CHAPTER - II

Mind and Consciousness: Sri Aurobindo

The first chapter of the thesis has presented Sri Aurobindo's view of Consciousness as distinguished from Materialistic and Idealistic theories. A critique of such theories was also undertaken from Sri Aurobindo's perspective.

Our discussion has brought us to the truth that Sri Aurobindo regards the Sachchidānanda or Pure Consciousness-Existence-Bliss as the ultimate reality. It is a truth which knows no distinction and is complete or without any division. It shines forth in the whole universe and illuminates the finite things which are manifested in the glory of the fundamental reality. The finite things are not illusory but they have an order of reality, which establishes their proper recognition in Sri Aurobindo's thought. Sri Aurobindo speaks of an ascending as well as a descending process and it is through them that Reality gets itself revealed. It is the journey of the Reality unto itself. In the first stage, Reality makes its descent into Matter from which it
raises itself to the next higher stage - the stage of life. Again this Reality rises to the higher stage than Life - the Mind, the highest of the three lower principles, which constitutes human existence. In the present context we want to confine our attention to Mind, i.e., we have to discuss the nature and limitations of Mind in comparison with the integrative power of Consciousness from Sri Aurobindo's point of view.

Our ordinary sense regards Mind as the first and supreme guide of human life. Sri Aurobindo gives us a novel interpretation of Mind without denying its importance. In his language, "Mind is not a faculty of knowledge, nor an instrument of omniscience; it is a faculty for the seeking of knowledge."¹ Mind in its essence is consciousness though it cuts, limits, separates the forms of things from the indivisible whole. It considers separate integer of the parts without accepting these parts as aspects of a whole. That is to say, it is obliged to deal with parts as things in themselves, even if it knows that they are not things in themselves. Mind controls the different activities - perception, sensation or the dealings of thought which it creates. So the action of Mind and enjoyment deal with a whole which is the part of a greater whole but the subordinate wholes.

¹ Sri Aurobindo, _The Life Divine_, p. 118.
are conceived or treated by Mind as whole for particular purposes. This Mind which cuts, divides, multiplies, adds can never go beyond these limitations and when it tries to go beyond the limitations and tries to attain a real whole it becomes puzzled, i.e., '.... it falls from its own firm ground into the ocean of the intangible, into the abysms of the infinite where it can neither perceive, conceive, sense nor deal with its subject for creation and enjoyment.'

The moment it tries to possess or to enjoy the Infinite, its instinctive tendency - i.e., the tendency of separation, division comes in and Mind finds itself handling with forms, images, etc. Mind can be possessed by the Infinite but can never possess the Infinite. The possession of the Infinite is impossible except the inert submission of the Mind to the '.... descending message of the Truth-Conscious Reality.'

The essential limitation is the very nature and action of Mind. Excluding the true nature of infinite, the Mind translates or interprets the infinity in terms of the finite and divides, separates everything. Naturally this Mind is considered as the nodus of the great Ignorance. On the basis of this nature of the Mind, it is mistakenly considered that Mind is the cause of the universe and of the divine.

2. Ibid., pp. 162-63.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 163.
Māyā, although this divine Māyā comprehends both knowledge as well as Ignorance, Viḍyā and Avidyā. Regarding the finite, Sri Aurobindo says, "The finite is only an appearance of the infinite, a result of its action, a play of its conception and cannot exist except by it."⁵ and there is an original consciousness which is aware of both finite and Infinite and relation to each other. In Consciousness we have no ignorance and finite is not considered as an independent reality separated from Consciousness. Still there is a tendency of delimitation without which creation in the universe is impossible. This is a process by which "the ever dividing and reuniting consciousness of Mind, the ever divergent and convergent action of Life and the infinitely divided and self-aggregating substance of Matter come, all by one principle and original act, into phenomenal being."⁶ But it is true that there is a divine Mind which is aware of what He does, conscious of the Infinite in the finite. But this Mind is subordinate to the Supermind and operates through the Truth-Consciousness.

We know that this universe is the creation of Prajñāna, witness of its own workings and enjoys its own creation. This Prajñāna makes division between Purusha and Prakriti. The former creates by his vision, knows and sees and Prakriti

⁵. Ibid.
⁶. Ibid., p. 164.
the Force-Soul is the vision, creation and knowledge of Purusha. Both Prakriti and Purusha are One Being, Existence and all the forms created by Purusha are placed by Him as knowledge before Himself. This Purusha is present in every form as well as in his totality by pervading the conscious extension of being and in this way Purusha possesses a close relation of each soul-form of Himself with other soul forms.

Naturally, the elements of division appear through three steps. Firstly, the Infinity of the one extended itself in conceptual Time and Space. Secondly, the Omnipresence of Infinite translates itself into multiplicity of conscious-souls, what is known as many Purushas of Sāmkhya. Thirdly, ".... the multiplicity of soul-forms has translated itself into a divided habitation of the extended unity." 7 These multiple Purushas do not have separate worlds of their own for they do not possess a separate Prakriti; on the other hand, they enjoy the same Prakriti. This exhibits that there is One, over the multiple forms of creation, having relation among different forms of creations. So the divine soul is aware of separate beings and phenomena of being but never forfeits its unity. It considers Mind as a subordinate action of the infinite knowledge.

Thus we have a creature mind or limiting mind opposed to the divine mind that sees the truth. Here Avidyā or

7. Ibid., p.165.
self-ignoring faculty separates the action of Mind and the action of Supermind. This Supermind governs the activities of Mind from behind the veil. The Mind neither accepts the universal nor both universal and particular as phenomena of the Infinite but sees only the particular. Mind cuts up being into parts until it dissolves into nothingness, and has no sense of a true infinity. But ultimately behind this dividing action there is supramental knowledge which knows that the parts, atoms, are the manifestation of One Consciousness. So when the Mind dissolves into an infinite nothingness, or when it proceeds by the way of division or the way of infinite enlargement, it actually arrives at the eternal being or Infinite existence. Although this division is only a subordinate appearance of the absolute and has no reality yet bears some importance because division is necessary for spatial and temporal play. We can never get the real either by the process of division into infinitesimal atom or by the aggregate of the world and systems.

Sri Aurobindo thinks that Avidyā is responsible for the fall of Mind from Supermind. It proceeds to consider everything from its own standpoint for which it identifies soul with temporal and spatial action which is the part of the being. It fails to realise the truth that all minds are one Mind, all lives are one Life, all body and form are one substance of Force. This is the truth which Mind has to rediscover.
We see, '... ignorance is farther deepened for man by his self-identification with the body' and we think that Mind is determined by body, as the former is always preoccupied and developed with the body. For this reason the Mind is not aware of its pure workings. But such mentality or Mind is, only our surface mind, not whole being.

Behind this Mind there is another mind that realises itself more than the body. Our first realisation of soul, or inner being, Purusha is only possible when we are conscious of the dynamic, deeper and larger action of our surface mind. But the 'Life-mind', which is able to make itself free from the error of body, is not ultimately free from the error of Mind. This subconscious mind is absorbed or mixed and limited by life, so it has the illusion of life, as the physical instrumental mind has the illusion of the body. In this mind, we are not also aware of the presence of Truth-Consciousness, our mind which is the meeting-place of Mind and the Super-mind remains in dark.

Besides these dynamic and vital minds, there is reflective mentality - the source of the pure thinker in us. It enjoys superior position for it sees the world in terms of mind, not in terms of body and life and knows mentality in itself. This mind is confused with the pure spirit. But still

8. Ibid., p.168.
this pure mentality is not free from the fundamental error of Mind, for it strives to arrive at its reality through its mental self accepting it as the witness and the main point of the universe. So the veil between Mind and Supermind or mental and supramental is still created by Avidyā and it has only the image of Truth-Consciousness, not the Truth.

From this we must not conclude that Mind is an unimportant factor in human life. It is true that there is a chance or possibility of Mind to realise the truth of things. This is possible when the veil between mental and supramental is rent and divided Mind is overpowered and silent. In this situation we have a luminous mentality and a realisation of Real-Idea. We can perceive the real world, ourselves in others and others in ourselves. The individual standpoint is absent in this stage, the source of error and limitations.

The Mind has to regard multiple objects of the world as the manifestation of One. It has to establish the diversity and contact in the eternal unity, and it has to enable the One to behave as if He were an individual dealing with other individuals but always in His own unity, and this is what the world really is. ¹⁰ So we see operations of Mind make appearance of limited objects and what we call ¹⁰. Ibid., p. 171.
Avidyā is unable to create a new object but only misinterprets Truth, i.e., Ignorance is the Mind—gives false interpretation denying the Supreme Truth.

All ignorance and limitations arise due to fall of the Mind from the self-knowledge for which the human being conceives himself as the centre of the universe and everything as independent, instead of as a form of One. So there arises limitation of knowledge, limitation of Consciousness and limitation of self-enjoyment, etc. Thus self-ignorance is the root cause of the perversity of our existence, and self-ignorance ultimately takes the form of egoism. The above discussion makes it clear that all our ignorance and perversity are only misinterpretations of Truth. But these misrepresentations are not absolutely false but arise due to the consideration of things in division by the Mind, instead of viewing itself and its division as the phenomenon of the play of the truth of Sachchidananda. This analysis of the limited power of Mind and integrative power of Supermind enables us to discuss empirical consciousness and transcendental consciousness which will be discussed in the next chapter.