CONCLUSION

In the foregoing five chapters an attempt has been made to bring out the integral nature of Sri Aurobindo’s life and thought. And, the specific objective of this thesis was to expose the inclusiveness of metaphysics and mysticism in his integral advaitism. In accordance with this objective, the search was limited in its successive stages in varied chapters to the area of epistemology, and within that wide field, to the question of method. In the course of the inquiry, the thesis has delineated the essential elements of Sri Aurobindo’s epistemology. Sri Aurobindo explored the possibility of a new epistemological method to perceive, conceive, and express the integral unity of physics, metaphysics and mystical levels of experience in human context. Such an attempt is a unique one in the history of Indian as well as Western epistemological enterprises. Thus, he could try to reset the foundations of Indian philosophical traditions by bridging the gulf between the philosophico-religious traditions of the East and the West, and by assimilating the relevant aspects from the vedântic, non-vedântic and the Western sources of philosophy and religion. The synoptic vision behind such fundamental philosophical reconstruction was further materialized in his attempts to set down the details of a distinct methodology for philosophizing from an Indian perspective. Relying on the contents of his own spiritual experiences, which were subsequently found - quite subjectively - as confirmed by the Vedas.

He redefined the epistemic trio in accordance with his integral approach. Whether his definition of each of the epistemic trio is in conformity with rational thinking is a question to be debated critically. But he has redirected the entire epistemological enterprise towards its right and complete object, which indeed is a good news to all conscious knowers/experience of reality in its integrity. And, this thesis stands fulfilled in being a herald of an integral epistemology proposed by Sri Aurobindo. His newly developed integral epistemology is a sure spring-board for all those who are consciously and seriously working to integrate every aspect of reality into their evolving consciousness/being. However, to guard against a simplistic subscription and consequent disillusionment, the difficulties that Sri Aurobindo seems to have experienced in formulating an objective methodology for the epistemological treatment of his mystically intuited knowledge/experience are also to be noted and
exposed. Therefore, a sympathetic as well as a critical reading of the major finding of each chapter is in order.

Sri Aurobindo’s life has an integral rational structure comprising, as the researcher has termed them in the first chapter, experiential, expressional and experimental aspects that converge to inner experiences which are his sources of knowledge. He uses literary creations as the channels of communication and the personal life and directly guided groups of disciples as his laboratory of experiments with truth. His intellectual background is a wide and comprehensive interdisciplinary matrix constituted by the elements from the East and the West.

Having ordained inner experience as the most reliable source of knowledge Sri Aurobindo advocates, as the researcher basing himself on the finding of the first chapter has tried to bring out in the fifth chapter, the ultimacy of mystical knowing in the advaitic philosophical tradition. In doing so he is in fact introducing a general method of inquiry that is applicable to all domains within the scope of actual and potential human consciousness. He further specifies this method of inquiry as a case of becoming progressively meritorious in moral and spiritual life. He seems to suggest that the genuine search for knowledge is an aspect of being good and holy. Ethics is thus not a resultant-theory in his scheme of thought, but the essential precondition of all epistemic processes of theorizing. However, precisely this idea that method in cognitive life is a case of being good and holy does create an initial but acute intellectual difficulty in understanding Sri Aurobindo’s integral philosophy. And, hence it is important at this juncture to explore briefly the exact source of this difficulty and bring out the factors that add its acuteness.

Sri Aurobindo conceives mystical knowing/experiencing as the highest as well as the ultimate pramāṇa. His advocacy of mystical approach in epistemology obviously presupposes the inestimable worth of mysticism. But, rationally, taking recourse to certain mystical source in an epistemic process cannot be justified unless a reasonable response is given to two crucial questions: one, whether the truth of personal mystical knowledge/experience can be tested by mystics as well as non-mystics? two, whether the value of mystical knowledge/experience in extending one’s self-knowledge, world-knowledge, etc., can be measured accurately? For,
veridicality and value are two essential aspects of any reliable knowledge/experience. Therefore, an appreciation of the worth of a mystical pursuit in epistemology must first of all consider the intrinsic truth and the pragmatic value of mystical knowledge/experience.

Mystical knowledge/experience that is relevant and reliable in epistemological discussions is that knowledge/experience which is taken by the mystical knower/experiencer to be cognitive. Non-cognitive information, however meaningful it may be, is not epistemologically relevant. Justification of all cognitive statements is an essential function of any sound epistemological theory. Here, the question is about the justification of Sri Aurobindo's mystically received knowledge/experience expressed in clear cognitive statements about the supaphysical realities; how does he bring out the veridicality of his mystical knowledge/experience and how can a non-mystic determine its value?

Sri Aurobindo regards mystical knowledge/experience as objectively veridical. He does not want the mystical claims to be a priori accepted or rejected. Along with all other knowledge-claims they too must be subjected to understanding, discrimination and verification. But, in so doing with the mystical claims, different ways of understanding, specific standards of discrimination and a unique method of verification have to be employed, because, the supraphysical objectivities, according to Sri Aurobindo, cannot be seized and verified in the way the physical objectivities are understood and established: "... the supraphysical realities by their very nature cannot be referred to the judgment of the physical or sense mind, ... they can only be verified by other senses and by a method of scrutiny and affirmation which is applicable to their own reality, their own nature."

Thus, a non-mystic through his/her rational intellect and its methods of inquiry cannot seize the significance of mystical claims. In order to bring out the veridicality of mystical knowledge/experience, he/she needs to develop some spiritual sense and supraphysical methods of inquiry. This indeed creates certain serious difficulty for the non-mystic inquirers studying mystical claims in general. The difficulty becomes all the more acute when one ventures to verify the veridicality of Sri Aurobindo's mystical claims, because his brand of mysticism has its own unique features that are
very much decisive in framing his claims. His mysticism is theistic and he regards the cognitive powers of his mystical life as derivative from the power of the Divine. Therefore, a clear understanding of the basic elements of his theistic philosophy of reality and knowledge is an imperatively essential prerequisite of a balanced valuation of the epistemological significance of his mystical claims. Indeed, the third and the fourth chapters of the thesis are devoted to an exclusive differential exposition of Sri Aurobindo’s ontological and epistemological reflections. And, because these reflections are in fact Sri Aurobindo’s claims about the evolution of consciousness, the second chapter that reviews his contributions in updating the Indian concept of consciousness becomes a relevant effort.

The introductory treatment of Sri Aurobindo’s theory of consciousness is carried out, in the second chapter, as preceded by an elaborate discussion on the Buddhist and the Upaniṣadīc conception of consciousness, and as followed by an overview of Sri Aurobindo’s points of departure in this regard from the Vedāntic, non-Vedāntic and scientific conceptions. And, this treatment puts forward four important ways in which Sri Aurobindo conceives consciousness: (a) consciousness, in terms of which everything can be understood has got a multi-level hierarchical manifestation ranging from Superconscience to Inconscience, (b) consciousness which is the second term of the Upaniṣadīc trinity of Saccidānanda, is not just the self-conscience of Being, but its power aspect too, (c) consciousness is involved in all parts of being and it is evolving from the lowest plane of Inconscience to the highest plane of Superconscience, (d) consciousness formulates itself as the epistemic trio of the knower, the known and the knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo does not restrict consciousness to human mind. He gives elaborate accounts of varied levels of consciousness both below and above the mind. Although his elaboration of the concept of consciousness may be regarded as one of his original contributions to the consciousness studies, it often remains unnoticed and less subscribed due to lack of conceptual clarity and terminological precision. Therefore, motivated researches pursue in view of restating philosophically the spiritual knowledge of Sri Aurobindo alone can help this handicap. However, as far as his system of thought is concerned, his conception of consciousness is a fitting, sure and sufficient basis for his evolutionary ontology and integral epistemology.
Sri Aurobindo’s ontological theory is absolutist and evolutionary at the same time. Consciousness is the ultimate ontic ground which determines all particular existents and in which every individual existent realizes its complete stature and nature. There is no single being that cannot be named after some plane of consciousness. God, humans, animals, plants, mind, matter and even waste and evil are all different forms of consciousness. Thus, after identifying the fundamentals of ontogeny according to Sri Aurobindo, the thesis has ventured further in the third chapter to bring out the eight principles of ontic determination, namely, Existence, Consciousness-Force, Bliss, Supermind, Psyche, Mind, Life and Matter, and the details of the process of ontic determination. The concept of different planes of consciousness as existing as different parts of being in and through an evolutionary process of self-formation of the Infinite Consciousness is another highlight of Sri Aurobindo’s ontology.

The distinctiveness of Sri Aurobindo’s advaitism owes much to his metaphysical standpoints. Unlike Śankara who gives no place for the evolution of the spirit in his advaitism, Sri Aurobindo considers spiritual evolution that is ontologically motivated by a prior involution of the spirit as a real fact. He introduces some categories such as Overmind and Supermind, and leaves a few levels of consciousness unnamed. However, the proposed ontological project of progressive divinization of matter, life and mind, though Sri Aurobindo might have realized in his individual self, seems still as an optimistic vision than as a vindicated theory.

Being the ultimate ontic fundament on the one hand, and the self-aware plane in the human level of its emergence on the other hand, consciousness remains as the vantage point for humans as knowers/experiencers to look at the whole of reality. Thus, having subscribed to an evolutionary ontology of consciousness, Sri Aurobindo is logically constrained to maintain an integral approach to epistemology. The fourth chapter brings out his epistemological theory, which has two defining peculiarities, one, that it is integral and two, that it is a theory of consciousness. Against the partial views held by the subjectivist and materialist theories of knowledge, Sri Aurobindo establishes his integral vision of reality and knowledge. He founds his integral theory of knowledge on the logic of the Infinite and on the principle of conversion of
consciousness. The logic of the Infinite is powered by a higher and plastic reason while the conversion of consciousness is realized by a reversal of outer consciousness through yogic sadhana. Where a higher logic is employed and consciousness got converted, integral knowledge avails itself of being received by any competent knower. Thus, the attainment of integral knowledge has a method. Sri Aurobindo has short-listed the methods of knowledge into four: Knowing by Identity, Knowing by Intimate Direct Contact, Knowing by Direct Separative Contact, and Knowing by Indirect Separative Contact. These methods can be employed in surface cognition as well as in subliminal cognition. Integral knowledge of an object is gained when one employs the apt method of knowledge in a subliminal cognitive process. For instance, integral knowledge regarding an external object is gained when the knower exercises subliminal cognition by identity in indirect separative contact.

However, the integral epistemological project proposed by Sri Aurobindo will be materialized if only humans are capable of employing subliminal cognition by identity in all their knowing processes. According to him, humans have this capacity to know/experience by identity; they have it as an expanded power of the self-knowing Knowledge of the Divine Consciousness that has already involved and is now evolving through the inner planes of their consciousness. Presuming such an inner power he writes, “it is of supreme importance for the human spirit to be free to sound the depths of inner subliminal reality, of spiritual and of what is still superconscient reality,” because, in that way alone humans can have “a release into a complete consciousness.”6 Thus, he urges all knowers/experiencers to develop their inner life, - for “all men can have a spiritual experience and can follow it out and verify it in themselves”7- which he deems essential for fulfilling all the cognitional potentialities of individual human nature.

But, however, Sri Aurobindo offers no sufficient evidential support that would motivate an individual to embrace a mystical path in his/her cognitive life.8 And the nature of mystical knowledge/experience is such that a time-bound examination of its veridicality and value by an uninvolved detached inquirer is almost impossible.9 Thus, rationally speaking, the inquirer is brought into a difficult situation. However, although the difficulty uncovered here is intellectually acute, it is negligibly insignificant from an existential perspective. For, as Sri Aurobindo views it, “the
inevitable and ultimate preoccupation' of humans that manifests itself as the constant aspiration for pure truth can be attained only by a 'revolutionary individual effort' to know/experience spiritually.10 Humans as mental beings have only imperfect knowledge, because mind is not the highest power of consciousness. Spirit is the highest manifestation of Infinite Consciousness. In humans it manifests its cognitive powers through the self-illuminating light of the supramental knowledge. Therefore, if humans, as knowers/experiencers, want to know perfectly they need to facilitate the manifestation of the spiritual being in them. Thus, mystical knowing presupposes a distinct course of spiritual action.

Integral theory of knowledge thus employs a specific method in its enterprises. And, the thesis in its last chapter labours to bring out the specificity of this method. The Upaniṣadic and the Buddhist traditions in the Indian thought, although they vary in their conceptions of reality, do exhibit certain parallelism in their philosophical methods. An affirmation of a spiritual orientation, the fabrication of a theory of illusion, and the employment of certain dialectical reasoning are the three elements that betray the methodological parallelism that exists between the Upaniṣadic and the Buddhist traditions. However, the modern Indian thinkers try to recover and systematize the ancient most methods of knowledge and communication used in the Vedas. Engaging in such an attempt, Sri Aurobindo retains the spiritual orientation that characterizes the classical Indian thought, but replaces the theory of illusion with the theory of integration and the method of negation with a method of affirmation.

To seize the significance of the methodological innovation brought in by Sri Aurobindo, it is important to revisit the problem of method in human cognitive life in general and in advaitism in particular. The researcher basing himself on a critical reading of Ken Wilber identifies physics-metaphysics-mysticism as those basic modes of knowing that constitute the cognitional being of humans. However, the thesis has tried to expose just one representative aspect of this integral structure of cognitional operations; it brings out the inclusiveness of metaphysics and mysticism in Sri Aurobindo’s epistemic procedures.

Within the vast field of human cognitive life, the question of method in Vedāntic philosophy is very pertinent, because Sri Aurobindo’s methodological
innovation has notable bearings on the method in Vedānta. Commitment to the testimony of sacred scriptures and false attribution followed by negation are the two aspects of the method employed in Vedāntic philosophy. Sri Aurobindo regards the method of classical Vedānta as incomplete, and develops on his part an integral method. In his integral method, mystical knowing, or subliminal cognition by identity, is the ultimate source of knowledge. It means that an intuitive seeing and elements leading to that are presupposed and employed in every act of knowing. And, every act of knowing that borrows ultimately from a spiritual or mystical experience will inevitably give rise to a metaphysics that explains and justifies the core-experience. Metaphysics is thus the skin of mysticism. The Indian theory of epistemic justification, as Sri Aurobindo conceives it, for instance, integrates metaphysics and mysticism in its method of knowing through consciousness. In the five-stage process of epistemic justification, as it was presented in the last chapter, each higher stage includes the lower ones; and thus in the fifth stage where the certain knowledge is arrived at, the ascertainment takes place by means of an ‘inspired discrimination’ that includes the supramental light of purified intellect and metaphysical discriminations.

The ultimacy of mystical knowing, the medial status of metaphysics, and the mutual inclusiveness of metaphysics and mysticism are thus the three salient characteristics of the method employed by Sri Aurobindo in his integral advaitism. Among the three the last one was the main focus of attention in this thesis. And, this aspect of Sri Aurobindo’s method was exposed, firstly, in the rational structure of his life that was conceived in the first chapter as constituted of mystical experiences, metaphysical expressions and life-experiments; secondly, in his conception of consciousness and in the related theories of reality and knowledge in the next three chapters where consciousness, which is seized by humans as the substance of their spiritual experience, was presented as the ultimate ground of all beings and the ultimate means of knowing; and finally, in the last chapter where the dynamic structure of human cognitive enterprise was conceived as comprising the physical, metaphysical and mystical processes of knowing/experiencing.

To sum up, the advaitism of Sri Aurobindo is a comprehensive conceptual framework wherein he suggests powerfully and justifies doxastically the possibility of mystical knowledge/experience in human cognitive life. The arguable weakness of
the doxastic justification of the mystical knowledge/experience is no serious reason to
devalue Sri Aurobindo’s contribution brought out in this thesis. For, the specific
objective of the present study was not Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy proper, but the
method in his philosophy. He wrote philosophy little, but on method. And in the
course of his search for the most genuine and the truly integral method of
knowing/experiencing, metaphysics is given a medial status in the basic
methodological alliance, and mysticism is given primacy and ultimacy. The exact
place and the distinct methodical function of physical knowledge/experience were not
inquired into in the thesis, for the study was solely conceptual, and not empirical.

Now, from the perspective of the question of method in philosophy, the
discovery of the mystical depths of Sri Aurobindo’s own (as well as all
knowers’/experiencers’) cognitional being, the medial position of metaphysics in
epistemological enterprises and the mutual inclusiveness of the basic methods of
knowing/experiencing in subliminal cognition are of great significance. Although in
the intellectual history, when viewed from the perspective of systematic philosophy,
Sri Aurobindo’s attempts to offer a coherent and comprehensive theory of everything
is not completely unobjectionable, to any and every conscious human
knower/experiencer engaged in an evolutionary general progression his spiritual
experiments and findings are invaluable guidelines indeed.
Notes

1 The researcher is influenced in this critical reading by STEPHEN H. PHILLIPS, Aurobindo’s Philosophy of Brahman, 6-53.
2 The Life Divine II, SABCL, 19, 647-50.
4 BINA GUPTA, Con Consciousness, 147-8 states that “Aurobindo’s original contribution ... lies in ... developing in great detail a theory of the different levels of consciousness: consciousness as implicit in matter (perhaps as manifested as the free play of elementary particles); consciousness as again escaping from the state of dormancy in matter into a state of relative freedom in animal sensitivity, which may be called vital consciousness (manifested in the energy of a living being towards self-maintenance, self-motion, self-reproduction, and towards appropriating the energy of external nature towards its own growth); and mental consciousness as expressed in mental thinking dominated by difference, conceptual construction, and above all by a subject-object dualism. Aurobindo does not stop with this, but goes even further, invoking the idea of several levels of consciousness higher than the mental, both from the resources of the ancient scriptures - the Vedas and the Upanisads - as well as from his own mystic experiences and those of others.”
5 E. I. WARRIER, Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga and Sankara’s Advaita - A Comparative Study (Allahabad: Vohra Publishers & Distributors, 1990) 82-118 compares the metaphysical doctrines of these two thinkers.
6 The Life Divine II, SABCL, 19, 651.
7 The Life Divine II, SABCL, 19, 650.
8 Indeed he has enumerated a lot of uncertain possibilities related to the increased powers of consciousness. See, The Life Divine II, SABCL, 19, 1043-50.
9 Mystics may have their own criteria to test for themselves the veridicality. For instance conformity with the scripture may be one such criterion accepted by them. But, a non-mystic may not accept the criteria set by the mystics. Non-mystics often rely on pragmatic tests. But, there are problems in determining the nature of a particular pragmatic test and in specifying the way it can be carried out. For instance, STEPHEN H. PHILLIPS, Aurobindo’s Philosophy of Brahman, 168-176 brings out the problem of temporal indeterminacy in deciding the pragmatic value of Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual predictions.
10 The Life Divine I, SABCL, 18, 1.
11 Doxastic means concerning one’s personal belief. Accordingly, doxastic justification would mean experienter’s own justification without reference to the logical coherence of the constituent propositions.