
UNIT 1 THEORIES OF EXISTENCE

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the unit is to provide a detailed account of the theories of existence in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. This unit shall bring to light the conceptual structure of Aurobindo's Metaphysics. This unit shall include the following sections:

- Introduction
- The Ultimate Reality
- Consciousness-Force
- Evolution of Consciousness
- The Structure and Organization of Being

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Aurobindo's theories of existence echo the teachings of the ancient sages of India in stating that behind the appearances of the Universe there is the reality of a Being and Consciousness, a Self of all things, one and eternal. All beings are united in that One Self and Spirit but divided by a certain separativity of consciousness, an ignorance of their true Self and Reality in the mind, life and body. It is possible by a certain psychological discipline to remove this veil of separative consciousness and become aware of the true Self, the Divinity within us. This One Being and Consciousness is involved in Matter. Evolution is the method by which it liberates itself; consciousness appears in what seems to be inconscient, and once having appeared is self-impelled to grow higher and higher and at the same time to enlarge and develop towards a greater and greater perfection. Life is the first step of this release of consciousness; mind is the second; but the evolution does not finish with mind, it awaits a release into something greater, a consciousness which is spiritual and supramental. The next step of the evolution must be towards the development of Supermind and Spirit as the dominant power in the conscious being. For only

then will the involved Divinity in things release itself entirely and it become possible for life to manifest perfection.

While the first steps in evolution were taken by Nature without a conscious will in the plant and animal life, in man, Nature evolves by a conscious will in the instrument. A conversion has to be made, a turning of the consciousness by which mind changes into the higher principle. This method is found in the ancient psychological discipline and practice of Yoga. In the past, it has been attempted by a drawing away from the world and a disappearance into the height of the Self or Spirit. Aurobindo teaches that a descent of the higher principle is possible which will not merely release the spiritual Self out of the world, but release it in the world, replace the mind's ignorance or its very limited knowledge by a supramental Truth-Consciousness which will be a sufficient instrument of the inner Self and make it possible for the human being to find himself dynamically as well as inwardly and grow out of his animal humanity into a divine race. The psychological discipline of Yoga can be used to that end by opening all the parts of the being to a conversion or transformation through the descent and working of the higher still concealed supramental principle.

1.2 THE ULTIMATE REALITY

The metaphysical position of Aurobindo is described as Integral Non-Dualism. In tune with the declarations of the Vedas and the Upanisads, Aurobindo identifies consciousness with the ultimate reality, the sachchidananda; infinite existence, consciousness and bliss. The three are not a trinity but a unity. Aurobindo says that Sachchidananda 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. Sacchidananda is the unity of the many-sidedness of manifested things, the eternal harmony of all their variations and oppositions, the infinite perfection which justifies their limitations and is the goal of their imperfections. Aurobindo defines Brahman as the reality of things which fills and supports their idea and form. It is an eternal in all stabilities, truth behind all appearances and a constant which supports all mutations but itself does not undergo any change either in terms of increase or decrease. The Brahman is the highest and this highest is the all; there is none beyond or none other than it. To know it is to know all. In relation to the universe, the Brahman is not only the spiritual, material and conscious substance of all the ideas and forces and forms of the universe, but their origin, support and possessor. Just as we are the play and form, the mental, vital, psychic and physical expression of a supreme Self unconditioned by the mind, life and body, the universe too is the play and form and cosmic soul expression of a supreme existence. This existence is unconditioned by force and matter, idea, name and form and the distinction between puruṣa and prakṛti. Our supreme Self and the the supreme existence which has become the universe are one spirit, one Self and one existence. The individual is also an expression of the universal being, an emanation from the transcendence. Aurobindo here draws our attention to the fact that one's true Self is not the natural personality, the created individuality which we are aware of, but is a universal being in its relations with others and with nature. It is the living front of a supreme transcendental spirit.

Aurobindo gives equal ontological status to the transcendental as well as the divine in the form of creation. Aurobindo uses the term Brahman to denote an Absolute which takes all relativities in its embrace. To substantiate his position, he draws our attention to the Upaniṣads that affirm

that all is Brahman, Mind is Brahman, Life is Brahman, Matter is Brahman; addressing vayu, the Lord of air and of life it is said “O Vayu, thou art the manifest Brahman”. Again pointing to man, beast, birds and insects, each is separately identified with the Brahman – “O Brahman, thou art this old man and boy and girl, this bird, this insect. “ Aurobindo further identifies Brahman with the Consciousness that knows itself in all that exists. It is the force that sustains the gods, titan and even demons. It is the force that acts in man and other animals and forms and energies of nature. It is Ānanda, the secret bliss of existence without which no being can survive. Brahman is the inner soul in all, taking a form corresponding to each created form which it inhabits. It is that which is conscious not only in the conscious being but also in inconscient things. He is the timeless and Time; he is space and all that is in space; he is causality and the cause and the effect. All realities and all aspects and all semblances are the Brahman. According to Aurobindo, the impersonal divine, Nirguṇa Brahman and the personal divine, Saguna Brahman are equal and co-existent parts of the Divine.³¹ They are the two essential modes, the fundamental aspects, the two poles of the eternal being. The Transcendent divine reality exceeds both these modes. These two modes practically correspond to the silent and active Brahman.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Explain the Integral- Non-dualism of Aurobindo.

2) How does Aurobindo define the Brahman?

1.3 CONSCIOUSNESS-FORCE

Aurobindo asserts that however we explain the concept of consciousness, taking Nature to be an inert impulse or a conscious principle, it is certainly force. According to him the basic principle of things is a formative movement of energies. All forms are born of the meeting and mutual adaptation of unshaped forces. All actions and sensations arise as a response to some previous occurrence and manifest in the form of forces. Thus, even if the entire world is conceived essentially as an act of consciousness, an act is implied in it and in the act, a movement of force and a play of energy. This is the fundamental nature of the world as experienced within us. All our activities are the play of triple forces, namely, knowledge-force, desire-force and action-force. All the three are really three streams of one original and identical power called ādyā śakti. Even the states of rest are but an equilibrium in the play of forces. Represented by the two forms of Shiva and Kali, Brahman and Shakti are two inseparable aspects of the same existence. This force may be at rest or in motion. Even when it is at rest it exists and is never abolished, diminished or essentially altered. Force by its very nature exists in the two alternative states of self-concentration and self-diffusion. Aurobindo argues that this being accepted, the question as to how the movement of force originates, does not arise, as movement has been accepted as one of the states of force. The potentiality of force must translate itself as an alternative rhythm of of

rest and movement succeeding each other in time or else as an eternal self-concentration of force in immutable existence with a superficial play of movement, change and formation like the rising and falling of waves on the surface of ocean. Consciousness Force has three characteristics. They are:

1. Infinite self-variation
2. Infinite self-limitation
3. Infinite self-absorption

The Consciousness Force is not restricted to one particular state of consciousness or to one law of action. The individual consciousness can see itself as a limited and phenomenal being; it can also put off its apparent limitations and see itself as a universal and a transcendent Being. The underlying consciousness being one and the same, there is no essential difficulty in passing from one status to another. The one being can thus experience or realize itself triply from any of these three statuses.

The second characteristic of consciousness force is its power of self-limitation. It is the subordinate movement of the infinite consciousness determining itself within the bounds of space and time. The power of self-limitation expresses itself in two forms – individual self-limitation and cosmic self-limitation. Though all spiritual individuals are, in essence, the same, they have their individual differentiations. This individual self-limitation is not a fundamental characteristic but only an individual specialisation of a common universality or totality. The spiritual individual acts from his own locus of Truth and in accordance with his nature, but on a common basis and not being blind to other selves and the nature around him.

Apart from the individual self-limitation, there is also the cosmic self-limitation of the infinite consciousness, which is the power responsible for the existence and working of the universe. The Infinite Consciousness supports the universe with only a certain part of itself and holds back all that is not needed for the cosmic movement. The self-determination of the mind, life and matter take place according to the same principle. Aurobindo says that though such a self-limitation of consciousness seems contradictory to our normal reason, it is one of the powers of the infinite which the logic of the infinite alone can reveal.

Self-absorption is the third characteristic of the infinite that takes place in two ways: that of superconscience and inconscience. In the state of superconscience, the infinite consciousness takes a plunge into itself, which is a state of pure self-awareness of Being. This state is devoid of both the universal as well as the individual consciousness. It transcends both and is a state of absorption in the ineffable One. The Infinite consciousness again takes a plunge into the inconscient which is a state of utter darkness. This state, though it appears as one of non-being, is really one of Being where the Being is in a state of perfect self-oblivion. The inconscient also possesses intrinsically both consciousness and force. Here the infinite consciousness is hidden, blinded and works automatically. The states of the superconscient and the inconscient are that of total self-absorption of the infinite consciousness. Mind, life and matter are states where the infinite consciousness is partially self-absorbed. Aurobindo cites these powers of self-absorption of Brahman as the factors responsible for the simultaneous existence of the Nirguna and Saguna aspects of Brahman.

1.4 EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Biologically, evolution is a progressive self-manifestation of nature in and through all entities including human beings. The biological evolution continues in man but transcends its own boundaries and gives way to an evolution that is spiritual. All evolution is indeed a heightening of consciousness in the manifest being. In human beings both the physical and spiritual evolution are operative. The process of repeated births facilitates it. Each evolved form of the body houses an evolved power of consciousness maintained and kept in continuity by the process of heredity. The evolution of the soul which is more of an invisible process starts from the level of mind and proceeds further. Mind itself can never be the final destination of evolution, argues Aurobindo, since it is only a principle of ignorance and division seeking for knowledge. Only the supramental Truth-Consciousness can bring to light the true and complete self-knowledge and world knowledge. Only such an integral knowledge can be the consummation of all evolution. According to Aurobindo, before there could be any evolution, there must be an involution of the divine. But for this involution there would only be a successive creation of new things not contained in their antecedents. Instead of inevitable consequences and processes in a sequence, we will have arbitrarily willed or miraculously conceived processes that happen by an inexplicable chance. The progressive self-manifestation of Nature, usually termed as evolution, necessarily depends upon three successive elements. There is that which is already evolved, that which is persistently in the stage of conscious evolution, and that which is to be evolved. The march of Nature according to Aurobindo is not set to a regular and mechanical forward stepping. There are attempts to go beyond herself leading sometimes to subsequent deplorable retreats. She often rushes; has splendid and mighty outbursts and immense realizations.

Nature has evolved for us the bodily life and the combination and harmony of Matter and Life, both of which are fundamentally necessary elements for all action and progress upon earth. Matter is the foundation and first condition of all energies and realizations and life-energy is the basis of our means of existence in a material body and the basis of all mental and spiritual activities. The material movement in Nature has attained a certain maturity and stability whereby it can act as the perfect instrument for the progressive manifestation of divinity in humanity. Once the bodily life has evolved sufficiently to house the spirit, evolution proceeds to the mental which is a subtler and finer instrument for divine manifestation. Once nature frees herself from the trammels of physical and vital, it surges onto the mental for higher realizations. The human mind is not a unified structure but a plural one constitutive of many gradations. These include the material and nervous mind, the pure intellectual mind which frees itself from the illusions of the body and senses, and a divine mind above the intellect which in turn liberates itself from the imperfect modes of the logically discriminative and imaginative reason. Mind in human beings is first enmeshed in the life of the body. In plants it is completely involved and in animals it is imprisoned. In human beings however, the bodily life is only a base or first condition for further evolution. In keeping with the ancient idea that human beings are thinking beings (hence called 'manu'), Aurobindo says that true human existence begins only when the intellectual mentality emerges out of the material and frees itself from the clutches of the nervous and physical. Freedom is the mark of the ascent in the process of evolution. However the mental life is not completed evolution of Nature; it is not yet firmly founded in the human animal. Civilized man has yet to establish an equilibrium between the fully active mind and the body; he does not yet

normally possess it. The increasing effort towards a more intense mental life seems to create an increasing disequilibrium of the human elements. A rare phenomenon like a genius is not a freak, an inexplicable phenomenon. It is only a natural next step in the right line of Nature's evolution. Nature has harmonised the bodily life with the material mind, and now she is attempting a harmony of it with the play of intellectual mentality. Though this does lead to a depression of the full animal and vital vigour, it does not produce any active disturbances. Mind is not the last term of evolution nor is it the ultimate aim to which evolution strives, but is like the body, an instrument. In tune with the Indian tradition, Aurobindo asserts that that which is to be manifested is not a new term in human experience, but has been developed before and has even governed humanity in certain periods of development. And if since then, Nature has sunk back from her achievement, the reason must always be found in some unrealised harmony or some insufficiency of the intellectual and material basis to which she has now returned, some over-specialisation of the higher to the detriment of the lower existence. Yoga recognises besides the physical and vital being that constitutes the gross body of food-sheath (annamayakośa) and the vital vehicle (prānamayakośa), the mental being composed of the mind-sheath or mental vehicle (manomayakośa) termed the subtle body. There is also a supramental being called the causal body that is constituted of a knowledge (vijñānamayakośa) and bliss sheaths (ānandamayakośa). The knowledge in the knowledge sheath is not a systematised result of mental questioning and reasonings, neither is it a temporary arrangement of conclusions and opinions in terms of the highest probability, but a pure self-existent and self-luminous truth. The bliss here is not a supreme pleasure of the heart and sensations, with the experience of pain and sorrow as its background. There is also a delight, self-existent and independent of objects and particular experiences, a self-delight which is the very nature, the very stuff as it were of a transcendent and infinite existence.

Behind the manifold of the everchanging evanescent appearances of the universe, there is an abiding reality which has been expressed in the fundamental triune of Sat – Cit – Ānanda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss). All things and creatures are united in the One Reality, though they appear to be separate and divided owing to the mental consciousness which is an ignorance-consciousness. Through a process of involution, the one existence and consciousness is plunged in the universe into its opposite called the inconscient, which is seemingly a total absence of consciousness. Evolution is the process by which the supreme consciousness liberates itself from inconscience, resulting in the manifestation of progressively higher levels of consciousness. According to Aurobindo, the scientific theory of physical evolution deals with only the outward and visible machinery of a process which is fundamentally a spiritual evolution, an evolution of consciousness. Matter is the first emergent from the inconscience. Matter is not an inert substance as it appears to be, but a form of consciousness which is closest to inconscience. Life or vital consciousness is the second emergence in the evolutionary process. Mind is the highest level of consciousness that has developed in the human race collectively and is the third step of release from the inconscience. However evolution has not come to an end with the appearance of mind; it awaits a release into the higher, spiritual levels of consciousness of which there are many gradations, ranging from the higher mind through illumined mind, intuition and overmind up to Supermind. The present human race according to Aurobindo is a preparation for the leap into the next step of evolution, into the supramental consciousness. The urge towards growth and evolution, inherent in the whole universe, is the inner driving of the consciousness-force, the progressive manifestation of the spirit being the innate intention behind evolution. In order to fulfill the evolutionary intent, the spiritual growth needs to be a double movement of ascent and

descent. The individual consciousness must ascend to progressively higher levels of consciousness and then must bring down the dynamism of the higher levels into the mental, vital and physical consciousness so as to transform the lower levels. Liberation is indeed an indispensable step and the initial goal of spiritual development, but the further goal of evolution according to Aurobindo is transformation.

At each stage evolution takes place by the double process of the upsurging of the Consciousness-Force from its involution in the inconscience and a descent of the Consciousness-Force pressing from the planes of consciousness above, seeking for manifestation. It is the pressure of the Consciousness-Force from the plane of life above the material universe that assisted the emergence of life from Matter in which life already lay involved. It is a pressure from the mind that helped the emergence of mind which was already there involved in life and matter. Again it is the pressure of the spiritual worlds above mind, which are now preparing for the manifestation of the spirit now slumbering in mind, life and matter. The growing urge towards spiritual growth in humanity today is, according to Aurobindo, the push of the Consciousness-Force towards the next higher rung of evolution.

1.5 THE STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF BEING

In a normal state of consciousness one feels oneself to be a unitary entity, a single being partially conscious of his psychological make-up and barely in a position to distinguish between its different aspects, physical, emotional and mental. In a heightened state of consciousness, obtained as a result of the practice of a spiritual discipline, one discovers that one's psychological nature is complex and made up of different distinguishable parts of the being.

Sri Aurobindo distinguishes two systems that are simultaneously active in the organization of the being and its parts. One system is concentric, like a series of rings or sheaths and the other is vertical like a flight of steps. The concentric system consists of the outer or surface being, the inner being and the inmost being or the psychic. The outer being and the inner being have three corresponding parts – mental, vital and physical. The vertical system consists of various levels or gradations of consciousness below and above mental consciousness. The Inconscient, the Subconscient, the Physical, the Vital, Mind, Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition, Overmind, Supermind and Satcitananda constitute the chief levels of consciousness in the vertical system.

The three major divisions in the outer being consists of the mind (the mental), the life-self (the vital) and the body (the physical). Each of these parts has its own distinct type of consciousness, though in our ordinary awareness, they are all mixed up. Though separate, the three principal parts of the outer being – the mental, the vital and the physical - are intermixed and interact on one another, giving rise to distinguishable subdivisions within each part of the being. Thus, besides the mind proper (the thinking mind), there is a part of the mind which is intermixed with the vital, called the vital mind. There is also a part of the mind which is interfused with the physical, called the physical mind. Similar subdivisions exist within the vital and the physical. Two of these subdivisions which generally play a prominent role in most human beings are the vital mind and the physical mind.

The vital mind is the part of the mind which is intermixed and dominated by impulses, desires and feelings of the vital nature. The reasoning of the vital mind is a pseudo-reasoning as is well

illustrated by the common act of rationalization by which the mind, usurped by the vital, provides plausible rational explanations and justifications for impulses and desires of the vital.

The physical mind is the part of the mind which is intermingled with and partakes of the characteristics of the physical consciousness. Some of the chief characteristics of the physical namely inertia, obscurity, mechanical repetitiveness, automatism, constriction and chaotic activity are reflected in the physical mind in the form of mental torpor, doubt, mechanical reactions to things, habitual modes of thinking and confusion. The part of the mind which is closest to the physical is referred to as the mechanical mind; it is like a machine that goes on turning round and round whatever thoughts occur in it.

The Inner Being (The Subliminal)

Behind the outer being is the inner being, also called the subliminal self. Whereas the outer being receives consciously only the outer touches and knows things indirectly through the outer mind and the senses, the inner being is directly aware of the universal consciousness and the universal forces that play through us and around us. The inner mind is directly in touch with the universal mind, just as the inner vital is in direct touch with the universal life forces and the inner physical with the universal physical forces around us.

Environmental Consciousness (The Circumconscient)

The subliminal has a formation of consciousness which projects itself beyond the body and forms a circumconscient, an environing part of itself, through which it receives the contacts of the world and can become aware of them and deal with them before they enter. This environmental consciousness surrounding the body is that part of the individual being through which the individual is in inner contact with other beings and with universal forces.

The Inmost Being – The Psychic

Supporting mind, life and body is the inmost being, called by Sri Aurobindo the psychic being the term being derived from a Greek root (*psukhe*) which means the soul. The soul in its essence, called the psyche, is described by Sri Aurobindo as a spark and an eternal portion of the divine present in all things and beings in the universe. Whereas the Universal Self or Atman stands above the evolutionary process and is unaffected by it, the psyche is the element that develops in the evolution and grows into an individual self called the psychic being. It is to be noted that a distinction must be made also between the true soul (psychic being) and the desire soul (the vital being) which is often mistaken for the real soul.

Purusa and Prakrti

Developing the concepts of Sankhya philosophy, Sri Aurobindo distinguishes between the soul or spirit side of the Being called Purusa (person or conscious being), which is the essential or true being, and the Nature side of Being called Prakrti (Nature), which is the phenomenal or instrumental Being. Both the outer Being and the inner Being belong to Prakrti. Behind the outer mind and the inner mind, the outer vital and the inner vital, the outer physical and the inner physical, lies the true being, the Purusa, in the form of an inmost mental, vital, physical, more specifically called the true mind, the true vital, the true physical consciousness. The psychic being behind the outer being and the inner being and supporting them both is a Purusa. In our

ordinary consciousness we are unable to distinguish our true self, the Purusa, from the Nature side of our being, Prakrti, because Purusa is identified with Prakrti. In the state of identification, the Self is bound and governed by its instrumental nature – body, life and mind. The experience of the separation of Purusa from Prakrti may take place on any plane of the being. The true being may be realized in one or both of two aspects - the individual soul (psychic being) or the Universal Self (Atman).

The Individual and Universal Being

Being or Consciousness is all embracing and includes the Universe as well as the Individual. Universe is a diffusion of the Divine All in infinite space and time, the individual its concentration within limits of space and time. It is the ego that creates a wall and sense of separation between the individual being and the universal being. Thus each part of the individual being corresponds to a plane of the universal being. In our normal consciousness, we are not conscious of our true being, we are aware only of our outer being – body, life and mind – with which we identify our self. This identification of the true being with the outer being gives rise to an ego – physical, vital and mental - which gives the sense of I-ness, an individuality separate from the rest of the universe.

The Subconscious and the Inconscious

The subliminal or the inner being is behind the outer being of mind, life and body. The subconscious and the inconscient constitute the nether being below the physical consciousness. Everything on earth is based on the inconscient which is not really devoid of consciousness, but is the nethermost level of the involution of consciousness from which the evolution of consciousness starts. The subconscious is the antechamber of the inconscient and lies between the inconscient and the conscious mind, life and body. During the waking state the mind lives largely in impressions rising up from the subconscious. In ordinary sleep most dreams are formations made from subconscious impressions. In most human beings, the outer self of mind, life and body is to a great extent an instrument of the upsurging irrational, mechanical and repetitive movements of the subconscious during both waking and sleep.

The Superconscious

Just as the subconscious is what lies below the physical consciousness from which things come up into the physical, the vital and the mental parts of the being, so the superconscious, consisting of higher levels of consciousness, lies above normal mind, and from these higher ranges, things descend into the lower parts of the being. Whereas the subconscious is the basis of our material being and supports all that comes up in the physical nature, the superconscious supports all our spiritual possibilities and nature. Sri Aurobindo distinguishes various distinct levels of consciousness among the higher planes of being which lie above the ordinary mind. There are many layers in each of the main gradations between mind and supermind, and each of these layers can be regarded as a gradation in itself.

The Higher Mind

The first in the ladder of minds from the mind to the supermind is the higher mind. The higher mind has its origin the supermind and its special character is that its activity is dominated by thought. Aurobindo uses terms like 'luminous thought-mind' and 'a mind of spirit born

conceptual knowledge' to denote it. The higher mind is far more powerful than reason or logical intelligence. Unlike knowledge in the mental level, which is a system of conclusions drawn from premises, knowledge in the higher mind is a self-revelation of eternal wisdom and not a knowledge acquired from extraneous sources.

The Illumined Mind

The illumined mind is a region of spiritual light. The clarity of the spiritual intelligence characteristic of the higher mind gives place to an intense luster, a splendor and illumination of spirit. This light is primarily a spiritual manifestation of the divine reality that is at once illuminative and creative. The illumined mind also witnesses the arrival of a dynamic inner force and power that replaces the comparatively slow and deliberative process of the higher mind.

The Intuitive Mind

The intuitive mind or intuitive reason is a higher form of the intellect which can do the work of the reason with a higher power by utilizing its intuitions, inspirations, its swift revelatory vision and its luminous insight and discrimination. The intuitive mind, just like the illumined mind does not proceed by thoughts but by visional concepts. It is a kind of truth-vision, truth hearing, truth memory and direct truth discernment.

The Overmind

Sri Aurobindo defines the overmind as a delegate of the supermind consciousness to the ignorance. The supermind transmits to the overmind all its realities and allows it to formulate it into a movement and according to an awareness of things which is still a vision of truth and yet at the same time a first parent of the ignorance. A line divides the supermind and overmind and it permits a free transmission and allows the lower power to derive from the higher power all that it holds or sees, but automatically compels a transitional change in the passage.

The Supermind

The Supermind is in its essence a truth-consciousness, a consciousness always free from ignorance which is the foundation of our present natural or evolutionary existence and from which nature in us is trying to arrive at self-knowledge and world-knowledge. It is a principle of active will and knowledge superior to the mind and is the creatrix of the world. It is not the ineffable Brahman but an intermediary power and a state of being between self-possession of the ineffable reality and the flux of the many. It is completely free from all forms of ignorance. It does not need to acquire knowledge from outside; it possesses all knowledge by its own right.

Beyond the supermind is the Sat-Cit-Ananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss), the supracosmic reality, the Divine, the supreme being who manifests himself as infinite existence of which the essentiality is consciousness, bliss and self-delight.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How does Aurobindo distinguish between Purusa and Prakrti?

2) Give a detailed account of the higher levels of consciousness beyond the ordinary mind, as explained by Aurobindo..

1.6 LET US SUM UP

The unit has given a brief description of the theory of existence from the Aurobindo's system of philosophical thinking.

1.7 KEY WORDS

Atman-brahman: Unity of empirical and absolute spirit.

1.6 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 2 MAN AND HIS NATURE

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

- To understand Aurobindo's concept of the human being
- To appreciate the evolving and spiritual nature of human beings
- To see the collective destiny of the whole, including humans.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Sri Aurobindo's contribution to Indian philosophical problems are important and his rare insight into the literature of Indian philosophy coupled with an earnestness and serious purposiveness make it imperative on the part of students of Indian Philosophy to study him with care and detachment. Sri Aurobindo in his philosophy tries to synthesise the manifold views of the world and points out that realization consists in the total understanding of Brahman which satisfies the demands of knowledge and experience, freedom and immortality. In this unit we take up some salient notions that will help us to understand human nature according to Aurobindo.

2.2 THE INDIVIDUAL SELF IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO

The nature of the individual has itself been a real problem, for we find various explanations for his existence. The individual soul is said to be a part of the material nature of spiritual ego or reality; its cognitive nature has been stated to be due to an accident of connection with outer objects and not belonging to it as a sentience-point (Varadachari 2011). In the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo immortality of the individual soul is accepted and therefore its rebirths are also accepted. The purpose of the individual atomic soul in trying to achieve its real nature of immortality in and through the process of rebirths into matter and other lower forms of life is not explained as adequately as may be desired in the philosophies of realistic Vedanta. If *Maya* had been inexplicable in *Mayavada*, it is no less true of the *Karma*. The explanation that it is inexplicable because its origination is unknown will not fully satisfy the seeker after a real and valuable explanation. We find in the philosophies of realisms too, *Maya* gets a place if not as a deluding agent, at least as a power-concept or knowledge-concept. The creative act is one of Delight of Brahman or God.

We take a long extract from Sri Aurobindo to show the emergence of the individual man:

“The Universe is a self creative process of the Supreme Reality whose presence makes spirit the substance of things, - all things are there as the spirit’s powers and means and forms of manifestation. An infinite existence, an infinite consciousness, an infinite force and will, an infinite delight of being is the Reality secret behind the appearances of the universe; its divine Supermind or Gnosis has arranged the cosmic order, but arranged it indirectly through the three subordinate and limiting terms of which we are conscious here Mind, Life and Matter. The material universe is the lowest stage of a downward plunge of the manifestation, an involution of the manifested being of this triune Reality into an apparent nescience of itself, that which we now call the Inconscient; but out of this nescience the evolution of that manifested being into a recovered self-awareness was from the very first inevitable. It was inevitable because that which is involved must evolve; for it is not only there as an existence, a force hidden in its apparent opposite, and every such force must in its inmost nature be moved to find itself, to realise itself, to realise itself into play but it is the reality of that which conceals it, it is the self which the Nescience has lost and which therefore it must be the whole secret meaning, the constant drift of its action to seek for and recover. It is through the conscious individual being that this recovery is possible; it is in him that the evolving consciousness becomes organized and capable of awakening to its own Reality. The immense importance of the individual being which increases as he rises in the scale, is the most remarkable and significant fact of a universe which started without consciousness and without individuality in an undifferentiated Nescience. This importance can only be justified if the Self as individual is no less real than the Self as cosmic Being or Spirit and both are powers of the Eternal. It is only so that can be explained the necessity for the growth of the individual and his discovery of himself as a condition for the discovery of the cosmic self and consciousness and of the Supreme Reality. If we adopt this solution, this is the first result, the reality of the persistent individual; but from that first consequence the other result follows, that rebirth of some kind is no longer a possible machinery which may or may not be accepted, it becomes a necessity, an inevitable outcome of the root nature of our existence” (Ghose 1949).

The above long extract is to put in clearest light the entire relevancy of the growth of the individual immortal soul from a concealed or veiled consciousness towards the superconscious consciousness of the Divine shaping its immortality with its ascent in the Organic through reducing the impenetrable and refractory Inconscient in a series of rebirths. The individual soul’s delight it is , and not its karma, that mystifying force of bondage, beginningless and mechanical, that propels it to organize the Inconscient, plane by plane, and to integrate them in the single organism of his highest achievement – the Divine Body, pure, immortal too, a perfect instrument of its own inner light, truth, delight and Consciousness-power. Thus the individual soul in its involution and evolution is undoubtedly persistent, not in an unreal manner nor in the manner of a fictitious stream nor is it helplessly caught up in the vice-grip of a terrible fate or karma or kismet (fate), wheeled forward and backward from one place of existence to another. In fact, the individual soul is a shaper of its own inner law of ascent and descent for the sake of enjoying that secret delight of its existence even when it is being overwhelmed by the tribulations of its ascending journey. It is, at first appearance, a coarse, selfish aggressive egoism placed in opposition to matter, struggling for survival, against it as well as against all that came to be with it. (Varadachari 2011)

Thus whether it is the breaking up of social organizations or of individuals, there emerge constantly recurrences or rebirths of these social forms and individuals till the equation of the social perfection and individual integral perfection is realised in all levels of true spiritual being.

2.2 INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

The relationship between the individual and the society appears at first look to be one of part and whole. The society is seeking its fulfillment in and through the individuals even as the fulfillment of the individuals is affirmed to consist in the fullest realisation of Society. The *angangi-bhava* (whole and part relation) or *sesa-sesi* (dependent-principal relation) between the society and the individual is the highest that humanism has been able to offer as a consolation to the distraught world.

In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy we have a clear enunciation of the metaphysical reality of the society as well as the integrity of the individuals through his unique thesis of eternal oneness in the eternal multiplicity, whether it be of the organism or the society, planes or powers, individuals or the Deity. It is this metaphysical basis that makes multiplicity seek the freedom for its many individuals even as the individuals are impelled towards some sort of unity wherein lies their strength. The two moments in the history of growth of individual freedom in society and achievement of social solidarity are, even when in frenzied movement, explained by his thesis. (Varadachari 2011)

The individual soul truly grows into a universal being, that is, a being having universal responsiveness and love and value for all, even as the universal Being is enabled to manifest itself in and through each of the individuals. The mystical consciousness which is the pioneering spirit ever after adventure into planes and spaces beyond the intellect, according to M. Bergson, seeks to evolve into the universal consciousness by a leap or a burst into the same through concentration, not indeed of its consciousness nor by a surrender to the Divine All, but by the strength of its vital impulse (*vital*). This explanation does scant justice to the fundamental uniqueness of each soul and the continuity of evolution, as it aims at the abolition of the true individuality in the expanse of Mind-energy of the intuitive level. It forgets that the mystics are realists and are unique personalities who, in spite of their universal outlook and disinterested activity, are strong personalities. On the other hand, according to Sri Aurobindo, the individual is a real one of the eternal multiplicity of the Divine, mounting or ascending the evolutionary rungs by rejecting the lower with the help of the Divine, so that ultimately the lower may be orientated or transmuted so as to express more and more fully the higher and highest planes of the individual soul, which indeed is a Divine personality. (Ghose 1949)

Thus the individual in the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo does not have merely a temporary existence nor is it a term in the phenomenal creation due to the operation of a *Maya* or *upadhi*; on the other hand, it can be a portion, *amsa*, a ray, or organ of the Divine, if by these terms we understand an integral oneness of the soul with the Divine One in every respect as one of the eternal multiplicity. (Varadachari 2011) Thus it is that the individual soul is capable of realising the supreme formula of its identity with the Divine of Brahman in a real manner through a real evolution and real surrender to the Divine which it apprehends to be its complementary and not a counter-reality.

2.4 HUMAN DESTINY

The destiny of the human individual is not to attain after death a transcendental or divine body (*aprakrta-sarira*) or to achieve a mergence or Divine Oneness after such a donning of the eternal luminous body, but even here to feel the Divine in oneself in His Oneness as also in His eternal multiplicity, and because of that presence undergo the changes in nature which are verily the formation of the *Aprakrta-divya-sarira*. This is the significant possibility of the indwellingness of the Supreme Divine 'superiorly' in the individual through a radical surrender and prayer to Him. The *Jivan-mukta* ideal is reinforced by the siddha-ideal, for it is not the *jivan-mukta* of the Advaita Vedanta that we arrive at but a more integral realisation of the Divine Personality in the individual. This is so much the case that the final movement of the Total Liberation of all individuals, if indeed that should happen, will be such that the eternal multiplicity is to remain a multiplicity of perfect unique personalities of the Divine (Varadachari 2011).

Sri Aurobindo's interest, and his main and abiding concern in all that he has given us, is in the future of the human individual, his race, and his prospects. In the Divine Life, Divine Race and Divine Unity he sees the secret founts of aspiration of man so far. His meridian or culmination is all that can make man yield his lower treasures, not once for all but only for a time so that attaining he could descend to transform or even in ascending transform his world and society and relationships in the pattern of transcending delights.

At the same time we need to realise that the fulfillment of the Divine consummation of integral all-sided existence is beyond the possibilities of the individual soul. In the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo the ideal of human unity is fashioned in the Superconscious life of each individual who has ascended and thereby fulfilled the mission set before himself at the beginning of the creature adventure to realise the divine pattern of his unique evolution of the Total All in the Divine, in His eternal multiplicity. The individual indeed becomes a Buddha and Siddha (realised or enlightened persons), not in the sense of having attained to a state of nirvana nor yet in the sense of possessing occult powers, but in the sense of fulfilling the Divine Eternity, Truth, Delight and Reality in terms of the Divine Knowledge of Gnosis. In that supreme consummation there is *purnatva*, fullness in the individual as it is in the Divine, constantly renewing the Divine activity of bliss and love and varied infinities of relationships, none of which limit to detriment, frustrate to annihilation or force into neurosis or veil to bind. Every individual personality of the Divine in his fullest vision perceives all as the play of the Divine and himself as the exponent of unique beauties and creative *mayas* of the Divine.

2.5 MAN AND EVOLUTION

It is very important to remember that in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy man is not the crown of the evolutionary process. There are many religions which have said that man is the final product of evolution. But Sri Aurobindo holds that man is an intermediate creature, based firmly in the material consciousness and yet reaching upwards into the divine consciousness, into what he later calls the supramental. He makes the point that man has the capacity to cooperate with the evolutionary thrust and thereby to speed up the process of evolution. Previously the rocks did not have anything to do with becoming vegetables, the vegetables did not have anything to do with becoming fish, and the fish had no particular contribution to become land animals and so on because it was a natural process of development which took place over vast areas of the earth

and millions of years of evolution. But with man it is different; “man is the first creature with the capacity to cooperate in the process of evolution,” as Karan Singh (2008) remarks.

2.6 JIVATMAN IN AUROBINDO’S OWN WORDS

The following long extract is taken from Aurobindo’s “Letters on Yoga” Subsection 4: The Central Being and is entitled “*Jiva – Jivatman*” (Ghose 1969). It will help us to appreciate the evolving understanding of human being that he had, besides give us the flavour of his almost poetic and powerful writing. The phrase “central being” in our yoga 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.

The natural attitude of the psychic being is to feel itself as the Child, the Son of God, the *Bhakta*; it is a portion of the Divine, one in essence, but in the dynamics of the manifestation there is always even in identity a difference. The *Jivatman*, on the contrary, lives in the essence and can merge itself in identity with the Divine; but it too, the moment it presides over the dynamics of the manifestation, knows itself as one centre of the multiple Divine, not as the Parameshwara. It is important to remember the distinction; for, otherwise, if there is the least vital egoism, one may begin to think of oneself as an Avatar or lose balance like Hridaya with Ramakrishna.

The word *Jiva* has two meanings in the Sanskritic 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 *Jivatma* - the Atman, spirit or eternal self of the living being. It is spoken of figuratively by the Gita as “an eternal portion of the Divine” - but the word fragmentation (used by you) is too strong, it could be applicable to the forms, but not to the spirit in them. Moreover the multiple Divine is an eternal reality antecedent to the creation here. An elaborate description of the *Jivatma* would be: “the multiple Divine manifested here as the individualised self or spirit of the created being.” The *Jivatma* 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.

The Advaita Vedanta (Monism) declares that the *Jiva* has no real existence, as the Divine is indivisible. Another school attributes a real but not an independent existence to the *Jiva* - it is, they say, one in essence, different in manifestation, and as the manifestation is real, eternal and not an illusion, it cannot be called unreal. The dualistic schools affirm the *Jiva* as an independent category or stand on the triplicity of God, soul and Nature. *Jivatma* is not the psychic being - we have fixed on *chaitya purusha* as the equivalent in Sanskrit of the psychic being. *Jivatma* is the individual Self - the central being. The central being is that which is not born, does not evolve, but presides over all the individual manifestation. The psychic is its projection here - for the psychic being is in the evolution and from within supports our whole evolution; it receives the essence of all experience and by that develops the personality Godward.

The Self is at once one in all and many - one in its essence, it manifests also as the individual self which may be described as in Nature an eternal portion of the Divine; in spirit a centre of the manifestation, individual but extending its universality and rising into transcendence. By *Jivatma*

we mean the individual self. Essentially it is one self with all others, but in the multiplicity of the Divine it is the individual self, an individual centre of the universe - and it sees everything in itself or itself in everything or both together according to its state of consciousness and point of view. The self, Atman is in its nature either transcendent or universal (*Paramatma, Atma*). When it individualises and becomes a central being, it is then the *Jivatman*. The *Jivatman* feels his oneness with the universal but at the same time his central separateness as a portion of the Divine. The soul, representative of the central being, is a spark of the Divine supporting all individual existence in Nature; the psychic being is a conscious form of that soul growing in the evolution - in the persistent process that develops first life in Matter, mind in life, until finally mind can develop into overmind and overmind into the supramental Truth. The soul supports the nature in its evolution through these grades, but is itself not any of these things.

The lower Nature, *apara prakriti*, is this external objective and superficial subjective apparent Nature which manifests all these minds, lives and bodies. The supreme Nature, *para prakriti*, concealed behind it is the very nature of the Divine - a supreme Consciousness-Force which manifests the multiple Divine as the Many. These Many are in themselves eternal selves of the Supreme in his supreme Nature, *para prakriti*. Here in relation to this world they appear as the *Jivatmas* supporting the evolution of the natural existences, *sarva-bhutani*, in the mutable Becoming which is the life of the *Kshara* (mobile or mutable) *Purusha*. The *Jiva* (or *Jivatma*) and the creatures, *sarva-bhutani*, are not the same thing. The *Jivatmas* really stand above the creation even though concerned in it; the natural existences, *sarva-bhutani*, are the creatures of Nature. Man, bird, beast, reptile are natural existences, but the individual Self in them is not even for a moment characteristically man, bird, beast or reptile; in its evolution it is the same through all these changes, a spiritual being that consents to the play of Nature.

What is original and eternal for ever in the Divine is the Being, what is developed in consciousness, conditions, forces, forms, etc., by the Divine Power is the Becoming. The eternal Divine is the Being; the universe in Time and all that is apparent in it is a Becoming. The eternal Being in its superior nature, *Para Prakriti*, is at once One and Many; but the eternal Multiplicity of the Divine when it stands behind the created existences, *sarva-bhutani*, appears as (or as we say, becomes) the *Jiva, para prakritir jivabhuta*. In the psychic, on the other hand, there are two aspects, the psychic existence or soul behind and in front the form of individuality it takes in its evolution in Nature.

The soul or psyche is immutable only in the sense that it contains all the possibilities of the Divine within it, but it has to evolve them and in its evolution it assumes the form of a developing psychic individual evolving in the manifestation the individual *Prakriti* and taking part in the evolution. It is the spark of the Divine Fire that grows behind the mind, vital and physical by means of the psychic being until it is able to transform the *Prakriti* of Ignorance into a *Prakriti* of Knowledge. This evolving psychic being is not therefore at any time all that the soul or essential psychic existence bears within it; it temporalises and individualises what is eternal in potentiality, transcendent in essence, in this projection of the spirit.

The central being is the being which presides over the different births one after the other, but is itself unborn, for it does not descend into the being but is above it - it holds together the mental, vital and physical being and all the various parts of the personality and it controls the life either through the mental being and the mental thought and will or through the psychic, whichever may happen to be most in front or most powerful in nature. If it does not exercise its control, then the

consciousness is in great disorder and every part of the personality acts for itself so that there is no coherence in the thought, feeling or action.

The psychic is not above but behind - its seat is behind the heart, its power is not knowledge but an essential or spiritual feeling - it has the clearest sense of the Truth and a sort of inherent perception of it which is of the nature of soul-perception and soul-feeling. It is our inmost being and supports all the others, mental, vital, physical, but it is also much veiled by them and has to act upon them as an influence rather than by its sovereign right of direct action; its direct action becomes normal and preponderant only at a high stage of development or by yoga. It is not the psychic being which, you feel, gives you the intuitions of things to be or warns you against the results of certain actions; that is some part of the inner being, sometimes the inner mental, sometimes the inner vital, sometimes, it may be, the inner or subtle physical *Purusha*. The inner being - inner mind, inner vital, inner or subtle physical - knows much that is unknown to the outer mind, the outer vital, the outer physical, for it is in a more direct contact with the secret forces of Nature. The psychic is the inmost being of all; a perception of truth which is inherent in the deepest substance of the consciousness, a sense of the good, true, beautiful, the Divine, is its privilege.

The central being - the *Jivatman* which is not born nor evolves but presides over the individual birth and evolution - puts forward a representative of himself on each plane of the consciousness. On the mental plane it is the true mental being, *manomaya purusha*, on the vital plane the true vital being, *pranamaya purusha*, on the physical plane the true physical being, *annamaya purusha*. Each being, therefore is, so long as the Ignorance lasts, centred round his mental, vital or physical *Purusha*, according to the plane on which he predominantly lives, and that is to him his central being. But the true representative all the time is concealed behind the mind, vital and physical - it is the psychic, our inmost being.

When the inmost knowledge begins to come, we become aware of the psychic being within us and it comes forward and leads the *sadhana*. We become aware also of the *Jivatman*, the undivided Self or Spirit above the manifestation of which the psychic is the representative here. The true inner being - the true mental, the true vital, the true physical represent each on its plane and answer to the central being, but the whole of the nature and especially the outer nature does not, nor the ordinary mental, vital or physical personality. The psychic being is the central being for the purposes of the evolution - it grows and develops; but there is a central being above of which the mind is not aware, which presides unseen over the existence and of which the psychic being is the representative in the manifested nature. It is what is called the *Jivatman*. The psychic is a spark of the Divine - but I do not know that it can be called a portion of the *Jivatma* - it is the same put forward in a different way.

What is meant by *Prakriti* or Nature is the outer or executive side of the *Shakti* or Conscious Force which forms and moves the worlds. This outer side appears here to be mechanical, a play of the forces, *Gunas*, etc. Behind it is the living Consciousness and Force of the Divine, the divine *Shakti*. The *Prakriti* itself is divided into the lower and higher, - the lower is the *Prakriti* of the Ignorance, the *Prakriti* of mind, life and Matter separated in consciousness from the Divine; the higher is the Divine *Prakriti* of *Sachchidananda* with its manifesting power of supermind, always aware of the Divine and free from Ignorance and its consequences. Man so long as he is in the ignorance is subject to the lower *Prakriti*, but by spiritual evolution he becomes aware of the higher Nature and seeks to come into contact with it. He can ascend into it

and it can descend into him - such an ascent and descent can transform the lower nature of mind, life and Matter. (Sri Aurobindo, SABCL, volume 22, pages 265-287).

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How does Aurobindo distinguish between Individual self and Brahman?

2) Give a detailed account of the understanding of human nature as explained by Aurobindo..

2.7 LET US SUM UP

The absolute may be regarded as the Being, the beginning and end of our metaphysical search. With care and caution, towards the end of our search, we can identify that Being or Absolute with God. For theists, such a God or Absolute is the unlimited existence, that is unalloyed bliss and perfect consciousness (*sat-cit-ananda*). We can respond to such a gift of existence personally or individually only through love.

2.8 KEY WORDS

Nescience: Absence of knowledge or awareness; ignorance

Inconscient: Unconscious; subconscious; wanting self-consciousness

Jivatman: *Atman* (the Self) is of two kinds - *jiva* or *jivatman*, and *Paramatman* or *Isvara*

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UNIT 3 KNOWLEDGE AND IGNORANCE

Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
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- 3.4 Integral Knowledge
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3.0 OBJECTIVES

- To see the role of knowledge in Aurobindo's Philosophy.
- To see the relationship between knowledge and ignorance in Aurobindo.
- To try to understand ignorance in the scheme of things of Aurobindo.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

How is knowledge related to ignorance? Why is there evil in this world of goodness? These are some questions that Aurobindo has been engaging in. In the chapter "The Eternal and the Individual" from *"The Life Divine,"* Sri Aurobindo indicates that we can move out of our essential ignorance, expressed through limitations of rational mind and supported by ego, by coming into touch with our True Self and Soul. As a result, we realize that we are not only an individual being, but a world being; an eternal individual capable of transcending all limitations of unconsciousness, ego, division, and ignorance.

Sri Aurobindo refers to this evolved, universalized person as a "True Individual." He is in touch with an individuality that includes a wider, universal and eternal existence. This true Individual lives through oneself, as well as others. He also perceives the deepest being, the Soul and experience of Transcendence not just in himself but in others. Moreover, because the individual is Eternal in essence, he has the potential to evolve his being to its ultimate potential, including his material being, even becoming immortal. In this unit, we want to understand Aurobindo's concept of knowledge and its relationship to ignorance. We also try to seek the remedy for falsehood and evil.

3.2 AUROBINDO ON KNOWLEDGE AND IGNORANCE

The main insights of Aurobindo on knowledge and ignorance, as presented in *"The Life Divine"* may be summed up as follows: Our Essential Ignorance vs. Integral Knowledge: Sri Aurobindo begins by describing the difference between our essential Ignorance and the Integral Knowledge we can move towards. He says we need to discover the nature of our essential Ignorance, and the Knowledge that must replace it. That through our inward and upward self-unfolding of consciousness, we discover that Knowledge (Ghose 1949).

Utility and Limits of Logical Mind and Our Ignorance: He then focuses on the fact that the logical mind is helpful in breaking the Ignorance, but is limited. He says that it is helpful for overcoming the essential Ignorance by the partial understanding, intellectualization, et al of normal mind, but itself cannot arrive at the Knowledge we are seeking. He says that it is more a guardian against error than a discoverer of truth; that its propensities to make distinctions are stumbling blocks on the road to Integral Knowledge.

Limits of Reason Caused by Ego, Preventing Integral Knowledge: Sri Aurobindo then addresses why the reason of Logical Mind is so limited. He says that the main problem is that the reason identifies the individual self with the ego, and the exclusions of consciousness that arise when we are absorbed in ego. He then explains what the problems of ego are. In particular, that our ego tends to centralize the activities of Nature in ourselves. That we have experiences that distinguish ourselves from the rest of being, and that is what we think of as our nature, but is really ego in action. Thus, this sense of individualization, this ego-sense is the crux of the problem (Ghose 1949).

Thus, if we are to move out of the Ignorance and towards Integral Knowledge, we need to somehow move out of ego. To do that, we have to see beyond this individualization of ego to our greater self and world being. We have to come to see that this self of our individuality is not only an ego self, but one that embraces the whole world and all other beings.

Moving out of Ego and Ignorance through Soul Connection: Now we come to the crux of the chapter. How do we move towards this wider self, this individuality that embraces the whole of existence beyond ego. He says when we move to the soul and Self, we move towards this wider existence. He says that this Self and Soul connects us to other souls, individuals, and the cosmic. This is the unity of being in Self. Thus there are two becomings of the Self, our individualization and the world, the individual and the cosmic. Moreover, these two becomings are always related to one another and are mutually dependent. For the liberated soul who comes in contact with the transcendent perceives that all is in each and each is in all and all is in God and God is all (Ghose 1949).

Perceiving our True Individuality as Both Individual and World Being Key: Thus we must consider we can move from our individual status to becoming the True Individual. This person is not the ego, and yet who has a relationship with other individuals. The true individual is a conscious power of the being of the Eternal in his power of individualizing self experience; living in unity and mutuality with others. The true Individual is contained in the world-being and dwells in the Transcendent. This is the key point of the chapter. He enjoys the transcendence through himself and in others.

Utility and Power of the Negative: Now Sri Aurobindo focuses on several particular ways it expresses its Ignorance. One has to do with how we see the positives and negatives of life. He says that rather than look at the negatives as we normally do, we should understand that they are packed with force, teeming with power of existence, full of actual or potential contents. He says that the negatives bring in the rest of the possibilities of the Absolute that the positive does not allow. E.g. A great war may seem negative from one view, but from another may clear the way to great possibilities it may not have had before. From here Sri Aurobindo goes on to say that that everything has the Eternal in it, including the negative. I.e. the Absolute includes all and everything. That it is not bound to the limits of the positive.

Seeing Contradictions as Complements through Higher Consciousness: Sri Aurobindo then says that all dualities, contradictions in life can be seen for what they really are, as complements, complementary pairs when we rise to our highest consciousness. On the other hand, the human reason sees contradictions. Sri Aurobindo concludes that from this highest consciousness we perceive that all meets and all principles, all persistent realities of existence stand in a primary relationship to each other in a free, not an exclusive unity of the Absolute (Ghose 1949).

3.3 SEVEN TYPES OF IGNORANCE

Given this background, we are in a position to understand the seven types of ignorance, as elaborated by our author. Sri Aurobindo's systematic approach has us first examining the extent and nature of the Ignorance as a prelude to our search for Knowledge. The first ignorance is a self-ignorance. "We are ignorant of the Absolute which is the source of all being and becoming; we take partial facts of being, temporal relations of the becoming for the whole truth of existence,—that is the first, the original ignorance." (SAS 2011)

The cosmic ignorance is next: "We are ignorant of the spaceless, timeless, immobile and immutable Self; we take the constant mobility and mutation of the cosmic becoming in Time and Space for the whole truth of existence..." (Ghose 1949).

The third ignorance is the egoistic ignorance: "We are ignorant of our universal self, the cosmic existence, the cosmic consciousness, our infinite unity with all being and becoming; we take our limited egoistic mentality, vitality, corporeality for our true self and regard everything other than that as not-self..." The temporal ignorance is fourth: "We are ignorant of our eternal becoming in Time; we take this little life in a small span of Time, in a petty field of Space, for our beginning, our middle and our end..." The fifth ignorance is our psychological ignorance: "Even within this brief temporal becoming we are ignorant of our large and complex being, of that in us which is superconscient, subconscient, intraconscient, circumconscient to our surface becoming; we take that surface becoming with its small selection of overtly mentalised experiences for our whole existence..."

The constitutional ignorance is sixth: "We are ignorant of the true constitution of our becoming; we take the mind or life or body or any two of these or all three for our true principle or the whole account of what we are, losing sight of that which constitutes them and determines by its occult presence and is meant to determine sovereignly by its emergence their operations..." Finally, there is the practical ignorance: "As a result of all these ignorances, we miss the true knowledge, government and enjoyment of our life in the world; we are ignorant in our thought, will, sensations, actions, return wrong or imperfect responses at every point to the questionings of the world, wander in a maze of errors and desires, strivings and failures, pain and pleasure, sin and stumbling, follow a crooked road, grope blindly for a changing goal..."

3.4 INTEGRAL KNOWLEDGE

Sri Aurobindo avoids the temptation to define knowledge as a specific limited formulation based on one aspect or tendency which we can recognise in our conscious awareness. He accepts that each major line of development, each major philosophical statement of truth is in fact speaking to one part or focus of our being, but needs to be reconciled, balanced, harmonised and related to the others. Truth is not opposed to truth; rather truth expands to include all aspects of truth. His

goal is not to achieve a victory in a battle of ideas, but to find how to reconcile seemingly opposite formulations of truth in an all-encompassing, all-embracing view.

“An integral knowledge then must be 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. Our present state is an Ignorance and a many-sided seeking; it seeks the truth of all things but,— as is evident from the insistence and the variety of the human mind’s speculations as to the fundamental Truth which explains all others, the Reality at the basis of all things,— the fundamental truth of things, their basic reality must be found in some at once fundamental and universal Real; it is that which, once discovered, must embrace and explain all,—for “That being known all will be known”: the fundamental Real must necessarily be and contain the truth of all existence, the truth of the individual, the truth of the universe, the truth of all that is beyond the universe.” (Ghose 1949) The mind’s seeking in each individual direction has its value and becomes a basis for a more comprehensive knowledge when we can finally fit together each of these “truths” into that one all-comprehending Truth that forms the Integral Knowledge.

3.5 THE ORIGIN AND REMEDY OF FALSEHOOD, ERROR, WRONG AND EVIL

[The following extract is Sri Aurobindo’s own words and taken from *The Life Divine*. Some comments are given in square bracket]

The Lord accepts the sin and the virtue of none; because knowledge is veiled by Ignorance, mortal men are deluded. *Gita*. V. 15.

They live according to another idea of self than the reality, deluded, attached, expressing a falsehood, - as if by an enchantment they see the false as the true. *Maitrayani Upanishad*. VII. 10.

They live and move in the Ignorance and go round and round, battered and stumbling, like blind men led by one who is blind. *Mundaka Upanishad*. I. 2. 8.

One whose intelligence has attained to Unity, casts away from him both sin and virtue. *Gita*. II. 50.

He who has found the bliss of the Eternal is afflicted no more by the thought, “Why have I not done the good? Why have I done evil?” One who knows the self extricates himself from both these things. *Taittiriya Upanishad*. II. 9.

These are they who are conscious of the much falsehood in the world; they grow in the house of Truth, they are the strong and invincible sons of Infinity. *Rig Veda*. VII. 60. 5.

The first and the highest are truth; in the middle there is falsehood, but it is taken between the truth on both sides of it and it draws its being from the truth. [Sri Aurobindo's Note: The truth of the physical reality and the truth of the spiritual and superconscient reality. Into the intermediate subjective and mental realities which stand between them, falsehood can enter, but it takes either truth from above or truth from below as the substance out of which it builds itself and both are pressing upon it to turn its misconstructions into truth of life and truth of spirit.] *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. V. 5. 1.

If Ignorance is in its nature a self-limiting knowledge oblivious of the integral self-awareness and confined to an exclusive concentration in a single field or upon a concealing surface of cosmic movement, what, in this view, are we to make of the problem which most poignantly preoccupies the mind of man when it is turned on the mystery of his own existence and of cosmic existence, the problem of evil? A limited knowledge supported by a secret All-Wisdom as an instrument for working out within the necessary limitations a restricted world-order may be admitted as an intelligible process of the universal Consciousness and Energy; but the necessity of falsehood and error, the necessity of wrong and evil or their utility in the workings of the omnipresent Divine Reality is less easily admissible.

And yet if that Reality is what we have supposed it to be, there must be some necessity for the appearance of these contrary phenomena, some significance, some function that they had to serve in the economy of the universe. For in the complete and inalienable self-knowledge of the Brahman which is necessarily all-knowledge, since all this that is is the Brahman, such phenomena cannot have come in as a chance, an intervening accident, an involuntary forgetfulness or confusion of the Consciousness-Force of the All-Wise in the cosmos or an ugly contretemps for which the indwelling Spirit was not prepared and of which it is the prisoner erring in a labyrinth with the utmost difficulty of escape. Nor can it be an inexplicable mystery of being, original and eternal, of which the divine All-Teacher is incapable of giving an account to himself or to us. There must be behind it a significance of the All-Wisdom itself, a power of the All-Consciousness which permits and uses it for some indispensable function in the present workings of our self-experience and world-experience. This aspect of existence needs now to be examined more directly and determined in its origins and the limits of its reality and its place in Nature.

This problem may be taken up from three points of view, - its relation to the Absolute, the supreme Reality, its origin and place in the cosmic workings, its action and point of hold in the individual being. It is evident that these contrary phenomena have no direct root in the supreme Reality itself, there is nothing there that has this character; they are creations of the Ignorance and Inconscience, not fundamental or primary aspects of the Being, not native to the Transcendence or to the infinite power of the Cosmic Spirit. It is sometimes reasoned that as Truth and Good have their absolutes, so Falsehood and Evil must also have their absolutes, or, if it is not so, then both must belong to the relativity only; Knowledge and Ignorance, Truth and Falsehood, Good and Evil exist only in relation to each other and beyond the dualities here they have no existence. But this is not the fundamental truth of the relation of these opposites; for, in the first place, Falsehood and Evil are, unlike Truth and Good, very clearly results of the Ignorance and cannot exist where there is no Ignorance: they can have no self-existence in the Divine Being, they cannot be native elements of the Supreme Nature. If, then, the limited Knowledge which is the nature of Ignorance renounces its limitations, if Ignorance disappears into Knowledge, evil and falsehood can no longer endure: for both are fruits of unconsciousness and wrong consciousness and, if true or whole consciousness is there replacing Ignorance, they have no longer any basis for their existence. There can therefore be no absolute of falsehood, no absolute of evil; these things are a by-product of the world-movement: the sombre flowers of falsehood and suffering and evil have their root in the black soil of the Inconscient. On the other hand, there is no such intrinsic obstacle to the absoluteness of Truth and Good: the relativity of truth and error, good and evil is a fact of our experience, but it is similarly a by-product, it is not

a permanent factor native to existence; for it is true only of the valuations made by the human consciousness, true only of our partial knowledge and partial ignorance.

Truth is relative to us because our knowledge is surrounded by ignorance. Our exact vision stops short at outside appearances which are not the complete truth of things, and, if we go deeper, the illuminations we arrive at are guesses or inferences or intimations, not a sight of indubitable realities: our conclusions are partial, speculative or constructed, our statement of them, which is the expression of our indirect contact with the reality, has the nature of representations or figures, word-images of thought-perceptions that are themselves images, not embodiments of Truth itself, not directly real and authentic. These figures or representations are imperfect and opaque and carry with them their shadow of nescience or error; for they seem to deny or shut out other truths and even the truth they express does not get its full value: it is an end or edge of it that projects into form and the rest is left in the shadow unseen or disfigured or uncertainly visible. It might almost be said that no mental statement of things can be altogether true; it is not Truth bodied, pure and nude, but a draped figure, - often it is only the drapery that is visible. But this character does not apply to truth perceived by a direct action of consciousness or to the truth of knowledge by identity; our seeing there may be limited, but so far as it extends, it is authentic, and authenticity is a first step towards absoluteness: error may attach itself to a direct or identical vision of things by a mental accretion, by a mistaken or illegitimate extension or by the mind's misinterpretation, but it does not enter into the substance. This authentic or identical vision or experience of things is the true nature of knowledge and it is self-existent within the being, although rendered in our minds by a secondary formation that is unauthentic and derivative. Ignorance in its origin has not this self-existence or this authenticity; it exists by a limitation or absence or abeyance of knowledge, error by a deviation from truth, falsehood by a distortion of truth or its contradiction and denial. But it cannot be similarly said of knowledge that in its very nature it exists only by a limitation or absence or abeyance of ignorance: it may indeed emerge in the human mind partly by a process of such limitation or abeyance, by the receding of darkness from a partial light, or it may have the aspect of ignorance turning into knowledge; but in fact, it rises by an independent birth from our depths where it has a native existence.

Again, of good and evil it can be said that one exists by true consciousness, the other survives only by wrong consciousness: if there is an unmixed true consciousness, good alone can exist; it is no longer mixed with evil or formed in its presence. Human values of good and evil, as of truth and error, are indeed uncertain and relative: what is held as truth in one place or time is held in another place or time to be error; what is regarded as good is elsewhere or in other times regarded as evil. We find too that what we call evil results in good, what we call good results in evil. But this untoward outcome of good producing evil is due to the confusion and mixture of knowledge and ignorance, to the penetration of true consciousness by wrong consciousness, so that there is an ignorant or mistaken application of our good, or it is due to the intervention of afflicting forces. In the opposite case of evil producing good, the happier and contradictory result is due to the intervention of some true consciousness and force acting behind and in spite of wrong consciousness and wrong will or it is due to the intervention of redressing forces. This relativity, this mixture is a circumstance of human mentality and the workings of the Cosmic Force in human life; it is not the fundamental truth of good and evil. It might be objected that physical evil, such as pain and most bodily suffering, is independent of knowledge and ignorance, of right and wrong consciousness, inherent in physical Nature: but, fundamentally, all pain and suffering are the result of an insufficient consciousness-force in the surface being which

makes it unable to deal rightly with self and Nature or unable to assimilate and to harmonise itself with the contacts of the universal Energy; they would not exist if in us there were an integral presence of the luminous Consciousness and the divine Force of an integral Being. Therefore the relation of truth to falsehood, of good to evil is not a mutual dependence, but is in the nature of a contradiction as of light and shadow; a shadow depends on light for its existence, but light does not depend for its existence on the shadow. The relation between the Absolute and these contraries of some of its fundamental aspects is not that they are opposite fundamental aspects of the Absolute; falsehood and evil have no fundamentality, no power of infinity or eternal being, no self-existence even by latency in the Self-Existent, no authenticity of an original inherence.

It is no doubt a fact that once truth or good manifests, the conception of falsehood and evil becomes a possibility; for whenever there is an affirmation, its negation becomes conceivable. As the manifestation of existence, consciousness and delight made the manifestation of non-existence, inconscience, insensibility conceivable and, because conceivable, therefore in a way inevitable, for all possibilities push towards actuality until they reach it, so is it with these contraries of the aspects of the Divine Existence. It may be said on this ground that these opposites, since they must be immediately perceivable by the manifesting Consciousness on the very threshold of manifestation, can take rank as implied absolutes and are inseparable from all cosmic existence. But it must first be noted that it is only in cosmic manifestation that they become possible; they cannot pre-exist in the timeless being, for they are incompatible with the unity and bliss that are its substance.

The true solution can intervene only when by our spiritual growth we can become one self with all beings, know them as part of our self, deal with them as if they were our other selves; for then the division is healed, the law of separate self-affirmation leading by itself to affirmation against or at the expense of others is enlarged and liberated by adding to it the law of our self-affirmation for others and our self-finding in their self-finding and self-realisation. It has been made a rule of religious ethics to act in a spirit of universal compassion, to love one's neighbour as oneself, to do to others as one would have them do to us, to feel the joy and grief of others as one's own; but no man living in his ego is able truly and perfectly to do these things, he can only accept them as a demand of his mind, an aspiration of his heart, an effort of his will to live by a high standard and modify by a sincere endeavour his crude ego-nature. It is when others are known and felt intimately as oneself that this ideal can become a natural and spontaneous rule of our living and be realised in practice as in principle.

But even oneness with others is not enough by itself, if it is a oneness with their ignorance; for then the law of ignorance will work and error of action and wrong action will survive even if diminished in degree and mellowed in incidence and character. Our oneness with others must be fundamental, not a oneness with their minds, hearts, vital selves, egos, - even though these come to be included in our universalised consciousness, - but a oneness in the soul and spirit, and that can only come by our liberation into soul-awareness and self-knowledge. To be ourselves liberated from ego and realise our true selves is the first necessity; all else can be achieved as a luminous result, a necessary consequence.

That is one reason why a spiritual call must be accepted as imperative and take precedence over all other claims, intellectual, ethical, social, that belong to the domain of the Ignorance. For the mental law of good abides in that domain and can only modify and palliate; nothing can be a

sufficient substitute for the spiritual change that can realise the true and integral good because through the spirit we come to the root of action and existence.

In the spiritual knowledge of self there are three steps which are at the same time three parts of the one knowledge. The first is the discovery of the soul, not the outer soul of thought and emotion and desire, but the secret psychic entity, the divine element within us. When that becomes dominant over the nature, the soul becomes conscious and the mind, life and body take their true place as its instruments; we are aware of a guide within that knows the truth, the good, the true delight and beauty of existence, controls heart and intellect by its luminous law and leads our life and being towards spiritual completeness. Even within the obscure workings of the Ignorance we have then a witness who discerns, a living light that illumines, a will that refuses to be misled and separates the mind's truth from its error, the heart's intimate response from its vibrations to a wrong call and wrong demand upon it, the life's true ardour and plenitude of movement from vital passion and the turbid falsehoods of our vital nature and its dark self-seeking. This is the first step of self-realisation, to enthrone the soul, the divine psychic individual in the place of the ego.

The next step is to become aware of the eternal self in us unborn and one with the self of all beings. This self-realisation liberates and universalises; even if our action still proceeds in the dynamics of the Ignorance, it no longer binds or misleads because our inner being is seated in the light of self-knowledge. The third step is to know the Divine Being who is at once our supreme transcendent Self, the Cosmic Being, foundation of our universality, and the Divinity within of which our psychic being, the true evolving individual in our nature, is a portion, a spark, a flame growing into the eternal Fire from which it was lit and of which it is the witness ever living within us and the conscious instrument of its light and power and joy and beauty. Aware of the Divine as the Master of our being and action, we can learn to become channels of his Shakti, the Divine Puissance, and act according to her dictates or her rule of light and power within us. Our action will not then be mastered by our vital impulse or governed by a mental standard, for she acts according to the permanent yet plastic truth of things, - not that which the mind constructs, but the higher, deeper and subtler truth of each movement and circumstance as it is known to the supreme knowledge and demanded by the supreme will in the universe.

The liberation of the will follows upon the liberation in knowledge and is its dynamic consequence; it is knowledge that purifies, it is truth that liberates: evil is the fruit of a spiritual ignorance and it will disappear only by the growth of a spiritual consciousness and the light of spiritual knowledge. The division of our being from the being of others can only be healed by removing the divorce of our nature from the inner soul-reality, by abolishing the veil between our becoming and our self-being, by bridging the remoteness of our individuality in Nature from the Divine Being who is the omnipresent Reality in Nature and above Nature. But the last division to be removed is the scission between this Nature and the Supernatural which is the Self-Power of the Divine Existence.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How do you describe ignorance.?

2) Explain integral knowledge.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

The paradox of knowledge and ignorance, along with goodness and evil, has challenged humans. In this unit we see Aurobindo's understanding of ignorance as leading to integral knowledge..

3.7 KEY WORDS

Circumconscient: The subliminal self is the true mental being and in relation to our waking mind is rather secretly circumconscient; for it envelops as well as supports. Of all this larger part of our being we are ignorant. The term "Intraconscient" and "Circumconscient" of Sri Aurobindo were explained to differentiate the subtle states from grosser states.

Superconscient: We are ignorant also of the superconscient, that which we ordinarily call spirit or soul.

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UNIT 4 INTERPRETATION OF 'TAT-TVAM ASI'

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 *Tat-Tvam Asi* And Aurobindo
- 4.3 Basic Assumptions Of Vedanta
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4.0 OBJECTIVES

- To see the basis and significance of advaitic philosophy.
- To see the relevance of 'Tat-tvam asi' for today.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Insightfully Sri Aurobindo wrote: "In liberation the individual soul realises itself as the One (that is yet Many). It may plunge into the one and merge or hide itself in its bosom—that is the *laya* of Advaita; it may feel its oneness and yet, as part of the Many that is the One, enjoy the Divine that is the Visistadvaitic liberation; it may lay stress on its Many aspect and go on playing with Krishna in the eternal Brindavan, that is the Dvaita liberation. Or it may, even being liberated remain in the Lila or Manifestation, or descend into it as often as it likes. The Divine is not bound by human philosophies—it is free in its play and free in its essence." In this unit we want to study Advaitic vision of Aurobindo, with the *mahavakya*, *Tat-tvam asi*. We also want to focus on its contemporary relevance for us.

4.2 TAT-TVAM ASI AND AUROBINDO

The actual test of a system in Indian religious thought is its capacity to grant liberation (*moksa*) to its followers. This test is inescapable and it is the difference between Western philosophy and Eastern philosophy. True love of wisdom which is the meaning of philosophy is to be had not in pursuing what is said to be truth but the wisdom that is life in freedom. Thus whatever secures freedom for the self is philosophy and not merely an intellectual edifice erected by the logic of the finite mind or bondage and called a systematic presentation of Reality in terms of the intellect.

Once this is grasped it naturally follows that Vedanta is not a mere intellectual construction nor a dialectical display of system but a profound search for the final liberation which alone would present a Vision (*darsana*) the Ultimate Reality. Such a *darsana* would not only be a synoptic Vision but an organic whole which could be called a harmony rather than a synthesis of standpoints. The many-sided nature of reality is well known but its oneness is also what is

perceived in a measure and in a sense even in our ordinary life but to reason and still more to our intuitive apprehension (Varadachari 2010).

Sri Aurobindo may be said to follow the great leaders of Vedanta in so far as he has through his original approach of yogic *anubhava* and *adhyatmic* (introspective meditative) approach sought to arrive at his own synthesis of the knowledge in the Veda, Upanishads and Gita. The threefold texts for Vedanta are recognised to be the Upanishads, Vedanta Sutras and the Gita. The Advaita approach claims to be based on the *anubhava* of oneness with the Ultimate Reality, that comes to one who has strenuously contemplated on the basic sentences or propositions of the scripture such as (i) *Tat tvam asi* (That thou art); (ii) *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am Brahman); *So'ham Asmi* (He or That am I); (iii) *Sarvam khalvidam Brahma* (all this verily is Brahman), (iv) *Ekamevadvitiyam* (Only one without a second). It is obvious mere contemplation of Brahman passages such as the above will lead to realisation of the truths contained therein. What is necessary is the attainment of the Brahman through devotion and grace, as advocated by Sri Aurobindo.

4.3 BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF VEDANTA

Before we proceed to study the basic interpretation of *tat-tvam-asi* (That thou art), we shall see certain fundamental assumptions of all Vedantas as expounded by Pujya Dr. K.C. Varadachari (Varadachari 2010).

1. There is one and only One Supreme Being or Existence. This is absolutely distinct in a sense from all that are seen also to exist, which are not supreme, divisible, divided and having the nature of dependents on something else for their being and Nature.

1a. The Supreme principle which is One however sustains and supports and manifests and withdraws all the others.

1b. This Supreme Principle is Vastness as well as Minutest. It is thus the internal and external principle of all that is vast and minute.

1c. If we definitely assert that the Substance is that which is all and as such all are dependent on it, in the relation of attributes or modes or bodies, then there is Only One substance. All the rest are included in it.

2. That the Brahman can be known through a different method Of *Upasana* (devotional contemplation through knowledge) and not through mere reciting, reading of scriptures, or works or charity or alms-giving, or mere sacrifice.

2a. This is possible but one requires the grace of God, that arises through establishing mental peace (*prasada*) or silence that is spiritual.

2b. To say that to be an object of knowledge is to be also inconscient is not necessary. To emphasise subjective knowing of the object or intuitive knowing of it is not the same as the objectification of the subjective or mental states. Advaita of Mayavada accepts this axiom which is not axiomatic.

2c. Nor can it be said that to be a knower is the condition of all things at all times. This is the prerogative of the Supreme Brahman. Brahman is the Object of all souls for attainment of Him alone means liberation. Thus the Objectivity of God cannot be denied. Nor can it be said of the individual souls who have the dual capacity even like God of being objects of Grace of God and subjects of experience of Nature and God.

2d. The only question then is about the World or Nature or the Inconscient (*acit*). Its existence is said to be of the enjoyability or the enjoyable. It is in that sense objectivity. But it is never without the Godhead and as such it derives a subjectivity of a peculiar kind of being enjoyable to the Divine. This subjectivity cannot be derived from the acceptance of its being conscious or animated by consciousness or entelechies or monads or *jivas*. All the universe being considered to be thus a college of souls or an aggregate of them, at different levels of consciousness.

2e. Thus Nature seems to be accepted as a triple threaded force or energy of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* which undergoes the modifications for the embodiment of the souls in manifestation.

2f. It is possible that the threefoldness is a reflection or correspondence or degradation or grossening of the primal spiritual triplicity of *sat*, *cit* and *ananda*.

3. The transcendence of the Nature and mere isolated soul of souls is the goal of Being and the restoration of Reality to the soul as well as the restoration of the imbalance of Nature.

3a. This is by a Return or *nivritti* to God beyond or above manifestation.

3b. The Return is a withdrawal from the manifestation or the gross manifestation or even a subtle manifestation, for it is a return into God or Absolute Reality.

The renunciation of the relative Reality follows as a consequence or the renunciation of attachment to whatever is offered by relative realities or some of them for the sake of higher and freer enjoyment of others, or it is the enlightened divine way of enjoyment of manifestation as the body of God which has been offered as the field of enjoyment.

3c. The assertion of a world of enjoyment of unalloyed bliss beyond the world of karma such as the world of lower Nature is also the assertion of a transcendent way of enjoyment through God-knowledge rather than 'misery' (enjoyment with attached or selfish enjoyment of the soul).

Thus we find that the assumptions of the Vedanta point out to the necessity of a person for loving and attaining God or absolute Reality-status. This is the primary condition of all spiritual pursuit. All Vedantins accept that the moral and spiritual or yogic preparation is the sine qua non of spiritual ascent. The attainment of Brahman is a process of dedication or philosophy by which one grows into the being of Brahman. Thus the famous statement that one who knows Brahman attains Brahman. Being and Becoming become synonymous for the infinity of Being is such that it is a continuous becoming of oneself its Nature.

4.4 AUROBINDO'S ORGANIC CONCEPTION OF REALITY

Sri Aurobindo's organic conception through evolution gives concrete shape and meaning to the metaphysical form of the organic union presented by Sri Ramanuja. In this sense it is rich approach to the Divine by a direct plunge into the centre of our being or the heart. It is not

enough to realise that one is a part or ray or many of Brahman's Organism, but it is necessary also to grow into Him to be in a sense filled by Him and be born of Him. The Upanishads are not unaware of this birth of the soul of Brahman, of becoming filled with Brahman, or growing in the vastness of Brahman or moving in the Brahman according to the Supreme Law of Being (Varadachari 2010).

The logic of the mechanical or rectilinear logic is replaced by the dynamic logic of the Organic of growth, of ascent, of liberation and birth in Brahman, surpassing or transcending ignorance that is confined to the search for freedom in the dark interiors of it which are revealed by such concepts as realisation without ascent or transcendence which truly are possible without realising or ascending since all are *maya* or illusion or limitations on the unchanging and non-many or One.

Sri Aurobindo's exposition of the several *vidyas* show the absolute necessity for a dynamic conception of the Reality as a wonderful process of evolution which makes for the play of the Many in the One and of the One in the Many. The Lila is then not merely a mirage play or miracle play but a supreme Act of creative Delight which has been said to be the heart of Brahman. It is clear that Dvaita's supreme quality of differences together with the unifying doctrine of dependence lends itself to the play of the many in the One. The profound question would yet arise as to whether the many and the one are of equal status, in which case the many would not be the souls or atoms, but Brahman Himself.

Sri Aurobindo therefore considers that the Eternal One is also eternally many. This view is of course very basically different from the concept of many *antaryamins* (indwelling God) since there will be the identification of the souls which are in evolution and involution in different levels and planes with the inner spirit immortal in all on the one hand and on the other with the incarnating deity in the heart of the Devotees. This however explains the identity formula between the soul and God directly.

Sri Aurobindo's Vedanta, if we may so speak of his interpretation of the Upanishads metaphysically, realises the organic view as also the peculiar kind of *bhedabheda* (difference and non-difference) between the many and the one, not merely during the periods of creation and dissolution but eternally. There is a profound play of the two at all times, perhaps with the shift of poises when oneness is dominant and when manyness is dominant with perhaps an intermediating oneness-manniness realising itself in all manifestation and liberation. This is shown by Prof Varadachari (2010).

The basic question is whether this approach to the Upanishads will yield the results of a coherent advaitic philosophy. The answer to this question will be that it is only actual *abhyasa* (practise) or *upasana* (sitting near in contemplation) of this profound psychological insight that will show that this view is right. Dialectical thought and mere interpretation based on finite logistics will fail to satisfy much less explain the profound seer-wisdom of the Vedic Rishis and the mystics of the South. One has to enter into the practice or *upasana*, and psychological opening into the Ultimate Reality by intuition will follow, as in the case of Sri Aurobindo. Thus, the intuition of the unity of the Creative principle with the reality of the Oneness-Manniness is one of the most important discoveries of Sri Aurobindo. The further intuition that the above is the real amazing formula of the Vedic *Rishis* is of far-reaching importance. The formula that Sri Aurobindo has

given has wonderful efficacy in its capacity to explain almost all divergent facts of the different areas of human life and culture and growth (Varadachari 2010).

4.5 CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATIONS

Our Indian tradition has confronted the problem of the One and the Many through affirming neither the One (monism) nor the Many (pluralism) but suggesting the One-in-the-Many (*advaita*).

Advaita has a vertical dimension: the Many are integrated in the One Absolute as totally dependent so that compared to the One Real the many are not real in the same way, but only dependently real. Ramanuja, for instance, will speak of the world as the body of God. Just as the body cannot exist apart from the atman or spirit and would disintegrate into its various material components, the world is totally dependent on the Absolute Atman. The Hindu philosophical tradition has mostly insisted on this vertical dependence. Only some more recent Hindu leaders have realized that the various constituents of the body, while absolutely dependent on the spirit, are also relatively dependent on each other. Such mutual interdependence can be an experience of equality and community (Amaladoss 2003).

There is a traditional story about the 8th century philosopher Sankara. His affirmation of the reality of the One Absolute is such as almost to deny the reality of the many and consider them illusory. He is considered a monist by most commentators, though this is denied by others. As he was walking along a narrow ridge in a rice field he encounters a low caste servant coming along the same ridge in the other direction and demands the right of way. The low caste person shames him by challenging him to show the basis for a hierarchy between two equally dependent and illusory beings. We shall try to show in the following pages how the vision of advaita can offer us an alternate principle to promote community and peace in a pluralistic and divided world of today.

Advaita in Its Origins

Historians speak of an axial period in the religious history of the world around the 6th century before the common era. The Upanishads had their origin in India during that period. Starting with a pluralistic phenomenal world their searching reflection leads them to its roots in one reality. The process is both cosmic and personal (Amaladoss 2003).

In *Kena Upanishad*, the One and the many are affirmed: but one has to see them as related – the many dependent on the One, who is both immanent and transcendent. “He moves and he moves not. He is far, and he is near. He is within all, and he is outside all. Who sees all beings in his own Self, and his own Self in all beings, loses all fear. When a sage sees this great Unity and his Self has become all beings, what delusion and what sorrow can ever be near him?” Brahman, the inner reality of all things becomes the Self – the Atman.

This identification is explained in other Upanishads. In the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, the sage Varuna explains to his son Bhrigu Varuni the structure of his own being, leading him from the outer to the inner reality, from food to life, mind, reason and joy. “From joy all things have come, by joy they all live, and unto joy they all return.” In the *Katha Upanishad*, Yama, the god of death, tells Nachiketas: “Concealed in the heart of all beings is the Atman, the Spirit, the Self; smaller than the smallest atom, greater than the vast spaces. The man who surrenders his human will leaves

sorrows behind, and beholds the glory of the Atman by the grace of the Creator.” In the *Chandogya Upanishad*, Svetaketu, the seeker, is taught by his father. He is asked to put some salt into a glass of water. After the salt dissolves, the water is salty, but the salt cannot be recovered. The father then instructs the boy: “In the same way, O my son, you cannot see the Spirit. But in truth he is here. An invisible and subtle essence is the Spirit of the whole universe. That is Reality. That is Truth. Thou art That (*tatvamasi*). The *Mundaka Upanishad*, therefore, can sing: “He who knows all and sees all, and whose glory the universe shows, dwells as the Spirit of the divine city of Brahman in the region of the human heart... There the sun shines not, nor the moon, nor the stars; lightnings shine not there and much less earthly fire. From his light all these give light; and his radiance illumines all creation.” In the *Bhagavad Gita* a central text describes Arjuna’s vision of Krishna in his cosmic form. (Amaladoss 2003)

If the light of a thousand suns suddenly arose in the sky, that splendour might be compared to the radiance of the Supreme Spirit. And Arjuna saw in that radiance the whole universe in its variety, standing in a vast unity in the body of the God of gods (11:12-13). Krishna goes on to instruct Arjuna: “He who sees the Lord of all is ever the same in all that is, immortal in the field of mortality – he sees the truth. And when a man sees that the God in himself is the same God in all that is, he hurts not himself by hurting others. When a man sees that the infinity of various beings is abiding in the ONE, and is an evolution from the ONE, then he becomes one with Brahman” (13: 27-28, 30).

We have rapidly quoted a number of early texts. They speak a symbolic language and they need to be interpreted. They affirm a basic oneness of all being: Atman- Brahman. The One alone is really real, if one can say so. The many are dependent on the One and draw their reality and value from the One. Detaching ourselves from the many to attach ourselves to the One, we rediscover the many in the One. This advaitic vision, interpreted in various ways, has animated the Indian spiritual search to realize the Self. The world or Brahman is not cut off from the Atman or Self. Rather it acquires a new value. This value, however, has not always been appreciated in the course of history. While the vision was always there, the dominant *sadhana* or spiritual effort has been to renounce the many in the pursuit of the One. A distinction between the phenomenal (*vyavaharika*) and the transcendent (*paramartika*) worlds has also made it possible to accept an unequal and hierarchical social world characterized by caste-based feudal systems of social organization at the phenomenal level, while pursuing a holistic and integrative experience in the transcendent level. Even the Tantric schools which used the senses and the body more positively did not translate it in terms of social concern. The (Mahayana) Buddhists, denying the transcendental level, affirmed that *Nirvana* is *Samsara* and practised universal compassion. But such a social consciousness occurs in Hinduism only in the last (20th) century, influenced by great personalities like Vivekananda, Ramakrishna, Aurobindo, Tagore, Gandhi, etc.

The Mediaeval Period

Nammalvar, a Vaishnavite poet of the early 10th century of the common era (c. 880-930) sings: We here and that man, this man and that other in-between, and that woman, this, those things, those woman, and that other, whoever, those people, and these, and these others in-between, this thing, that thing, and this other in-between, whichever, all things dying, these things others in-between, good things, bad things, things that were, that will be, being all of them he stands there. Ramanuja (1017-1137), the philosopher-theologian, who systemizes the Vaishnava doctrine will picture this as “the world as the body of God” (Amaladoss 2003).

Social Interpretation of *Tat Tvam Asi* in Modern Times

In the modern times we can focus on three national leaders with social and political awareness who are inspired by the Aurobindo and the advaitic vision in relating, not only to God, but also to the others and nature. Sri Narayana Guru struggled for the equality of all humans in a positive way, by educating and developing the 'so-called' low caste people. He affirmed the advaitic vision as guaranteeing the equality of all beings, human and other.

“One of caste, one of religion and one in God is man;

Of one womb, of one form; difference therein none.

Within a species, is it not, that offspring truly breed?”

The society of man thus viewed, to a single caste belongs. (*Jati Mimamsa*)

“All are of one Self-fraternity.

Such being the dictum to avow,

In such a light how can we take life,

And devoid of least pity go on to eat?

The non-killing vow is great indeed,

And, greater still, non-eating to observe;

All in all. Should we not say, Oh men of righteousness,

Even to this amounts the essence of all religions?” (*Jiva Karunya Panchakam*)

“A compassionate man without any vested interest works both day and night for the welfare of others. On the other hand, a selfish man, desirous of his own good, toils day and night and comes again and again to his frustration. What is known as that person, or this person, when carefully considered, is the one undifferentiated form of the primeval Self. Whatever one does for the happiness of one's own self should also include the happiness of others. What is good for one and might cause disaster to another is opposed to the unity of the Self. Those who grievously hurt others will bring upon themselves the pain of consequential hell-fire.” (*Atmopadesa Sathakam*, 23-25). The advaitic vision leads Sri Narayana Guru to affirm, not only human equality, but also non-killing and non-eating of animals.

Rabindranath Tagore sees God in the toiling other.

“Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads!

Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark

corner of a temple with doors all shut?

Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground
and where the path-maker is breaking stones.

He is with them in sun and in shower,
and his garment is covered with dust

Put off thy holy mantle and even like him
come down on the dusty soil.

Come Out of thy meditations and leave aside
thy flowers and incense!

What harm is there if thy clothes become
tattered and stained?

Meet him and stand by him in toil and
in sweat of thy brow.”

Another poem “I know thee as my God and stand apart” is also insightful.

I know thee as my God and stand apart --
I do not know thee as my own and come closer.
I know thee as my father and bow before thy feet --
I do not grasp thy hand as my friend's.

I stand not where thou comest down and ownest thyself as mine,
there to clasp thee to my heart and take thee as my comrade.

Thou art the Brother amongst my brothers, but I heed them not,
I divide not my earnings with them, thus sharing my all with thee.

In pleasure and in pain I stand not by the side of men,
and thus stand by thee. I shrink to give up my life,
and thus do not plunge into the great waters of life.

Mahatma Gandhi states, “I am endeavouring to see God through service of humanity, for I know that God is neither in heaven, nor down below, but in every one. “

“To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist... He transcends speech and reason... He is a personal God to those who need His personal presence. He is embodied to those who need His touch. He is the purest essence. He simply is to those who have faith. He is all things to all men. He is in us and yet above and beyond us...”

“Non-violence is a power which can be wielded equally by all children, young men and women or grown up people, provided they have a living faith in the God of Love and have therefore equal love for all mankind. When non-violence is accepted as the law of life it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts.”

“*Ahimsa* is a comprehensive principle. We are helpless mortals caught in the conflagration of *himsa*. The saying that life lives on life has a deep meaning in it. Man cannot for a moment live without consciously or unconsciously committing outward *himsa*. The very fact of his living-eating, drinking and moving about necessarily involves some *himsa*, destruction of life, be it ever so minute. A votary of *ahimsa* therefore remains true to his faith if the spring of all his actions is compassion, if he shuns to the best of his ability the destruction of the tiniest creature, tries to save it, and thus incessantly strives to be free from the deadly coil of *himsa*. He will be constantly growing in self-restraint and compassion, but he can never become entirely free from outward *himsa*.”

Gandhi's *ahimsa* therefore applies to the whole of creation, not only to the humans. He also realizes how difficult it is in practice.

4.6 THE ADVAITA: AN ALTERNATE PERSPECTIVE

Going through these texts discussed above we can see a consistent vision of an Absolute that is transcendent, but also immanent. As immanent it can serve as the foundation for cosmic community. Creationism, wrongly understood, has led to the secularization of the cosmos. The world is perceived as material and mechanical. It becomes an object which the humans can dominate and exploit. Among the humans themselves individualism becomes the norm. Combined with unbridled consumerism, it leads to competition and conflict over scarce resources (Amaladoss 2003).

The root of such conflicts is the absence of relationship and community. The ideology of liberal capitalism idolizes the individual, who instrumentalizes the others and creation for his/her own benefit. It is in this context that the advaitic vision provides an alternative way of looking at others and the cosmos. While the advaita of Ramanuja, seeing the world as the body of God, underlines the mutual interdependence of all things and their dependent relationship on God, the advaita of Sankara is considered by many (foreign and Indian scholars) as monistic reducing the world to *maya* or illusion. But other scholars have pointed out that illusion itself is phenomenal and only points to the relative reality of the world when compared to the absolute reality of the Absolute. The Nirguna Brahman (without qualities) manifests itself in Saguna Brahman (with qualities). These are two dimensions of the same Brahman, the latter rooted in the former. The many devotional hymns of Sankara show how he treasured his relationship with the Absolute, even if it be one-sided.

Professor Amaladoss (2003) suggests that such an advaitic vision is an answer to the problem of the One and the Many. The monists affirm the One and deny the many as illusory. The pluralists, like the Jains in India, affirm the Many and deny the One. The advaita suggests a middle way seeing the One in the Many. The many are different manifestations of the One. The many are limited by the mediating elements. They are also different from each other. But all of them are dependent on the One in being. It is like an artist expressing himself/herself in a plurality of products, all seeking to express the same basic idea. It is the artist who gives meaning to these different products. But these products have an existence of their own, though they are dependent on the creative artist. This is only an analogy since the many do not stand on their own but are dependent on the One for their very being. This oneness in being generates a sense of community which is more basic than the diversity in manifestation. An awareness of this community can obviate competition and conflict at the level of the many.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is the Advaitic understanding of reality.

2) Give a detailed account of the relationship between Advaita philosophy and Aurobindo..

4.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have seen the significance of the profound advaitic insight “tat-tvam asi” and its significance for contemporary society. Aurobindo’s interpretation has the potentiality to offer resources necessary for the promotion of peace and harmony among the humans and other creations through their relationship to the Absolute which he has successfully achieved.

4.8 KEY WORDS

Darsana: Literally 'seeing' or 'view', the Sanskrit word which most closely approximates the Western term 'philosophy.' Also one of six orthodox philosophical systems or viewpoints on the nature of reality and the release from bondage to karma.'

Upasana: *Upasana* in Sanskrit literally means "Sitting near" but normally the term is used in Hinduism to denote a prescribed method for approaching a Deity or God or getting close to a deity/deities.

Tat-tvam asi: *Tat Tvam Asi*, a Sanskrit sentence, translating variously to "Thou art that," "That thou art," "You are that," or "That you are," is one of the Mahavakyas (Grand Pronouncements) in Vedantic Hinduism. It originally occurs in the Chandogya Upanishad. The meaning of this saying is that the Self - in its original, pure, primordial state - is wholly or partially identifiable or identical with the Ultimate Reality that is the ground and origin of all phenomena. The knowledge that this is so characterizes the experience of liberation or salvation that accompanies the *Unio Mystica*.

4.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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