

**THE DESTINY OF MAN
IN THE EVOLUTIONARY THOUGHT OF
SRI AUROBINDO**

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950)¹ has rightly been hailed as one of the greatest mystic-philosophers of modern India. His mystical experiences and insights, nourished by the ancient Hindu scriptures, constitute the mainstay of his philosophic system which is synthetic in character. His world-view is centered on the Absolute Spirit who, through a free « involution », has manifested this material universe. Consequently there is no part of reality which is not in some degree infused with the presence and power of the Absolute. The indwelling Spirit leads and guides the world-process of « evolution », which is to culminate, slowly but surely, in the full manifestation of the Spirit in this universe and in the realization by men of a blissful, immortal life here on earth.

The present study is an attempt to understand in depth the ultimate destiny of man as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo. In order, however, to place this study in the context of the whole system of Aurobindo's thought, we think it necessary to highlight first some of his fundamental presuppositions.

¹ For biographical informations, cfr. A.B. PURANI, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, Pondicherry 1958; ID., *Sri Aurobindo in England*, Pondicherry 1956; K.R.S. IYENGAR, *Sri Aurobindo, A Biography and History*, 2 vols., Pondicherry 1972; J. ROARKE, *Sri Aurobindo*, Pondicherry 1973; R.R. DIWAKAR, *Mahayogi*, Bombay 1972.

Abbreviations used in this study:

E.Git. = SRI AUROBINDO, *Essays on the Gita*, Pondicherry 1974.

L.D., I. = ID., *The Life Divine*, vol. I, Pondicherry 1970.

L.D., II. = ID., *The Life Divine*, vol. II, Pondicherry 1970.

S.Y. = ID., *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Pondicherry 1973.

Ups. = ID., *The Upanishads*, Pondicherry 1972.

Up. = Upanishad.

A) AUROBINDO'S BASIC INSIGHT

I. *Integral Advaitism*

« An 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 contradictions nearest to our ordinary experience to those remotest antinomies which lose themselves on the verge 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. ... Brahman is the Alpha and the Omega »². These words of Sri Aurobindo condense the sum and substance of his philosophic insight. An integral vision of the Reality constitutes its whole foundation.

If philosophy is an investigation into the reality, Aurobindo contends that it should take into account the entire domain of the reality. A true philosophy cannot afford to ignore either matter or spirit. A spiritualistic philosophy which denies matter is as partial and imperfect as a materialist philosophy which negates spirit. Philosophy, therefore, should strike a balance between two extreme positions, namely materialism ignoring spirit and spiritualism ignoring matter³. Accordingly Aurobindo proposes an *Integral Advaitism*, which he maintains to be the true solution to the problem of existence.

Aurobindo's is an *Advaitism* or Non-dualism because he regards the Spirit or Brahman as the one and the only fundamental reality. This Advaitism is *Integral* because it does not disregard the reality of any of the aspects of Existence, but considers the world and the individuals as manifestations of the one Spirit. Matter and Spirit are the lowest and the highest terms of Existence.

This system, thus, tries to solve the perennial problem of the opposition between the Infinite and the finite, the Transcendence and the immanence, the One and the many, the Being and the becoming, the Spirit and the matter, by an integral approach. Aurobindo finds a confirmation of his vision in the great scriptural formula regarding the Ultimate Reality: « The One without a second »⁴, but interpreting it in the light of another equally important declaration of the

² *L. D.*, I, p. 33.

³ Aurobindo calls these two exaggerated trends of thought respectively, « the denial of the materialist », and « the refusal of the ascetic », (*ibid.*, p. 9).

⁴ Cfr. *Chāndogya Up.*, 6, 2, 1.

scriptures: « All this is Brahman »⁵. Accordingly he solemnly affirms that matter also is Brahman⁶.

What, then, is the nature of Brahman, the Ultimate Reality?

II. *The Ultimate Reality*

The entire philosophic structure of Aurobindo rests on the foundation of a characteristic conception of the Ultimate Reality⁷. Following the Vedantic tradition, he designates it as *Sacchidānanda*, a trinity of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss⁸. In his analysis of the nature of the triune *Sacchidānanda*⁹, Aurobindo strongly emphasises Its absolute transcendence, but without losing sight of Its freedom to assume an immanent dimension. Accordingly, « the Supreme is pure Being, Absolute Existence, *sat* »¹⁰. « He is Existence because He alone *Is*, there being nothing else which has any ultimate reality or any being independent of His self-manifestation »¹¹. The absolute Existence is essentially One, but not a oneness that excludes the many; it is not the Being that excludes the becoming. As our author puts it: « The Being is one, but this oneness is infinite and contains in itself an infinite plurality or multiplicity of itself: the One is the All; it is not only an essential Existence, but an All-existence »¹².

⁵ Cfr. *Māndūkya Up.*, 2.

⁶ *L.D.*, I, p. 6; « The real Monism, the true Advaita, is that which admits all things as the One Brahman, and does not seek to bisect Its existence into two incompatible entities, an eternal Truth and an eternal Falsehood, Brahman and not-Brahman, Self and not-Self, a real Self and an unreal yet perpetual Maya. If it is true that the Self alone exists, it must be also true that all is the Self » (*ibid.*, p. 31).

⁷ « An absolute, eternal and infinite Self-existence, Self-awareness, Self-delight of being that secretly supports and pervades the universe even while it is also beyond it, is, then, the first truth of spiritual experience » (*ibid.*, p. 325). Aurobindo in his various works makes indiscriminate use of the terms like *Sacchidānanda*, Brahman, Absolute, Atman, Self, Spirit, God, Godhead, *Īśvara*, the Divine, *Puruṣottama*, and so on, to indicate the Ultimate Reality.

⁸ « He who knows Brahman as truth, knowledge, infinite (*satyam*, *jñānam*, *anātam*), hidden in the cavity (of the heart) and in the farthest space, he obtains every wish in communion with Brahman, the omniscient » (*Taittirīya Up.*, 2, 1); « Brahman is knowledge and bliss (*vijñānam ānādam Brahma*) » (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up.*, 3, 9, 28).

For a study on the Upanishadic foundation of « *Sacchidānanda* », see: P. DEUSSEN, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, New York 1966, pp. 126-146.

⁹ « *Sacchidānanda* is the One with a triple aspect. In the Supreme the three are not three but one, — existence is consciousness, consciousness is bliss, and they are thus inseparable, not only inseparable, but so much each other that they are not distinct at all » (SRI AUROBINDO, *Lights on Yoga*, Pondicherry 1974, p. 20).

¹⁰ *Ups.*, p. 16.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 17.

¹² *L.D.*, II, p. 660.

The absolute existence is also pure Awareness, full Consciousness, *cit*, it is Conscious-Existence. « His Consciousness is from itself and of itself, like His Existence »¹³. This self-existent Consciousness is not confined to the realm of knowledge alone, but is an effective Consciousness; it is a Consciousness-Force, *cit-śakti*. « Absolute is in its nature absolute power; the nature of Cit is Shakti »¹⁴. It is endowed with the absolute liberty of self-concentration of Force or self-diffusion of Force. The manifestation of the finite universe is nothing but a free self-diffusion of the Divine Force, and this self-diffusion is also a free self-limitation. « The Infinite would not be the Infinite if it could not assume a manifold finiteness; the Absolute would not be the Absolute if it were denied in knowledge and power and will and manifestation of being a boundless capacity of self-determination »¹⁵. The whole universe and each one of its parts are incessantly being sustained and guided by the Divine Cit-Shakti embedded in them. « A Conscious-Force everywhere inherent in Existence, acting even when concealed, is the creator of the world, the occult secret of Nature »¹⁶.

The Absolute is also Bliss, *ānanda*. « Just as Existence is Consciousness and cannot be separated from Consciousness, so Conscious Existence is Bliss and cannot be separated from Bliss »¹⁷. « Ānanda is the very essence of Brahman, it is the supreme nature of the omnipresent Reality »¹⁸. Brahman is pure and absolute bliss and so is independent of any cause or agent other than His own intimate nature for His delight. The world manifestation is a spontaneous outflow of his infinite Delight and, all the delights that are in this world are its remote shadows or imperfect sharing; they are the variable expressions of the one invariable Delight of Brahman. « For all joy, beauty, love, peace, delight are outflowing from the Ānanda Brahman »¹⁹. The Divine Delight is not only the source, but also the ultimate culmination of all finite delights. As Aurobindo puts it: « Delight is existence, Delight is the secret of creation, Delight is the root of birth, Delight is the cause of remaining in existence, Delight is the end of birth and that into which creation ceases »²⁰.

But the Absolute considered in its transcendent aspect is beyond

¹³ *Ups.*, p. 18.

¹⁴ *L.D.*, I, p. 570.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 267.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 295.

¹⁷ *Ups.*, p. 19.

¹⁸ *L.D.*, II, p. 990.

¹⁹ *S.Y.*, p. 568.

²⁰ *L.D.*, I, p. 101.

all relation and causality of any kind. How then can it be the origin and finality of the universe? It is made possible through what Aurobindo calls the *Supermind*, which is nothing else than the same Absolute considered in its immanent dimension. The relationless Absolute becomes related to the world as its Author and Master through the Supermind. Aurobindo underlines that a passage from the indivisible unity of Sacchidananda to the multiplicity of the world reality is possible only through the mediation of the Supermind. On the one hand, it possesses within itself all the reality and power of Sacchidananda, and on the other, it contains the essential truth of the finite world. It has the power and freedom of adopting a static or a dynamic poise, and by adopting the dynamic poise it actually manifests the universe. In relation to the Absolute, the Supermind functions as the « principle of active Will »²¹, and as such chooses and actualises some of the objects — the present universe — from among the infinity of possible objects to which the unlimited power of the Absolute can extend itself. Thus, « the Supermind is between Sacchidananda and the lower creation »²².

III. *Involution - Evolution*

Now the question is, how did the Supreme Reality bring the lower creation into being? By becoming its immanent cause. « Brahman self-extended in Space and Time is the universe »²³, maintains Aurobindo. But how was it actually brought about? By a descent-ascent, or involution-evolution process of the Spirit. Evolution is a generally accepted scientific hypothesis. But Aurobindo contends that one cannot reasonably speak of the evolution of higher species of beings from lower ones unless one admits first an involution²⁴. « The manifestation of the Being in the universe takes the shape of an involution which is the starting point of an evolution, - Matter the nethermost stage, Spirit the summit »²⁵.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 122.

²² *Lights on Yoga*, p. 20.

²³ *Ups.*, p. 84.

²⁴ « We speak of evolution of Life in Matter, the evolution of Mind in Matter, but evolution is a word which merely states the phenomenon without explaining it. For there seems to be no reason why Life should evolve out of material elements or Mind out of living form unless we accept the Vedantic solution that Life is already involved in Matter and Mind in Life, because in essence Matter is a form of veiled Life, Life a form of veiled Consciousness. And there seems to be little objection to a further step in the series and the admission that mental consciousness may itself be only a form and a veil of higher states which are beyond Mind » (*L.D.*, I, p. 3).

²⁵ *L.D.*, II, p. 662; « An Involution of the Divine Existence, the spiritual

The involution is a gradual process as also the evolution. In the involution Aurobindo distinguishes seven principles of gradations²⁶. The first three are the original and fundamental triune reality of the Absolute, namely the divine Existence — Consciousness-Force — Delight. A fourth principle is associated with it, that is, the Supermind which is its characteristic power of self-determination. These four principles constitute what is called the upper hemisphere of manifestation in which the Spirit retains its original purity and perfection. The involution then descends to the lower hemisphere which is the domain of Mind, Life and Matter²⁷. Involution, thus, is a step by step process by which the Infinite conceals itself or puts veil upon veil on itself to reach finally the inconscient nature of matter. Owing to this process the Spirit and Matter become the two poles of the same reality; Matter is only the outcome of the Spirit's « plunge into the inconscience »²⁸; it is « the last word in the descent »²⁹. Hence, « Involution of a Superconscient Spirit in the inconscient Matter is the secret of this visible and apparent world »³⁰.

In Aurobindo's thought, therefore, involution is the theoretical foundation for the doctrine of evolution. Evolution of higher species from matter becomes conceivable and feasible because matter, far from being an inanimate substance, is right from the start throbbing with the reality of the Spirit; it is a self-limited form of the Spirit and so is capable of evolving higher. Accordingly, evolution is not a casual development of the material energy, nor the outcome of an instinctive struggle of individual beings for survival, but the expression of the Spirit's urge to ascend back to its original perfection, slowly traversing the stages of its free descent. « To manifest what is from the first occult whithin it is the whole hidden trend of evolutionary Nature »³¹.

Reality, in the apparent inconscience of Matter is the starting-point of the evolution » (*ibid.*, p. 683).

²⁶ Cfr. *ibid.*, pp. 662-663.

²⁷ « 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 the developing life, soul and mind and the illuminating medium of Supermind towards the divine being » (*L.D.*, I, p. 264).

²⁸ *L.D.*, II, p. 770.

²⁹ *L.D.*, I, p. 258.

³⁰ SRI AUROBINDO, *The Hour of God*, Pondicherry 1973, p. 53; « In the descent into the material plane of which our natural life is a product, the lapse culminates in a total Inconscience out of which an involved Being and Consciousness have to emerge by a gradual evolution » (*L.D.*, II, p. 663).

³¹ *L.D.*, II, p. 659; « The secret of the terrestrial evolution is the slow and progressive liberation of this latent indwelling Spirit, the difficult appearance of Something or Someone already involved, with all its potential forces in a first formal basis of supporting substance, its greater slowly emerging move-

As in the case of involution, so also in that of evolution Aurobindo envisages various gradations. According to him « evolution is the 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 »³². Accordingly the Spirit is to be the final evolutionary emergence because it is the original involutory factor, and matter is to be the first to emerge in the evolution because it is the last term in the involution. We have seen how Aurobindo distinguishes seven terms in the involutory operation of Spirit, namely: Existence — Consciousness-Force — Bliss, Supermind, Mind, Life and Matter. And the evolutionary process corresponds to the « ascending series of Matter, Life, Mind, Supermind and that other higher divine triplicity of Sacchidananda »³³.

Seeing that the gap between two stages — between matter and life, for instance, or between life and mind — is quite considerable, Aurobindo visualizes intermediary stages between them. Evolution, therefore, is a slow process prepared by very gradual progress. This clarification makes it all the more practicable. As he states: « Evolution, being thus continuous, must have at any given moment a past with its fundamental results still in evidence, a present in which the results it is labouring over are in process of becoming, a future in which still unevolved powers and forms of being must appear till there is the full and perfect manifestation »³⁴. Thus the form of life which appears for the first time in matter is not in its fullfledged nature but only in a rudimentary form in such a way that, for all practical purposes, there would be little to distinguish it from inanimate matter. This rudimentary life principle develops into various forms of vegetable life, sensitive life in its initial stage evolving gradually into all sorts of animals, half-animal man, developed human beings, and so forth until the process culminates in the full manifestation of the divine³⁵. « Because of the continuity of the evolutionary

ments locked up in the initial expressive power of Matter » (*The Hour of God*, p. 55).

³² *L.D.*, II, p. 853.

³³ *L.D.*, I, p. 255; « Matter, Life, Mind, Supermind or Gnosis, and beyond these the quadruple power of a supreme Being — Consciousness-Force — Bliss: these are the grades of the evolutionary ascent from Inconscience to the Superconscience » (*The Hour of God*, pp. 52-53).

³⁴ *L.D.*, II, p. 707.

³⁵ « We can see that it is the Consciousness which had lost itself returning again to itself emerging out of its 'giant self-forgetfulness, slowly, painfully, as a Life that is would-be sentient, half-sentient, dimly sentient, wholly sentient and finally struggles to be more than sentient, to be again, divinely self-conscious, free, infinite, immortal » (*L.D.*, I, p. 244).

process there is no rigid separation between them; each new advance or formation takes up what was before »³⁶. Thus the passage from one stage to the next is almost imperceptible³⁷.

Evolution brings about in the being that newly emerges, not only external modifications, but also internal transformations. Internally evolution is, in fact, a process of a slow awakening of the dormant consciousness. Looked from this point of view, Aurobindo distinguishes three principal stages in it. « An evolution in the Inconscience is the beginning, an evolution in the Ignorance is the middle, but the end is the liberation of the Spirit into its true Consciousness and an evolution in the Knowledge »³⁸. The initial stage comprises the material forms leading to the appearance of the lower species of life and animals. The middle stage represents man in all his human capacities. We are now labouring in this middle stage. And the final stage will be a supramental evolution.

IV. *The Logic of the Infinite*

It is the firm conviction of Aurobindo that a merely human logic or reasoning is inadequate to establish coherently all that is implied in his system. For an ultimate justification of his entire philosophy, therefore, he has recourse to what he calls the Logic of the Infinite. As the term itself suggests, it is the logic of the Supreme Being, as distinct from the finite, human, mental logic. He wants us to look at the truth from the perspective of the Divine, not from our own limited and imperfect perspective. Though man can obtain a clear grasp of the Logic of the Infinite only when he transcends his present limitations, he can still form a fair idea of its nature and functioning by contrasting it with the ordinary finite logic.

The finite logic, in particular what is known as formal logic, is based on discursive reasoning. It draws conclusions from certain premises, proceeding in accordance with some laws, such as: the law of identity, the law of contradiction, the law of excluded middle. Self-consistency in thought is all that matters here; it bothers little about the correspondence of reasoning with reality.

This procedure, though valid in its own field, is inadequate to deal with the Reality in its totality which is infinite. Mental reason

³⁶ *L.D.*, II, p. 706.

³⁷ Aurobindo does not exclude the possibility of sudden leaps in the evolutionary process caused by some critical event in Nature or some extraordinary intervention from above. (Cfr. *L.D.*, II, p. 706).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 703.

and logic are indirect means of knowledge. « If the means of knowledge are indirect and imperfect, the knowledge attained will also be indirect and imperfect »³⁹. Aurobindo draws attention to one particular limitation of our reasoning: « Our reasoning is based upon our experience of the finite operations of physical Nature, on an incomplete observation and uncertain understanding of something that acts within limits; it has organised on that basis certain conceptions which it seeks to make general and universal, and whatever contradicts or departs from these conceptions it regards as irrational, false or inexplicable »⁴⁰. With such a means of knowledge we cannot reasonably claim to know the truth of the Infinite Reality. « 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 of a hard incisive graph which speaks of the Reality but does not express it »⁴¹. Hence the basic principle to be borne in mind, according to Aurobindo, is this: « Our way of knowing must be appropriated to that which is to be known; otherwise we achieve only a distant speculation, a figure of knowledge and not veritable knowledge »⁴².

For dealing with the Infinite Reality, therefore, we have to rely on the logic of the Infinite, a logic not confined to the laws and principles of the mental logic. This is not to say that the higher logic throws overboard the laws of the finite logic, such as those of identity and contradiction, whose importance is duly recognised. But he refuses to accord absolute validity to the principles of finite reason. « 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 »⁴³.

Every being has got three inseparable dimensions: the individual, the universal and the transcendental. Our knowledge of the individual is complete only when we relate it to the universal and the transcendental. So, too, our understanding of the Transcendental is full only when related to the universal and the individual. To quote Aurobindo: « There is an essentiality of things, a communality of things, and individuality of things; the communality and individuality are true and eternal powers of the essentiality: that transcends them

³⁹ *L.D.*, I, p. 213.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 327-328.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 323.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 474; « If this logic of the Infinite contradicts the conceptions of our finite reason, it is because it exceeds it and does not base itself on the data of the limited phenomenon, but embraces the Reality and sees the truth of all phenomena in the truth of the Reality » (*ibid.*, p. 339).

both, but the three together and not one by itself are the eternal terms of existence »⁴⁴. Finite reason and its laws may be baffled in trying to reconcile these three aspects. But they remain eternally reconciled in the Infinite Logic.

Aurobindo, therefore, declares: « To understand truly the world-process of the Infinite and the Time-process of the Eternal, the consciousness must pass beyond this finite reason and the finite sense to a larger reason and spiritual sense in touch with the Infinite and responsive to the logic of the Infinite which is the very logic of being itself and arises inevitably from its self-operation of its own realities, a logic whose sequences are not the steps of thought but the steps of existence »⁴⁵.

Aurobindo's vision of man and his ultimate destiny is to be seen from the perspective of these preliminary considerations.

B) MAN'S TRANSITIONAL NATURE

« Man », says Aurobindo, « is a transitional being »⁴⁶. He is a stage in the evolutionary process which began with the inanimate matter and passed through the manifestation of life in the vegetable and animal kingdoms and reached finally the present mental stage. The importance of man is not exactly his human nature but rather what he is to attain in future. « Man's greatness is not in what he is, but in what he makes possible »⁴⁷. He is to evolve into a supramental and divine status; « he is a god in the making »⁴⁸. Man is a finite-seeming infinity and hence he cannot rest satisfied as long as he does not realize his infinity. « 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 »⁴⁹.

Man is the first being on earth who became aware of God within

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 475; « What is magic to our finite reason, is the logic of the Infinite. It is a greater reason, a greater logic because it is more vast, subtle, complex in its operations; it comprehends all the data which our observation fails to seize, it deduces from them results which neither our deduction nor induction can anticipate, because our conclusions and inferences have a meagre foundation and are fallible and brittle » (*ibid.*, p. 329).

⁴⁶ *The Hour of God*, p. 43.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁴⁸ *L.D.*, I, p. 381.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

him and of his call to reach an immortal divine status. « Up till this advent of a developed thinking mind in Matter evolution had been effected, not by a self-aware aspiration, intention, will or seeking of the living being, but subconsciously or subliminally by the automatic operation of Nature »⁵⁰. In man the urge to exceed himself has become a conscious drive which spurs him on to do all in his power to attain to a supramental goal.

A product of evolution, man encloses within himself all the stages of being that appeared before him: the physical nature of matter, the vital nature of plant, the sensitive nature of animal, and at the top the mental nature which is characteristic of man. « Just as we have in us these subnormal selves and subhuman planes, so are there in us above our mental being supernormal and superhuman planes »⁵¹.

The evolutionary emergence of each stage is in itself a beginning and a preparation for a leap to the next one, however slow the pace of that leap might be. In the automatic consistency of the physical plane the rudimentary beginnings of inconscient life are seen; in what seems inconscient life the signs of sensation coming towards the surface are visible; in the moving and breathing life the emergence of a sensitive mind is apparent and the preparations for a thinking mind are not entirely hidden, and in thinking mind there are already the beginnings of a supramental self-exceeding. Each great achievement of human history, each great personality that illumined human race, is for Aurobindo a tangible proof for the faith in the power and promise of a final self-exceeding of humanity, of its supra-human destiny⁵².

Aurobindo is absolutely unshaken in his faith in the superhuman evolutionary destiny of man because he believes that it rests on a solid foundation: what is involved must evolve; what is hidden must be made manifest; the Spirit within must one day come to the surface. As he spells it out: « The significance of our existence here determines our destiny: that destiny is something that already exists in us as necessity and a potentiality, the necessity of our being's secret and emergent reality, a truth of its potentialities that is being worked out; both, though not yet realized, are even now implied in what has been already manifested. If there is a Being that is becoming, a Rea-

⁵⁰ *L.D.*, II, p. 843.

⁵¹ *S.Y.*, p. 372; « It [human nature] has an element of matter taken up by life, an element of life taken up by mind, an element of mind which is being taken up by the Spirit: the animal is still present in its humanity; the very nature of the human being presupposes a material and a vital stage which prepared his emergence into mind and an animal past which moulded a first element of his complex humanity » (*L.D.*, II, p. 761).

⁵² *Cfr. E.Git.*, p. 361.

lity of existence that is unrolling itself in Time, what that Being, that Reality secretly is, is what we have to become, and so to become is our life's significance »⁵³. He says again: « In a more vivid and less metaphysical language, the mental man has to evolve himself into the divine Man; the sons of Death have to know themselves as the children of Immortality »⁵⁴. « A divine perfection of the human being is our aim »⁵⁵. « To fulfil God in life is man's manhood. He starts from the animal vitality and its activities, but a divine existence is his objective »⁵⁶. « The ascent to the divine Life is the human journey, the Work of works, the acceptable Sacrifice. This alone is man's real business in the world and the justification of his existence »⁵⁷. « Our aim must be to grow into our true being, our being of Spirit, the being of the supreme and universal Existence, Consciousness, Delight, Sacchidananda »⁵⁸.

The actual achievements of man, though great and marvelous, have not taken him beyond his species. In the fields of science and technology, in intellectual and spiritual domains, in socio-economic and political matters, and practically in all spheres of human endeavour the modern man can rightly boast of an unprecedented progress. Still man has not stepped out of the frontiers of mind, he is still a mental being only. A supramental transformation of his nature is far from being a reality.

Aurobindo observes, however, that this is nothing to be surprised about. Before there can be a supramental transformation the mental being has to develop all the capacities enshrined in its nature. As he puts it: « ...the action of evolutionary Nature in a type of being and consciousness is first to develop that type to its utmost capacity by just such substitution and increasing complexity till it is ready for her bursting of the shell, the ripened decisive emergence, reversal, turning over of consciousness on itself that constitutes a new stage in the evolution »⁵⁹. The mental man has to evolve out of himself a fully conscious being, « a divine manhood or a spiritual and supramental supermanhood which shall be the next product of the evolution »⁶⁰.

In the higher evolution man is not supposed to discard anything

⁵³ *L.D.*, II, p. 1016.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 684-685.

⁵⁵ *S.Y.*, p. 590.

⁵⁶ *L.D.*, I, p. 36.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

⁵⁸ *L.D.*, II, p. 685.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 841-842.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 825.

of what constitutes his essential nature. As evolution implies an integration, the lower principles of nature will be modified in such a way as to function harmoniously with the higher principle that emerges. An integral transformation is the aim of evolutionary nature. « Our call must be to live on a new height in all our being: we have not, in order to reach that height, to drop back our dynamic parts into indeterminate stuff of Nature and abide by this liberating loss in a blissful quiescence of the Spirit; ... but what Nature herself attends from us is that the whole of what we are should rise into the spiritual consciousness and become a manifest and manifold power of the Spirit. An integral transformation is the integral aim of the Being in Nature »⁶¹.

I. *The Complexity of the Human Composite*

« All the problems of human life », affirms Aurobindo, « arise from the complexity of our existence, the obscurity of its essential principle and the secrecy of the inmost power that makes out its determinations and govern its purpose and its processes. If our existence were one piece ... there would be nothing to perplex us »⁶². A purely material being knows no problem; a purely mental being in the mental world would solve all problems, if any, by the purity of its mental harmony; a pure spirit would be above all problems and self-content in the infinite. But the existence of man is a web of various strands, a thing mysteriously physical, vital, mental and spiritual at once. As Aurobindo would put it: « Man is in his real nature... a spirit using the mind, life and body for an individual and communal experience and self-manifestation in the universe »⁶³. Each of these constitutive parts of our being contributes something to the total movement of our consciousness, thought, will, sensation, feeling, action.

A further introspective analysis impells our author to distinguish a double aspect in each of the constitutive principles of our being: a subtle body behind the external physical body, a subliminal force of life behind the outer life in the physical body, a subliminal mind behind the surface mind⁶⁴. The inner and secret part of our being is said to be « much larger in its potentialities, more plastic, more powerful, more capable of manifold knowledge and dynamism than

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 727.

⁶² *E.Git.*, p. 545.

⁶³ *S.Y.*, p. 598.

⁶⁴ Cfr. *L.D.*, I, p. 220.

our surface mind, life or body »⁶⁵. For this reason Aurobindo proposes that « the outer mind, and life and body must become for us only an antechamber »⁶⁶, and that we have to learn to live habitually in and from the inner mind and life and body. In fact what we are outside is completely conditioned by what we are within, in our inner recesses. It is thence that come the secret initiatives, inspirations, motivations, preferences, and so on and so forth. A clear knowledge, therefore, of these inner depths of our being is indispensable not only for a fuller understanding of our own nature but also for developing a well integrated personality and for exploiting all the powers and potentialities contained therein. Aurobindo states: « For a larger mental being is there within us, a larger inner vital being, even a larger inner subtle-physical being other than our surface body-consciousness, and by entering into this, or becoming it, identifying ourselves with it, we can observe the springs of our thought and feelings, the sources and motives of our action, the operative energies that build up our surface personality »⁶⁷.

Aurobindo attaches greater importance to the double aspect of the soul, which he calls the *central being* of man. The two aspects which constitute it are the *jivatman* and the *psychic being*. Our author spells out his theory as follows: « The phrase 'central being'... is usually applied to the portion of the Divine in us which supports all the rest and survives through death and birth. This central being has two forms — above, it is Jivatman, our true being, of which we become aware when the higher self-knowledge comes, — below it is the psychic being which stands behind mind, body and life. The Jivatman is above the manifestation in life and presides over it; the psychic being stands behind the manifestation in life and supports it »⁶⁸.

The Jivatman is the transcendent principle in man and as such is not affected by the evolutionary process or the phenomenon of birth and death; it is always the same. It is our real Self, our uncreated, unborn, eternally existing spiritual substance. In regard to our empirical existence, it stands above it and presides over it. Here are some of the statements of Aurobindo on this matter: « This Infinite, this

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 532.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 533.

⁶⁸ *Lights on Yoga*, p. 14; « The word Jiva has two meanings in Sanscritic tongues — « living creatures » and the Spirit individualised and upholding the living being in its evolution from birth to birth. In the latter sense the full term is Jivatman — the Atman, spirit or eternal self of the living being » (*ibid.*, p. 16).

Spirit who is housed within us but not bound or shut in by mind or body is our own Self »⁶⁹; « ... that which is within us is the spirit of the Eternal Spirit »⁷⁰. « The immutable Spirit, the imperishable soul in us has come out of the Transcendence »⁷¹. « The inner soul in man is here a partial self-manifestation of the Divine »⁷². « An elaborate description of the Jivatman would be: 'the multiple Divine manifested here as the individualised self or spirit of the created being' »⁷³.

The real Self of man is beyond the individuality of the individual. By the very nature of its existence the Jivatman knows itself to be simultaneously individual, universal and transcendent. It is always aware of its unity with the Divine who is the truth of its being, the master of its nature and the very stuff of its reality. « Our real self is cosmic, infinite, it is one with all existences. The self behind our mind, life and body is the same as the self behind the mind, life and body of all our fellow beings »⁷⁴. It is essentially identical with the supreme Sacchidananda. As Aurobindo reiterates: « Atman, our true self, is Brahman; it is pure indivisible being, self-concentrated in Force, self-delighted. Its existence is light and bliss. It is timeless, spaceless and free »⁷⁵. The ultimate aim of evolutionary process and of all spiritual discipline is said to be to discover this eternal Sacchidananda, this essential self within us and to live in it and to make manifest its true nature in all the aspects of our being⁷⁶.

The psychic being, on the other hand, is seen as the representative or deputy of the Jivatman, and is involved in the process of evolution. « The Jivatman in its essence does not change or evolve, its essence stands above the personal evolution; within the evolution itself it is represented by the evolving psychic being which supports all the rest of the nature »⁷⁷. Aurobindo calls it also individual soul or the *caitya purusha*⁷⁸, the eternal portion of Ishwara⁷⁹, a ray of the supreme Soul and Godhead⁸⁰, an inextinguishable flame of the Godhead and an indestructible spark of the Divine⁸¹. Evidently these

⁶⁹ SRI AUROBINDO, *The Problem of Rebirth*, Pondicherry 1969, p. 80.

⁷⁰ *E. Git.*, p. 410.

⁷¹ *S.Y.*, p. 242.

⁷² *E. Git.*, p. 308.

⁷³ *Lights on Yoga*, p. 16.

⁷⁴ *S.Y.*, p. 354.

⁷⁵ *Ups.*, p. 87.

⁷⁶ *Cfr. S.Y.*, p. 598.

⁷⁷ *Lights on Yoga*, p. 16.

⁷⁸ *Cfr. L.D.*, I, p. 225.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

⁸⁰ *E. Git.*, p. 275.

⁸¹ *L.D.*, I, p. 225.

are figurative expressions, probably the best suited to convey spiritual truths. And what is conveyed is this: « The eternal and universal Self of every human being is God; even his personal self [psychic being] is a part of the Godhead, *mamaivāṃśah*, — not a fraction or fragment, surely, since we cannot think of God as broken up into little pieces, but a partial consciousness of the one Consciousness, a partial power of the one Power, a partial enjoyment of the world-being by the one and universal Delight of being, and therefore in manifestation or, as we say, in Nature a limited and finite being of the one infinite and illimitable Being »⁸².

This psychic entity is « that which endures and is imperishable in us from birth to birth, untouched by death, decay or corruption, an indestructible spark of the Divine »⁸³. « This is the traveller between birth and death and between death and birth, our nature parts are only its manifold and changing vesture »⁸⁴. In our human nature it supports the mind, life and body, « standing behind the mental, the vital, the subtle-physical being in us and watching and profiting by their development and experience »⁸⁵. Its mission is to lead man in the Ignorance to the light of the divine Consciousness⁸⁶.

A dynamic aspect of the Divine, the psychic being represents the Spirit's involved dimension. It did not appear in the beginning as a full-fledged psychic entity, but only as a lower form of material being. As Aurobindo states: « There is no body without soul, no body that is not itself a form of soul: Matter itself is substance and power of Spirit and could not exist if it were anything else, for nothing can exist which is not substance and power of Brahman; and if Matter, then still more clearly and certainly Life and Mind must be that and ensouled by the presence of the Spirit »⁸⁷. In each stage of the evolutionary manifestation the soul puts forward a corresponding aspect: in the material plane it is the true physical being, in the vital plane the true vital being and in the mental plane the true psychic being. Aurobindo says: « The psychic being is the spark growing into a Fire, evolving with the growth of the consciousness. The psychic being is therefore evolutionary... »⁸⁸.

As the principle of individuality, the psychic entity leads and guides the individual evolution. Its actual nature as soul of man does

⁸² *E.Git.*, p. 149.

⁸³ *L.D.*, I, p. 225.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁸⁷ *L.D.*, II, p. 761.

⁸⁸ *Lights on Yoga*, p. 15.

not constitute its final and permanent formation. « It was a lesser manifestation than the human in its past, it can become something much greater than mental man in its future. And when this soul rises above all ignorant limitation, then it puts on its divine nature of which its humanity is only a temporary veil, a thing of partial and incomplete significance »⁸⁹. In the slow process of evolution the psychic being itself will be identified with the Jivatman. « When there is full consciousness, the Jivatman and the psychic being join together »⁹⁰, says Aurobindo. Then it realizes its true individuality without losing sight of its universality and transcendence.

II. *The Doctrine of Rebirth*

The essential aspect of evolution, according to Aurobindo, is the progressive unfolding of consciousness or the gradual manifestation of the individual soul. The physical evolution is only an instrument for such an unfolding. This truth was not so evident in the lower stages: there the physical factors obscured the hidden working of the conscious element, the soul-reality. Only with the emergence of man did this truth become apparent. In man too the soul-evolution is an on-going process, until it will culminate in the full manifestation of the Spirit. Aurobindo sets the doctrine of rebirth against this background. Rebirth, according to him, is an indispensable machinery for realizing such a finality. He says: « Each grade of cosmic manifestation, each type of form that can house the indwelling Spirit, is turned by rebirth into a means for the individual soul, the psychic entity, to manifest more and more of its concealed consciousness: each life becomes a step in a victory over Matter by a greater progression of consciousness in it which shall make eventually Matter itself a means for the full manifestation of the Spirit »⁹¹.

Accordingly rebirth⁹² occupies a central position in the whole question of individual evolution or soul evolution. We need, therefore, turn our attention to the theory of rebirth and highlight its nature and implications.

It is well known that rebirth is one of the cardinal « dogmas » of the Indian religio-philosophical systems. Not only do the Hindus, but

⁸⁹ *E.Git.*, p. 431.

⁹⁰ *Lights on Yoga*, p. 15.

⁹¹ *L.D.*, II, p. 826.

⁹² Though the terms « transmigration », « metempsychosis », « reincarnation » and « rebirth » are usually taken for synonyms, Aurobindo prefers « rebirth » as it renders better the sense and essence of the Sanskrit term *punarjanma* (Cfr. *The Problem of Rebirth*, p. 9).

the Buddhists and Jains too accept it as part and parcel of their tradition. As a matter of fact Buddhism and Jainism inherited this doctrine from Hinduism.

The rebirth, as it is generally understood, is the process by which the soul reincarnates in another living body after the death of the previous one. The nature and fortunes of the new incarnation are not determined arbitrarily, but almost automatically by the law of *karma* according to which to each one is meted out a retribution corresponding exactly to the merits and demerits of one's past actions: as one sows, so one reaps⁹³.

The ancient scriptures of the Hindus speak of rebirth in very clear terms. For instance, as Cāndogya Upanishad expresses it: « Those who are of pleasant conduct here — the prospect is indeed that they will enter a pleasant womb, either the womb of a Brahmina, or the womb of a Kshatriya or the womb of a Vaiśya. But those who are of stinking conduct here — the prospect is indeed that they will enter a stinking womb, either the womb of a dog, or the womb of a swine, or the womb of an outcaste »⁹⁴.

Aurobindo accepts the spirit of this scriptural teaching and affirms that *rebirth* and *karma* are so intimately related that dispensing with the latter the former would become a chaotic process. « If we believe that the soul is repeatedly reborn in the body, we must believe also that there is some link between the lives that preceded and the lives that follow and that the past of the soul has an effect on the future; and that is the spiritual essence of the law of karma. To deny it would be to establish a reign of the most chaotic incoherence »⁹⁵.

He, however, points out some defects in the traditional view of rebirth and karma. First of all, laying too much emphasis on the individual aspect of the purification of the soul, the traditional theory loses sight of the role of the individual in the universal evolution. « The old idea of rebirth », he says, « errs ... by an excessive individualism. Too self-centered, it treated one's rebirth and karma as too much one's own single affair, a sharply separate movement in the

⁹³ For a detailed study of the doctrine of rebirth in Hindu tradition, cfr. P. DEUSSEN, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, New York 1966, pp. 313-361; S. RADHAKRISHNAN, *The Brahma Sutra*, London 1971, pp. 183-207; D. ACHARUPARAMBIL, *Induismo: vita e pensiero*, Roma 1976, pp. 199-213.

⁹⁴ *Chandogya Up.*, 5, 10, 7; In the *Kaushitaki Up.* we read: « Either as a worm or as a moth or as a fish or as a bird or as a lion or as a wild boar or as a snake or as a tiger or as a person or as some other in this or that condition he is born again here according to his deeds, according to his knowledge » (1, 2).

⁹⁵ *The Problem of Rebirth*, p. 113.

whole ... »⁹⁶. Secondly, trying to combine the idea of a life beyond with the notion of rebirth, it supposes a double retribution: « for the sinner is first tortured in hell and afterwards afflicted for the same sins in another life here, and the righteous or the puritan is rewarded with celestial joys and afterwards again pampered for the same virtues and good deeds in a new terrestrial existence »⁹⁷. And he remarks: « This looks a little superfluous and a rather redundant justice »⁹⁸. Thirdly, the whole process is seen to be governed by a crude and mechanical ethical ideal. Put in his words: « The ordinary current concept of law of karma is dominantly ethical, but ethical in no very exalted kind. Its idea of karma is a mechanical and materialistic ethics, a crudely exact legal judgement and administration of reward and punishment, an external sanction to virtue and prohibition of sin, a code, a balance »⁹⁹. Aurobindo finds this derogatory to the very nature of our being. « If the fundamental truth of our being is spiritual and not mechanical, it must be ourself, our soul that fundamentally determines its own evolution, and the law of Karma can only be one of the processes it uses for that purpose »¹⁰⁰. He observes further: « It is not conceivable that the Spirit within is an automation in the hands of karma, a slave in this life of its past actions; the truth must be less rigid and more plastic. If a certain amount of results of past karma is formulated in the present life, it must be with the consent of the psychic being which presides over the new formation of its earth experience... »¹⁰¹.

Consequently Aurobindo is not satisfied with the traditional interpretation of the theory of rebirth. Instead he incorporates it organically into his basic vision of the involution-evolution process of the Spirit. For him « the true foundation of the theory of rebirth is the evolution of the soul, or rather its efflorescence out of the veil of Matter and its gradual self-finding »¹⁰². For this purpose rebirth is not just a possibility, but a necessity. « Rebirth is an indispensable machinery for the working out of a spiritual evolution; it is the only

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁹⁷ *L.D.*, II, p. 805; see also *The Problem of Rebirth*, pp. 124-125.

⁹⁸ *The Problem of Rebirth*, p. 125.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁰⁰ *L.D.*, II, p. 808.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*; « The law of Karma can be no rigid and mechanical canon or rough practical rule of thumb, but rather its guiding principle should be as supple a harmonist as the Spirit itself whose will of self-knowledge it embodies and should adapt itself to the need of self-development of the variable individual souls who are feeling their way along its lines towards the right balance, synthesis, harmonies of their action » (*The Problem of Rebirth*, p. 123).

¹⁰² *The Problem of Rebirth*, p. 17.

possible effective condition, the obvious dynamic process of such a manifestation in the material universe »¹⁰³.

The individual soul was not born in the human condition all of a sudden. Our author maintains on this point, that « human birth is a term at which the soul must arrive in a long succession of rebirths and that it has had for its previous and preparatory terms in the succession the lower forms of life upon earth »¹⁰⁴. The human soul did not begin its earthly pilgrimage when human beings began to people the face of the earth; « he must have presided over a soul-experience in the lower forms of life before he took up the human evolution »¹⁰⁵. He is believed to have assumed previously the plant and animal forms. By means of such experiences and slow process of development the soul has now manifested itself in the human condition. But the actual mental humanity too is only a transitory stage; this too is to be outlived. « The soul is not bound by the formula of mental humanity: it did not begin with that and will not end with it; it had a pre-human past, it has a super-human future »¹⁰⁶.

A question now presents itself: whether the soul, having once arrived at humanity, can be reborn in infrahuman condition? The scriptural statements and the popular belief support this view. But Aurobindo is reluctant to endorse it fully on the basis that man is a very decisive step in the whole process of evolution and hence it would be frustrating the entire purpose of the process if any considerable number of humans were to go back to subhuman conditions¹⁰⁷. He does not however exclude altogether the possibility of individual cases of such a retrogression, especially in the case of those who are not developed enough to retain their human character. « The movement of Nature is always sufficiently complex for us not to deny dogmatically such a possibility »¹⁰⁸. « All the secret of the circumstances of rebirth centres around the one capital need of the soul, the need of growth, the need of experience; that governs the line of its evolution and all the rest is accessory »¹⁰⁹.

Now, why should there be succession of births in human form?

¹⁰³ *L.D.*, II, pp. 754-755.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 761.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 760; « We can only get away from this necessity of an animal past by denying all soul to sub-human nature. But this denial is only one of the blind, hasty and presumptuous isolations of the human mind which, shut up in its own prison of separate self-perception, refuses to see its kinship with the rest of natural being » (*The Problem of Rebirth*, p. 63).

¹⁰⁶ *L.D.*, II, pp. 760-761.

¹⁰⁷ Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 762.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 815.

The answer is that « the soul has not finished what it has to do by merely developing into humanity; it has still to develop that humanity into its higher possibilities »¹¹⁰. « It is evident that in one life we do not and cannot labour out and exhaust all the values and powers of that life, but only carry on a past thread, weave out something in the present, prepare infinitely more for the future »¹¹¹. Neither the primitive man in the forest, nor the ignorant peasant engrossed in a hand-to-mouth life, nor the so-called cultured modern man immersed in the pleasures of life have exhausted the necessity of a human birth, have developed all its possibilities, have realized the whole meaning of human condition. Not even a Plato or a Shankara marks the crown of human development. May be one is apt to suppose that people like them represent the highest point of human possibilities. Aurobindo, therefore, claims that « this present highest point at least must be reached before we can write finis on the recurrence of the human birth for the individual »¹¹².

Thus viewed from the perspective of the evolutionary thought of Sri Aurobindo, rebirth becomes a necessary, an inevitable logical conclusion. As he puts it: « Rebirth is self-evidently a necessary part, the sole possible machinery of such an evolution. It is as necessary as birth itself; for without it birth would be an initial step without a sequel, the starting of a journey without its further steps and arrival. It is rebirth that gives to the birth of an incomplete being in a body its promise of completeness and its spiritual significance »¹¹³.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 762.

¹¹¹ *The Problem of Rebirth*, p. 115.

¹¹² *L.D.*, II, p. 763.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 764; In regard to the post-mortal state of the soul and the process of its subsequent rebirth Aurobindo hazards the following account: « The soul takes birth each time, and each time a mind, life and body are formed out of the materials of universal Nature according to the soul's past evolution and its need for the future.

« When the body is dissolved, the vital goes into the vital plane and remains there for a time, but after a time the vital sheath disappears. The last to dissolve is the mental sheath. Finally, the soul or psychic being retires into the psychic world to rest there till a new birth is close.

« This is the general course for ordinarily developed human beings. There are variations according to the nature of the individual and his development. For example, if the mental is strongly developed, then the mental being can remain; so also can the vital, provided they are organised by and centred around the true psychic being; they share the immortality of the psychic.

« The soul gathers the essential elements of its experiences in life and makes that its basis of growth in the evolution; when it returns to birth it takes up with its mental, vital, physical sheaths so much of its Karma as is useful to it in the new life for further experience » (*Lights on Yoga*, p. 17).

III. *Man, the Mental Being*

« It is Self that is the man; or, if we regard only our normal surface existence, Mind is the man, — for man is the mental being »¹¹⁴, says Aurobindo. Though a dominant principle in the present state of man, the mind reached its actual perfection only after passing through various stages of development. Aurobindo distinguishes three main grades in the process: physical mind, vital mind and thinking mind.

The first to appear was a physical mind or a physical man who attached the most importance to his own material and physical existence, to his external life and to the objective things of the world around him. He was little attuned to the subjective and internal dimensions of his being, not to say anything of the transcendent. « The physical mind takes its stand on matter and the material world, on the body and the bodily life, on sense-experience and on a normal practical mentality and its experience »¹¹⁵. It is just and right that it should be so, thinks Aurobindo. « It is inevitable that the human being should thus take his first stand on Matter and give the external fact and external existence its due importance; for this is Nature's first provision for our existence, on which she insists greatly »¹¹⁶. By this means Nature ensures the safety, integrity and well-being of our physical existence.

But the mental being cannot remain always at this lowest rung of the evolutionary ladder. It ascends further and there emerges the vital mind or life-mind. Unlike the physical mind « it is not satisfied with the physical and objective only, but seeks too a subjective, an imaginative, a purely emotive satisfaction and pleasure »¹¹⁷. « It attaches immense importance to the satisfaction and fulfilment of the life-being, the life-force, the vital nature; it looks on physical existence as a field for the life-impulses' self-fulfilment... »¹¹⁸. The man in this vital mentality is said to be « the man of desire and sensation, the man of force and action, the man of passion and emotion, the kinetic individual »¹¹⁹. His mental life is often enslaved to the vital force and its desires and passions, and it is these he mostly seeks to satisfy through the mind. But being highly dynamic, it is a great force in the working of the evolutionary Nature.

The evolution, then, takes the next step and arrives at the thinking

¹¹⁴ *L.D.*, I, p. 502.

¹¹⁵ *L.D.*, II, p. 717.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 718.

¹¹⁷ *L.D.*, I, p. 414.

¹¹⁸ *L.D.*, II, p. 718.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 719.

mind, the intelligent mind, the mental man to whom the things of the mental world are the most important realities. « Those who are under its influence, the philosopher, thinker, scientist, intellectual creator, the man of the idea, the man of the written or spoken word, the idealist and dreamer are the present mental being at his highest attained summit »¹²⁰. In the initial stages of his emergence the mental man would feel in himself the weight of the discordant exigencies of the lower physical and vital being; only in a more complete development will he be able to control and subject them and attune them to the higher mental nature. Such a mental man, according to Aurobindo, « is the normal summit of Nature's evolutionary formation on the human plane »¹²¹.

These three degrees of mind, observes Aurobindo, are most often found to coexist in our present composition. But from the point of view of Nature's evolution they are significant steps in the development of the mind towards self-fulfilment.

Though mind is the « highest of the three lower principles which constitute our human existence »¹²², yet it is « not the highest possible power of consciousness »¹²³. It is not a possessor of Truth but only a seeker of Truth; and it cannot arrive at the full Truth but only at partial truths. « Beyond mind is a supramental or gnostic power of consciousness that is in eternal possession of Truth »¹²⁴. « The utmost mission of Mind is to train our obscure consciousness which has emerged out of the dark prison of Matter, to enlighten its blind instincts, random intuitions, vague perceptions till it shall become capable of this greater light and this higher ascension »¹²⁵. That is why Aurobindo declares: « Mind is a passage, not a culmination »¹²⁶. « Mind is a clumsy interlude between Nature's vast and precise subconscious action and the vaster infallible superconscious action of the Godhead »¹²⁷.

Mind is seen as a faculty of partial and imperfect knowledge which normally is conditioned by the intervention of sensation, per-

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 720.

¹²² *L.D.*, I, p. 172; The term *Mind* ordinarily used to signify the whole of human consciousness, is employed by Aurobindo « to connote specially the part of the nature which has to do with cognition and intelligence, with ideas, with mental or thought perceptions, the reactions of thought to things, with the truly mental movements and formations, mental vision and will, etc., that are part of his intelligence » (*Lights on Yoga*, p. 12); Mind is the totality of « the life of thought, feeling, will, conscious impulsion » (*L.D.*, I, p. 46).

¹²³ *The Hour of God*, p. 43.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *L.D.*, I, pp. 127-128.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹²⁷ *The Hour of God*, p. 47.

ception, imagination, memory, ideation and so on. It is therefore an indirect means of cognition. Here is a description of the limitations of mental knowledge: « Its highest knowledge is often abstract, lacking in concrete grasp; it has to use expedients and unsure means of arrival, to rely upon reasoning, argumentation and debate, inferences, divinations, set methods of inductive or deductive logic, succeeding only if it is given correct and complete data and even then liable to reach on the same data different results and varying consequences »¹²⁸.

All the defects and imperfections of the mental knowledge spring, maintains Aurobindo, from one fundamental limitation to which mind is subject, namely *Ignorance*. He goes to the extent of declaring that « the very nature of our mind is Ignorance »¹²⁹. He hastens to clarify what he means by Ignorance: « not an absolute nescience, but a limited and conditioned knowledge of being, limited by a realization of its present, a memory of its past, an inference of its future, conditioned therefore by a temporal and successive view of itself and its experience »¹³⁰.

Aurobindo distinguishes in the mind a sevenfold ignorance: the original, the cosmic, the egoistic, the temporal, the psychological, the constitutional and the practical ignorance¹³¹.

a) Original ignorance: We are ignorant of the true nature of the Absolute which is the source of all being and becoming; we consider some partial aspect of It as the whole truth.

b) Cosmic ignorance: We are ignorant of the spaceless, timeless, impersonal, immutable Self, and we consider the phenomenal universe as the whole of existence.

c) Egoistic ignorance: We are ignorant of our universal Self and our unity with all beings and consider the ego as our true self, thus isolating ourselves from the rest of the reality.

d) Temporal ignorance: We think of ourselves exclusively in terms of our present life and body, forgetful of our past existences and future becoming.

e) Psychological ignorance: Even in the present brief existence we are normally aware only of our surface being and are ignorant of the whole gamut of the subconscious and superconscious spheres of our being.

¹²⁸ SRI AUROBINDO, *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*, Pondicherry 1973, p. 83.

¹²⁹ *L.D.*, I, p. 504.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 504-505.

¹³¹ Cfr. *L.D.*, II, pp. 654-655.

f) Constitutional ignorance: We regard the mind or life or body or all the three as the whole account of what we are, losing sight of the indwelling Spirit which constitutes them.

g) Practical ignorance: As a result of all these in practical life, we wander in a maze of errors and desires, sin and stumbling, pain and pleasure and fail to adapt ourselves to the exigencies of circumstances.

Ignorance, however, is only a stage in the evolution, and knowledge is its culmination. Man, therefore, is not doomed to remain always in this many-sided ignorance, but is destined to be transformed into a many-sided and integral Knowledge through a higher evolution. An integral knowledge, according to Aurobindo, is a « knowledge of the truth of all sides of existence both separately and in the relation of each to all and the relation of all to the truth of the Spirit »¹³². To be noted however that, « this is not an intellectual knowledge which can be learned and completed in our present mould of consciousness; it must be an experience, a becoming, a change of consciousness, a change of being »¹³³. « The integral knowledge, then, can only come by an evolution of our being »¹³⁴.

C) THE HIGHER EVOLUTIONARY DESTINY OF MAN

Though the physical and external aspects of evolution easily commands attention, the essential feature of evolution, according to Aurobindo, is the internal change, the change of consciousness. « In the inner reality of things a change of consciousness was always the major fact, the evolution has always had a spiritual significance and the physical change was only instrumental »¹³⁵. In the stages that preceded man this was not so evident because the dense inconscience of matter was not sufficiently attuned to the light of the Spirit and so it gave the impression that it was physical changes which determined internal transformations. But once this imbalance has been set aright in man, it is the internal evolution that brings about the necessary external changes; « the consciousness itself by its mutation will necessitate and operate whatever mutation is needed for the body »¹³⁶.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 653.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 655.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 844.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

The next major step which Aurobindo envisages in the evolution of man is the realization of Supramental consciousness with the corresponding transformations in his physical being. But our author finds that the gulf that separates the actual mental man from the Supermind is so enormous that without some intermediary stages the transition from the one to the other is simply impossible. He bridges the gulf by postulating a *triple transformation: psychic, spiritual, and then supramental*. To put it in his own words: « There must first be the psychic change, the conversion of our whole present nature into a soul-instrumentation; on that or along with that there must be a spiritual change, the descent of a higher Light, Knowledge, Power, Force, Bliss, Purity into the whole being, even into the lowest recesses of the life and body, even into the darkness of our subconsciousness; last, there must supervene the supramental transformation, — there must take place as the crowning movement the ascent into the Supermind and the transforming descent of the supramental consciousness into our entire being and nature »¹³⁷.

I. *The Psychic Transformation*

One of the strange paradoxes of ordinary human existence is that, though the psychic entity, the soul, constitutes the essential part of man's personality, he is very seldom aware of it. While the other parts of our natural composition are mutable and perishable, « the psychic entity in us persists and is fundamentally the same always »¹³⁸. In fact, « the soul, the permanent being in us, puts forth and uses mind, life and body as its instruments »¹³⁹. But the ordinary experience is that, « this being stands back and in most human natures is only the secret witness or, one might say, a constitutional ruler who allows his ministers to rule for him, delegates to them his empire, silently assents to their decisions and only now and then puts in a word which they can at any moment override and act otherwise »¹⁴⁰.

The first step towards a higher transformation is to rectify this state of affairs, to remove the veil that hides the psychic being and let its light flood the whole of our surface being, body, life and mind. The true harmony, equilibrium and integration of the discordant elements that constitute human nature can be had only when the

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 891.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 892.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 900.

inner reality emerges strong enough to assert itself and control the whole being; « it is by the coming forward of this true monarch and his taking up of the reins of government that there can take place a real harmonization of our being and our life »¹⁴¹.

This means that the consciousness has to shift its centre from the surface to the inner being; from there must spring all our thought, life and action. Aurobindo warns that this is not an easy task because of the instinctive opposition from the surface and subconscious nature which cling to the accustomed poise and externalised ways. A strenuous effort of self-discipline, self-purification and introspection would considerably facilitate the process. « As the crust of the outer nature cracks, as the walls of inner separation break down, the inner light gets through ... The soul, the psychic entity, then manifests itself as the central being which upholds mind and life and body and supports all the other powers and functions of the Spirit; it takes up its greater function as the guide and ruler of nature »¹⁴².

A perfectly luminous and an ever-pure flame of the divinity¹⁴³, the psychic entity is the most reliable guide of nature, because truth is its only criterion. Guiding from within, it will expose every movement to the light of Truth, repel what is false, obscure or opposed to the divine realization¹⁴⁴. A further result of such a psychic change will be a free inflow of all kinds of spiritual experiences; experience of the Self and the divine Reality, experience of cosmic consciousness and a direct touch with cosmic forces, a psychic sympathy and inner communication with other beings, illuminations of the mind by knowledge, illuminations of the heart by love and devotion, illuminations of the sense and the body by higher experience, and so forth¹⁴⁵.

II. *The Spiritual Transformation*

« Although the psychic transformation is one necessary condition of the total transformation of our existence, it is not all that is needed ... but another, a spiritual transformation from above is needed for us to possess our self in its universality and transcendence »¹⁴⁶. The spiritual transformation takes up the psychic transformation to complete it. While the latter is an inward movement, the former is a

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 907.

¹⁴³ Cfr. *ibid.*, p. 891.

¹⁴⁴ Cfr. *ibid.*, p. 907.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 908-909.

¹⁴⁶ *L.D.*, I, p. 227.

movement upward. « The psychic movement inward to the inner being, the Self or Divinity within us, must be completed by an opening upward to the supreme spiritual status or a higher existence »¹⁴⁷. This is an opening of ourselves to the real Self, the self-luminous Spirit, which is beyond all the psycho-physical adjuncts.

The spiritual transformation can take place even before the psychic change is complete, as a result of an inner subliminal and sustained aspiration or by a special intervention of the Spirit, « the touch of the Divine Being »¹⁴⁸. What happens in consequence is a rising up towards the Infinity above us or a descent of its powers into our being. We begin to experience « an eternal Presence or an infinite Existence, an infinity of Consciousness, an infinity of Bliss, - a boundless Light, a boundless Power, a boundless Ecstasy »¹⁴⁹.

In the beginning, because of the imperfections of the lower nature, such experiences may be sporadic and short-lived. As the mind ascends by degrees into higher planes and the other lower constituents become more and more purified, the Spirit reveals itself all the better. For the full spiritual transformation we need « a permanent ascension from the lower into the higher consciousness and an effectual permanent descent of the higher into the lower nature »¹⁵⁰. It will be a veritable invasion by the Spirit of all spheres of our being resulting in the raising of their level altogether. « A light and power, a knowledge and force are felt which first take possession of the mind and remould it, afterwards the life-part and remould that, finally of the little physical consciousness and leave it no longer little but wide and plastic and even infinite »¹⁵¹.

Such changes bring about an abiding spiritual sense and an awareness of the eternal Reality everywhere; a constant joy and peace of the Infinite become a concrete experience. « In all sights and forms one sees the Eternal, the Reality, in all sounds one hears it, in all touches feels it; there is nothing else but its forms and personalities and manifestations; the joy or adoration of the heart, the embrace of all existence, the unity of the spirit are abiding realities »¹⁵².

This is not all: there are yet other changes to be effected and stages to be traversed before supramental transformation can take place.

¹⁴⁷ *L.D.*, II, p. 910.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 911.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 912.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 913.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 913-914

III. Further Preparations for the Supramental Transformation

The spiritual transformation paves the way for the highest stage in the process, — the supramental transformation. « As the psychic change has to call in the spiritual to complete it, so the first spiritual change has to call in the supramental transformation to complete it »¹⁵³. This is a thorough transformation of the whole nature through the intervention of the supramental Power. All the stages that precede it are only transitional; they prepare the nature for this final flowering. « The Truth-Consciousness, finding evolutionary Nature ready, has to descend into her and enable her to liberate the supramental principle within her; so must be created the supramental and spiritual being as the first unveiled manifestation of the truth of the Self and Spirit in the material universe »¹⁵⁴.

Aurobindo insistently underlines that the Supramental Force will act directly on the nature only when it is fully ready to receive such an action; the Supermind does not admit of any premature descent. The reason is that « there is too great a disparity between the power of the supreme Force and the capacity of the ordinary nature; the inferior nature would either be unable to bear or, bearing, unable to respond and receive or, receiving, unable to assimilate »¹⁵⁵. Till the nature is ready the supramental Force will act indirectly, making it to develop gradually through some other intermediary stages. Evolution takes a new decisive step only after the previous main step has been sufficiently confirmed. « This law of Natura's procedure », says Aurobindo, « brings in the necessity of a gradation in the last transitional process, a climbing of degrees, an unfolding of higher and higher states that lead us from the spiritualised mind to Supermind, — a steep passage that could not be accomplished otherwise »¹⁵⁶.

In this development prior to the supramental manifestation Aurobindo visualises four gradations. « These gradations may be summarily described as a series of sublimations of the consciousness through *Higher Mind*, *Illumined Mind* and *Intuition* into *Overmind* and beyond it; there is a succession of self-transmutations at the summit of which lies the Supermind or Divine Gnosis »¹⁵⁷.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 917-918.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 918.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 931.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 932.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 938 (emphasis mine); « All the works of mind and intellect must be first heightened and widened, then illumined, lifted into the domain of a higher Intelligence, afterwards translated into workings of a greater non-mental

1. *Higher Mind*

The first notable step out of our human condition towards the supramental status is called the Higher Mind. Unlike our ordinary mind which is only a half-light, a mixture of light and darkness, this Higher Mind is full of the clarity of the Spirit. « Its special character, its activity of consciousness are dominated by Thought; it is a luminous thought-mind, a mind of Spirit-born conceptual knowledge »¹⁵⁸. This Thought opens the flood-gates of spontaneous knowledge, and as such has a different character from the process of thought to which we are normally accustomed; for there is nothing here of seeking, no trace of mental construction, no labour of speculation or difficult discovery¹⁵⁹.

The Higher Mind is in possession of Truth and its knowledge is an automatic and spontaneous manifestation of it. While the ordinary mind has to depend for its knowledge on sense-experience, ratiocination, induction, deduction, and so on, « in this greater Thought there is no need of a seeking and a self-critical ratiocination, no logical motion step by step towards a conclusion, no mechanism of express or implied deduction and inferences, no building or deliberate concatenation of idea with idea in order to arrive at an ordered sum or outcome of knowledge »¹⁶⁰. « This Higher Consciousness is a Knowledge formulating itself on a basis of self-existent all-awareness and manifesting some part of its integrity, a harmony of its significances put into thought-form »¹⁶¹. « This thought is a self-revelation of eternal Wisdom, not an acquired knowledge »¹⁶².

The Higher Mind is also possessed of a power of dynamic effectuation, an aspect of will, through which it seeks to purify the lower strata of our being and to eliminate all the obstacles, — ignorance, inconscience, inertia, — that stand in the way of a higher transformation. Aurobindo observes that the Higher Mind by itself is not powerful enough to sweep out all the impediments of our lower nature and create the gnostic being; it can, however, bring about a first change that will capacitate a higher ascent and an integral transformation.

Intuition, then again transformed into the dynamic outpourings of the Overmind radiance, and these transfigured into the full light and sovereignty of the supramental Gnosis » (S.Y., p. 139).

¹⁵⁸ *L.D.*, II, p. 939.

¹⁵⁹ Cfr. *L.D.*, I, p. 277.

¹⁶⁰ *L.D.*, II, p. 940.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

2. *Illumined Mind*

The next step in the upward march of evolution is the Illumined Mind, « a Mind no longer of higher Thought, but of spiritual light »¹⁶³. It renders our inner being radiant with an intense lustre, a splendour and illumination of the Spirit. « A play of lightnings of spiritual truth and power breaks from above into the consciousness... »¹⁶⁴. In this phase thought and ideas are relegated to a secondary position, while they are dominant in the previous one. « The Illumined Mind does not work primarily by thought but by vision; thought is here only a subordinate movement expressive of sight »¹⁶⁵. Normally man who relies mostly on thought for his ideas and theories, conceives that to be the highest process of knowledge. But Aurobindo reminds us that « in the spiritual order thought is a secondary and a not indispensable process »¹⁶⁶. « Thought », he says, « 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... »¹⁶⁷. Accordingly, while the Higher Mind creates a thinker, a sage, the Illumined Mind creates a mystic, a seer. But then, he remarks: « A consciousness that proceeds by sight, the consciousness of the seer, is a greater power for knowledge than the consciousness of the thinker »¹⁶⁸.

The power of the Illumined Mind to bring about an integral transformation and a higher evolution of our nature is greater than that of the Higher Mind. It can break to an extent and remould the lower layers of our being. Still it is not powerful enough to attune them to the supramental realization. The human nature remains still too defective to be raised to the level of the supermind by the light and vision, dynamic though they are, of the Illumined Mind. The evolutionary nature, therefore, makes a further ascent, to a higher spiritual plane called Intuition.

3. *Intuition*

Though the term « intuition » is used generally to indicate any kind of supra-intellectual direct way of knowing, this, according to Aurobindo, is only a partial glimpse or a passing action of the self-

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 944.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 945.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

existent knowledge which is the reality of Intuition, It has a « greater power of the Truth-Force, an intimate and exact Truth-vision, Truth-thought, Truth-sense, Truth-feeling, Truth-action » than the Illumined Mind ¹⁶⁹.

Intuition is a knowledge by identity. In ordinary mental knowledge a distinction exists between the knower, the knowledge and the known. « Even when I regard myself mentally, I have still to make this distinction. I am, as the knower; what I observe in myself, I regard as the object of my knowledge, myself yet not myself; knowledge is an operation by which I link the knower to the known » ¹⁷⁰. This distinction is surpassed in intuition. « The foundation of intuitional knowledge is conscious or effective identity between that which knows and that which is known; it is that state of common self-existence in which the knower and the known are one through knowledge » ¹⁷¹. With regard to the origin in us of intuitive knowledge Aurobindo says: « It is when the consciousness of 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 of lightning-flash from the shock of the meeting... » ¹⁷².

The human mind might often experience glimpses of intuition, but it is always conditioned and contaminated by the imperfections of the mental stuff. « A pure intuition is a rare occurrence in our mental activity » ¹⁷³. At present the power of intuition acts in us only in a covert manner, veiled by the action of mind and reason. It emerges occasionally and fragmentarily; it casts a sudden light, it makes a luminous suggestion or inspiration, it scatters a small number of isolated or related brilliant ideas. The mental power immediately lays hold on them, manipulates and utilizes them in their own way, often altering their truth in the process and always limiting their potential force.

True intuition is not obtained by the normal indirect means of knowledge which needs the mediation of sensation, perception, ideation, and so on. « The true intuition proceeds from the self-existent truth of things and is secured by that self-existent truth » ¹⁷⁴. The ordinary mind « seeking in the darkness or at most by its own unsteady torch-light, first, sees things only as they are presented in that light and, secondly, where it does not know, constructs by ima-

¹⁶⁹ *L.D.*, I, p. 258.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹⁷² *L.D.*, II, p. 946.

¹⁷³ *L.D.*, I, p. 274.

¹⁷⁴ *S.Y.*, p. 460.

gination, by uncertain inference, by others of its aids and makeshifts, things which it readily takes for truth, ... deceptive anticipators, possibilities and probabilities which do duty for certitudes »¹⁷⁵. Intuitive mind, on the contrary « constructs nothing in this artificial fashion, but makes itself a receiver of the light and allows the truth to manifest in it and organise its own constructions »¹⁷⁶. But so long as there is a mixed action, and the mental constructions and imaginations are allowed to operate, this passivity of the intuitive mind to the higher light, to the light of the truth, cannot be complete and secure. In such cases the intuition can intervene only as sporadic lightning flashes that illumine some aspect of the truth, not the whole of it. But true intuition, being an almost direct projection of the self-manifesting light of the omniscient Spirit in human consciousness, is beyond such limitations¹⁷⁷.

« The highest intuitive knowledge », says Aurobindo, « sees things in the whole, in the large, and details only as sides of the indivisible whole: its tendency is towards immediate synthesis and the unity of knowledge »¹⁷⁸. In contrast to this, the ordinary mental knowledge and reason, he points out, proceed by analysis and division and assemble the facts to form a whole: « but in the assemblage so formed there are opposites, anomalies, logical incompatibilities, and the natural tendency of Reason is to affirm some and to negate others which conflict with its chosen conclusions so that it may form a flawlessly logical system »¹⁷⁹.

As the ordinary intellect has to construct its theories and conclusions with difficulty out of the unknown from signs and indications and gathered data, their validity is not self-evident; it will depend rather on a subsequent verification or support from the evidence of other rational conceptions. « True intuition, on the contrary, carries in itself its own guarantee of truth; it is sure and infallible within its limit. And so long as it is pure intuition and does not admit into itself any mixture of sense-error or intellectual ideation, it is never contradicted by experience »¹⁸⁰. That is why Aurobindo declares: « Intuition is as strong as Nature herself from whose very soul it has sprung and cares nothing for the contradictions of reason or the denials of experience. It knows what is because it is ... »¹⁸¹.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 866.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Cfr. *ibid.*, p. 865.

¹⁷⁸ *L.D.*, I, pp. 69-70.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁸⁰ *S.Y.*, p. 459.

¹⁸¹ *L.D.*, I, p. 67.

Aurobindo distinguishes a fourfold power in Intuition: « A power of revelatory truth-seeing, a power of inspiration or truth-hearing, a power of truth-touch or immediate seizing of significance, which is akin to the ordinary nature of its intervention in our mental intelligence, a power of true and automatic discrimination of the orderly and exact relation of truth to truth »¹⁸². Owing to these potentialities it is capable of performing all the functions of reason and intelligence but with greater efficiency and security because it has a greater influence over all the powers and faculties of our being.

Still Aurobindo points out that Intuition does not have enough power to bring about a total integration of the human nature. It is only a ray of the Supermind and as such is only a transitional stage before the full light of the Supermind reveals itself. Intuition is always hampered in its task by the basic defects of our lower nature. « The intuitive mentality is still mind and not gnosis. It is indeed a light from the Supermind, but modified and diminished by the stuff of mind in which it works, and stuff of mind means always a basis of ignorance »¹⁸³. Hence it has to open itself to a still higher ascent.

4. *Overmind*

Th next step of the ascent brings us to what Aurobindo calls Overmind, to which Intuition is only an introduction. Overmind is a power of cosmic consciousness or a principle of global knowledge which is in close contact with the supramental consciousness¹⁸⁴. This description emphasises two specific aspects of its nature: its power of cosmic consciousness on the one hand and, its relation to the Supermind, on the other.

The first thing which the Overmind with its emergence realizes is to complement the ascent so far reached. In the stages of Higher Mind, Illumined Mind and Intuition, was brought about an intense individual opening upwards, a vertical ascent towards the supreme Light. The Overmind perfects this ascent by widening its horizon, expanding its consciousness to the horizontal dimension in such a way as to embrace the totality of reality. The sense of individuality gives place to a sense of universality. As he puts it: « When the Overmind descends, the predominance of the centralising ego-sense is entirely subordinated, lost in largeness of being and finally abolished; a wide cosmic perception and feeling of a boundless universal self and

¹⁸² *L.D.*, II, p. 949.

¹⁸³ *S.Y.*, p. 778.

¹⁸⁴ Cfr. *L.D.*, II, p. 950.

movement replaces it »¹⁸⁵. « It takes up all that is in the three steps below it and raises their characteristic workings to their highest and largest power, adding to them a universal wideness of consciousness and force, a harmonious concert of knowledge, a more manifold delight of being »¹⁸⁶. All experiences in the higher and lower spheres of our being now assume a cosmic character. The Overmind carries in itself a direct cognition of the cosmic truth and the fundamental movements of cosmic Nature; it realizes clearly that « both the individual and the cosmos come from a transcendent Reality which takes form in them »¹⁸⁷.

Overmind derives all these characteristics and expansion of consciousness from its affinity with the Supermind. Aurobindo calls it a « protective double », or a « delegate » of the Supermind¹⁸⁸, or « a sort of inferior Supermind »¹⁸⁹. The Supermind transmits to the Overmind all the powers it possesses so that it may prepare the ignorant nature to manifest overtly the reality of the Supermind. A stage closest to the Supermind in the evolutionary ascent, the Overmind freely and efficaciously receives the higher powers of the Supermind. But in the passage it is automatically attenuated precisely because the Overmind is a lesser power than the Supermind. It does not possess the integrality of truth and power which is proper to the Supermind alone. « The integrality of the Supermind keeps always the essential truth of things, the total truth and the truth of its individual self-determinations clearly knit together; it maintains in them an inseparable unity and between them a close interpenetration and a free and full consciousness of each other: but in Overmind this integrality is no longer there »¹⁹⁰. Though it is aware of the essential truth of things its vision is global, not integral; it sees the essential harmony of the divergent and opposing aspects of the reality; but there is not the absolute harmony of the Supermind.

From the point of view of evolution Overmind is the highest stage attainable in the lower hemisphere. But it is not the final possibility of the whole evolutionary manifestation of the Spirit. Now the veil that separates the two hemispheres must be rent, the lower one must take its final leap into the higher, the Overmind must find its consummation in the Supermind. The Overmind, though it effects great and valuable changes in the lower nature¹⁹¹, yet « it cannot lead

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 952.

¹⁸⁷ *L.D.*, I, p. 309.

¹⁸⁸ *Cfr. ibid.*, p. 278.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

¹⁹¹ *Cfr. L.D.*, II, p. 954.

Mind beyond itself, and in this world of original Inconscience it cannot dynamise the Transcendence »¹⁹².

And because of the downward pull and gravitation of the Inconscience, against which the Overmind has only limited power, evolution may even run the risk of a regression and disintegration. To ward off such a tragedy and to assure a continuous progression of evolution to transcendent levels there must intervene the Supermind and bring about an integral supramental transformation of the whole nature. « A last transition from Overmind to Supermind and a descent of Supermind must therefore intervene at this stage of evolutionary Nature »¹⁹³.

IV. *Not a Rigid Scheme*

Sri Aurobindo wisely warns against taking the above scheme of evolution in a rigid and uniform fashion: evolution is too complex a process to allow such a mathematical exactitude of gradations and progression. He wants it to be understood only as an ideal account of the spiritual transformation. It is a step by step development; and the order of steps he has traced might be the one followed in many a case. But with regard to its universal applicability Aurobindo claims only this much: « This is so far correct that a sufficient integration of one status has to be complete before an ascent to the next higher station can be entirely secure »¹⁹⁴. For the rest, there can be individual variations and consequent emergence of an abundant number of different intermediate stages too.

The very complexity of the evolutionary nature would reject any simple, clear-cut, successive stages in its course. The complexity of human nature itself is the foremost reason for the complexity of its evolution. Even when the soul gallops in the way of spiritual growth, the retinue of the lower nature may be lagging behind. That the lower nature may not crumble beneath the strain, the soul will have to descend on and off to lower levels in order to make sure of their support and integration. Our author compares the whole process to an army advancing in columns which annexes new ground, while the main body is still behind in a territory overrun but too large to be effectively occupied, so that there has to be a frequent

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 953; « The highest heights of mind or of overmind come still within the belt of a mitigated ignorance; they can refract a divine Light but not pass it on in undiminished power to our lower members » (S.Y., p. 456).

¹⁹³ *L.D.*, II, p. 954.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 955.

halt and partial return to the traversed areas for the consolidation and assurance of the hold on the occupied country and assimilation of its people¹⁹⁵.

Besides, the very fact that the whole evolutionary development is ultimately the work of the Spirit which is infinite by definition implies that it is not bound by any rigid scheme, but can assume an infinite variety of course and formation. As Aurobindo states it: « In the spiritual evolution it is inevitable that there should be a many-sided passage and reaching to the one Truth, a many-sided seizing of it; this many-sidedness is the sign of the approach of the soul to a living reality, not to an abstraction or a constructed figure of things that can be petrified into a dead or stony formula »¹⁹⁶.

V. The Supramental Transformation

The final stage of evolution is the Supramental transformation in which man transcending the domain of Ignorance attains the realm of Knowledge becoming thus a *Gnostic being* or a *Superman*. This supramental state of life, designated also as Gnostic or *Divine Life*, is the final destiny of man's evolutionary existence¹⁹⁷. The stages we have examined so far are only preparations for this crowning leap of evolution, and it will happen only when the nature will be completely ready for it; no premature ascent to the supramental level is to be expected. The nature is to be sufficiently refined and strengthened before it can contain and operate in tune with the light and power of the supernature. Till that is achieved the supramental force acts covertly in the nature.

Sri Aurobindo points out that it would be to go altogether outside present limits to attempt anything like an adequate presentation of the whole character of what the supramental change is going to be like. The reason is that in it we, leaving behind the limitations of mind, step into the realm of the infinite. While mental nature and mental thought are based on a consciousness of the finite, the supramental nature is in its very grain a consciousness and power of the Infinite. « As the summits of our human mind are beyond animal

¹⁹⁵ Cfr. *ibid.*, p. 956.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 886-887.

¹⁹⁷ « A life of gnostic beings carrying the evolution to a higher supramental status might fitly be characterised as a divine life; for it would be a life in the Divine, a life of the beginnings of a spiritual divine light and power and joy manifested in material Nature. That might be described, since it surpasses the mental human level, as life of spiritual and supramental Superhumanity » (*Ibid.*, p. 1067).

perception, so the movements of Supermind are beyond the ordinary human mental conception »¹⁹⁸. Hence all our descriptions of it will only be an approximation, and even that will convey a true meaning to us only if we have already experienced some higher levels of consciousness which paves the way for the supramental change¹⁹⁹.

Another point to be borne in mind is that this change is not going to be realized in a uniform fashion, that the circumstances and the lines of transition would not be the same for all. « It is impossible for the mind to forecast in detail what the supramental change must be in its parts of life-action and outward behaviour or lay down for it what forms it shall create for the individual or the collective existence »²⁰⁰. Here too the reason is the mind's inadequacy to grapple with the infinite. The Supermind can manifest its unity in the largeness of multiplicities which to the mind may appear confusing.

Aurobindo notes further that the supramental evolution is not an abnormal development of things, it is not anything not due to nature, but rather a natural flowering of the process by which the hidden supramental principle is emerging to the broad light²⁰¹. Manifestation of the Supermind is something inevitable; « it must happen in this world sooner or later »²⁰². « But there would be nothing supernatural or miraculous in such an evolution, except in so far as it would be a supernature or superior nature to ours just as human nature is a supernature or superior nature to that of animal or plant or material objects »²⁰³.

At the same time Aurobindo emphasizes strongly that no amount of human effort by itself can obtain such a transition from na-

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 920.

¹⁹⁹ « It must be remembered that there is always a difference between the supreme Supermind of the omniscient and omnipotent Ishwara and that which can be attained by the Jiva. The human being is climbing out of the ignorance and when he ascends into the supramental nature, he will find in it grades of its ascension, and he must first form the lower grades and limited steps before he rises to higher summits. He will enjoy there the full essential light, power, Ananda of the infinite self by oneness with the Spirit, but in the dynamical expression it must determine and individualise itself according to the nature of the self-expression which the transcendent and universal Spirit seeks in the Jiva » (S.Y., p. 768).

²⁰⁰ *L.D.*, II, p. 965.

²⁰¹ « This greater nature we speak of as Supernature because it is beyond his actual level of consciousness and capacity; but in fact it is his own true nature, the height and completeness of it, to which he must arrive if he is to find his real self and whole possibility of being. Whatever happens in Nature must be the result of Nature, the effectuation of what is implied or inherent in it, its inevitable fruit and consequence » (*ibid.*, pp. 1033-1034).

²⁰² *The Supramental Manifestation...*, p. 63.

²⁰³ *L.D.*, II, p. 1042.

ture to supernature. « Our effort belongs to the inferior power of Nature; a power of the Ignorance cannot achieve by its own strength or characteristic or available methods what is beyond its own domain of Nature »²⁰⁴. A real transformation is realized only by a direct and unveiled intervention from above, by a descent of the Supermind into our nature duly prepared to allow it therein an open and unopposed reign. « In order that the involved principles of Overmind and Supermind should emerge from their veiled secrecy, the being and powers of the Superconscience must descend into us and uplift us and formulate themselves in our being and powers: this descent is a *sine qua non* of the transition and transformation »²⁰⁵. « The Supermind alone can transform the lower nature »²⁰⁶. The supramental change of the whole substance and powers of our being takes place « when the involved Supermind in Nature emerges to meet and join with the supramental light and power descending from Supernature »²⁰⁷. By this descent the veil that separates nature from supernature is rent and the transition of evolution from the lower hemisphere to the higher hemisphere is inaugurated. « The rending of the veil is the condition of the divine life in humanity; for by that rending, by the illumining descent of the higher into the nature of the lower being and the forceful ascent of the lower being into the nature of the higher, mind can recover its divine light in the all-comprehending Supermind, the soul realize its divine self in the all-possessing, all-blissful Ananda, life repossess its divine power in the play of omnipotent Conscious-Force, and Matter open to its divine liberty as a form of the divine Existence »²⁰⁸.

Thus the supramental evolution with its double process of a descent from above and an ascent from below, of a self-revelation of the Spirit and an evolution of Nature, brings about, in the one who obtains it, a complete transformation, elevation and fulfilment of all the levels of his being, ushering in a divine life on earth. Then Ignorance will have no sway on him; his life will become a gnostic life and himself, a gnostic being. « The gnostic life will exist and act for the Divine in itself and in the world, for the Divine in all; the increasing possession of the individual being and the world by the Divine Presence, Light, Power, Delight, Beauty will be the sense of life to the gnostic being »²⁰⁹. As a result of this thorough sublimation and

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 921.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *Lights on Yoga*, p. 20.

²⁰⁷ *L.D.*, II, p. 962.

²⁰⁸ *L.D.*, I, pp. 264-265.

²⁰⁹ *L.D.*, II, p. 984.

supramentalization of the whole being of man through the open and free intervention of the Divine Supermind, man becomes wholly the Superman²¹⁰.

The transition into the gnostic life is the decisive step in the supramental evolution, but its final resting place is not gnosis but bliss, *Ananda*. « The basis of the gnostic existence is the self-stuff and self-form of the Ananda »²¹¹. And consequently the evolution must culminate in it. As Aurobindo declares: « A supramental manifestation in its ascent would have as a next sequence and culmination of self-result a manifestation of the Bliss of the Brahman: the evolution of the being of gnosis would be followed by an evolution of the being of bliss; an embodiment of gnostic existence would have as its consequence an embodiment of the beatific existence »²¹². By being assumed into bliss gnosis is not annulled but only fulfilled in the absolute freedom of the supreme Ananda. « In the Ananda », observes Aurobindo, « all law ceases and there is an absolute freedom without binding term or limit »²¹³. A person thus perfected in evolution will in a way be a replica on earth of the supreme Sacchidananda: « He will be conscious in the Brahman that is the All, *sarvam brahma*, in the Brahman infinite in being and infinite in quality, *anantam brahma*, in Brahman as self-existent consciousness and universal knowledge, *jñānam brahma*, in Brahman as the self-existent bliss and its universal delight of being, *ānandam brahma* »²¹⁴.

Aurobindo does not envisage a sweeping transformation at one stretch of the whole humanity into supramental or gnostic beings. « It is not to be supposed », he says, « that all humanity would rise in a block into the Supermind; at first those only might attain to the height or some intermediate height of the ascent whose inner evolution has fitted them for so great a change or who are raised by the direct touch of the Divine into its perfect light and power and bliss »²¹⁵.

Aurobindo, however, visualises a community or a race of supramental beings living side by side with the less evolved human beings on earth. As there has been established on earth a race of mental beings which has taken up into itself all of earthly nature that was ready for such a manifestation, so too, affirms our author, « there will be established on earth a gnostic Consciousness and Power which

²¹⁰ S.Y., p. 796.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 484.

²¹² L.D., II, p. 990.

²¹³ S.Y., p. 485.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 669.

²¹⁵ *The Supramental Manifestation...*, p. 31.

will shape a race of gnostic spiritual beings and take up into itself all of earth-nature that is ready for this new transformation »²¹⁶.

The supramental race would not be moulded according to a single standardised 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 »²¹⁷. Aurobindo observes further that « in a gnostic unity in multiplicity the harmony would be there as a spontaneous expression of the unity, and this spontaneous expression presupposes a mutuality of consciousness aware of other consciousness by a direct inner contact and interchange »²¹⁸. Thus unity in diversity, mutuality and harmony will be the characteristic features of the collective life of the gnostic beings.

VI. *The Impact of Gnostic Beings on the Rest of Evolution*

The emergence even of just a handful of supramental beings would be an event of enormous consequences to the whole human race. The salutary impact of such a radical change will be felt far and wide. It will mark the beginning of a more complete transformation of human nature as a whole. « For the way would be open to all who have the will to rise, the supramental influence of the truth-consciousness would touch the earth-life and influence even its untransformed mass and a hope would be there and a promise eventually available to all which now only the few can share in or realize »²¹⁹.

As mind, though limited, imperfect, open at every moment to all kinds of deviation from the truth or missing of truth, to all kinds of error and perversion, is the leading principle in the present earth-nature, so the Supermind — with its sure possession of truth and with its power and efficiency to lead other beings to their higher possibilities — will then become the leading principle on this earth. It would bring about « an uplifting and transforming change in mind itself and as an inevitable consequence in the consciousness of man, the mental being, and would bring about a radical and transforming change in the principles and forms of his living, his ways of action and the whole build and tenor of his life »²²⁰.

Those who open themselves to its divinizing influence will reap its fruits to the full extent; but even others who remain content with

²¹⁶ *L.D.*, II, p. 967.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 971.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1041.

²¹⁹ *The Supramental Manifestation...*, p. 31.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

a normal human existence would not fail to benefit therefrom. Not only humanity, but the whole process of evolution would profit by the presence of the Supermind at the head of the evolutionary nature: « An incidence, a decisive stress would affect the life of the lower evolutionary stages; something of the light, something of the force would penetrate downwards and awaken into a greater action the hidden Truth-Power everywhere in Nature. A dominant principle of harmony would impose itself on the life of the Ignorance... »²²¹.

Still no dramatic and sudden transformation of the rest of the universe is to be expected. Gnostic life would be only a part of the total terrestrial existence within which there would still continue life belonging to a less evolved order, and « gnostic life would have to fit into this total existence and carry into it as much of its own law of unity and harmony as may be possible »²²². This transforming action and influence of the gnostic being on the less evolved beings would be more from within than from without. « His action in the world will be largely an inner action by the power of the Spirit, by the spiritual-supramental idea-force formulating itself in the world, by the secret unspoken word, by the power of the heart, by the dynamic life-force, by the enveloping and penetrating power of the self one with all things; the outer expressed and visible action will be only a fringe, a last projection of this vaster single total of activity »²²³.

Not only will the influence on others of the gnostic being be principally from within, but its own life too will be mainly an inward living. As Aurobindo puts it: « A divine life must be first and foremost an inner life; for since the outward must be the expression of what is within, there can be no divinity in the outer existence if there is not the divinization of the inner being »²²⁴. The antinomy in ordinary life of the inner and the outer will be cured and exceeded by the radiation of the inner divine light and power into the whole being. The more one opens inwards, goes inwards, lives inwards and receives from within, the more one draws away from the limitations of the inconscient basis of the lower nature and moves towards the infinity of the divine superconscient. That is why he declares: « There can be no real perfection for us except by our inner Self and truth of spiritual existence taking up all truth of the instrumental existence into itself and giving to it oneness, integration, harmony. As our only real freedom is the discovery and disengagement of the spiritual Rea-

²²¹ *L.D.*, II, p. 969.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 1045.

²²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 979-980.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1023.

lity within us, so our only means of true perfection is the sovereignty and self-effectuation of the spiritual Reality in all the elements of our nature »²²⁵.

VII. *The Divine Life*

« A total perfection is the ultimate aim which we set before us, for our ideal is the Divine Life, which we wish to create here, the life of the Spirit fulfilled on earth, life accomplishing its own spiritual transformation even here on earth in the conditions of the material universe »²²⁶. This statement of Aurobindo puts in a nutshell the nature of the evolutionary destiny of man: an integral transformation of human nature and the realization of *Divine Life* on earth. He spells out succinctly what is meant by divine life: « To be complete in being, in consciousness of being, in force of being, in delight of being and to live in this integrated completeness is the divine living »²²⁷. Our aim, therefore, is to reject nothing but to fulfil everything; to be and to be fully is our aim.

The realization of the divine life or the fulness of being entails, according to Aurobindo, the following perfections: 1) to be wholly conscious of one's being; 2) to be in possession of the intrinsic and integral force of one's being; 3) to have the full delight of one's being; 4) to be universally, and 5) to be transcendently²²⁸.

1. *To be Wholly Conscious of one's Being*

One of the defects of our present condition is an imperfect self-knowledge. We are normally aware only of a small portion of our being: our surface mentality, our surface life, our surface physical being is all that we know, and in fact we do not know even all of that. Our surface existence is only a surface and as such is only an external formulation of a greater inner being. « All that is formulated on the surface is a small and diminished representation of our secret greater existence »²²⁹. A complete self-knowledge entails the consciousness of the total range of our existence which includes, besides the surface being, a subconsciousness and a superconsciousness. « Self-knowledge

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1051.

²²⁶ *The Supramental Manifestation...*, p. 6.

²²⁷ *L.D.*, II, p. 1025.

²²⁸ Cfr. *Ibid.*, pp. 1023-1027.

²²⁹ *L.D.*, I, p. 523.

is impossible unless we go behind our surface existence ... and send down our plummet into the subconscious and open ourself to the superconscious so as to know their relation to our surface being. For between these three things our existence moves and finds in them its totality »²³⁰.

The subconscious being covers, according to Aurobindo, a much vaster sphere of our total existence than we are normally aware of so much so that the surface being is said to form only a wave of its secret surge²³¹. It is a superimposition upon our subconscious inner being; it is like the crown and dome of a temple jutting out from the waves while the great body of the building is submerged under the surface of water²³². The impact of the subconscious being on man is so profound that he often becomes a puppet of its unidentified impulsions.

There is, besides, a superconscious realm in us; « it is ultimately our own highest, deepest, vastest Self »²³³, which is the selfsame Supreme Spirit, Sacchidananda. « What appears here as man », affirms Aurobindo, « is an individual being of the Divine; the Divine extended in multiplicity is the Self of all individual existences »²³⁴. Through the dynamics of His free descent and ascent the supreme Spirit is immanent within us without ceasing thereby to be absolutely transcendent. This presence and power it is that enlivens, guides and directs all the movements of our surface and subconscious being. « We ourselves, though we know it not, are being of his being, force of his force, conscious with a consciousness derived from him; even our mortal existence is made out of his substance ... »²³⁵.

Now, a fulness of being, implying as it does a fulness of self-consciousness, should extend itself to all these three spheres of our being. Any sort of unconsciousness, half-consciousness or deficient consciousness indicates a state of being not in possession of itself, and as such is not a fulness of being. « To be aware wholly and integrally of oneself and of all the truth of one's being is the necessary condition of true possession of existence »²³⁶.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

²³¹ Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 560.

²³² Cfr. *ibid.*, p. 556.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 561.

²³⁴ *L.D.*, II, p. 690.

²³⁵ *S.Y.*, p. 231.

²³⁶ *L.D.*, II, p. 1024.

2. *To be in Possession of the Intrinsic and Integral Force of One's Being*

Consciousness carries in itself the force of being; fulness of consciousness is also fulness of force. As Aurobindo affirms: « The *vijñāna* or gnosis is not only truth but truth-power, it is the very working of the infinite and divine nature; it is the divine knowledge one with the divine will in the force and delight of a spontaneous and luminous and inevitable self-fulfilment »²³⁷. Fulness of knowledge fills us with the divine power²³⁸. To possess fulness of consciousness without possessing at the same time the full force of one's being, or with a half-force or deficient force of it, is an imperfect, mutilated existence; not the fulness of being.

One of the characteristic features of the supramental nature is « an identity of Knowledge and Will acting as a single power in perfect unison with the truth of things »²³⁹. The ordinary human being often experiences a disorder and disharmony between knowledge and will with the result that even when knowledge is clear and complete the will may not approve of it, or even after approving, may lack the power to execute it; and so on. This discord will persist as long as the mental nature is not liberated from its original inconscience by a supramental evolution; and then only will man realize the full extent of the power enshrined within him.

Aurobindo observes: « Wherever there is an increase of consciousness there is an increase of potential force and the actual power of the existence »²⁴⁰. Knowledge is also power, and as the former is intrinsic and self-existent, so too is the latter. In the evolutionary development as the beings increased in consciousness their power to deal with the internal and external forces also was found to increase. Thus the mental being is much more powerful to deal with himself and nature than the animal. An immensely greater power would be reached when the supramental consciousness would emerge to replace the hampered operations of the mental energy. Unlike our mental consciousness which needs the devices and contrivances of scientific discoveries to deal with the forces of nature, the supramental being would deal with them directly and more efficiently by

²³⁷ S.Y., p. 457.

²³⁸ « A growth of the being into Supernature and its life in Supernature cannot take place or cannot be complete without bringing with it a greater power of consciousness and a greater power of life and a spontaneous development of an instrumentation of knowledge and force normal to that Supernature » (*L.D.*, II, p. 1043).

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1036.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1037.

its own power of consciousness. « For the greater knowledge of gnostic being would not be in the main an outwardly acquired or learned knowledge, but the result of an evolution of consciousness and of force of consciousness, a new dynamisation of the being »²⁴¹. Finding nothing in him to oppose the free and full manifestation of the Spirit the supramental being becomes such a powerful channel of divine Force that he is nearer to the very divine omnipotence²⁴². « The gnostic being would be in unison and communion with the Consciousness-Force that is at the root of everything: his vision and his will would be the channel of the supramental Real-Idea, the self-effective Truth-Force; his action would be a free manifestation of the power and workings of the root Force of existence, the force of an all-determining conscious Spirit... »²⁴³.

3. To Have the Full Delight of One's Being

Fulness of being implies also fulness of delight: a being without an entire delight in itself and in all to which it is related, is a deficient being. All forms of deficiency of delight are signs of imperfection, incompleteness; « they arise from a division of being, an incompleteness of consciousness of being, an incompleteness of the force of being »²⁴⁴.

An aspiration for the supreme and total delight is secretly inherent in the whole make of our being. In lower levels this basic demand takes the shape of an insatiable search for the various pleasures of life, joy and rapture of many kinds, mental delights and so on; on higher levels it becomes apparent in the urge for spiritual joy and peace and divine ecstasy. These are conditioned by the separation of parts of our nature and their imperfect integration and harmonization. In the supramental level wherein man enters the realm of the Infinite, he begins to experience the unalloyed bliss of the Divine. This is founded on the essential truth of our being which is Brahman who is Ananda. Supramental manifestation, in fact, is nothing but an ascent to the Ananda Barhman from whom it emerged in the involutory descent. Aurobindo therefore declares: « In the involutory descent as in the evolutionary return Supermind is supported by the original Delight of Existence and carries that in all its activities as their

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1039.

²⁴² Cfr. *S.Y.*, p. 808.

²⁴³ *L.D.*, II, p. 1039.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1025.

sustaining essence »²⁴⁵. Supramental, gnostic existence is consequently a blissful existence. It will not be dependent on external factors but will be something inherent, intrinsic to the gnostic being, and will grow in perfection along with the development of the gnostic nature.

The supramental bliss is beyond the highest delight conceivable to our present nature. It has been held that the ecstatic experience of a spiritual rapture accompanied by a feeling of supreme happiness in the whole psycho-physical system is our supreme attainment. It is indeed a splendid experience full of excitement, exultation, exaltation and pure joy of a very intense nature. Aurobindo points out however that these things are basically transient and so not congenial to the supramental nature. In it there is no vehement exultation and excitement; « there is instead an illimitable intensity of participation in an eternal ecstasy which is founded on the eternal Existence and therefore on a beatific tranquillity of eternal peace. Peace and ecstasy cease to be different and become one »²⁴⁶. All realms of its being and all its actions and reactions will in all moments be permeated and percolated by this ever new and ever young transcendent bliss.

The supramental delight being the very delight of the infinite Spirit, is not an egocentric and separative experience, opposed or indifferent to the delight of others. « One in self with all, the supramental being will seek the delight of self-manifestation of the Spirit in himself but equally the delight of the Divine in all: he will have the cosmic joy and will be a power for bringing the bliss of the Spirit, the joy of being to others »²⁴⁷.

To be conscious of the totality of Reality, to be conscious of the integral relation of each individual being and movement to the whole and to possess the spontaneous joy of that luminous totality is the mark of the supramental being. Aurobindo observes: « The gnostic existence and delight of existence is a universal and total being and delight, and there will be the presence of that totality and universality in each separate movement: in each there will be, not a partial experience of self or a fractional bit of its joy, but the sense of the whole movement of an integral being and the presence of its entire and integral bliss of being, Ananda »²⁴⁸.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 990.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 991.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 975-976.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 977.

4. *To be Universally*

To be in possession of the fulness of being entails also to exceed the limitations of an exclusive individuality and a restricted ego and to embrace the universal reality. To confine oneself to one's separate individuality is to be less than oneself, is to live in a partial being and consciousness and power and delight. Reality is universal. « All being is one and to be fully is to be all that is. »²⁴⁹. « Not only is Being one in itself, but it is one everywhere, in all its poises and in every aspect, in its utmost appearance of multiplicity as in its utmost appearance of oneness »²⁵⁰. « For every individual being is the Self, the Divine... »²⁵¹. The realization of the oneness of all in the Supreme Spirit as one's own oneness with it is an essential ingredient of supramental existence. For the gnostic being his self is « the Spirit that is one in all: he will see the world as a universe of the Spirit »²⁵². Consequently, « all beings would be to him his own selves, all ways and powers of consciousness would be felt as the ways and powers of his own universality »²⁵³. He will certainly retain his individuality, but will not be limited by a separative individuality. « His individuality is universal; for he individualises the universe »²⁵⁴.

A complete individual, according to Aurobindo, is a cosmic individual, because individuality can be complete only when it takes into itself the universe of which it is a part. « 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 »²⁵⁵.

One of the greatest problems of our present state of existence is our maladjustment to the rest of beings and the universe as a whole. Though concord and harmony are the law of Reality, — « for in fact both individual and universe are simultaneous and interrelated expressions of the same transcendent Being »²⁵⁶ — yet conflict and discord with the rest of beings are apparently our normal experience and a source of great sufferings to us. Because of our imperfect knowledge and lack of force we fail to harmonise our demand on the

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1025.

²⁵⁰ *S.Y.*, p. 401.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

²⁵² *L.D.*, II, p. 982.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 972.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 974.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

world with the world's demand on us. In order to effect a real harmony we have either to enforce ourselves upon the world and make it subservient to us or suppress ourselves and become subservient to it or else arrive at an all too difficult balance between the exigencies of the two. But for the supramental being which is no more confined to the ego, no such difficulty would exist; « 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 »²⁵⁷.

Thus, for Aurobindo, « a large universality of self-expression, a large harmonic universality of world-being would be the very sign of the supramental Person in his gnostic nature »²⁵⁸. He has no conflict of interest with anybody or anything because all form part of his universal interest; there is nothing to oppose him because he is one with all, because he is one with the All. « To be in the being of all and to include all in one's being, to be conscious of the consciousness of all, to be integrated in force with the universal force, to carry all action and experience in oneself and feel it as one's own action and experience, to feel all self as one's own self, to feel all delight of being as one's own delight of being is a necessary condition of the integral divine living »²⁵⁹.

5. *To be Transcendentally*

Finally, supramental existence which is the realization of the fulness of being, implies a transcendental existence which means to exceed all the limitations of the present condition of body, life and mind. This does not mean the rejection of these realms of our evolutionary nature; they will be preserved, but perfected and transformed in such a way as to be a true expression and instrumentation of the transcendent Self. « The supramental transformation, the supramental evolution must carry with it a lifting of mind, life and body out of themselves into a greater way of being in which yet their own ways and powers would be, not suppressed or abolished, but perfected and fulfilled by self-exceeding »²⁶⁰. Just as one does not give up the bodily life in order to attain to the mental and the spiritual, so too, to reach the supramental level one does not abandon the lower forma-

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 975.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1025.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 982.

tion, but arrives at an integral transformation of one's total being. « The gnostic individual would be in the world and of the world, but would also exceed it in his consciousness and live in his Self of transcendence above it »²⁶¹.

As a first step towards this self-exceeding the mind, the life and the body must be liberated from their sense of separation from the rest and feel the oneness with the universal mind and all minds, with universal life and all life, with the total material existence. But this is not all; it is not enough that one transcends the individual formula and reaches the universal; even this universal is to be surpassed to find its fulness and perfect harmonisation in the Transcendence, for the individual and the universal, says Aurobindo, « are in their outer formulation incomplete terms of the Transcendence, but they are that in their essence, and it is only by becoming conscious of that essence, that individual consciousness or universal consciousness can come to its own fulness and freedom of reality »²⁶².

As a result of the self-transcendence which is the realization of oneself as the self-formation of the divine Reality, all one's mind, life and physicality will be converted into terms of that supernature. The defects that are now normal to our human condition will then disappear altogether. The mind will be liberated from its ignorant gropings and will be suffused with supramental light and truth. « The transition from mind to Supermind is not only the substitution of a greater instrument of thought and knowledge, but a change and conversion of the whole consciousness. There is evolved not only a supramental thought, but a supramental will, sense, feeling, a supramental substitute for all the activities that are now accomplished by the mind »²⁶³.

Life, too, which now is full of confusions and occupied with so many obscure and lower aims, would feel all its urges and instincts exalted and irradiated and become a glorious counterpart of the supramental life. As our author states: « Life and body would be no longer tyrannous masters demanding nine-tenths of existence for their satisfaction, but means and powers for the expression of the Spirit »²⁶⁴. Elsewhere, he says: « The supramental transformation supravitalises the vital, reveals it as a dynamics of the spirit, makes a complete opening and a true revelation of all the spiritual reality behind and within the life force and the life spirit and of all its spi-

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 972.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 1026.

²⁶³ *S.Y.*, p. 795.

²⁶⁴ *L.D.*, II, p. 1066.

ritual as well as its mental and purely vital truth and significance »²⁶⁵.

Also the body should undergo a corresponding transformation by a conversion of its action, its functioning, its capacities into a congenial instrument of the Spirit. The ideal which Aurobindo envisages is « a divine life in a divine body »²⁶⁶. The ordinary religious attitude is to consider body as an impediment to spiritual ascent, or at best as an instrument that must be dropped when its work is done. No tradition seems to visualise a divine destiny for the body here on earth. But for Aurobindo it is to be the natural consequence of the whole evolutionary process. « If a total transformation of the being is our aim, a transformation of the body must be an indispensable part of it; without that no full divine life on earth is possible »²⁶⁷. As the present human body came into existence with the due modifications of the previous animal form and powers so as to suit the principle of mind and the life of a mental being, so too, claims Aurobindo, a body must be developed with powers and potentialities expressive of the divine action proper to the supramental manifestation.

In this process matter will not lose its identity; it will not be transformed into something subtle and spiritual; instead it will be turned into « a true and fit and perfectly responsive instrument of the Spirit »²⁶⁸. The Spirit does not cast away the energies of matter, its capacities, its methods; « it brings out their hidden possibilities, uplifts, sublimates, discloses their innate divinity. The divine life will reject nothing that is capable of divinisation »²⁶⁹.

As a result of the unobstructed operation of the Spirit the body would acquire a secure completeness and stability of strength and health, all the natural capacities of the physical frame would reach their utmost extension and be there at command and sure of their flawless action. « Even it could become a revealing vessel of a supreme beauty and bliss, — casting the beauty of the light of the Spirit suffusing and radiating from it as a lamp reflects and diffuses the luminosity of its indwelling flame, carrying in itself the beatitude of the Spirit, its joy of the seeing mind, its joy of life and spiritual happiness, the joy of matter released into a spiritual consciousness and thrilled with a constant ecstasy »²⁷⁰.

Sri Aurobindo reminds us that the infinite Spirit in its urge for

²⁶⁵ S.Y., p. 841.

²⁶⁶ *The Supramental Manifestation...*, p. 28.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁶⁸ L.D., II, p. 986.

²⁶⁹ *The Supramental Manifestation...*, p. 7.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

self-manifestation would open vistas beyond what he has hazarded to delineate. « But of this », he says, « it would be premature to speak: what has been written is perhaps as much as the human mind as it is now constituted can venture to look forward to and the enlightened thought understand in some measure »²⁷¹.

In short, the transcendental existence of the supramental evolution would mean « the evolution not only of an untrammelled consciousness, a mind and sense not shut up in the walls of the physical ego or limited to the poor basis of knowledge given by the physical organs of sense, but a life-power liberated more and more from its mortal limitations, a physical life fit for a divine inhabitant and, ... the conquest of death, an *earthly immortality* »²⁷².

We may summarise Aurobindo's vision of the evolutionary destiny of man in his own words: « Thou art man and the whole nature of man is to become more than himself. He was the man-animal, he has become more than the animal-man. He is the thinker, the craftsman, the seeker after beauty. He shall be more than the thinker, he shall be the seer of knowledge; he shall be more than the craftsman, he shall be the creator and master of his creation; he shall be more than the seeker of beauty, for he shall enjoy all beauty and all delight. Physical he seeks for this immortal substance; vital he seeks after immortal life and the infinite power of his being; mental and partial in knowledge, he seeks after the whole light and the utter vision.

« To possess these is to become the superman; for he is to rise out of mind into the Supermind. Call it the divine mind or Knowledge or the Supermind; it is the power and light of the divine will and the divine consciousness. By the Supermind the Spirit saw and created himself in the worlds, by that he lives in them and governs them. By that he is Swarat Samrat, self-ruler and all-ruler.

« Supermind is superman; therefore to rise beyond mind is the condition.

« To be the superman is to live the divine life, to be a god; for the gods are the powers of God. Be a power of God in humanity.

« To live in the divine Being and let the consciousness and bliss, the will and knowledge of the Spirit possess thee and play with thee and through thee, this is the meaning.

« This is the transfiguration of thyself on the mountain »²⁷³.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁷² *L.D.*, I, p. 261 (emphasis mine).

²⁷³ *The Hour of God*, pp. 6-7.

CONCLUSION

As the above analytical study demonstrates clearly, Sri Aurobindo's is a mighty endeavour to reinterpret the human condition and its final consummation from a modern Hindu perspective. The proverbial spiritual outlook on the entire reality of the Indian heritage stands out very impressively throughout this system. Aurobindo has done an admirable work in integrating this spiritual outlook with the scientific theory of evolution. His exposition is suffused with the warmth and vividness of a poetic vision.

A balanced sense of realism compels Aurobindo to acknowledge the unquestionable reality both of the material world and of the Supreme Spirit. His spiritual experience on the one hand, and the scriptural teaching, on the other, leaves him with no shadow of doubt not only of the absolute supremacy of the Spirit, but also of its almost tangible presence in the world. Brahman is not only the One without a second, but everything that is is Brahman.

Aurobindo accepts this as an incontrovertible truth. Reason's business now is to give a logical and coherent explanation of how the transcendent Spirit is at the same time the immanent cause of the phenomenal universe. The hypothesis of evolution furnished him with a handy tool. It had all the advantages of a generally accepted scientific theory. He corrected its philosophic error of explaining ontologically higher beings with ontologically lower ones by introducing the principle of involution, thanks to which matter encloses within itself, right from the start, all the potentialities of the Spirit. As a result, evolution is essentially nothing but the reverse process of involution, an expression of the Spirit's urge to regain its original perfection. The net result of such a theory is a flagrant pantheism.

Aurobindo is not only aware of it, but wants to abide by it most obstinately. He declares: « All Matter as well as all Life, Mind and Supermind are only modes of the Brahman, the Eternal, the Spirit, Sacchidananda, who not only dwells in them all, but is all these things »²⁷⁴. The multiplicity of the cosmic experience is only an expression of the Supreme. « The many are only His representations and becomings »²⁷⁵. « From that [omnipresent Reality] all variations begin, in that all variations consist, to that all variations return »²⁷⁶. « There is nothing that is not the omnipresent Reality »²⁷⁷. If everything is the Divine there is an obvious pantheism.

²⁷⁴ *L.D.*, I, p. 242.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

But it is to be added immediately that Aurobindo's pantheism is altogether unique; it does not fit into any ordinary understanding of pantheism according to which the Divine is, so to say, lost in the universe. Our author does not subscribe to such an approach. « All views of existence that stop short of the Transcendence and ignore it must be incomplete accounts of the truth of being. The panteistic view of the identity of the Divine and the Universe is a truth, for all this that is is Brahman: but it stops short of the whole truth when it misses and omits the supracosmic Reality »²⁷⁸.

Thus Aurobindo admits pantheism only as a partial truth; for the whole truth one has to transcend pantheism. Its partiality consists in exclusively emphasising one aspect of the Divine, — His immanence — inspired by certain spiritual experience of the nearness, the presence of the Divine everywhere and in everything. But he points out: « This extended universe is not all that the Spirit is, there is an Eternal greater than it by which alone its existence is possible. Cosmos is not the Divine in all his utter reality, but a single self-expression, a true but minor motion of his being »²⁷⁹.

Aurobindo, therefore, complements the pantheistic view by insisting on the transcendent aspect of the Spirit. Unequivocal is his stress on the transcendent Divine. He declares: « The World and the Divine are not one and the same thing, as certain kind of pantheistic thinking would like to believe... The Divine is not here alone; there is a Beyond, an eternal Transcendence »²⁸⁰. « This is the mystery of His being that He is supracosmic, yet not in any exclusive sense extracosmic. For He pervades it all as its self »²⁸¹. « Even in becoming all he is still a Transcendence; even in assuming finite forms he is always the Infinite »²⁸². « In his highest supracosmic status Brahman is a transcendent Eternity without origin or change »²⁸³. Consequently his vision of the Divine is a comprehensive, all-embracing one, a vision that « harmonises the pantheistic, the theistic and the highest transcendental terms of our spiritual conception and spiritual experience »²⁸⁴.

Now, the problem is, how can pantheism be accepted and transcended at the same time? Obviously, reason finds itself baffled at such a view. But Aurobindo's mainstay is not the mental reason,

²⁷⁸ *L.D.*, II, p. 661.

²⁷⁹ *E.Git.*, p. 301.

²⁸⁰ *S.Y.*, pp. 241-242.

²⁸¹ *E.Git.*, p. 298.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 333-334.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 401-402.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

which he has shown in no uncertain terms to be inadequate to deal with the real nature and operations of the Supreme Reality. His intuitive, supra-rational approach called the logic of the Infinite, is the answer to the problem. While in mental logic and reasoning one approaches the Reality from a human perspective, in the logic of the Infinite one adopts the perspective of the Divine. This is an all-comprehensive vision, embracing in an ineffable unity the Reality in all its aspects, which to the mental logic, insisting as it does on consistency and coherence according to a set pattern, may appear a bundle of contradictions, irrational or inexplicable. This only proves, maintains Aurobindo, the limitations of the mental logic, and not the inability of the Absolute to adopt poises which appear incompatible to such a logic. He, therefore, remarks: « But the Absolute, obviously, finds no difficulty in world-manifestation and no difficulty either in the simultaneous transcendence of world-manifestation; the difficulty exists only for our mental limitations which prevent us from grasping the supramental rationality of the coexistence of the Infinite and the finite or seizing the nodus of the unconditioned with the conditioned. For our intellectual rationality these are opposites; for the absolute reason they are inter-related and not essentially conflicting expressions of one and the same reality »²⁸⁵.

Coming now to the view of man and his destiny. Man, according to Aurobindo, is a product of evolution and as such is a transitional being. He enshrines within himself all the power and dynamism of the Spirit to evolve higher and reach the supramental and divine stage: « he is a god in the making »²⁸⁶. To rest satisfied with the present condition will be a great stumbling block to the innate evolutionary urge. But Aurobindo believes that man cannot indefinitely hamper his higher evolution because, on the one hand, the imposing consciousness of his present limitations will spur him on to strive for a self-exceeding, and on the other, the involved Spirit naturally pushes forward the process of evolution so that its real nature may one day be fully manifest in man.

The evolution which Aurobindo contemplates is a slow, gradual and intricate process; it is not to be completed in one human birth, but to be carried on through repeated births. Belief in rebirth, therefore, is an essential element of this system. It is rebirth that enables man to overcome slowly and steadily his various limitations and to reach his high destiny. In fact Aurobindo calls rebirth « the sole

²⁸⁵ *L.D.*, I, p. 377.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

possible machinery of such an evolution »²⁸⁷.

The next important stage in the evolution is to be that of the Supermind. But Aurobindo does not contemplate a leap in the process; it takes a new step only after having confirmed well all the powers and potentialities of the previous one, and integrated fully the lower elements therein with the higher one: there is to be no gulf between two stages. Taking into account the enormous difference between the mental nature and the Supermind, Aurobindo tries to bridge it by envisaging various intermediary stages, such as psychic transformation and spiritual transformation, and the realization of Higher mind, Illumined mind, Intuition and Overmind. These developments take man the closest possible to the Supermind, which in its turn descending into the individual so prepared, elevates him to the supermanhood. Thus human life is transformed into a Gnostic or Divine life.

The Gnostic or Divine life is a life in possession of the fulness of being, and that not in a celestial abode, but here on earth. Such an existence entails, according to the analysis of Aurobindo, the fulness of consciousness, power and delight, and also a universal and transcendent mode of being.

In the whole system there is much that deserves profound appreciation, above all its stubborn spiritual outlook and its bold optimism. So stubborn is its spiritual outlook that even matter is seen as a form of the Spirit; and so bold is its optimism that it looks forward to a divine and immortal life here on earth for all without exception. It may not be materialised in the near future; but sooner or later it will come about because the involved Spirit won't remain idle until it is fully manifest in the universe: what is involved must evolve one day.

In all appearance Aurobindo's optimism borders upon a utopia. But he is adamant in his position, though admitting at the same time that ordinary human mind may hesitate or even refuse to accept it. According to him, we are in respect to our future higher evolution much in the position of the original ape of the Darwinian theory. He argues that as, despite the inability of that ape mind, — assuming for the moment the validity of the Darwinian theory — to imagine its future evolution into a developed human being, such an evolution has become a reality, so, too, notwithstanding the present man's scepticism about the magnificent future here forecasted, he is destined to realize it²⁸⁸. Aurobindo claims further that in proposing such

²⁸⁷ *L.D.*, II, p. 764.

²⁸⁸ Cfr. *L.D.*, I, p. 55.

a sublime destiny for man, he is only re-proposing what man always and everywhere has in reality hoped for. « It is a keen sense of this possibility », writes Aurobindo, « which has taken different shapes and persisted through the centuries, — the perfectibility of man, the perfectibility of society, the Alvars' vision of the descent of Vishnu and the gods upon earth, the reign of saints, *sādhūnām rājyam*, the city of God, the millennium, the new heaven and earth of the Apocalypse »²⁸⁹. These reasonings serve to play down to some extent the utopian overtone of the whole vision; but much more is required to carry conviction, and yet more, to see that conviction materialised!

On the whole, the entire system of Sri Aurobindo seems to rest on certain gratuitous assumptions. First of all, the involution or descent of the Spirit into matter and the consequent view of matter as a self-limited form of the Spirit, — and this is the theoretical foundation of his philosophic structure — are to be accepted on the authority of Aurobindo, or at the most, on the authority of the Hindu scriptures as interpreted by him. The idea of evolution as a slow and gradual self-unfolding of the indwelling Spirit in the material reality, fares no better than that of involution. The view of man as a product of evolution from lower grades of being, propelled always by the hidden Spirit, has no more force than that of a hypothesis. The faith in rebirth, an integral part of this system, can offer no more than arguments of convenience in its favour. And finally, the ultimate destiny of man, namely, his higher evolution and the realization of the Supramental, Divine Life here on earth, though highly attractive, — a prophetic vision for Aurobindo and his followers — is not, on the face of it, anything more than a utopia.

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²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 485-486.