nobler parts of the nature must determine the music of our life and being.”

Thus a divine transformation of our physical sheath, annamaya kośa, is an indispensable concomitant of a truly divine living in the world. But in the actually realised status of consciousness of man the mental being, this transformation can by no means be achieved nor even initiated on the plane of the body. It will then be like putting the cart before horse. For, where is the necessary lever of transformation or the potent agent to effectuate the change? In reality – whatever may be the appearances to the contrary – it is consciousness and consciousness alone that is always the prime determinant. So, before we can at all expect any transformation of our physical existence, we must first acquire a divine consciousness within and effectuate a total liberation of our Purusha part. Then and then alone can the question of the liberation of our Prakriti part and of the divine transfiguration of our bodily instrument acquire some practical importance, not before. In the forthright words of the Mother: “You must begin from within. I have said a hundred times, you must begin from above. You must purify the higher region and then purify the lower.” Sri Aurobindo too has warned us:

“The transformation to which we aspire is too vast and complex

to come at one stroke; it must be allowed to come by stages. The physical change is the last of these stages and is itself a progressive process.

"The inner transformation cannot be brought about by physical means either of a positive or a negative nature. On the contrary, the physical change itself can only be brought about by a descent of the greater supramental consciousness into the cells of the body." (italic ours.)

Yes, it is the 'supramental consciousness' – understood not in the sense of any and every spiritual consciousness above the plane of Mind but in the specific sense in which Sri Aurobindo uses it – that alone possesses the Knowledge and Power to effectuate the transformation of our physical being. It is the descent of Supermind from above and the emergence of involved Supermind from behind the veil into the arena of our manifested becoming, that can progressively divinise our inner existence and finally proceed to the divinisation of our body itself as the summit achievement of the evolutionary elaboration of life. No other spiritual consciousness or power short of this Supermind, this divine Gnosis and the Truth-Consciousness (rta-cit) of Sachchidananda possesses this power of integral transformation. And that is why a subjective spiritual liberation of our inner being and an inner change of consciousness alone, although the essential precondition for any attempt at physical transformation to be at all made feasible, cannot be as a general rule-sufficient by itself.

But why is it so? Why have the states of spiritual consciousness attained so far by men of spirit in different climes and times failed to mould the physical existence in the image of divinity? What are the basic difficulties that render this task of physical transformation almost impossible of realisation?

To have a proper grasp of the problem we must at the outset take note of a few cardinal points concerning the process of transformation in general:

(1) In order that a particular part of our total existence may be transformed, it is essential that the part itself seek for this desired transformation. It has to grow self-aware of the need for the change and acquire the necessary capacity to bear the transfiguring touch when it comes.

(2) A higher consciousness acting from above or imposing its influence on any lower part of the being, without the latter's self-conscious and willing collaboration, may indeed modify to some extent the prevailing nature or working of this lower part, but can never altogether transform it. "If the work were done from above, from some spiritual height, there might be a sublimation or uplifting or the creation of a new structure compelled by the sheer force of the influence from above; but this change might not be accepted as native to itself by the lower being; it would not be a total growth, an integral evolution, but a partial and imposed formation...; a creation from outside the normal nature, by imposition upon it, it could be durable in its entirety only as long as there was a maintenance of the creating influence."  

(3) The higher Power and Consciousness has thus to descend into the lower part and dynamically act therein, seeking to awaken in the process the consenting participation of the latter. But this meeting of the higher and the lower has a reciprocal two-way consequence. While the higher seeks to transfigure the lower with its own power and its own law of nature, svadharma, it is at the same time modified, its light obscured and its effectivity curtailed by the counteraction of the lower. To quote Sri Aurobindo again:

"A descent of consciousness into the lower levels is... necessary, but in this way also it is difficult to work out the full power of the higher principle; there is a modification, dilution, diminution which keeps up an imperfection and limitation in the results: the light of a greater knowledge comes down but gets blurred and modified, its significance misinterpreted or its truth mixed with mental and vital error, or the force, the power to fulfil itself is not commensurate with its light.... A mutilated power, a partial effect or hampered movement is the consequence."

(4) Now the capacity of the higher principle to modify or change the lower without at the same time itself undergoing any dilution or mixture depends upon its essential potency. "It is not likely that it will be able to bring about an entire transformation if it is not itself the original Principle of Existence, if it is only derivative, an instrumental power and not the first puissance."

7. Ibid., p. 916.
8. Ibid., p. 704.
Now, if we view the problem of physical transformation in the light of the above points, we can very well understand why this problem has defied any solution so far. First of all, our body itself possesses a subconscient consciousness of its own which clings with an obstinate fidelity to its past habits and modes of functioning and automatically and invariably offers a dogged opposition to all that seeks to change its nature. And this is so because the process of evolution here upon earth has started from an inconscient base and all that has emerged and developed afterwards has had to appear as a superstructure upon the unchanged foundation of Inconscience.

Thus even in man, as yet the summit product of evolutionary becoming, the substance of the normal being is moulded out of the Inconscience. "Our ignorance is a growth of Knowledge in a substance of being which is nescient; the consciousness it develops, the knowledge it establishes are always dogged, penetrated, enveloped by this nescience.... The nescience invades or encompasses or even swallows up and absorbs into its oblivious darkness all that enters into it; it compels the descending light to compromise with the lesser light it enters: there is a mixture, a diminution and dilution of itself, a diminution, a modification, an incomplete authenticity of its truth and power."

Thus, unless this ‘blind Ananke of the Inconscience’ can somehow be illumined and transfigured, there can be no prospect for any physical transformation. For this ‘dragon base’ remaining as it is now, the dead weight of the inconscient substratum of our physical being, the inexorable downward pull towards the original Inertia and Nescience, will infructify the action of any intervening Force that seeks to effectuate a radical transformation. Even the higher spiritual-mental powers and their intensities entering into the substance of this Inconscient foundation, undergo this inescapable disability and cannot annul the disparity between the consciousness that comes in and its force of dynamic effectuation. Thus whatever the degree or status of the subjective spiritual illumination of the sadhaka, this substance of Inconscience constituting his body and physical nature continues to circumscribe and diminish “the sovereignty and freedom and dynamism of the spirit with its own force of adjustment by limitation, demarcation by

incapacity, foundation of energy on the repose of an original Inertia”\textsuperscript{10}, and as a consequence remains subject to the established and inexorable laws of Darkness and Incapacity and Death.

Faced with this almost insuperable difficulty of physical transformation, most spiritual seekers have tended to turn away from the physical being of man with aversion or even total denial, and reconciled themselves to its supposedly unalterable fate of ever remaining unregenerate and untransformed. But, evidently, this cannot be the right attitude for the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga. Since a divine transformation of all the parts of our existence including its most material foundation is the goal envisaged by the Yoga of Integral Transformation, we must seek for the clue that will resolve the age-old deadlock and open the portals to the transfiguration of our body.

We have seen before that a ‘static seizure’ of the domains of the spirit in our inner consciousness is not sufficient for the physical transformation; for that to be possible there must come about a dynamic descent of the higher consciousness into our physical nature and a luminous awakening evoked in the very bosom of body-consciousness itself.

Now, it is only the supramental Force, the ‘original and final self-determining Truth-Force of the self-existent Infinite’ that has got the necessary potency to entirely overcome the iron hold of the basal Inconscience. For only the supermind can descend into the subterranean reaches of our existence without losing in any way its full dynamic power of action; for “its action is always intrinsic and automatic, its will and knowledge identical and the result commensurate: its nature is a self-achieving Truth-Consciousness.”\textsuperscript{11} To the dark negating Necessity of the Inconscience, supermind opposes a supremely imperative luminous spiritual Necessity that is irresistible in its power of effectuation.

It follows then that if there is to be an entire transformation even of our material existence, supermind or divine Gnosis must directly intervene in our earth-nature and overtly act therein. From the point of view of evolution, this supramental intervention will take the form of a twofold process. When the evolutionary Nature is found ready and receptive, there will occur “a supramental inflow from above, the descent of a gnostic being into the

\textsuperscript{10} The Life Divine, p. 962.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 917.
nature, and an emergence of the concealed supramental force from below; the influx and the unveiling between them will remove... the nature of the Ignorance. The rule of the Inconscient will disappear: for its Inconscience will be changed by the outburst of the greater secret Consciousness within it, the hidden Light, into what it always was in reality, a sea of the secret Superconscious.

As a result of this transmutation of the inconscient foundation of our embodied existence, spirit will become the truly sovereign occupant of form, our bodily existence will transcend the present law of death, division and mutual devouring, the material substance itself will be transfigured and spiritualised and our body will become the body divine that will "reflect or reproduce here in a divine life on the earth something of this highest greatness and glory of the self-manifesting Spirit."

At this point the sceptic may raise his eyebrows and exclaim: "Impossible! This is too fantastic a possibility to be realised by the future evolution of man, albeit supramental." But have not the achievements of each new phase of the evolutionary unfoldment of life upon earth looked like fantasies when viewed from the station of an anterior phase? Who could have possibly imagined that in the midst of the inanimate and insensible primal desert universe of "nebulae and star-clusters and suns and planets, existing only for itself, without a sense in it, empty of cause or purpose," there could at all be first an outbreak of teeming life and then the appearance of a thinking mind? Would it not have seemed to be a sheer absurdity to foresee that "in this minute island of life, so inconspicuous amid the immensities, in one sole species out of this petty multitude, a mental being would emerge,... who would create all manner of utensils, tools, instruments out of Matter for all kinds of utilities, erect out of it cities, houses, temples, theatres, laboratories, factories, chisel from it statues and carve caves-cathedrals, invent architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry and a hundred crafts and arts, discover the mathematics and physics of the universe and the hidden secret of its structure, live for the sake of mind and its interests, for thought and knowledge, develop into the thinker, the philosopher and scientist and, as a supreme

defiance to the reign of Matter, awake in himself to the hidden Godhead, become the hunter after the invisible, the mystic and the spiritual seeker."\(^{15}\)

Indeed, no limit need be or can be put to evolutionary possibilities. Actuality never exhausts the sum of potentialities.\(^{16}\) And, as Sri Aurobindo has so forcefully pointed out, to argue that something cannot be done because it has never yet been done is to "deny the possibility of changing things and thus of evolution, of the realisation of the unrealised,... and reduce all to a matter of rigid and unalterable status quo, which is an insolent defiance to both fact and reason (!) and suprareason."\(^{17}\)

But this cannot be. And evolutionary Nature brushes aside all our preconceived notions of plausibility and proceeds always to conquer ever-new terrains of achievement.\(^{16}\) But a valid question may be raised whether the process of evolution is still continuing, particularly so far as form-evolution is concerned. We maintained that the divine body to appear in the course of the future evolution of man will have a different structure and a new type of 'physiological' functioning and acquire hitherto unrealised evolutionary capabilities. But has not the process of organic evolution stopped long since? And has not the human body with all its foibles and virtues, its chemistry and physiology, already acquired a well-set unalterable disposition? If so, the present structure and habitual responses of man's body must be deemed to be permanent and binding and incapable of any alteration. After all - the disbeliever would so declare - the body is the product of inconscient physical energy and the consciousness that seems to indwell it is only a derivative outcome of the operation of this energy. Hence it follows that once the evolutionary process has come to a stop, there is no more any scope for any adaptive improvement and our bodily system is destined to remain bound down to its present form and functioning. For, if the process of evolutionary transfiguration is set aside as not being operative any longer, what other alter-


16. Cf. "Impossibility is only a sum of greater unrealised possibles. It veils an advanced stage and a yet unaccomplished journey." (Sri Aurobindo, Thoughts and Glimpses, p. 6.)


18. Cf. "All things (not only those that are conceivable at the moment, but all those that are for the moment inconceivable) all are not only possible, but will be realised." (The Mother, *Bulletin*, Vol. XIII, No. 3, p. 51.)
native mechanism can at all be conceived of that can bring about the necessary change?

But this train of reasoning is altogether fallacious. For, the implied assumptions and hence the conclusions are only half-truths, and has it not been well said that 'half-truth is its own Nemesis'? As a matter of fact, doubts and misgivings of the above sort arise from a superficial consideration of the truth of things, which again is due to the thought's concentrating on the appearance alone and missing thereby what lies behind the frontal process. But a deeper inquiry reveals to us that:

(1) The true foundation is above while the branchings are downward, ārdhāvudhna niścina-sākha (Rig Veda), ārdhamūlo-vāksākha (Gita). Consciousness is not an epiphenomenon of Matter; it is on the contrary Matter itself that is derivative and a phenomenon of Energy. And this Energy that is secretly and universally operative behind all manifestation is 'not without a Being or Existence possessing it or a Consciousness supplying it': it is indeed in its essential nature the Consciousness-Force, cit-śakti, cit-tapas, of Sachchidananda.

(2) Thus our "body is not mere unconscious Matter: it is a structure of a secretly conscious Energy that has taken form in it." And consciousness that "seems to be a result is – in its reality, though not in its form – the origin; the effect is in the essence pre-existent to the apparent cause, the principle of the emergent activity precedent to its present field of action."

(3) That the embodied soul is so much dependent upon the bodily and nervous life, that the physiological functionings of the body govern and determine the reactions of the subjective being, is thus seen to be only a minor and secondary truth. The major and primary truth is that Consciousness is the real and original determinant of our bodily life; it can, if it so wills and under proper conditions, transmit its commands to the bodily instrument and govern its reactions "even to the overriding of its normal law or conditions of action."

(4) That the body and not the indwelling consciousness appears to be the primary determinant is only a provisional evolutionary arrangement. For in the involutionary self-shrouding of

20. Ibid., p. 853.
Consciousness, the principle of Matter represents the nethermost stage of the descent, 'an abysmal sleep, a fathomless trance of consciousness',22 in which the absorbed Energy is totally oblivious of its origin and real self, and supports the physical existence in a somnambulist action. Thus in our body, “the outer force and figure of being, what we might call the formal or form existence as distinguished from the immanent or secretly governing consciousness, is lost in the physical action, is so absorbed into it as to be fixed in a stereotyped self-oblivion unaware of what it is and what it is doing.”23

(5) But behind the outer veil of material inconscience and the iron-grip of physico-chemical determinism, a secret involved Consciousness, cosmic and infinite, is always at work in our body. And without this supporting greater Consciousness-Force that is ‘awake in all that sleeps’,24 our physical system itself would have no power of action, nor any organising coherence at all.

(6) Now, the whole nisus of the evolutionary process is to bring out to the front the totality of this involved Consciousness and make it the overt master even over our outer existence and nature. It follows then that the evolutionary emergence cannot stop short with man and mental consciousness: For Mind is no more than an intermediate power of consciousness, limited in vision and limping in movement. Now, “evolution is an inverse action of the involution: what is an ultimate and last derivation in the involution is the first to appear in the evolution; what was original and primal in the involution is in the evolution the last and supreme emergence.”25 Thus spirit being the original involutionary element and factor must be a final evolutionary emergence. The evolutionary progression is thus bound to continue till Supermind, the original ‘creative medium’ of the Divine, and the triune glory of Sachchidananda stand evolved here in the material universe.26

(7) The old evolutionary procedure that relied on a prior form-

22. The Life Divine, p. 593.
23. Ibid., p. 711.
24. Ya esa supetesu jagari. (Katha Upanishad, V.8.)
26. Cf. “The Divine descends from pure existence through the play of Consciousness-Force and Bliss and the creative medium of Supermind into cosmic being; we ascend from Matter through a developing life, soul and mind and the illuminating medium of supermind towards the divine being.” (The Life Divine, p. 264).
evolution to effectuate a resultant change of consciousness has now been superseded. Indeed, "in man a reversal is possible, indeed inevitable; for it is through his consciousness, through its instrumentation and no longer through a new bodily organism as a first instrumentation that the evolution can and must be effected.... It is no longer the change of body that must precede the change of consciousness; the consciousness itself by its mutation will necessitate and operate whatever mutation is needed for the body."27 (Italics ours.)

(8) With the emergence of Supermind in evolution, will come about the discovery of all the hidden truths and powers of the concealed Spirit; and the right dynamisation of that higher knowledge will establish the Spirit's total mastery over all its fields of operation. Matter in general and the body in particular will then be obedient instruments of the Spirit and pliantly move to fulfil without any let or hindrance all the demands made upon them.

We conclude then that when we speak of the ultimate conquest of the present disabilities of our physical existence to be achieved through the process of an evolutionary transfiguration, we are not indulging in a child-soul's phantasy or its demands for arbitrary miracles nor are we visualising any impossible chimera that goes beyond or outside all forces of Nature. What we are envisaging is the control and conquest of the prevailing determinism of our bodily system by the higher determinism of the supernal grades and powers of our being. And there is nothing "miraculous" or "irrational" here. Indeed, "what seems to us supernatural is in fact either a spontaneous irruption of the phenomena of other-Nature into physical Nature or... a possession of the knowledge and power of the higher orders or grades of cosmic Being and Energy and the direction of their forces and processes towards the production of effects in the physical world by seizing on possibilities of interconnection and means for a material effectuality."

But why at all these misgivings and doubts about the prospect of

27. The Life Divine, p. 844.

Cf. "I may say with certainty that people who want to see miracles are people who cherish their ignorance!... There is miracle, because you do not give people the time to see the procedure by which you do things, you do not show them the steps." (The Mother, Bulletin, August, 1964, p. 31.)
some wonderful achievements expected to come from a future supramental evolution? Is not our body, even in its actuality, already a marvel product of organic evolution? We do not pause to study and contemplate its weird functioning and its intricate structure; therefore it appears to our blissful ignorance altogether self-evident, simple and natural! But anyone who studies the physiology and biochemistry of a living body cannot but be struck by the amazing ingenuity displayed by life although acting so far under the heavy load of a frontal ignorance. To cite only a few amongst a host of instances that baffle the comprehension of even the twentieth-century men of science:

(a) Harmony and co-ordination: We know that life is largely a matter of enzymes. Even the simplest of living cells contains a thousand or more of them. Thus the “picture of the smallest living cell is already one of a complexity which the mind finds difficulty in grasping. How all these separate and complex enzyme molecules are packed away in a tiny fragment of protoplasm, how they work in harmony with each other, producing that result which we recognize as life, we hardly know.”

(b) Enzymatic action: its speed and efficiency: We know that almost all biochemical reactions in a living body are mediated by enzymes. But how, through what mechanism, these wonderful bio-catalysts bring about these diverse reactions is still “largely a matter of conjecture”.

And the speed and smoothness accompanying these enzymatic actions are something that the chemist can hardly match in his laboratory experiments. “In practice, chemical synthesis in the laboratory is often very difficult. Compounds have to be transformed one step at a time, often by wasteful processes, using powerful chemicals, heat, and sometimes electrical actions, to bring about the desired changes. It may take months to build up a compound, by a complicated sequence of actions, which a cell can make in a matter of minutes.”

It is not only the speed of these enzymatic actions that is breathtaking; their efficiency too is wonderful. These enzymes bring about rapid chemical changes and in large bulks, even when they

30. Ibid., p. 25.
31. Ibid., p. 22.
are present in very small quantities, and that too without being changed themselves. Thus, "a solution containing a ten millionth of an ounce of pepsin has a powerful effect on the clotting of milk; rennin, another enzyme present in calves' stomachs and used for making junkets and cheese, can clot ten million times its weight of milk in ten minutes. Urease crystals produce a hundred times their weight of ammonia from urea in five minutes; it is said that one molecule of catalase can decompose over two million molecules of hydrogen peroxide every minute."\(^{32}\)

(c) The mystery of specific protein synthesis: Proteins are the most essential constituents of all living cells. But these are different and specific for different kinds of cells. Now, all these various proteins are made up of highly complex chains of amino acids and "the number of possible ways of arranging, say, a chain of one hundred units chosen from twenty different kinds is enormous. But the cell selects the amino acids and places them in the correct order with great ease and speed. In many bacteria a new generation is produced in thirty minutes or even less time." In this period, the full complement of proteins for a new cell must be synthesized. It is evident that the protein synthesizing mechanism works with great speed and efficiency. What is its nature?\(^{33}\)

Modern science has not yet been able to unravel this greatest mystery of life, the mystery of how specific proteins are made. Instances are indeed legion that go to demonstrate life's wonderful ingenuity and what has been termed by Walter Cannon 'the wisdom of the body'. We need not cite any more examples here, for even a slight acquaintance with the organisational details of living bodies and with the behaviour patterns of different creatures cannot but convince even the most casual observer that behind the apparent inconscience of the workings of physico-chemical energies there must be operative all the while a conscient purposive Force. The physical scientist may seek to 'explain' away all these things in terms of physical causality bearing such high names as adaptability, homoeostasis, feed-back reactions, etc. But this sort of 'explanation' does not go very far. For it explains, if at all, only the phenomenal 'how' and never the intrinsic 'why'.

Now we can very well imagine what wonderful results will be achieved in the overt frontal plane of life, when the divine

33. Ibid., p. 50.
Supermind will emerge from behind and descend from above to take charge of the evolutionary process.

In referring to the supramental evolution, we have been so far speaking in the future tense, but that should not convey the impression that the supramental manifestation is something that is still lying in the womb of distant future and its possible glorious achievements that we have mentioned above are only the golden ineffectual dreams of incorrigible optimists. No, the supramental manifestation upon earth is no longer just a speculative conjecture; it has already entered the phase of active realisation. For the divine supermind has descended into earth-nature and is now dynamically operative to liberate the supramental principle involved within her.

As a consequence of this supramental descent and its subsequent action, something of capital importance has happened in a particular individual body, that unmistakably heralds the emergence of a divinely transformed physical existence in the foreseeable future. On this point let us listen to the words of the Mother about whom Sri Aurobindo declared a long time ago: “The Mother comes in order to bring down the Supramental and it is the descent which makes her full manifestation here possible.”34 Also, “Her embodiment is a chance for the earth-consciousness to receive the Supramental into it and undergo first the transformation necessary for that to be possible.”35

Is it not She again who Herself announced to the world in the month of March 1956 after the descent of the Supermind:

“Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute:
A new Light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.”

Now, as regards some of the most significant results already attained of this supramental manifestation upon earth, the Mother says:

“There are many kinds of freedom, mental freedom, vital freedom, spiritual freedom, which are the fruits of successive mastery. But there is quite a new freedom that has become

34. Sri Aurobindo on the Mother, p. 48.
35. Ibid., p. 49.
possible with the supramental manifestation, the freedom of the body.

"One of the very first results of the supramental manifestation has been to give to the body a freedom and an autonomy which it had never known. And when I speak of freedom, it is not a matter of a psychological perception or a state of inner consciousness, it is another thing and it is much better – it is a new phenomenon in the body, in the cells of the body. The cells themselves have felt for the first time that they are free, that they have a power of decision. "Normally as it is, the body lives always with the impression that it is not master in its house: ... Now, with the supramental manifestation, something new has happened in the body: it feels it is master of the house, autonomous, both the feet planted upon earth, if I may say so. The impression it gives physically is that the whole being is erect, it has lifted its head – one is master... Yes, things have changed. It is the body that has a direct power without any external intervention. I consider this to be a very important result."

Then the Mother adds significantly: "This new vibration in the body has made me understand the mechanism of the transformation. It is not a thing that comes with a Higher Will, a higher consciousness imposed upon the body, it is the body itself that wakes up in the cells, it is a freedom of the cells themselves, altogether a new vibration, and the disorders are mended, disorders even antecedent to the supramental manifestation." (Italics ours.)

The divine transfiguration of our embodied material existence and the emergence of a divine body upon earth are no longer dreams, to be realised, if at all, perhaps at the end of thousands of years from now. Here and now, we may remind our readers, the process of physical transformation has already been undertaken and is being executed with the full potency of Supermind in action.

Now what will be the ultimate impact of this supramental manifestation upon the physico-chemical structure of our present human body? Sri Aurobindo envisages a radical change in the structure and functioning of the body itself before it can serve as the vehicle of a supramental divine life. For, the human body's present "minutely constructed and elaborated system of organs and a precarious order of their functioning which can easily
become a disorder, open to a general or local disorganisation" represent too heavy a liability for the actually elaborated human body to act as the physical base for a divinised existence. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“Even if we suppose a soul, a conscious will at work in this body it could not arrive at a divine transformation if there were no radical change in the bodily instrument itself and in the organisation of its material workings. The transforming agent will be bound and stopped in its work by the physical organism’s unalterable limitations and held up by the unmodified or imperfectly modified original animal in us. The possibility of the disorders, derangements, maladies native to these physical arrangements would still be there and could only be shut out by a constant vigilance or perpetual control obligatory on the corporeal instruments’ spiritual inhabitant and master. This could not be called a truly divine body; for in a divine body an inherent freedom from all these things would be natural and perpetual; this freedom would be a normal and native truth of its being and therefore inevitable and unalterable. A radical transformation of the functioning and... of the structure... of the bodily system would be imperative.” (Italics ours.)

Indeed, one of the urges of the supramental evolution will be to effectuate the necessary changes in the most material part of the organism, in its physical constitution and its bodily processes. As a consequence of the direct and overt intervention of Supermind, many of the organs of the present human body will be automatically changed in their material working and use, and the need of their instrumentation and even of their existence greatly diminished. This change might ultimately go so far that some of “these organs might cease to be indispensable and even be felt as too obstructive: the central force might use them less and less and finally throw aside their use altogether. If that happened they might waste by atrophy, be reduced to an insignificant minimum or even disappear. The central force might substitute for them subtle organs of a very different character or, if anything material was needed, instruments that would be forms of dynamism or plastic transmitters rather than what we know as organs.”

To minds attached to the present state of things these sort of

39. Ibid., pp. 61-62.
40. Ibid., p. 70.
revolutionary changes in the physical structure and functioning of the human body may appear to be a senseless and impossible chimera. But, Sri Aurobindo warns us, no limits and no impossi­bility of any necessary change can be imposed on the evolutionary urge. And when Supermind, the divine Gnosis, takes charge of evolution, there is absolutely nothing impossible under the Sun.

Let us conclude this chapter and the book with some prophetic lines from sri Aurobindo’s Savitri:

“The Spirit shall look out through Matter’s gaze
And Matter shall reveal the Spirits’ face.
Then man and superman shall be at one
And all the earth become a single life.

..."The Spirit shall take up the human play,
This earthly life become the life Divine."
(Savitri, Bk. XI. C.1, pp.709, 711.)
THE EVER-ASCENDING MARCH OF MAN

Sri Aurobindo on Man's Evolutionary Destiny

"An animal creation crept and ran
And flew and called between the earth and sky,
Hunted by death but hoping still to live
And glad to breathe if only for a while.
Then man was moulded from the original brute.
A thinking mind had come to lift life's moods,
A keen-edged tool of a Nature mixed and vague,
An intelligence half-witness, half-machine.
...
An opening looked up to spheres above
And coloured shadows lined on mortal ground
The passing figures of immortal things;
...
A fragile human love that could not last,
Ego's moth-wings to lift the seraph soul,
Appeared, a surface glamour of brief date
Extinguished by a scanty breath of Time;
Joy that forgot mortality for a while
Came, a rare visitor who left betimes,
And made all things seem beautiful for an hour,
Hopes that soon fade to drab realities.
And passions that crumble to ashes while they blaze
Kindled the common earth with their brief flame.
A creature insignificant and small
Visited, uplifted by an unknown Power,
Man laboured on his little patch of earth
For means to last, to enjoy, to suffer and die.
A spirit that perished not with the body and breath
Was there like a shadow of the Unmanifest
And stood behind the little personal form
But claimed not yet this earthly embodiment.
Assenting to Nature's long slow-moving toil,
Watching the works of his own ignorance,
Unknown, unfelt the mighty Witness lives
And nothing shows the Glory that is here.
A Wisdom governing the mystic world.
A Silence listening to the cry of Life,
It sees the hurrying crowd of moments stream
Towards the still greatness of a distant hour.

... 
Unseen here act dim huge world-energies
And only trickles and currents are our share.
Our mind lives far off from the authentic Light
Catching at little fragments of the Truth,
In a small corner of infinity,
Our lives are inlets of an ocean force.
Our conscious movements have sealed origins
But with those shadowy seats no converse hold;
No understanding binds our comrade parts;
Our acts emerge from a crypt our minds ignore.
Our deepest depths are ignorant of themselves;
Even our body is a mystery shop;
As our earth's roots lurk screened below our earth,
So lie unseen our roots of mind and life.
Our springs are kept close hid beneath, within;
Our souls are moved by powers behind the wall.

... 
A thinking puppet is the mind of life:
Its choice is the work of elemental strengths
That know not their own birth and end and cause
And glimpse not the immense intent they serve.

... 
These unwise prompters of man's human heart
And tutors of his stumbling speech and will,
Movers of petty wraths and lusts and hates
And changeful thoughts and shallow emotion's starts,
These slight illusion-makers with their masks,
Painters of the decor of a dull-hued stage
And nimble scene-shifters of the human play,
Ever are busy with this ill-lit scene.
Ourselves incapable to build our fate
Only as actors speak and strut our parts
Until the piece is done and we pass off
Into a brighter Time and subtler Space.
Thus they inflict their little pigmy law
And curb the mounting slow uprise of man,
Then his too scanty walk with death they close.

This is the ephemeral creature's daily life.
As long as the human animal is the lord
And a dense nether nature screens the soul,
As long as intellect's outward-gazing sight
Serves earthy interest and creature joys,
An incurable littleness pursues his days,
Ever since consciousness was born on earth,
Life is the same in insect, ape and man,
Its stuff unchanged, its way the common route.

Still even in man the plot is mean and poor.
A gross content prolongs his fallen state;
His small successes are failures of the soul,
His little pleasures punctuate frequent griefs:
Hardship and toil are the heavy price he pays
For the right to live and his last wages death.

Trivial amusements stimulate and waste
The energy given to him to grow and be.
His little hour is spent in little things.
A brief companionship with many jars,
A little love and jealousy and hate,
A touch of friendship mid indifferent crowds
Draw his heart-plan on life's diminutive map.

He is satisfied with his common average kind;
Tomorrow's hopes and his old rounds of thought,
His old familiar interests and desires
He has made a thick and narrowing hedge
Defending his small life from the Invisible;
His being's kinship to infinity
He has shut away from him into inmost self,
Fenced off the greatnesses of hidden God.

He is the crown of all that has been done:
Thus is creations's labour justified;
This is the world's result, Nature's last poise!
And if this were all and nothing more were meant,
If what now seems were the whole of what must be,
If this were not a stade through which we pass
On our road from Matter to eternal Self,
To the Light that made the world, the Cause of things,
Well might interpret our mind's limited view
Existence as an accident in Time,
Illusion or phenomenon or freak,
The paradox of a creative Thought
Which moves between unreal opposites,
Inanimate Force struggling to feel and know,
Matter that chanced to read itself by Mind,
Inconscience monstrously engendering soul.

... 
A mind looks out from a small casual globe
And wonders what itself and all things are.

... 
Such is our scene in the half-light below.
This is the sign of Matter's infinite,
This the weird purport of the picture shown
To Science the giantess, measurer of her field,
As she pores on the record of her close survey
And mathematises her huge external world,
To Reason bound within the circle of sense,
Or in Thought's broad impalpable Exchange
A spectator in tenuous vast ideas,
Abstractions in the void her currency
We know not with what firm values for its base.
Only religion in this bankruptcy
Presents its dubious riches to our hearts
Or signs unprovisioned cheques on the Beyond:
Our poverty shall there have its revenge.
Our spirits depart discarding a futile life
Into the black unknown or with them take
Death's passport into immortality.

Yet was this only a provisional scheme,
A false appearance sketched by limiting sense,
Mind's insufficient self-discovery,
The Ever-Ascending March of Man

An early attempt, a first experiment.
This was a toy to amuse the infant earth;
But Knowledge ends not in these surface powers
That live upon a ledge in the Ignorance
And dare not look into the dangerous depths
Or to stare upward measuring the Unknown.

There is a deeper seeing from within
And, when we have left these small purlieus of mind,
A greater vision meets us on the heights
In the luminous wideness of the Spirit’s gaze.
At last there wakes in us a witness Soul
That looks at truths unseen and scans the Unknown;
Then all assumes a new and marvellous face.
The world quivers with a God-light at its core,
In Time’s deep heart high purposes move and live,
Life’s borders crumble and join infinity.

Our seekings are short-lived experiments
Made by a wordless and inscrutable Power
Testing its issues from inconscient Night
To meet its luminous self of truth and Bliss.

In the symbol pictures drawn by word and thought,
It seeks the truth to which all figures point:
It looks for the source of Light with vision’s lamp;
It works to find the doer of all works,
The unfelt Self within who is the guide,
The unknown Self above who is the goal.
All is not here a blinded Nature’s task;
A Word, a Wisdom watches us from on high,
A Witness sanctioning her will and works,
An Eye unseen in the unseeing vast;
There is an Influence from a Light above,
There are thoughts remote and sealed eternities;
A mystic motive drives the stars and suns.
In this passage from a deaf unknowing Force
To struggling consciousness and transient breath
A mighty supernature waits on Time.
The world is other than we now think and see,
Our lives a deeper mystery than we have dreamed;
Our minds are starters in the race to God,
Our souls deputed selves of the Supreme.

... 
In this investiture of fleshly life
A soul that is a spark of God survives
And sometimes it breaks through the sordid screen
And kindles a fire that makes us half-divine.
In our body’s cells there sits a hidden Power
That sees the unseen and plans eternity,
Our smallest parts have room for deepest needs;

... 
Even in our skeptic mind of ignorance
A foresight comes of some immense release,
Our will lifts towards it slow and shaping hands.
Each part in us desires its absolute:
Our thoughts covet the everlasting Light,
Our strength derives from an omnipotent Force,
And since from a veiled God-joy the worlds were made
And since eternal beauty asks for form
Even here where all is made of being’s dust,
Our hearts are captured by ensnaring shapes,
Our very senses blindly seek for bliss.

... 
And when that greater Self comes sea-like down
To fill this image of our transience,
All shall be captured by delight, transformed:
In waves of undreamed ecstasy shall roll
Our mind and life and sense and laugh in a light
Other than this hard limited human day,
The body’s tissues thrill apotheosised,
Its cells sustain bright metamorphosis.
This little being of Time, this shadow-soul,
This living dwarf figure-head of darkened spirit
Out of its traffic of petty dreams shall rise.
Its shape of person and ego face
Divested of this mortal travesty,
Like a clay troll kneaded into a god,
New-made in the image of the eternal Guest,
It shall be caught to the breast of a white Force

... As if reversing a deformation’s spell,
Released from the black magic of the Night,
Renouncing servitude to the dark Abyss,
It shall learn at last who lived within unseen
And seized with marvel in the adoring heart
To the enthroned Child-Godhead kneel aware,
Trembling with beauty and delight and love.

But first the spirit’s ascent we must achieve
Out of the chasm from which our nature rose.
The soul must soar sovereign above the form
And climb to summits beyond mind’s half-sleep;
Our hearts we must inform with heavenly strength,
Surprise the animal with the occult god.
Then kindling the gold tongue of sacrifice,
Calling the powers of a bright hemisphere,
We shall shed the discredit of our mortal state,
Make the abysm a road for heaven’s descent,
Acquaint our depths with the supernal Ray
And cleave the darkness with the mystic Fire.”

(From Sri Aurobindo’s epic-poem *Savitri*, Book II, Canto V, pp. 158-172.)
SRI AUROBINDO ON THE TASK BEFORE HUMANITY

"The salvation of the human race lies in a more sane and integral development of the possibilities of mankind in the individual and in the community.

The safety of Europe has to be sought in the recognition of the spiritual aim of human existence, otherwise she will be crushed by the weight of her own unillumined knowledge and soulless organisation.

The safety of Asia lies in the recognition of the material mould and mental conditions in which that aim has to be worked out, otherwise she will sink deeper into the slough of despond, of a mental and physical incompetence to deal with the facts of life and the shocks of a rapidly changing movement....

The message of the East to the West is a true message, "only by finding himself can man be saved," and "what shall it profit a man though he gain the whole world, if he lose his own soul." ...

The message the West brings to the East is a true message. Man also is God and it is through his developing manhood that he approaches the godhead ...

The problem of thought therefore is to find out the right idea and the right way of harmony ...

What then shall be our ideal? Unity for the human race by an inner oneness and not only by an external association of interests; the resurgence of man out of the merely animal and economic life or the merely intellectual and aesthetic into the glories of the spiritual existence; the pouring of the power of the spirit into the physical mould and mental instrument so that man may develop his manhood into that true supermanhood which shall exceed our present state as much as this exceeds the animal state from which Science tells us that we have issued. These three are one; for man's unity and man's self-transcendence can come only by living in the Spirit."

(The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings, pp. 287-291.)