CHAPTER 01
THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF SRI AUROBINDO
FOREGROUND AND BACKGROUND

1.1 General Introduction

This thesis tries to bring out the epistemological basis of Sri Aurobindo’s integral philosophy. Sri Aurobindo must have had some definite method of knowing, a distinct epistemology, because unless one has an effective method of knowing, one cannot ascertain the nature of reality. Sri Aurobindo’s advaitism is a comprehensive metaphysical vision that includes all parts and aspects of existence in its ontological scheme. For instance, he finds the meaning and destiny of human existence in its inherent capacity, to cite a few cases, to know the infinite, to establish infinite freedom, and to realize immortal life. In so viewing human existence, Sri Aurobindo is in fact saying that humans are transitional beings and they do have a divine destiny provided they allow their individual mental consciousness to get converted into cosmic and supramental dimensions. That is, he spells out clearly what the ultimate nature of human existence is - the ontological aspect -, and what humans should do to realize their real nature - the ethical aspect. This and similar passages that contain certain ontological and/or ethical theorizing do betray the sure presence of distinct epistemological roots of his system.

However, the prior researches in Sri Aurobindo’s thought, as far as the present researcher knows, do not seem to have included a serious and exclusive study of his epistemology. Indeed a couple of articles have appeared in this connection, yet the exact epistemic process of integration of all the cognitive resources available to humans as knowers/experencers, on which in fact Sri Aurobindo’s synoptic and interconnected view of the nature of reality and life bases itself, has seldom been examined and exposed. This thesis aims to throw light on the hitherto unexplored aspects of integral epistemology. And, within the vast epistemological framework of integral advaitism, the present study focuses on its major cognitive sources. And, the main contention of the thesis is that in the advaitism of Sri Aurobindo there is an inclusiveness of metaphysics and mysticism. Here, “metaphysics” and “mysticism” are meant to indicate respectively
the rational and super-rational means of knowledge.\(^5\) And, thanks to the exclusive focus on the sources of knowledge, the work becomes inevitably a methodological inquiry.\(^6\)

1.2 Specific Introduction

At the outset, this chapter may seem to give a rationalized biographical introduction to the person and philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, but its actual purpose is to highlight the process of integration and the aspect of inclusiveness – which in fact is the seminal element in the whole thesis – in his life and thoughts. The primary source material of this exposition is Sri Aurobindo’s own autobiographical notes and other writings. Still, a few academically-researched introductions to his life and philosophy shall also be used as guiding notes. What is intended in this chapter is not an overview of the dated life-events and important teachings of Sri Aurobindo, but a review of his life and legacy from the perspective of spiritual philosophy.\(^7\)

A person is much more than the perceptible outer structure of his/her life. Specially, in the case of mystics and seers, their biographical landscapes are largely extended to the inside world imperceptible to a second person. Commenting on a life-sketch that was sent to him, Sri Aurobindo wrote to the sender; “...neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all of my life, it has not been on the surface for men to see.”\(^8\) Later this idea that ‘what he was and what he did within was that gave any value to his outer life’ is found functioning as guiding principle for him to view the outward life of a spiritual man as a living representation of the workings of ‘the Divine’ inside.\(^9\) If such is the case, and if what Sri Aurobindo has stated about the life of spiritual men in general is applicable to himself, his life must be an integral whole constituted by the work of the Divine and two of its successive manifestations, namely the inner life which is the representation of the Divine movement, and the external life which is the symbolization of the inner realizations. Consequently, in a serious attempt to study the life and thought of Sri Aurobindo, the commonplace historico-biographical approach becomes irrelevant.

A perspective reading that is intended in the present work needs a specially furnished logical framework wherein the varied aspects of the subject of inquiry could be placed. Therefore, the primary task here is to discover a rational structure of Sri
Aurobindo’s life, and secondly to set the events and achievements of his life in that pattern, and, finally, to highlight the ideological framework and the background of his life and thought. Accordingly the following part of this chapter, entitled, foreground, will make an attempt to reorganize all the philosophically relevant aspects of Sri Aurobindo’s life in and around a rational structure. The section that comes next, namely, background, is intended to expose the overarching ideology behind his life and works as well as his background knowledge.

1.3 Foreground

For want of sufficient data, sharp heuristic tools, and generally accepted hermeneutic framework, students of spirituality encounter a number of difficulties. Here, in the case of the (spiritual) life of Sri Aurobindo, the difficulties encountered in the course of its study are engendered by an ontological dispute and an epistemological problem. The ontological dispute is regarding the very existence of the spirit, which in fact is the basic assumption of spiritual experience, and systematic studies on the same. But, one could provisionally dismiss this dispute for the single reason that spirit is an experiential reality. Many a religious and spiritual philosophies base themselves on the belief in and the experience of the presence and working of the spirit, human or divine. More than being a mere confessional claim, the existence of spirit has been a very strong postulate in the philosophical studies of the origin and development of religion.

The real problem in the field of philosophical researches into spiritual experiences is epistemological, and, within the vast domain of epistemology, it is precisely in regard to meaning and interpretation. There is hardly any philosophically warranted interpretative guideline to comment on the spiritual experience of a person. Peter Heehs describes this problem as hermeneutical. He says, “It is one thing to scrutinize descriptions of spiritual experiences, quite another to interpret them. Unlike such disciplines as history and literary criticism, the study of spirituality has no generally accepted hermeneutic framework. Spiritual experiences are not available on demand, nor do they lend themselves well to intellectual systematizing.” Peter Heehs’ approach to the study of Sri Aurobindo’s life is historico-biographical, and yet he comes across a hermeneutical problem!
However, among the two observations that Heehs made in this context, the second one that ‘spiritual experiences do not lend themselves well to intellectual systematizing’ is objectionable. Intellectual systematization of inner experiences is not an impossible project altogether, because Sri Aurobindo himself, for instance, has translated his mystical experiences into metaphysical language that took the form of prose and poetry. To engage in such endeavours one may have to choose or develop, as Sri Aurobindo did in his venture, more nuanced concepts, widely inclusive language and sufficiently comprehensive systems. What is very significant and suggestive in the quote from Heehs is his first observation that ‘spirituality has no generally accepted hermeneutic framework’. The search in this section for the rational structure of life in general and as it is manifested in the life of Sri Aurobindo is an indirect response to this remark. From such basic rational structure, interpretative guidelines could be deduced and a specific hermeneutic framework could eventually be set up.

1.3.1 The Rational Structure of Sri Aurobindo's Life

Since Sri Aurobindo was a prolific writer and a speculative metaphysician, the right door through which one can make an entry to his life would be the cognitive aspect of his being. Accordingly, the search for an overall rational structure of the life of Sri Aurobindo and that of the human life in general shall be pursued epistemologically.

If existence is understood as the state of being real and the world as the vast scene of existence, then human existence in the world becomes the human way of being real in the world. The specificity of the human way of being in the world could be initially understood as characterized by its aspect of knowing, which is an experience that often originates and/or always culminates within humans and by which they discern their reality as knowing beings. Knowing is an essential function of humans’ being. Any change in the being of the knower will always be followed by a corresponding change in the nature and amount of the knowledge possessed. The changes in the physical, intellectual and spiritual being, as knowers, will affect the knowledge and vice versa.

It is because of this mutual influence of the being and knowing, that humans have also a becoming mode of existence. That is, the change in the conditions of being affects knowledge, and with the advancements in the knowing process, humans begin to
become. Thus, knowledge has a transforming function in the constitution of humans’ being. Therefore, from an epistemological point of view, to be is to know, and consequently to become.

Knowledge manifests itself in three distinct yet interrelated modes; knowledge as inwardly received or experienced, knowledge as lingually expressed, and knowledge as practically experimented. Together these modes would represent the totality of one’s being in the world. That is, one’s life in the world could be understood as the totality of three integral modes of his/her being and knowing. To avoid the ambiguity of using multiple terminology, these three modes may be called EXPERIENCE, EXPRESSION and EXPERIMENT. Now, it is a contention of the thesis that experience, expression and experiment constitute the basic rational structure of a person’s life, and as a result, an exploration into the world of inner experience, diverse forms of its expressions, and various attempts to experiment with the experiential knowledge in different areas of actual life situations, would give a true and complete understanding of one’s life.

All events that a person witnesses or even involved in need not necessarily be an experience, where the latter is understood as a constituent element of his/her being. An event becomes an experience only when it is taken into, or, by itself enters into the consciousness of the experiencer. For instance, among the many a visual events, only a few ‘sights’ give ‘in-sights’. The realm of experience is concerned with such insights and not with mere sights. When an insight gets conceptually organized, it can be called a thought. Again, when experience seeks intelligible expression, its content, namely insight(s) that has already undergone a conceptual organization inside the knowing sector of the mind of the subject, undergoes a subsequent process of linguistic formalization. In a similar way, when experience seeks empirical realization, the viability of the insights is put into test by trying them as substitutes and curatives for various aspects of the personal and the social life of the experiencer. The above said two subsequent processes of linguistic formalization and empirical realization can be simultaneous as well as successive. The actual work involved in an attempt to give an integral view of the life of a person consists in identifying the experiential, expressional and experimental aspects of his/her life and then organizing the varied life-events and acts of the subject in such a pattern.
Yogic experiences, philosophico-poetic writings and spiritually oriented and politically committed activities are the three clearly discernible aspects of Sri Aurobindo's personality. Therefore, a three-tier depiction of his life and legacy after the pattern of the basic rational structure of general human life in the world is possible. Accordingly in the sections that follow, the attempt is to present the three integral aspects of Sri Aurobindo's life.

1.3.2 Inner Experiences

The experiential dimension of Sri Aurobindo's life has two phases. The first one is constituted by various moments and short periods in his life in which he had lots of powerful spontaneous spiritual experiences, and, the second phase includes a number of conscious spiritual realizations. Neither Sri Aurobindo nor his early disciples have subjected the spontaneous spiritual experiences to a detailed and serious analysis. Still they are worthy of being surveyed briefly, for, Sri Aurobindo has readily accepted their cognitive content and practical imperatives. What has undergone a thorough intellectual systematization is the set of conscious spiritual realizations. In this phase Sri Aurobindo has taken some clear voluntary initiatives and subjected himself with perseverance to sustained disciplining processes, and hence, the reasons and aims of such spiritual endeavours and the role of some guidance, if any, are to be investigated in the course of the present inquiry.

1.3.2.1 Spontaneous Spiritual Experiences

Without any consciously undertaken concentrated effort from his part, Sri Aurobindo is said to have received lots of solace, inner light, guidance and knowledge. Such “inner experiences coming of themselves and with a sudden unexpectedness, not part of Sadhana” are considered here as constituting the first phase of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual cognition. Besides a few spiritual experiences like, a vast calm which descended upon him at the moment when he stepped first on Indian soil after his long absence, the realization of the vacant Infinite while walking on the ridge of the Takhti-Suleman in Kashmir, the living presence of Kāli in a shrine on the banks of the Narmada, and the vision of the Godhead surging up from within when he was in danger of carriage accident in Baroda in the first year of his stay there, Sri Aurobindo has
received some ‘sudden commands’ too. While he was considering how he should respond to the Government’s intention to search the Karmayogin office and arrest him, it is said that “he received a sudden command from above to go to Chandernagore in French India” and still in Chandernagore where he “plunged entirely to solitary meditation and ceased all other activity,” there came to him a call to proceed to Pondicherry. Following these commands he left politics and settled in Pondicherry. Some days after his arrival, as he explained later in 1926, he “was given” a “programme of what he would do in Yoga.” It was this programme that he developed as synthetic Yoga, tested in his own life first and recommended for his disciples. Thus, although these inner experiences were spontaneous in nature, they were nonetheless playing highly significant roles in the making of the yogic personality of Sri Aurobindo.

1.3.2.2 Conscious Spiritual Realizations

On 1 July 1912, Sri Aurobindo wrote in his private journal of Yoga, “August 1912 will complete the seventh year of my practice of yoga.” If so, he might have started a conscious move towards yogic realizations in August 1905. “The Pranayama” that he started to practice in 1905 – which may be regarded as the first conscious step of an intense spiritual life – brought him “nothing of any kind of spiritual realization.” Truc, it did bring him “an increased health and overflow of energy, some psycho-physical phenomena, a great outflow of poetic creation, a limited power of subtle sight (luminous patterns and figures, etc.) mostly with the waking eye,” but eventually it brought him complete spiritual arrest and some near-fatal illness. All the same, it is important to note this experience of practicing a Hatha-Yogic discipline, for it paved the way and served as the immediate background for his four fundamental inner realizations accompanied by transforming spiritual cognitions. However, before discussing in detail these basic realizations, the aim of his conscious inner search and the role of guidance in its progress need to be considered.

1.3.2.2.1 The Aim of the Inner Search

Despite a number of spontaneous spiritual experiences, Sri Aurobindo did not embrace a life of intense spiritual seeking for its own sake. His earliest conscious move towards spirituality was motivated by a felt need for an unfailing strength and true
guidance in his work. Regarding the choice of a yogi as his spiritual guide, Sri Aurobindo wrote; “I wanted to do Yoga but for work, for action, not for Sannyasa and Nirvana; - but after years of spiritual effort I had failed to find the way and it was for that I had asked to meet him.”35 Here, by action he would have meant the socio-political and philosophico-cultural activities that he was then engaged in. Indeed he wished, as he later declared, spirituality would bring fulfillment in all these and other realms of life.36

As to the personal life of Sri Aurobindo, the ultimate aim of his spiritual search was not Mukti or Nirvana in the sense of liberation, but transformation.37 The transforming spiritual experience that Sri Aurobindo presents as the object of his integral Yoga has three stages; one, getting purified by a process of becoming aware of the inner consciousness, two, getting transformed by a process of recognizing the Divine in all planes and universalizing the being, and, three, becoming an agent of transformation by a process of supramentalizing the consciousness and nature.38

1.3.2.2.2 The Role of Guidance

It is possible that the aspirants of spiritual life may at times be “misled from the true way of the inner life and seeking into false paths or to be left wandering in an intermediate chaos of experiences and fail to find out his way out into true realization.”39 To meet such initial dangers in spiritual life, “an entire submission to the directions of a path-finder or path-leader”40 is necessary.41 However, Sri Aurobindo had no path-leader when he started Yoga.42 But, soon he felt the need to find a Guru, and approached a Maharashtrian Yogi, Vishnu Bhasker Lele. He instructed Sri Aurobindo how to reach “complete silence of the mind and immobility of the whole consciousness”43 which the latter was able to achieve in three days. The next and the last lesson that Lele gave Sri Aurobindo was “to rely wholly on the Divine and his guidance alone both for his Sadhana and for his outward action.”44 From that time “till the Mother came to India”45 Sri Aurobindo received no spiritual help from any one else. He has relied on the Gitā for practicing Yoga, and the Upaniṣads for making meditation. The Veda was not a guide-book for his Sādhana but an original source that confirmed his spiritual realizations.46 In short, all throughout his Sādhana, be it under the guidance of Lele or with help of the sacred books, he was “following the inner guidance implicitly and moving only as he was moved by the Divine.”47
Basing himself on the experience of being led by the Divine, Sri Aurobindo tells that one has to offer “all the activities to the Divine and call for the inner guidance and the taking up of one's nature by a Higher Power.” To learn to give full assent to the workings of the Divine is the meaning of Śādhana. For an ordinary śādhak it takes time, as Sri Aurobindo himself notes, “either because of ideas in the mind, desires in the vital or inertia in the physical consciousness.”

1.3.2.2.3 The First Two Realizations

It was “while meditating with the Maharashtrian Yogi Vishnu Baskar Lele at Baroda in January 1908” that Sri Aurobindo had “the realization of the silent, spaceless and timeless Brahman which gained after a complete and abiding stillness of the whole consciousness ... attended by an overwhelming feeling and perception of the total unreality of the world.” This was an experience of the reality of Brahman and the unreality of the World – Brahma satayam Jagat mitya. Later, there was a return to the “participation of the world consciousness.”

Also, Sri Aurobindo noted an intervening experience of “something else than himself taking up his dynamic activity and speaking and acting through him without any personal thought or initiative from his part.” For instance, his speech at Bombay on 19 January 1908 was a “speech came” to him from the “source above the brain-mind.” What this was was unknown to him until the second great realization of the dynamic side of Brahman. Sri Aurobindo resumed his political activities even after having entered the silence of Brahman. For, he regarded the accomplishment of all things, rather than the annihilation of all, as the most desirable spiritual pursuit. He was associated with the revolutionary movements in Bengal, and one such group led by Barindrakumar Ghose was working under his patronage. This group in April 1908 made an attempt to kill Douglas Kingsford. In connection with this incident Sri Aurobindo was charged with conspiracy, arrested and taken to Alipore Central Jail. On 6 May 1909, he was acquitted and released. It was during this period - April 1908 - May 1909 - in the prison that Sri Aurobindo had his second great realization. But, in the Jail before he entered in a concentrated Śādhana he said to have suffered intense mental agony.
The second realization brought him certain new knowledge that he could have never learnt by himself.\textsuperscript{59} In fact he describes the whole realization as ‘knowledge’ that God gave him: On 30 May 1909, while addressing the annual session of the Society for the protection of Religion in Uttarpara, Bengal, he said; “That knowledge he gave to me day after day during my twelve months of imprisonment and it is that which He has commanded me to speak to you now that I have come out.”\textsuperscript{60} The central aspect of the second realization was the awareness about the universal presence of the Divine. It was the vision of Sri Krishna as the all-pervading Lord of creation that brought him this awareness.\textsuperscript{61} This realization complemented and completed the former one. In the former case, he realized Brahman but practically nothing, very sensible speeches came to him – sign of concrete effect, but their sources remained ever elusive to sense knowledge. These gaps were filled and his ordinary individual self felt saturated with the second realization. Therefore, although these realizations were granted to him\textsuperscript{62} separately through two successive experiences, essentially they are two integral parts of one fundamental experience.\textsuperscript{63}

\textbf{1.3.2.2.4 The Third and Fourth Realizations}

The first two realizations, viz; passive Brahman and cosmic consciousness,\textsuperscript{64} were the essential steps for Sri Aurobindo in his spiritual discipline to reach the final realizations. And the two later realizations “that of the supreme reality with static and dynamic Brahman as its two aspects and that of the higher planes of consciousness leading to the supermind”\textsuperscript{65} had commenced in the Alipore Jail itself. However, no clear and detailed description is given regarding when he had them in their fullness.\textsuperscript{66} In fact, Sri Aurobindo never told the disciples about the circumstances and details of his final realizations. He was “extraordinarily silent” about that and hence it is only through his later “works and fragments of conversations that one can recapture the thread of experience.”\textsuperscript{67} In Letters of Yoga, Sri Aurobindo clearly states that “It is hardly possible to say what the Supermind is in the Language of the Mind, even spiritualized Mind, for it is a different consciousness altogether and acts in a different way. Whatever may be said of it is likely to be not understood or misunderstood.”\textsuperscript{68} However, what can be done at this stage to bring out the cognitive components of these realizations is to distinguish generally between the religious and rational aspects of these inner experiences.\textsuperscript{69}
Rationally, consciousness is the fundamental thing in existence. It is inherent in the latter. Although it is usually identified with the mind, mental consciousness does not exhaust all the possible ranges of consciousness. “There are ranges of consciousness,” says Sri Aurobindo, “above and below human range, with which the normal human has no contact and they seem to it unconscious, - supramental or overmental and submental ranges.”

From the time of his confinement in Alipore Jail, Sri Aurobindo has been aware of the different planes of consciousness above the ordinary mind. Later he names them as Higher mind, Illumined mind, Intuitive mind and Overmind. These are in fact graded approaches to the Supermind. It is with the help of this intuition into the different planes of consciousness that Sri Aurobindo understands the integral non-duality and the apparent division between the two aspects of the ultimate reality. The Supermind can seize the integrality of reality whereas Overmind divides reality and separates the resultant parts into different aspects.

However, these rational principles are not merely logical propositions. They came to Sri Aurobindo primarily in the form of irresistible religious experiences that he had from 1 July 1912. And, what remained for him to realize was not the essential knowledge, but practical knowledge that includes “a full development of the general mental and physical faculties and experiences attainable by humanity.” In effect “such a mental and physical life would be in its nature a translation of the spiritual existence into its right mental and physical values.” And, it occurred on 24 November 1926. However, the spiritual journey does not stop at this level. The descent of the Supermind is the next step and it is in this supra-mental stage that one attains complete transformation and integral unity. Sri Aurobindo could only announce in 1950 that this would happen shortly.

Thus, according to the final realizations, the human beings are privileged to be raised from the present state of their consciousness of the ordinary mind to the state of consciousness of the spirit. However, the complete realization of the total import of his final spiritual cognitions was ever a process. Satprem wrote in 1970; “Sri Aurobindo began, he found the secret at Chandernagore in 1910 and worked for forty years, he gave
up his life to it. Mother is continuing.6 Hence, in the final analysis it may be said that the complete realization is a vision-action continuum.

1.3.3 Lingual Expressions

The essential elements of Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual cognitions include the integral nature of divine reality, modes of divine action, planes of consciousness and the ways of divine descent and human ascent. Language and personal life-experiments were the two media that he used to communicate these cognitive contents of his inner realizations to the world. And, of the two, language was the most transparent medium for him to communicate the entire content of his integral knowledge, whereas his attempts to translate the contents of inner realization into actual life events was not as smooth and successful as his lingual works.8 Whenever he wanted to express himself, to make his view clear, to register a feeling or to react to a situation, he did it first on a piece of paper.9 One can rightly describe him as a predominantly lingual man, in fact a multi-lingual man who used diverse literary forms to express his feelings, ideas, insights and opinions.

1.3.3.1 Language - The Vehicle of Consciousness

Language is linked up with the experiencing subject because a word is a verbal formalization preceded by a conceptual organization of the experience of the writer or the speaker. In other words, language expands human consciousness. If, as Noam Chomsky observes, linguistic and mental procedures are virtually identical,10 one could validly argue that language is the primary and most reliable means for the complete expression of an inner experience. Now, in the case of Sri Aurobindo, since it was by a direct spiritual intuition that he came to know inwardly the Omnipresent Divine reality, to express this intuitive knowledge adequately, he needed a language that was at once intuitive and indicative. For, as V. Madhusudhan Reddy argues, “words minted by the mind and given credence by an intellect, circumscribed by space and time cannot communicate experience of non-phenomenal dimension. A language formed and founded upon the normal experience of reason cannot do justice to the truth of a higher and illimitable self-experience founded on spiritual infinities.”11 However, Sri Aurobindo
overcame this initial yet crucial linguistic problem by discovering and making use of the synthetic nature of language.\textsuperscript{87}

A synthetic language would "contain the rationalist and the romanticist, the pragmatist and the idealist and much more – the metaphysical and spiritualistic tendencies, all blended into an integral whole."\textsuperscript{88} The rich concreteness of the ancient tongues and the illuminating clarity of modern languages – the essential elements of ideal language\textsuperscript{89} – "richly co-exist rather blend admirably and luminously," observes Madhusudhan Reddy, "in Sri Aurobindo's usage of English language with the additional merit that the mystical and the aesthetic elements receive their highest prominence in their own right."\textsuperscript{90} He enumerates a few more characteristics of Sri Aurobindo's English: "The English language attains a new light in his usage of it, for at his hands it demonstrates a unique capacity for assimilation, expansion and plasticity. ... Language with him becomes the vehicle of consciousness, complete and captivating, irradiating integral understanding and delight."\textsuperscript{91} 

Sri Aurobindo made contributions in many different provinces of knowledge such as spiritual philosophy, political science, cultural studies, literary criticism, scriptural exegesis, etc. Prose and poetry were the two main literary forms that he used.\textsuperscript{92} All his literary works consistently embody an integral outlook and clearly express the vision of Yoga in intellectual language. Therefore, be it brief or lengthy, a one-by-one presentation of his works is a needless job. What is needed in an introductory treatment like this is to browse and choose the representative materials from his writings. To do that hazardous deductive work, the Kantian notions of intellectual synthesis and figurative synthesis would be two helpful heuristic tools.

\textbf{1.3.3.2 Sri Aurobindo's Works as a Transcendental Synthesis}

Human knowledge has two stems, one is sensibility – through which objects are given, and the other understanding – where the objects of knowledge are thought.\textsuperscript{93} The knowledge that humans gain through sensibility, that is, the representations given in sensible intuition,\textsuperscript{94} is distinct from the a\textit{priori} form of knowing through which they know what they come to know through sensibility. This \textit{a\textit{priori}} form is the mode of knowing distinct from the object of knowledge. However, a synthesis of different objects
of knowledge – combination of a manifold (of representations) given in sensible intuition – is the work done by the other stem of human knowledge, namely, understanding.95

Since the body of human knowledge formed by manifold concepts includes certain concepts obtained by pure *apriori* employment, Kant says, “their right to be so employed always demands a deduction.”96 He specifies it as a transcendental deduction.97 In the section on the Transcendental Deduction in *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant demonstrates that the categories are applicable to objects of sensible intuition. It is by disclosing the necessity of transcendental synthesis that he does this. Transcendental synthesis as it appears in Transcendental Deduction in the *Second Edition of Critique of Pure Reason* has two subspecies: intellectual synthesis and figurative synthesis.98

Now, this study conceives the corpus of Sri Aurobindo’s writings as a transcendental synthesis having two sub-species comprising the intellectual abstractions and imaginative creations.100 Applying this Kantian distinction, one can envisage the philosophical synthesis achieved by Sri Aurobindo in his numerous works as arranging themselves in two groups; one under the banner of intellectual synthesis and the other with the title of figurative synthesis. The metaphysical, exegetical, critical and other such philosophical writings are obviously intellectual syntheses, whereas poetic creations, public speeches and other literary works could be considered as figurative syntheses. In fact, all the volumes of Sri Aurobindo are worthy of serious study, but the present study is limited to those works that he penned after his fundamental spiritual realizations, for, its purpose in this chapter is to highlight the epistemic features of his inner life.

There was a time when he produced a number of muzzled mental creations101 and there was also another phase of his literary career where he just remained as “a receiver of knowledge.”102 All those works that belong to the former phase are bracketed out, and the focus is laid on the latter.103

1.3.3.2.1 Intellectual Synthesis

*The Life Divine* deals with the highest problems of existence and aims to form a vast synthesis of knowledge. Its approach is philosophical and the method synthetic. It discusses the problems of existence at individual, communal, political, national and
international levels. Sri Aurobindo views these problems as problems of harmony.\textsuperscript{104} And, his attempt in \textit{The Life Divine}, as he himself states, is to offer a "metaphysical foundation of harmony."\textsuperscript{105}

Following the lines of his own spiritual realizations in Alipore Jail and later in Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo affirms in metaphysical language the absolute reality of Brahman without denying the reality of the phenomenal world. Brahman and the world is the central pair of opposites that he reconciles in \textit{The Life Divine}.\textsuperscript{106} The world is conceived as the manifestation of the divine perfection. But, however, this way of understanding the world sharpens the question of evil. And, it is epistemologically that he tackles this problem.\textsuperscript{107} Harmony is the object of Brahman’s involution and delight is its reason.\textsuperscript{108} As to evolution, manifestation of the greater powers of Existence works the motivating factor.\textsuperscript{109}

Man, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the key of the entire evolutionary movement, inwardly that of the higher powers of consciousness and outwardly of more complex forms of being. Man himself is a transitional being. An individual is not a monad-like windowless unit, but a thoroughly relational being who finds the fulfillment of the Divine in himself and others simultaneously.\textsuperscript{110} It is through such individuals who have realized the Divine in themselves and in the fellow beings – Sri Aurobindo calls such individuals Gnostic beings – that the Divine life manifests in material Nature.

A synthetic method and an evolutionary resolution are the two main features that are characteristic of Sri Aurobindo’s major works.\textsuperscript{111} His unfinished work, \textit{The Synthesis of Yoga}, is a planned attempt to combine all paths of Yoga, including his own Yoga of self-perfection, namely, \textit{Sapta Canṣṭaya}.\textsuperscript{112} The integral philosophy that is successfully established in \textit{The Life Divine} is applied to sociology and history in the \textit{Human Cycle} and in the \textit{Ideal of Human Unity} respectively. These two works treat a common problem, namely, the harmony among individuals, or, in other words, the question of the relationship between individuals and society. The \textit{Human Cycle} studies the problem through the angle of social psychology, and, the \textit{Ideal of Human Unity} assumes a political standpoint. The exegetical works such as \textit{Essays on the Gita} and \textit{The Upanisads} bring to light the integral non-dualism that is implicit in the ancient Hindu scriptures,
whereas The Future Poetry claims that even literature exhibits an evolutionary movement.\textsuperscript{113}

\section*{1.3.3.2.2 Figurative Synthesis}

Although his prose writings have achieved greater popularity, Sri Aurobindo seems to have given greater significance to his poetic works. In The Future Poetry he compares prose and poetry and establishes the superiority of the latter.\textsuperscript{114} In fact, Sri Aurobindo’s integralism is more explicit in his poetic works\textsuperscript{115} than in his prose writings in philosophy, because the former has lively images and mantric language\textsuperscript{116} at its disposal while the latter seems to struggle to infuse life into the intellectually invented categories of understanding. To bracket out, as it was done with the prose writings, some poems and plays would be a methodic error of omission and to survey the contents of all of them would be a needless luxury. Therefore, methodologically, what is required here, it seems, is to choose and examine one representative work from the complete set of his literary creations.

\textit{Savitri: A Legend and Symbol} is generally considered as the “supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo’s vision and work.”\textsuperscript{117} This was the one single work that Sri Aurobindo was preoccupied with for thirty-five years of his life. It was not just a poetic work for him but primarily the “means for yogic ascension”\textsuperscript{118} and coincidently the poetic chronic of his Yoga.\textsuperscript{119} In Savitri he made fundamental experiments in linguistics too.\textsuperscript{120} “Sri Aurobindo has crammed,” observes Mona Sarkar, “the whole universe in this single Book.”\textsuperscript{121} The tale of Satyavan and Savitri is a story of conjugal love that conquers death.\textsuperscript{122} Sri Aurobindo takes this legend as a symbolic myth.\textsuperscript{123} He explores its meaning further and finds that it is more than an allegory. He says; “the characters are not personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch and they take human bodies in order to help man and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life.”\textsuperscript{124}

In The Synthesis of Yoga, Sri Aurobindo speaks of two states of awareness between which all humans move. They are the “timeless infinite and the infinite deploying itself and organizing all things in time.”\textsuperscript{125} The ordinary mental consciousness
cannot realize the timeless Infinite; to do that one needs supramental infinite consciousness. “It is toward the realization of this infinite consciousness and strength as part of humanity’s destiny that Savitri, the human-divine has been working for.”

The opening scene that pictures the darkness of pre-creation refers to the “precipitous and abysmal situation before the advent of gods.” With the descent of “Light” the gods are awakened, and with that the process of manifestation of consciousness begins. Thus, involution precedes evolution. Savitri’s birth represents the divine dawn that prepares Nature to receive the light of the Supernatural. Aswapati, the father of Savitri is the symbol of earth’s deep longing for its integral realization. It is in response to his prayer that the Supreme Mother takes birth in the person of Savitri. Now, Savitri, the Divine consciousness in human body, begins to ascend to “Infinity that was her own natural home.” But, in the course of ascension, she has to pierce through the shadow of death, that is Yama - the god of denial of life - at deeper level. At the face of death Savitri assumes her original form and infuses into it her divine energy and thus transfigures it into its original reality. This is possible because death is just the “grandiose darkness of the infinite” itself, its “shadow” and “Instrument.” Savitri, after having achieved self-transcendence and simultaneous transformation of death, rejoins Satyavan who emerges coincidently, and together they enter the deathless world. Their entry into the world of everlasting Light is the guarantee of the promise that,

Nature shall live to manifest secret God
The Spirit shall take up the human play
This earthly life becomes the life divine.

1.3.4 Practical Experiments

The details of Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual realizations and the varied ways they were expressed in language have already been discussed in the previous sections. What remains to be discussed further is his attempt to realize them in the actual life situations. He loved to call such attempts “experiments” and, although all aspects of individual and social life were included in the approach, he wanted to conduct them with a spiritual basis. The work he said to have started in 1920 was in fact not a fresh venture but a refreshed restart of the fourfold work that he was commanded to undertake when he had his fundamental spiritual realizations in Alipore Jail. And thus, basing himself on the
powerful and transforming spiritual experience he had, he started his experiments in the four areas of life: cultural, political, spiritual and social.

The central project of his experiments in the cultural field was to reinterpret the Indian tradition from a new standpoint of integral spirituality. He conducted this experiment mainly through literary works. The seven volumes of Arya published between 1914 and 1921 could be considered as the direct and immediate result of his attempts to redeem the true culture of India. The idea of restoring the proper place of India in the world was worked out thorough his active involvement in the struggle for freedom too. He was an uncompromising revolutionary committed to regain the liberty of India through any means. He was absolutely clear and convinced on his political aims and the revolutionary methods to achieve them, but, however, he failed to move the mediocre and to carry out the secret revolutionary plots. Among the four, the experiments in the spiritual life were the most extensive of all. All his life and energy was invested in this line. Although it was in 1912 in Alipore Jail that he received the command to establish the new method of Yoga, search for a unique spiritual path was ever active in him. It is the Sapta Catusṭaya found in the Record of Yoga that gives the pattern of his own spiritual adventures whereas the Letters on Yoga provides with the details of his experiments in the spiritual direction of his disciples.

The last area where Sri Aurobindo made original experiments is the social side of human existence. The aim of these experiments was to prepare the humanity to receive the descending divine light. He thought that society is needed to be remodeled so as to contain the higher perfection. In view of this, he started to establish small communities where people could be trained to join him for the ‘work.’ He started one such commune with the help of Motilal Roy, another one in Bhawanipur, Calcutta under the direction of his brother Barindrakumar and yet another one in Gujarat. But none of them was found working satisfactorily and hence he closed them all one after another. Yet, he did not give up the idea of a center where an ideal society lives and awaits perfection. He always cherished the dream of a “seed plot, a laboratory.” However, it was in 1920, with the help of Mirra Richard, whom Sri Aurobindo first referred as Mira Devi and later as the Mother, that the dream project in the social field began to materialize slowly and gradually.
1.4 Background

Sri Aurobindo believed that Hinduism, conceived as Sanātana Dharma, alone could serve as the framework for a new world outlook, and it may be contented here that this same Hinduism has provided him with an idealistic framework for his inner spiritual realizations, symbols and images for their expression and clear yardsticks for their practical application. Hinduism that Sri Aurobindo puts forward as Sanātana Dharma is not the popular Hinduism, but a religion “that embraces Science and faith, Theism, Christianity, Mohomedanism and Buddhism and yet is none of these, ... that rejects nothing but insists on testing and experiencing every thing, ... that has many scriptures, Veda, Vedanta, Gita, Upanisad, Darsana, Purana, Tantra,” that which does not “reject the Bible or the Koran” and, the most authoritative scriptures of which “is in the heart in which the Eternal has his dwelling.” Thus, Hinduism, as understood and projected by Sri Aurobindo, transcends all sectarian definitions. This ‘wider Hinduism’ is interdisciplinary and an all-inclusive endeavour. One of Sri Aurobindo’s exhortations appeared in Karmayogin substantiates this reading; “We shall devout ourselves not to politics alone, nor to social questions alone, nor to theology or philosophy or literature of science by themselves, but include all these in one entity which we believe to be all-important, the dharma, the national religion which we also believe to be universal.”

1.4.1 Basics of Hinduism

Hinduism is founded on three basic ideas or “three fundamentals of a highest and wisest spiritual experience,” as Sri Aurobindo calls it. The first ‘universal credo of the religious mind of India’ is the One, the Absolute, the Eternal, the Infinite, the Divine. The second basic idea is the possibility of the manifold ways of human approach to the One. And, the third basic idea is that the Divine can be reached by each individual soul in itself.

Among these three fundamentals of Indian religious experience, the third idea, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the most dynamic one for inner spiritual life. He himself has reportedly realized the One Divine, first in the ‘spiritual part’ of his soul, and, gradually in his integral self. The structure of his spiritual realization in its essential
sense is arguably Hinduistic in nature. For, he finds the philosophical syntheses that are very important as far as his starting point is concerned as contained in the Hindu scriptures of the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, the Gītā and the Tantra.

The Vedic synthesis, according to Sri Aurobindo, “pursued behind the symbols of the material universe into those superior planes which are hidden from the physical sense and the material mentality.” “The crown of this synthesis,” he continues to observe, “was in the experience of the Vedic Rishis something divine, transcendent and blissful in whose unity the increasing soul of man and the eternal divine fullness of the cosmic godheads meet perfectly and fulfill themselves.” The Upaniṣads take up this Vedic experience as the starting point of their philosophical synthesis. And, the Gītā, says Sri Aurobindo, “starts from this Vedantic Synthesis and upon the basis of the essential ideas builds another harmony of the three great means and powers, Love, Knowledge, and Works, thorough which the soul of man can directly approach and cast itself into the Eternal.” And then follows the Tāntric synthesis wherefrom all the Purānic tradition draws the richness of its contents.

It is after a critical examination of the scope of these syntheses that Sri Aurobindo spells out his plans about another synthesis of his own. Therefore, in an attempt to expose the background of Sri Aurobindo’s life and thought, it is important to discuss the influence of these earlier syntheses on him.

1.4.2 The Vedas and the Upaniṣads

Vedas and Upaniṣads are the basic literature wherein the Hindu conceptual structure is based. Sri Aurobindo has undertaken a serious study of Rg Veda and the early Upanisads. He often refers back to Rg Veda as a source that confirms his views. He found “a considerable body of profound psychological thought and experience lying neglected” in Rg Veda. To him personally the Vedas provided with sufficient explanation of his own psychological experience and exact meaning of obscure Upaniṣadic texts. And he regards the Upaniṣadic statements as symbolic expressions of mystical experiences than as the results of interpretative theorizing. Although, initially he was just fascinated by the literary and poetic quality of the Upaniṣads, later
as he began to progress in his *sādhana*, he found a number of Upaniṣadic concepts as very helpful in understanding and explaining the contents of his inner realizations.

1.4.3 The Gītā

As it was mentioned earlier, Sri Aurobindo’s decision to get introduced to Yoga had no religious motivation behind it. But, in the Alipore Jail he had some theistic experiences that were quite transforming. With those experiences he reconsidered his relationship with God and willed to give up his agnostic attitudes: “They proved to me by convincing reasons that God does not exist, and I believed them. Afterwards I saw God, for He came and embraced me. And, now which I am to believe, the reasoning of others or my own experience?” Elsewhere he confesses; “others boast of their love of God. My boast is that I did not love God, i. was He who loved me, and sought me out and forced me to belong to Him.”

The idea of a God who is actively concerned about each individual’s unique development is an essential aspect of Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual philosophy. And, however, the same is one of the prominent messages of the Gītā too. And, when one considers what Sri Aurobindo himself says about “what exactly” he thinks he may “derive from” the Gītā, it becomes clear that the Gītā’s influence on him was more of spiritual means and experiences than of metaphysical abstractions and moral reasoning in it: “what we can do with profit is to seek in the Gītā for the actual living truths it contains, apart from their metaphysical form, to extract from it what can help us or the world at large and to put in the most natural and vital form and expression we can find that will be suitable to the mentality and helpful to the spiritual needs of our present day humanity.”

1.4.4 Initiation to Philosophy

Sri Aurobindo was not a person trained in philosophical reasoning. He was primarily a mystic-poet. He himself writes to Dilip Kumar Roy; “... I never, never was a philosopher – although I have written philosophy ... I was a poet, a politician, a not a philosopher; ... because I had to write in the terms of intellect all that I had observed and came to know in practicing Yoga daily, the philosophy was there automatically.”
spite of or because of this special kind of initiation to philosophy, Sri Aurobindo has developed his own methods of philosophizing. To seize the newness in the ways of philosophizing, the integral non-dualism of Sri Aurobindo needs to be distinguished from the earlier interpretations offered to Vedānta.\textsuperscript{163} And, it must be worked out against the background of the diverse religious traditions of Hinduism.\textsuperscript{164} Such an introductory treatment is necessary for two reasons; firstly, in India philosophy and religion have always been intimately related.\textsuperscript{165} and, secondly, Sri Aurobindo was a Hindu religious philosopher by ordination and in articulation. Along with this, Sri Aurobindo’s Western sources must also be explored.

1.4.4.1 Vedānta

The two important philosophical orientations in the Upaniṣādic tradition are absolutism and theism. A clear distinction between Absolute Brahman and Personal God is discernable in the Upaniṣads themselves.\textsuperscript{166} And accordingly, Vedānta has been interpreted within a theistic as well as an absolutist framework. The theistic interpretations were framed to refute the absolutist explanations of Śaṅkara and his followers who laid an exclusive emphasis on the transcendental aspect of Being. Absolutist interpretations, be it in the Upaniṣādic or in the Buddhistic tradition, did produce, it seems, a negative attitude to life and the world around. However, it should be noted that the negative attitude was not a logical consequence of their transcendental metaphysics. Rather it was an emergent feature of their search for higher spiritual values: “It was not necessary,” says Haridas Chaudhuri in this regard, “but a fact of history.”\textsuperscript{167}

There are eight theistic schools of Vedānta; five Vaiṣṇava schools, namely, Viśiṣṭādvaita of Ramanuja, Dvaita of Madhva, Dvaitādvaita of Nimbārka, Saṁkhya of Vallabha and Acintya-bhedābhēda of Caitanya, and three Śaiva schools, namely, Śaiva Siddhānta, Vīra Śaivism and Kāśmir Śaivism. In their combat against the religionless absolutism, the Vedāntic theistic schools were joined by the tāntic theistic cults. Five tāntic cults are generally mentioned, such as Ganapatya, Śaura, Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Śakta. Among these five, Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Śakta are the three important ones which have their origins “partly in Vedas and partly in some popular religious cults, and the literature of which, called the Āgamas and also the Samhitās, seems to have started about the 1\textsuperscript{st} century B.C, or A.D.”\textsuperscript{168} The Vedāntic philosophers, except Śaṅkara
and Bhāskara, belonged either to Śaiva or to Vaiṣṇava tradition and, their interpretations of Vedānta were always in conformity with their respective religious traditions.¹⁶⁹

The variety of interpretations offered to Vedānta and the related schools of religious philosophy can be grouped into two: the main trends and the subaltern trends. The main trends will include 'the principal modes of interpretation of Vedānta,'¹⁷⁰ namely, Unqualified non-dualism (Kēvala Advaita), Qualified non-dualism (Viśiṣṭadvaita)¹⁷¹ and Unqualified dualism (Dvaita),¹⁷² for, “of all the Vedantic schools, those of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Madhva are the most important. They have the largest following and the largest amount of literature in the form of commentaries, independent treatises (prakaramagranthās), and polemics against one another.”¹⁷³ The subaltern trends will include the other theistic schools of Vedānta and the related Tāntic theistic cults. Sri Aurobindo’s background knowledge of the Western thought shall be discussed in a separate section. In the following presentation of the main trends in Vedāntic philosophy the focus shall be on Advaitism, for, Sri Aurobindo’s system is known as integral advaitism. And among the subaltern trends Śaivism and Śaktism will be explored more because Sri Aurobindo was a scholar of these theistic schools.¹⁷⁴

1.4.4.2 Advaita Vedānta

Vedānta metaphysics, in its inquiry into the nature of reality, is concerned with assessing the implications of the facts of experience. Man finds himself amidst a world where everything flows and changes. But, the change and flux is not all that it is. Which means, man possesses an awareness of change and unreality on the one hand, and a consciousness of permanence and reality on the other. These two aspects of human cognition are closely related, for, as Śaṅkara contends, “whenever we deny something as unreal, we do so with reference to something real.”¹⁷⁵ Accordingly there should be a reality not within the world of change. It is: a logical presupposition of every cognitive process. Thus, a postulation of an absolute reality becomes a logical necessity of the dynamics of a philosophical system.¹⁷⁶ Śaṅkara in his system of thought posits the absolute reality of Brahman. This Brahman, which is the foundational principle, is not only different from the phenomenal; the spatial, the temporal and the sensible,¹⁷⁷ but devoid of any internal variety also.¹⁷⁸ Brahman is described not as one, but as non-dual. It is neither being nor non-being. One can reach Brahman through an "everlasting
No" such as, "not coarse, not fine, not short, not long"; "soundless, touchless, formless;" etc. Śaṅkara gives only a communicative value and a religious purpose to those spatial conceptions of Brahman found in the scriptures. Thus Īśvara, Jagat and Jīva do not essentially belong to the hard core of the Advaitic philosophy of Śaṅkara, for, whatever is different from Brahman is unreal.

Although, generally speaking, it is true that Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy is not influenced by classical Vedānta, one can validly infer that he was at least indirectly related to Śaṅkara through his opposition to the former as well as by the commonly shared intellectual and cultural climate. Indeed Sri Aurobindo has read Śaṅkara in Sanskrit.

Śaṅkara’s absolute non-dualism is regarded here as setting certain background for Sri Aurobindo’s integral non-dualism. It is so conceived for the single reason that, as Stephen H. Phillips observes, “Śaṅkara is his [Sri Aurobindo’s] direct predecessor in regard to holding a mystic experience to be of the greatest personal value...” However, the present attempt to bring out the common mystical lineage in the advaitic tradition does not in any way intend to view Śaṅkara as a mystic. He was predominantly a metaphysical thinker. Sri Aurobindo’s relation to Śaṅkara is reviewed here precisely in the context of the problem of method in philosophy that considers critically the question of the highest source of knowledge.

Although Śaṅkara shares Mīmāṃsakā’s dogmatic conservatism in regarding the Mahāvākhyas as doctrinally the most important, he does differ from the Mīmāṃsakā as regards their meaning and implication. For the Mīmāṃsakās, Mahāvākhyas are injunctions to perform religious rituals; whereas, for Śaṅkara, they are pointers to an immediate experience of Brahman. Thus, the crucial question is whether Mahāvākhyas are leading to dharma or to Brahman. Śaṅkara considers the scriptures, the cream of which is available in the Mahāvākhyas, are providing the inquirer with truths about the nature of Brahman.

Anubhava or direct experience, according to Śaṅkara, is the highest type of direct knowledge through which one can come to know Brahman. Brahman cannot be known through pramāṇas and scriptures alone. In view of knowing Brahman, all
that pramāṇas can do is to generate "a knowledge which involves their negation or
annulment."195 Scriptures are meant to cleanse the inquirers of all false conceptions. All
pramāṇas including śruti - though it has a comparatively higher place -196 help to bring
about the final intuition. Thus, Śaṅkara, though he was not a mystic, seems to value
mystical experience as the highest source of knowledge.197 The term that he employs to
denote this mystical experience is anubhava. Sri Aurobindo has also offered a rigorous
critique of all the mentally powered sources of knowledge, and regarded what he calls
'supramnetal knowledge'198 as the basic, best and highest.199

1.4.4.3 Subaltern Trends in Vedāntic Philosophy

Indian theism developed mainly in two directions before the Christian era, viz.,
Vaiṣṇavism200 and Śaivism. In order to counter the spreading of Jainism and Buddhism,
in about 400 AD, the Gupta Kings initiated a revival movement within Hinduism.201
What the higher class of Hindu society intended through this movement was just a
revival of Vedic ritualism, but the actual result was the resuscitation of the old theistic
schools of Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism. Later Śaṅkara, who regarded absolutism rather than
theism as the authentic import of the Upaniṣadic doctrines, reinterpreted Vedānta in
order to restore what he believed to be the original philosophic tradition of India. Some
thinkers who succeeded Śaṅkara tried on their part, says M. Hiriyanna, "to amalgate the
theistic creeds with the Upanisadic doctrines, introducing such changes in the new
interpretation of the latter as were necessary for that purpose."202 Such attempts resulted
in the emergence of a number of subalern trends in Vedāntic philosophy.

Attempts have been made to integrate Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism with Vedānta.
Qualified non-dualism of Rāmānuja and the dualism of Madhva are the major outcome
of such attempts from the Vaiṣṇavite camp. Nimbārka, Vallabha and Caitanya are the
other important Vaiṣṇava Vedāntins. Sri Kānta and Śripati are the two generally
mentioned Śaiva Vedāntins. While the Vaiṣṇava Vedāntins identify the Upaniṣadic
Brahman with Viṣnu, the Śaiva Vedāntins identify him with Śiva. Identification of the
Upaniṣadic Absolute with a personal God, either as Viṣnu or as Śiva, is the
distinguishing factor between the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva schools, and, the same is the
common element within each school comprising various religio-philosophic strands and
sects.203
However, Sri Aurobindo does not think that the Vedantic sources, be it the main or the subaltern, will give the complete picture of reality. He says; “It is only if you approach the supreme through his double aspect of sat and chit-shakti, double but inseparable, that the total truth of things can become manifest to the inner experience. This other side was developed by the saktta tantrics. The two together, the vedantic and the tantric truth unified, can arrive at an integral knowledge.”

1.4.4.4 Tāntric Traditions

According to Sri Aurobindo, Tantra is more bold and forceful than the Gītā, for at least five reasons; it converts the obstacles to spiritual life into means for successful spiritual conquest, it enables one to embrace the whole life in his/her divine scope, it brings forward, besides the divine knowledge, works and love, the secret powers of human body and mind, and finally it highlights the divine ‘perfectability’ of humans.

Thus, Sri Aurobindo regarded Tāntric traditions as providing with a set of practical methods to realize the Divine finitely and existentially in this world. The ordination of the entire cosmos as divine, which in fact is the distinguishing feature of Sri Aurobindo’s cosmology, seems to come from the Tāntric concept of Śakti. According to him the world is worthy and significant just because in it is developing ‘the life divine.’ His metaphysical concepts of divine involution and cosmic evolution are obviously similar and arguably influenced by the philosophy of Tāntric Śaktism. A brief introduction to these traditions is in order.

The non-Vedāntic theistic school of Śaktism is very much similar and related to Śaivism. The personal Goddess of Śakta cult is Śakti who is known, according to the Hindu mythology, as the wife of Śiva. Except for a few primitive practices and ritual modes of worshipping Śakti, the followers of Śakta cult are one with Śaivism. However, an understanding of Śaivism, specially, Kāśmīr Śaivism, will be helpful in bringing out the specificity of Śaktism.
1.4.4.1 Śaivism

There are variations of philosophical views among Śaivism itself. The variety ranges from pluralism to non-dualism. Śaiva Siddhānta of south India, Vīra Śaivism of Kannada and Śaivism of Kāśmīr are the three important schools of Śaivism. And, because Kāśmīr Śaivism is non-dualistic,²⁰⁸ it deserves a special attention in this study that analyses the integral non-dualism of Sri Aurobindo who was full of praise for the former.

According to Kāśmīr Śaivism, Śiva is the only reality, the absolute self or pure consciousness. He is immanent as well as transcendent. Śiva’s power of self-consciousness or will-consciousness is called Śakti with which the former is in perfect union. It is through Śakti²⁰⁹ that Śiva realizes himself as the self-shining infinite self-consciousness. Unlike the advaita vedāntins, these Śaivists of Kāśmīr treat the pure-consciousness of the Absolute as self-consciousness and ascribes activity to it.²¹⁰

The entire universe is non-different from the Absolute Self. Commenting on a text of Vasugupta, Dr. Sharma says; “The manifested universe is within Him and with Him. There is no other material (upādāna), ground (ādhāra) or canvas (bhitti) on which it is projected. All manifestations are by Him, on Him and in Him. He is all-embracing, all-inclusive, nothing falls outside Him.”²¹¹ Creative self-consciousness, which constitutes the essence of the Self, is also applicable in a limited way to the finite selves as well. Therefore, the individual self is a real knower, agent and enjoyer. The bondage caused by ignorance, that is eternal than being merely intellectual, is overcome by what the Kāśmīr Śaivisists call Recognition (Pratyabhijna) of the individual soul’s identity with the Absolute Self. The concrete existential “I” realizes the “Transcendental I”. As the Īśvara-pratyabhijna IV-1-1²¹² says, the individual self realizes himself/herself as Śiva and sees every thing as the projection of his own glory and as non-different from the Self.

1.4.4.2 Śaktism

Among the Tāntric²¹³ cults that are generally mentioned, “Sakta is the most popular one so much so that the word tantra has come to mean, generally, though mistakenly,
According to Śaktism, reality is non-dual, and, there is nothing real apart from the non-dual reality of Śiva-Śakti, Consciousness-Power. The ultimate non-dual reality of Śiva-Śakti manifests itself as the world of plurality through the real power of Māya. While Śiva is the predominant principle in Śaivism, Śakti is the dominant factor in Śakti philosophy and religion. The concept of ‘motherhood of God’ assumes a philosophical and theological backing in Śaktism. Having accepted the mother-principle in God, Śaktas engage themselves in various forms of ritual worship of women. However, “Śakti is woman,” explains T. M. P. Mahadhevan, “only figuratively and symbolically. Śakta is God as the principle of productivity; Śakti gives it the female form for purposes of worship. In truth however, the ultimate reality is neither male or female.” Finally, quite in consonance with its realistic metaphysics, Śaktism advocates a life of ceaseless activity and meditation as the sadhana to reach the goal of mokṣa. The soul that is carried away from its true nature by the outgoing process must go back to its source through a reverse process. Such reverse process is the rationale behind the so called Vāmācāras of this cult. “By that one must rise by which one falls” is the underlying principle of these rituals.

Although Sri Aurobindo, like many other Indian mystics, conceives his spiritual experiences in terms of the Tāntric concepts such as Śakti, Kundalini, Cakras, etc., he was not in fact following the Tāntric order of spirituality. He followed an Upaniṣads-based novel path which led him to the transforming realizations that he had from his life in the Alipore jail on. Similarly, though Sri Aurobindo seems to share the Tāntric worldview, the perceived similarity shall not be conceived as coming from his dependence on the latter. Rather, it so seems because, like the Tāntrics who, according to Sir John Woodoffe, depended on the early Upaniṣads for their foundational metaphysical ideas, Sri Aurobindo’s ideas are thoroughly Upaniṣādic.

1.4.4.5 East-West Integration

An understanding of the non-vedāntic background of Sri Aurobindo will not be complete without a discussion on his contact with the West. He was well acquainted with the developments in the Western philosophy, culture and science. S. K Maitra explains how he was steeped in the most formative period of his life in all that was best in Western culture and thought; “He is of all Indian ... thinkers the one for whom the
ancient Greek philosophers are still living personalities... as one reads his books, one cannot fail to notice how thorough is his grasp of the great western philosophers of the present age, such as Kant, Hegel, Spencer and Bergson.221 There is a real and in-depth synthesis of the Indian thought and Western philosophy in the system of Sri Aurobindo, and, they find their fulfillment in the latter.22 He refused to borrow terms and concepts from the West to build up his system, rather he employed the same old concepts of the ancient Indian thought, because the locus of integration for him was the Indian experience and reflections on them.

Apart from the engagement with Western philosophy, Sri Aurobindo has made an effort to integrate the modern scientific explanations also within his conception of reality.223 This does not mean that his conception of reality is that of a scientist. One will not find in the writings of Sri Aurobindo any presentation of an uncritical parallel between the theories of modern science and the teachings of Vedânta. He has made a clear distinction between the proper domain and method of Science and philosophy. "Science and metaphysics ... have each its own province and enquiry. Science cannot dictate its conclusions to metaphysics any more than metaphysics can impose its conclusions on Science."224

1. 5 Retrospect and Prospect

An attempt has been made in this chapter to expose the foreground and background of Sri Aurobindo's life and thought. On the foreground of his life, the researcher finds an integration of different realms of experience and in that of his thought a synthesis of different views. A rational structure behind the general human life was identified as being constituted by what the researcher called 'experience, expression and experiments,' and then the life-events and achievements of Sri Aurobindo were realigned according to this definite pattern.

The exploration into the background of his life and thought has not been an exhaustive search. It was rather a pointed and limited research into the background-knowledge of Sri Aurobindo's cognitive life. The influence of ancient Indian scriptures, the religious philosophy of advaitism and tantricism, and the science and philosophy of the West on the life and thought of Sri Aurobindo was the single area of concern.
However, Sri Aurobindo, while admitting the value and necessity of a vast background-knowledge, does not want to allow him to be limited by its multi-level influence.225

The next chapter is meant to introduce Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy of consciousness in the context of a few classical Indian treatments of the topic. This general introductory analysis will be followed by more specific philosophical discussions later in the third and the fourth chapters along the ontological and epistemological lines of thought. Finally, in the last chapter, the search will be further limited and pointed to the question of method in Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy.
Notes


2 In The Life Divine I, SABCL, 18,1-2 he writes; “To know, to possess and be the divine being in an animal and egoistic consciousness, to convert our twilit or obscure physical mentality into the plenary supernal illumination, to build peace and self-existent bliss where there is only a stress of transitory satisfactions besieged by physical pain and emotional suffering, to establish an infinite freedom in a world which presents itself as a group of mechanical necessities to discover and realize the immortal life in a body subjected to death and constant mutation, - this is offered to us as the manifestation of God in Matter and the goal of Nature in her terrestrial evolution.”


5 More specific meaning of these terms will be brought out in the fifth chapter.

6 However, this is not a “merely methodological” inquiry. A “merely methodological” principle or process of inquiry assumes a dichotomy between methodology and metaphysics. SAMI PHILSTROM, “Methodology Without Metaphysics? A Pragmatic Critique”, Philosophy Today, 48:2 (Summer, 2004) 188-215 gives a catalogue of “merely methodological” views. Since the present study has integral non-dualism as its proper object, one cannot brand it as a “merely methodological” inquiry, for integralism rejects all sorts of dualistic conceptions.

7 According to Sri Aurobindo, there is a distinction between mental knowledge and spiritual knowledge. Mental knowledge is a kind of cognition that has two parts; the living perception in thought rising as a vivid mental feeling, and a reproduction of what is thus known in the substance of mind. Spiritual knowledge is more concrete than this. There one knows by a kind of identity in one’s own very substance. (Letters on Yoga II, SABCL, 23, 396). The kind of philosophy that bases itself on spiritual knowledge is known as spiritual philosophy. This has to be distinguished from rational philosophy that is “only a play of the intellect.” (The Life Divine II, SABCL, 19, 666).

8 On Himself, SABCL, 26, Introductory Page.

9 In On Himself, SABCL, 26, 378 he says; “It is the inner life that gives to the outer any power it may have, and the inner life of a spiritual man is something vast and full and, at least in great figures, so crowded and teeming with significant things that no biographer or historian could ever hope to size it all or tell it. Whatever is significant in the outward life is so because it is symbolic of what has been realized within himself and one may go on and say that the inner life also is only significant as an expression, a living representation of the movement of the divinity behind it.”

10 Sri Aurobindo was essentially a mystic. See, for instance, The Life Divine, SABCL, 18, 317.

11 F. B. TAYLOR, Religion in Primitive Culture (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1958) 1-79 proposes a theory of Animism, which, for instance, considers the belief in the existence of soul as the cause for the origin of religion.

12 According to STEPHEN H. PHILLIPS, Aurobindo’s Philosophy of Brahman, (Electronic Version, March 2001) http://link.lanic.utexas.edu/psnic/phillips/pages/APB/APB01c.html, the central problem in the field of epistemology of mysticism, specifically in regard to the mystic claims of Sri Aurobindo, is that of justification. But, however, as it seems to the present researcher, could Aurobindo’s mystic experience constitute a reason for a non-mystic to accept his view Brahman? is indeed a second order philosophical inquiry compared to the rational effort to understand his claims.

13 PETER HEEHS is an archivist at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives and Research Library, Pondicherry. He is also a widely published historian and a dependable writer on the life and works of Sri Aurobindo. For the biographical data of Sri Aurobindo, the present study mostly relies on Heehs’ book, Sri Aurobindo. A Brief Biography (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

14 PETER HEEHS, Sri Aurobindo. A Brief Biography. 86.

15 HARI DAS CHAUDHURI, The Philosophy of Integralism (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1967) 7 notes in this regard; “In order to appreciate fully the significance of the integral view of reality as the unity of change and permanence, it is necessary to shake lose from the old obsession of metaphysics of permanence. It is necessary to revise some of our old rigid habits of thinking.”
The transformation is revolutionary, known. As the individual grows up, his knowledge and the thing realized and to live in will be at once the highest aim and meaning and the most all-embracing of the Reality and helped him to see how One is present in Many and Many in One, which in fact is the core of cosmic consciousness.”

Dr. Thomas Aykara, Cosmic Consciousness (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1997) 158 writes; “Isolated and unexpected though these experiences were, they gave him certain wonderful glimpses of the Reality and helped him to see how One is present in Many and Many in One, which in fact is the core of cosmic consciousness.”

PRĀNAYĀMA means the control of generalized vital force, mainly by means of controlling the breath. Sri Aurobindo was initiated to PRĀNAYĀMA by one of his friends, who was a disciple of Śwāmī Brahmānanda. Śwāmī Brahmānanda had an āshāram on the bank of Narmada. Once Sri Aurobindo had a darśan of Śwāmīn in the Āshāram.

On Himself, SABCL, 26, 77.
On Himself, SABCL, 26, 78-79.
On Himself, SABCL, 26, 79.
Peter HEEHS, Sri Aurobindo: A Brief Biography, 88.

The four fundamental realizations of Sri Aurobindo are discussed in detail in the sections, 1.3.2.2.3, and 1.3.2.2.4 of this chapter itself.
On Himself, SABCL, 26, 279.

In The Social and Political Thought, SABCL, 15, 216-17 he writes; “The spiritual aim will seek to fulfill itself therefore in a fullness of life and man’s being in the individual and the race which will be the base for the heights of the spirit, - the base becoming the end of one substance with the peaks. It will not proceed by a scornful neglect of the body, nor by an ascetic starving of the vital being and an utmost bareness or even squalor as the rule of spiritual living, nor by a puritanic denial of art and beauty and aesthetic joy of life, nor by neglect of science and philosophy as poor, negligible or misleading intellectual pursuits, - though the temporary utility even of these exaggerations against the opposite excesses need not be denied; it will be all things to all, but in all it will be at once the highest aim and meaning and the most all - embracing expression of themselves in which all they are and seek for will be fulfilled. It will aim at establishing in society the true inner theocracy, ...” According to B. BRUTEAU, Worthy is the World. The Hindu Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo (London: Penguin Books, 1971) 23-4, Sri Aurobindo’s study of the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda are responsible for his appreciation of Yoga in relation to the life of action.

In Letters on Yoga II, SABCL, 23, 507, Sri Aurobindo has made a distinction between the object of ancient Yoga and that of his; “Peace is the necessary basis but peace is not sufficient. Peace if it is strong and permanent can liberate the inner being, which can become a calm and unmoved witness of the external movements. That is the liberation of the Sannyasin. In some cases it can liberate the external also, throwing the old nature out into the environmental consciousness, but even this is liberation, not transformation.”

See Letters on Yoga II, SABCL, 23, 509. “The aim of the Yoga is to open the consciousness to Divine and to live in the inner consciousness more and more while acting from it on the external life, to bring the
inmost psychic into the front and by the power of the psychic to purify and change the being so that it may become ready for transformation and be in union with the Divine Knowledge, Will and Love. Secondly, to develop the yogic consciousness, ie., to universalize the being in all the planes, become aware of the cosmic being, cosmic forces and be in union with the Divine on all the planes up to the overmind. Thirdly to come into contact with the transcendent Divine beyond the overmind through the supramental consciousness, supramentalize the consciousness and the nature and make oneself an instrument for the realization of the dynamic Divine Truth and its transforming descent into the earth nature.”

39 The Life Divine II, SABCL, 19, 905.
40 The Life Divine II, SABCL, 19, 905: “... these perils... have been met by imposing the necessity of initiation, of discipline, of methods of purification and testing by ordeal, of an entire submission to the directions of the path-finder or path-leader, one who has realized the Truth, and himself possesses and able to communicate the light, the experience, a guide who is strong to take by the hand and carry over difficult passages as well as to instruct and point out the way.”

41 According to Sri Aurobindo, discipline in the early stages is indispensable. He says in Letters on Yoga II, SABCL, 23, 620; “Yes, it is a defect in the vital, a lack of will to discipline. One has to learn from the master and act according to the his instructions because the master knows the subject and how it is to be learnt - just as in spiritual things one has to follow a Guru who has the knowledge and knows the way.”

42 On Himself, SABCL, 26, 50-51.
43 On Himself, SABCL, 26, 61. Mind or citra, according to PATANJALI: Yogasūtras with Commentaries of Vyāsa and Vacaspatimsāra (Trans.) RAM PRASAD (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corp., 1978) is made up of three components; manas, buddhi and ahamkāra. Manas, which is the recording faculty, receives the sense-impressions. Buddhi, the discriminating faculty, classifies the sense-impressions and responds to them. Ahamkāra is the cog-sense that claims the sense-impressions as its own and stores them as individual knowledge.

44 On Himself, SABCL, 26, 64.
45 On Himself, SABCL, 26, 68.
46 On Himself, SABCL, 26, 68: “But in the jail I had the Gita and the Upanisads with me, practiced the yoga of the Gita and meditated with the help of the Upanisads; these were the only books from which I found guidance; the Veda which I first began to read long afterwards in Pondicherry rather confirmed what experiences that I already had than was any guide to my Sadhana.”

47 On Himself, SABCL, 26, 58.
48 Letters on Yoga II, SABCL, 23, 518. To know more about the aspects of the Divine in humans, see the same volume 509-10.

49 Letters on Yoga II, SABCL, 23, 583.
50 On Himself, SABCL, 26, 64. The actual yogic process (directed by Leela) by which he reached this stage of realization is explained in the same volume pp. 83-4 as follows; “Sit in meditation’ he said, “but do not think, look only at your mind; you will see thoughts coming into it; before they can enter throw these away from your mind till your mind is capable of entire silence.” ... I did not think either of questioning the truth or the possibility, I simply sat down and did it. In a moment my mind became silent as windless air on a high mountain summit then I saw one thought and then another coming in a concrete way from outside; I flung them away before they could enter and take hold of the brain and in three days I was free. From that moment in principle, the mental being in me became a free Intelligence, a universal Mind, not limited to the narrow circle of personal thought as labourer in a thought factory, but a receiver of knowledge from all the hundred realms of being and free to choose what it willed in this vast sight-empire and thought-empire.”

51 Collected Poems, SABCL, 5, 161 describes it as Nirvana. R.R. DIWARKAR, Mahayogi: Life Sadhana and Teaching of Sri Aurobindo (Bombay: Sri Aurobindo Circle, 1954) 149 explains it as an Upaniṣadic experience of Samādhi: “The Upanisads speak of supraconscious stage (prajnam) in which all ordinary experiences are transcended and there is one great, limitless, homogenous reality without duality. This is the stage of the nonconceptual intuition of the self where knower, knowledge and known merge into one. It is totality of simple and undifferentiated experiences, the bedrock of all our ordinary consciousness and knowledge. It is at once the essence of our individual self and the highest principle of the universe, the Brahman, the Pramāṇa.”

52 On Himself, SABCL, 26, 86.
53 On Himself, SABCL, 26, 86.
54 On Himself, SABCL, 26, 49-50. For the text of the speech, see, Bandemataram, SABCL, 1, 652. Thereafter, same was his experience with his philosophical writings. He wrote to Dilip Kumar Roy, as cited in DILIP KUMAR ROY, Sri Aurobindo Came to Me (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, [No Year
trials.

The knowledge of Brahma is not a thing luminous but otiose, informing to the intellectual view of things but without consequence to the soul of the individual or his living...the highest state of our being is not a denial, contradiction and annihilation of all that we now are, it is a supreme accomplishment of all things that our present existence means and aims at, but in their highest sense and in the eternal values.

Barindra Kumar Ghose is the younger brother of Sri Aurobindo.

It was Douglas Kingsford who presided over a number of press prosecutions and other svadési related trials.

Karmayogin, SABCL 2, 5.

Karmayogin, SABCL 2, 4.

R. R. Dharkar, Madhavag, 152 says that it was, according to Sri Aurobindo, not due to any personal effort that he had these realizations, but thanks to Lord's abundant grace.

In order to bring out the integral nature of Sri Aurobindo's inner life at its every stage, the researcher has made an attempt to juxtapose the various aspects of the first two realizations. See Appendix A.

Or, in other words, the realization of the formless Absolute and vision of the all-pervading Lord Krishna.

On Himself, SABCL 26, 50.

According to a few early disciples and some other writers, the climax of these important realization took place in 1910. See for instance, SATPREM, Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness (Delhi: The Mother's Institute of Research, 2000) 231-253: "Then, one day in 1910, at Chandamagore, a strange phenomenon took place. ...Sri Aurobindo had reached the bottom of the hole, he had crossed all the foul layers on which Life has grown like an inexplicable flower. There only remained that Light above shining more and more intensely as he descended, bringing forth all the fifth bit by bit under its exact ray, as if all this were calling ever more Light deeper, in a more and more solid concentration that was the mirror image of the concentration above, leaving this single wall of Shadow under this single Light when all of sudden, without any transition, in the depths of this inconscout Matter, in the dark cells of this body, without ecstasy without loss of individuality, without cosmic dissolution and with his eyes wide open, Sri Aurobindo was thrust into the Supreme Light: He broke into another Space and Time (Savitri I, SABCL 28, 91)." See also DR. THOMAS AYKAR, Cosmic Consciousness, 162-63.

Letters on Yoga I, SABCL 22, 259.

B. Brutelau, Worthy is the World. The Hindu Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, 31-40 presents the final realizations separately as the realization of 'multiform unity' and 'siddhi'. He rightly joins HARIDAS CHAUDHURI, Sri Aurobindo: The Prophet of Life Divine (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1960) 14, to state that the third spiritual realization, namely the multiform unity, was the foundation of Sri Aurobindo's unique distinction - a major contribution of Sri Aurobindo to the Indian philosophy - between the "Higher or divine Maya" and the "Lower or mundane Maya". However, this observation regarding the interrelation between spiritual experience and development of philosophy is very important as far as the present study is concerned.

Letters on Yoga I, SABCL 22, 236.

In Letters on Yoga I, SABCL 22, 234 he says that consciousness is "there even when it is not active on the surface but silent and immobile, it is there even when it is invisible on the surface, not reacting on the outward things or sensible to them, but withdrawn and either active or inactive within, it is there even when it seems to us to be quite absent and the being to our view unconscious and inanimate." Letters on Yoga I, SABCL 22, 234. Even in the body-consciousness humans can become aware of five distinct mind-functions, such as the physical mind, the vital mind, the mental mind, the psychic mind and the spiritual mind. Indeed the average man is aware of the first three of these mind-functions. The hierarchy of mind-levels will be discussed in detail later in 2.3.1.4.

B. Brutelau, Worthy is the World. The Hindu Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, 31.

The Synthesis of Yoga I, SABCL 20, 139-9: "...the spiritualized mind will expand itself and transmute into a supernal power of knowledge...it will mount successively into the pure broad reaches of a higher mind and next into the gleaming belts of a still greater free intelligence illumined with a light from above. ...Here too not an end, for it must rise beyond into the very domain of that untruncated Intuition,... For there is an Overmind behind Mind, a Power more original and dynamic which supports Mind, sees it as a diminished radiation from itself,... The last step of the ascension would be the surpassing of Overmind itself or its return into its own still greater origin, its conversion into the supernal light..."
Supermind is a word coined by Sri Aurobindo. Its meaning and functions will be explained later in 2.3.1.3.5. Presently, note one of the descriptions found in The Hour of God, SABCL, 17, 7: “Supermind is at its source the dynamic consciousness, in its nature at once and inseparably infinite wisdom and infinite will of the divine knower and creator.”

75 See Letters on Yoga I, SABCL, 22, 259, “The scission between the two aspects of the Divine is a creation of the overmind which takes various aspects of the Divine and separates them into separate entities. Thus it divides Sat, Chit and Ananda, so that they become three separate aspects different from each other. In fact in the Reality there is no separateness, the three aspects are so fused into each other, so inseparably one that they are a single undivided reality. It is the same with the Personal and the Impersonal, the Saguna and Nirguna, the silent and the active Brahm. The overmind does not deny any in the aspects as the Mind does, it admits them all as aspects of the One Truth, but by separating them it originates the quarrel in the more ignorant more limited and divided Mind, because the Mind, cannot see how two opposite things can exist together in one Truth, how the Divine can be nirguna guna; having no experience of what is behind the two words it takes each in an absolute sense. The Impersonal is Existence, Consciousness, Bliss, not a Person, but a state. The Person is the Existent, the Consciousness, the Blissful, consciousness, existence, bliss taken as separate things are only states of his being. But in fact the two (personal being and the eternal state) are inseparable and are one reality.”

76 Record of Yoga I, CWSA, 10, 76-77 reads thus: “formerly I realized the Impersonal God, Brahman or Saccidananndam separately from the Personal, Ishwara or Saccidanda. Brahman has been thoroughly realized in its absolute infinity & as the material & informing presence of the world & each thing it contains, yet isca jagat is jagat. But the sense of the One has not been applicable utterly & constantly; there have been lacunae in the unitarian consciousness, partly because the personality has not been realized with equal thoroughness or as one with the Impersonality. Hence while dwelling on Paramatman, the mind, whenever the Jivatman manifested itself in the sarvam Brahman, has been unable to assimilate it to the predominant realization and an element of Daitya bhava, - of Visishatatawaita has entered into its perception. Even when the assimilation is partly effected, the jiva is felt as an individual and the local manifestation of the impersonal Chaitanya and not as the individual manifestation of Chaitanya as universal Personality. On the other hand the universal Sri Krishna or Krishna-Kali in all things animate or inanimate has been realized entirely, but not with sufficient constancy & latterly with little frequency. The remedy is to unify the two realizations & towards this consummation the Shakti to be now moving.” On 30th December of the same year he wrote in Record of Yoga I, CWSA, 10, 168; “Realization of Atman & Brahman Nirguna & Saguna is always available & a once returns in fullness when the mind turns in that direction, but the nitya smaraana is not there, because perhaps the realization of Ishwara is not equally well-established.” Yet, as he notes in Supplemet, SABCL, 27, 433, shortly after 15 August 1912, he seemed to have written regarding these final realizations that he had received its final zeal and something like a consummation by a prolonged realization and dwelling in Parabrahman.

77 The Synthesis of Yoga I, SABCL, 20, 49.

78 The Synthesis of Yoga II, SABCL, 20, 49.

79 A. B. PURANI, The Life of Sri Aurobindo (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1989) 247 writes about this experience; “The 24th Nov. 1926 was the descent of Krishna into the physical. Krishna is not the supernal light. The descent of Krishna would mean the descent of the Overmind Godhead preparing, though not itself actually, the descent of Supermind and Ananda.”

80 In 1956, six years after the death of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother announced that the supermind had descended through her.

81 In The Synthesis of Yoga II, SABCL, 21, 783 he contrasts the two states of consciousness: “From the consciousness of the ordinary mind subject to the control of vital and material Nature and limited wholly by birth and death and Time and the needs and desires of the mind, life and body to the consciousness of the spirit free in itself and using the circumstances of the mind, life and body as admitted or self-chosen and self-figuring determinations of the spirit, using them in a free self-knowledge, a free will and power of being, a free delight of being.” The statuses of transformation are directly related to the statuses of consciousness. Although in his Record of Yoga Sri Aurobindo gives a multilevel depiction of consciousness, in Letters on Yoga I, SABCL, 22, 95 he has simplified it as a three-layer entity and related it to a triple transformation process; “There are different statuses (avashta) of the Divine Consciousness. There are also different statuses of transformation. First is the psychic transformation, in which all is in contact with the Divine through the individual psychic consciousness. Next is the spiritual transformation in which all is merged in the Divine in the cosmic consciousness. Third is the supramental transformation in which all becomes supramentalized in the Divine Gnostic consciousness. It is only with the last that there can begin the complete transformation of mind, life, and body.”

82 SATPREM, Sri Aurobindo or The Adventure of Consciousness, 231.
However, language and life-experiments shall not be conceived as two unrelated means of communication. Indeed, the former, in the case of Sri Aurobindo, is itself a fusion of life as lived and the lingual forms employed. The alleged limitations of his life experiments will be discussed in the next section.

When Sri Aurobindo read the telegram informing him his wife’s death, he wrote to his father-in-law; as found in Supplement, SABCL. 27, 422; “... words are useless in the face of feelings it has caused, even if they can ever express our deepest emotions. God has seen good to lay upon me the one sorrow that could still touch me to the center. He knows better than ourselves what is best for each of us, and now the first sense of the irreparable has passed, I can bow with submission to his divine purpose. The physical tie between us is, as you say, severed, but the tie of affection subsists for me. Where I have once loved, I do not cease from loving.” To note another instance, PETER HEFFES, Sri Aurobindo. A Brief Biography, 44–45 describes Sri Aurobindo’s reaction to the news regarding the deportation of Lala Lajpat Rai; “In Calcutta Aurobindo was wakened from his sleep and given the telegram bringing the bad news from Lahore. He got up, asked for pencil and paper, and wrote: “Lala Lajpatrai has been deported out of British India. The fact is its own comment. The telegram goes on to say that indignation meetings have been for four days. Indignation meetings? The hour for speeches and fine writing is past. The bureaucracy has thrown down the gauntlet. We take it up. Men of Pranj! Race of the lion! Show these men who would stamp you into the dust that for one Lajpat they have taken away, a hundred Lajpats will arise in his place. Let them hear a hundred times louder your war-cry – Jai Hindustan.”


Stating the linguistic problem clearly and making an inquiry into Sri Aurobindo’s solution to the same is definitely a promising research project. However, it does not come under the purview of the present search. For such detailed treatment of the linguistic problem see V.K. Gokak, The Poetic Approach to Language (No place of publication, OUP, 1952).

V. MADHUSUDHAN REDDY, 7 Studies in Sri Aurobindo, 163.


V. MADHUSUDHAN REDDY, 7 Studies in Sri Aurobindo 173.

V. MADHUSUDHAN REDDY, 7 Studies in Sri Aurobindo 173.

However in his Record of Yoga a number of literary forms and languages other than English such as Sanskrit, Greek, etc, are mentioned and used. See, for instance, Record of Yoga, CWSA, 1488 ff.

And, IMMANUEL KANT, Critique of Pure Reason (Trans.) NORMAN KEMP SMITH (New York: The Modern Library, 1958) 38 suggests that they “perhaps spring from a common, but to us uncommon, root.”

IMMANUEL KANT, Critique of Pure Reason, 91.

IMMANUEL KANT, Critique of Pure Reason, 91; “... all combination – be we conscious of it or not, be it a manifold of intuitions, empirical or non-empirical, or of various concepts – is an act of the understanding. To this act the general title ‘synthesis’ may be assigned.”

IMMANUEL KANT, Critique of Pure Reason, 75.

Transcendental, according to IMMANUEL KANT, Critique of Pure Reason, 37-38 means “all knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode of knowledge is to be possible a priori.” Besides a few judgments “which are necessary and in the strictest sense universal” and some concepts like substance, there are “certain modes of knowledge” that “leave the field of all possible experiences and have the appearance of extending the scope of our judgments beyond all limits of experience and this by means of concepts to which no corresponding object can ever be given in experience” are all a priori in nature. (See, IMMANUEL KANT, Critique of Pure Reason, 28.) The following long and complex passage from IMMANUEL KANT, Critique of Pure Reason, 76 would further clarify why a transcendental deduction in contradistinction with empirical deduction is required: “We are already in possession of concepts which are of two quite different kinds, and which yet agree in that they relate to objects in a completely a priori manner, namely, the concepts of space and time as forms of sensibility, and categories as concepts of understanding. To seek an empirical deduction of either of these types of concept would be labour entirely lost. For their distinguishing feature consists just in this, that they relate to their objects without having borrowed from experience any thing that can serve in representation of these objects. If, therefore, a deduction of such concepts is indispensable, it must be in any case transcendental.”

99 Intellectual synthesis (Synthesis Intelectualis) is a synthesis by means of which the categories are "related through the mere understanding to objects of intuition in general, without it being determined whether this intuition is our own or some other but still sensible one" (IMMANUEL KANT, Critique of Pure Reason, B. 150). Thus, while intellectual synthesis abstracts from the apriori forms of intuition, figurative synthesis (Synthesis Speciosa), on the other hand, bases itself on the fact that certain form of sensible intuition apriori is fundamental in humans. Figurative synthesis is a transcendental synthesis of imagination (IMMANUEL KANT', Critique of Pure Reason, B. 151). There is a lively debate in the philosophical circle today regarding the primacy of figurative synthesis.

100 Since, as IMMANUEL KANT, Critique of Pure Reason, 38 says, the purpose of transcendental synthesis is not "to extend knowledge, but only to correct it, and not to supply a touchstone of the value, or lack of value, of all apriori knowledge," the present study stands justified in its use of this concept and its internal distinction for heuristic purpose.

101 Recollecting such times Sri Aurobindo writes in On Himself, SABCL, 26, 374; "Look here! Do these people expect me to turn myself again into a machine for producing articles? The times of Bande Mataram and Arya are over, thank God."

102 On Himself, SABCL, 26, 84.163.

103 Such a choice is made because this thesis, taking into account the place and significance given to spiritual realizations, regards Sri Aurobindo as a spiritual man who knew inwardly, articulated lingually and, practiced literally what the Divine said to have revealed to him and what in turn he subsequently tried to explain in his works.

104 In The Life Divine I, SABCL, 18, 2 Sri Aurobindo states; "Essentially all Nature seeks a harmony, life and matter in their own sphere as much as mind in the arrangement of its perceptions."


106 Book I is devoted for this task. Spirit and matter, personal and the impersonal, being and becoming, the one and many, the individual and society, determination and free-will, action and silence, works and knowledge, and renunciation and enjoyment are the other opposites that Sri Aurobindo seeks to reconcile in The Life Divine.

107 He coins the term inconscient (See, Letters on Yoga I, SABCL, 22, 9, The Life Divine I, SABCL, 18, 334. 550, Letters on Yoga I, SABCL, 22, 27, 223, 279. Savitri II, SABCL, 29, 753.) — the self-created opposite of Brahm — to denote the basis from where consciousness ascends through the levels of matter, life, and mind to the supramental higher planes where sat-chit-ananda is regained. It is a re-gaining because this ascension is preceded by an involution of Brahm who has allowed himself to involve in his own self-created opposite, the Inconscient. Where human existence is understood as a process-reality moving towards its fulfillment in and through the stages of evolution, the comparative estimations of imperfection and evil become understandable facts: of life generated by an epistemic inevitability. Sri Aurobindo establishes this point by reconciling knowledge and ignorance against the background of spiritual evolution. (See the Second Book of The Life Divine I, SABCL, 18).

108 The Life Divine II, SABCL, 19, 911, 714.

109 The Life Divine II, SABCL, 19, 516, 834, 835.


111 PETER HEEHS, Sri Aurobindo: A Brief Biography, 114.


113 PETER HEEHS, Sri Aurobindo: A Brief Biography, 116.

114 See the 2nd chapter of The Future Poetry, SABLC, 9. See the following passage from The Future Poetry, SABLC, 9, 18 that gives a sample argument for the superiority of poetry: "For in all things that speech can express there are two elements, the outward or instrumental and the real or spiritual. In thought for instance, there is the intellectual idea, that which the intellect makes precise and definite to us, and the soul idea that which exceeds the intellectual and brings us into nearness or identity with the whole reality of the thing expressed. Equally in emotion, it is not the mere emotion that the poet seeks, but the soul of
emotion, that in it for the delight for which the soul in us and the world desires or accepts emotional experience. So too with the poetical sense of objects, the poet's attempt to embody in his speech truth of life, truth of Nature, is this greater truth and its delight and beauty for which he is seeking, beauty which is truth and truth beauty and therefore a joy for ever, because it brings us the delight of the soul in the discovery of its own deeper realities. This greater element the more timid and temperate speech of prose can sometimes shadow out to us, but the heightened and fearless style of poetry makes it close and living and the higher cadence of poetry carry in on their wings what the style by itself could not bring."

115 Lyric, drama, narrative and epic were the poetic forms in which Sri Aurobindo made his productions. Unlike in the case of prose writings, here it is hardly possible to make a distinction between the works that are exclusively spiritual and that are completely secular. True, that there are a few poems written even in the pre-yogic phase of his life and while he was at Pondicherry that deal directly with the spiritual themes. But on the other hand, the plays he wrote, for instance, even while he was deeply involved in Yoga, were powerful dramatic presentations of some or other love stories from the Greek myths, the Arabian Nights, Kathasarith Sagara, etc.

116 Mantra, according to The Upanishads, SABCL, 12, 169 is “a word of power born of the secret depths of our being where it has been brooded upon by a deeper consciousness than the mental, framed in the heart and not constructed by the intellect, held in the mind, and again concentrated on by the waking mental consciousness and then thrown out silently or vocally — the silent word is perhaps held to be more potent than the spoken — precisely for the work of creation.” And Mantric language, according to The Future Poetry, SABCL, 9, 360-76 is one that “conveys infinitely more than the mere surface sense of the words seems to indicate, a rhythm that means even more than the language and is born out of the infinite and disappears into it, the power to convey not merely the mental, vital or physical contents or indications or values of the thing uttered, but its significance and figure in some fundamental and original consciousness which is behind all these and greater.”

117 V. MADHUSSUHAN REDDY, 7 Studies in Sri Aurobindo, 83.
118 PETER HEESH, Sri Aurobindo: A Brief Biography, 124.
119 PETER HEESH Sri Aurobindo: A Brief Biography, 127.
121 MONA SARKAR, Sweet Mother—Harmonies of Light (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1978) 22.
122 Mahabharata, Vanaprastam 293-99.
123 In Savitri I, CWSA, 33, Author’s Note Sri Aurobindo says; “This legend is, as shown by many features of the human tale, one of the many symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle. Satyavan is the soul carrying the divine truth of being with in itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance; Savitri is the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun, goddess of the supreme Truth who comes down and who is born to save; Aswapati, the Lord of the Horse, her human father, is the Lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of spiritual endeavour that helps us to rise from the mortal to the immortal planes; Dyumatsena, Lord of the shining Hosts, father of Satyavan is the Divine mind here fallen blind, losing its celestial kingdom vision, and through that loss its kingdom of glory.”
124 Savitri I, CWSA, 33, Author’s Note.
125 The Synthesis of Yoga II, SABCL, 21, 853.
126 V. MADHUSSUHAN REDDY, 7 Studies in Sri Aurobindo, 78. Also elsewhere in p. 82* of his study of Savitri, V. MADHUSSUHAN REDDY says; “The main thrust of the epic is the ascent and conquest of the kingdoms of consciousness; the epic itself is disarmingly wide and bold ... in its style and space. Where the Space is the canvas and Time used for the brush, and pigments are of the essences of manifold consciousness with the Avatar as the supreme artist, surely Savitri is the portrait of humanity’s Gnostic future.”
127 V. MADHUSSUHAN REDDY, 7 Studies in Sri Aurobindo, 84.
128 Savitri, SABCL, 28, 1-10
129 Savitri, SABCL, 28, 557.
130 V. MADHUSSUHAN REDDY, 7 Studies in Sri Aurobindo, 94.
132 Savitri, SABCL, 29, 666.
133 Savitri, SABCL, 29, 711.
134 In a letter to Dr. Munje found in On Himself, SABLC, 26, 432, he wrote that he had “definitely commenced another kind of work with a spiritual basis, a work of spiritual, social, cultural and economic reconstruction of an almost revolutionary kind, and ..., making or at least supervising a sort of practical or laboratory in that sense which needs all the attention and energy ..."
Sanatana Dharma to reading, underscores worries about his having apologetic motives, perhaps unconsciously, in finding an Yuga. That work has to begin on A perfect humanity being intended, society will center, which Vedanta and Veda in part of the above implicit mystic empiricism in other Hindu literature. (Could not be that Aurobindo’s love of Indian culture approached Though a universal human intelligence.) Schocken, 1968)

Sri Aurobindo that Hinduism alone religion is to aim at so growing knowledge from our mind and life and become aware of the Divinity within us.”

For instance, basing himself on certain historicist reasons, STEPHEN H. PHILLIPS, Aurobindo’s Philosophy of Brahman, 84-85 opines that “Vedic study has negligible influence upon Aurobindo’s philosophy.” Also he suspects the genuineness of Sri Aurobindo’s interest in undertaking Vedic study. He says, “his very interest in that ancient Hindu book par excellence, regardless of the correctness of his reading, underscores worries about his having apologetic motives, perhaps unconsciously, in finding an implicit mystic empiricism in other Hindu literature. (Could not be that Aurobindo’s love of Indian culture led him unconsciously to view a whole Hindu conceptual gestalt as well-founded in the experiences of a long line of Indian mystics?)” (35-6), and, LOUIS RENOU, Religions of Ancient India (New York: Schocken, 1968) 171 questions the correctness of Sri Aurobindo’s understanding of Vedas: “According to

135 He has listed those four works in a letter in Supplement, SABLC, 27, 433-34: “1. To re-explain the Sanatana Dharma to the human intellect in all its parts, from a new standpoint. This work is already beginning, and three parts of it are being clearly worked out. ... I have therefore to re-explain the whole Vedanta and Veda in such a way that it will be seen how all religious arise out of it and is one every where. In this way it will be proved that India is the center of the religious life of the world and its destined Saviour through Sanatana Dharma. 2. On the basis of Vedic knowledge, to establish a yogic Sadhana which will not only liberate the soul, but prepare a perfect humanity and help in the restoration of Satya Yuga. That work has to begin now but it will not be complete till the end of the Kali. 3. India being the center, to work for the restoration to her proper place in the world, but this restoration must be effected as a part of the above work and by means of Yoga applied to human means and instruments, not otherwise. 4. A perfect humanity being intended, society will have to be remodeled so as to be fit to contain that perfection.”

136 Supplement, SABLC, 27, 434.

137 This is an observation made by PETER HEHES, Sri Aurobindo: A Brief Biography. 3: “It seemed to Aurobindo that Hinduism alone among the ‘great embodiments of the old religions & moral spirit’ did not on the side of reason stand naked to the assaults of Science’. Hinduism therefore could serve as the framework of a new world outlook.”

138 Karmayogin, SABCL, 2, 19.

139 Karmayogin, SABCL, 2, 19.

140 Bande Mataram, SABLC, 1, 755: “Hinduism is no sect or dogmatic creed, no bundle of formulas, no set of social rules, but a mighty eternal and universal truth.” In fact, the term Hinduism was originally and etymologically employed in a geographical sense than in a sectarian sense.

141 Karmayogin, SABCL, 2, 17.

142 The Foundations of Indian Culture, SABCL, 14, 136.

143 The Foundations of Indian Culture, SABCL, 14, 136: “First come the idea of the One Existence of the Veda to whom Sages give different names, the One without a second of the Upanishads who is All that is, and beyond all that is, the Permanent of the Buddhists, the Absolute of the Illusionists, the supreme God or Purusha of the Theists who holds in his power the soul and Nature, - in a word the Eternal, the Infinite. This is the first common foundation; but it can be and is expressed in an endless variety of formulas by the human intelligence. To discover and closely approach and enter into whatever kind of degree of unity with this Permanent, this Infinite, this Eternal, is the highest height and last effort of its spiritual experience.”

144 The Foundations of Indian Culture, SABCL, 14, 36-37: “... second basic idea is the manifold way of man’s approach to the Eternal and Infinite. The Infinite is full of many infinities and each of these infinities is itself the very Eternal. ... in each finite we can discover and through all things as his forms and symbols we can approach the Infinite; all cosmic powers are manifestations, all forces are forces of the One.”

145 The Foundations of Indian Culture, SABCL, 14, 138: “It is that while the supreme or the Divine can be approached though a universal consciousness and by piercing through all inner and outer Nature, That or He can be met by each individual soul in itself, in its own spiritual part, because there is something in it that is intimately one or at least intimately related with the one divine Existence. The essence of Indian religion is to aim at so growing and so living that we can grow out of the ignorance which veils this self-knowledge from our mind and life and become aware of the Divinity within us.”

146 Essays on the Gita, CWSA, 19, 9: The Vedas contain, in Sri Aurobindo’s reading, a synthesis of “the psychological being of man in its highest flights and widest range of divine knowledge, power, joy, life and glory with the cosmic existence of the gods,...”

147 Essays on the Gita, CWSA, 19, 9.


149 Essays on the Gita, CWSA, 19, 9.

150 Essays on the Gita, CWSA, 19, 9. See the Foot Note, no.1.

151 However, there are few negative remarks found registered against Sri Aurobindo’s Vedic background: For instance, basing himself on certain historicist reasons, STEPHEN H. PHILLIPS, Aurobindo’s Philosophy of Brahman, 84-85 opines that “Vedic study has negligible influence upon Aurobindo’s philosophy.” Also he suspects the genuineness of Sri Aurobindo’s interest in undertaking Vedic study. He says, “his very interest in that ancient Hindu book par excellence, regardless of the correctness of his reading, underscores worries about his having apologetic motives, perhaps unconsciously, in finding an implicit mystic empiricism in other Hindu literature. (Could not be that Aurobindo’s love of Indian culture led him unconsciously to view a whole Hindu conceptual gestalt as well-founded in the experiences of a long line of Indian mystics?)” (35-6), and, LOUIS RENOU, Religions of Ancient India (New York: Schocken, 1968) 171 questions the correctness of Sri Aurobindo’s understanding of Vedas: “According to
this theory the Veda is a vast piece of symbolism representing the passions of the soul and its striving after higher spiritual planes: thus the Veda, we are told, ceases to be a barbarous and unintelligible hymnary. I fear that it also ceases to be a document of pre-history and becomes a manual of modern theosophy. Such an obvious anachronism is not likely to convince any serious student."

152 The Secret of the Veda, SABCL, 10, 37.

153 In The Secret of the Veda, SABCL, 10, 37 he says: "... the importance of this element increased in my eyes when I found, first, that the mantras of the Veda illuminated with a clear and exact light psychological experiences of my own for which I had found no sufficient explanation either in European psychology or in the teaching of Yoga or of Vedanta, so far as I was acquainted with them, and, secondly, they shed light on obscure passages and ideas of the Upanisads to which previously, I could attach no exact meaning."

154 The Upanisads, SABCL, 12, 71 reads thus: "The Upanisads being vehicles of illumination and not of instruction, composed for seekers who already had general familiarity with the ideas of the Vedic and Vedantic seers and even some personal experience of the truths on which they were founded, dispense in their style with expressed transitions of thought and the development of subordinate notions. Every verse in the Isā Upanisad reposes on a number of ideas implicit in the text but nowhere set forth explicitly: the reasoning that supports its conclusions is suggested by the words, not expressly conveyed to the intelligence. The reader, or rather hearer, was supposed to proceed from light to light, confirming his intuitions and verifying by experience, not submitting the ideas to the judgments of the logical reasoning."

155 The Future Poetry, SABCL, 19, 322.

156 The Hour of God, SABCL, 17, 80.

157 The Hour of God, SABCL, 17, 129.

158 STEPHEN H. PHILLIPS, Aurobindo’s Philosophy of Brahman, 80.

159 Gītā 4.11, A symbolic presentation of this idea can be found in Gītā 11.11, 11.15, A related concept of Iṣṭadevata is found in Gītā 9.23,9.26,15.18, etc. For these references the researcher is indebted to STEPHEN H. PHILLIPS, Aurobindo’s Philosophy of Brahman, 80-5.

160 Essays on the Gita, CWSA, 19, 4.

161 Essays on the Gita, CWSA, 19, 5.


163 Although the word Vedānta literally means the end of Veda, and therefore, the Upaniṣads, Vedāntic philosophy has a wider scope. Besides the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavadgītā and the Vedānta Aphorisms of Bādarāyaṇa had also been the basic sources of Vedāntic philosophers.

164 T. M. P. MAHADEVAN, Outlines of Hinduism (Bombay: Chetana Limited, 1960) 216: Sri Aurobindo was a Hindu seer and saint. He "represented in himself the loftiest virtues of Hinduism, and showed to mankind the way to achieve the final goal of life. "The realization and the propagation of the truth of the Hindu religion was the original spiritual mission of Sri Aurobindo. This fact becomes clear when we examine the content of the way the voice of the Bhagavan of the Gītā told him in a profound religious experience that he claims to have had in the Alipur Jail: "Something has been shown to you in this year of seclusion, something about which you had your doubts and it is the truth of the Hindu religion. It is this religion that I am raising up before the world, it is this religion: that I have perfected and developed through risis, saints and avatars, and now it is going forth to do my work among the nations."

(Quoted in T. M. P. MAHADEVAN, Outlines of Hinduism, 232.) As it appears, from a historicist point of view, Hindu religion is not monolithic in the nature of its rituals and the details of beliefs. Therefore an in-depth study of an individual thinker and system in Indian Philosophy naturally calls for a clarification of the philosophical and religious background of the thinker and his system.

165 The religio-philosophic thought of India finds its first clearest formulation in the Upaniṣads. See for instance C. Up. VI. 1.3, VII. 1.3; K. Up. II. 1.2,4,11,2.12. A cognitive apprehension of the Absolute and a direct experience of the Absolute (by which man attains the supreme goal of his religious life) are two equally important aspects of the Upaniṣads. According to R. S. MISRA, Studies in Philosophies and Religion (Varanasi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashana, 1971) xx: "It is true that the philosophers of the Upaniṣads show a considerable intellectual curiosity and earnestness for having a clear and right understanding and apprehension of the Absolute and its relationship with man and the world. Yet their thought is not moved by the speculative demands of the human mind. It arises ultimately out of a deeper understanding and appreciation of the existential situation of man which is symbolized by the concept of suffering. The solution to man’s suffering lies, ..., in having a correct knowledge of Brahman or the Absolute and attaining unity with it. This approach evinces a deep and intimate relationship between philosophy and religion. Philosophy reveals the real nature and structure of the Absolute or Brahman and its relation to the world process and man and religion shows man the way to realize the supreme value of his life called moksa or liberation by attaining unity with Brahman. This deep and intimate relationship between
philosophy and religion is found not only in the Upanisads but in all the systems of Indian Philosophy." The situation is different as far as the Western thought is concerned. S. K. MAITRA, *The Meeting of the East and the West in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1956) 13-14 observes, "The unfortunate conflict between the two in the West is due to the fact that Religion wanted to be all in all, that it not only laid down what values were to be pursued, but even what facts are to be accepted as true. This naturally brought Religion not only into conflict with Philosophy but also with Science." But in the Indian culture, without being reduced to one another, philosophy and religion remained always related and yet flourished independently in their proper domains. However, the distinction shall not be confused with the notion of difference. Perhaps the apt word to describe their relationship is "advaita" itself. The integral non-dualism of Sri Aurobindo is an example of a modern Indian system in which the two distinct disciplines of philosophy and religion are brought into inter-relation and mutual integration.

According to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, these two orientations are to be cultivated as two complementary attitudes. And Sankara, an uncompromising absolutist, is himself said to have composed poems of devotional nature. See the Forward of S. M. SRINIVASA CHARI, *Advaita and Visistadvaita* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1961).

HARIDAS CHAUDHURI, *The Philosophy of Integralism*, 14. And he further observes in the same page: "In India transcendentalism was more mystical and philosophic in outlook. It received its highest expression in Buddha and Sankara. It performed no doubt an important function in man's quest of the spiritual truth. But in the course of time its negative feature—its world and life negation character—began to come to fore. Consequently we find that the transcendentalism of Ubuntu and Sankara had to be strenuously combated in later times by the theistic schools of Vedanta."

P.T. RAJU, *Structural Depths of Indian Thought* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1985) 377. See P.T. RAJU, *Structural Depths of Indian Thought*, 377-378. The Pasupata tradition treated the Vedantic Brahman as Siva and is therefore called Siva Tradition, whereas *Pancaratra* treats the Brahman as Vighyu and is called the Vaishhava tradition.


Ramanujas philosophy gives a theistic interpretation of Vedanta. He differs from Sankara with regard to the kind of relation of the world to God. The souls of the world and the world of matter are real but their reality is dependent on the independent reality of God. He further postulates a spiritual principle at the basis of the world, which could be contrasted with the principle of Maya found in the unqualified non-dualism of Sankara, for the former is not an illusion. Brahman is eternally free from all imperfections, absolutely independent and the sole controller of all. On the other side, matter being unconscious and the souls being ignorant, the world of nature remains imperfect. Also, they are utterly dependent on Brahman and controlled by Brahman. Ramanuja's theory is called non-dualmism, because, as to him, the world of nature and individual souls have no existence and purpose apart from Brahman. All the same, it is not pure non-dualism, rather it is a qualified one, for it admits plurality of forms as souls and matter in which the supreme spirit subsists.

In the list of the interpreters of Vedanta, Madhva holds the extreme position of unqualified dualism. In opposition to Sankara's advaita and in agreement with Ramanuja, Madhva affirms the reality of souls and matter, and he goes further, to differ from Ramanuja, to explain the exact nature of souls and Brahman. Brahman is the independent reality and the absolute creator of the universe. He is identified with Vishnu who directs the world. The distinction between Brahman and jiva is real. Hence, neither in this world nor in the life after final release, they are non-dual. Two individual souls are not alike. The world of nature originates from the primary matter, Prakriti, and returns to it in the course of time. Thus, he rejects all attempts to reduce the world of souls and nature to a mere illusion or an emanation of God, and sets forth an absolute dualism.

P.T. RAJU, *Structural Depths of Indian Thought*, 381.


B.S.S.B. iii, 2.22, as cited in RADHAKRISHNAN, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. II. 533.

RADHAKRISHNAN, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. I. 533-534.

B.S.S.B. 4. 3.14 as cited in RADHAKRISHNAN, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. II. 533.

B.S.S.B. 1.3.1 as cited in RADHAKRISHNAN, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. II. 535.

RADHAKRISHNAN, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. I. 538.

B. Up. 3.8.8.

K. Up. 3. 15.

Upalabhyartham, and Upasanartham. See, RADHAKRISHNAN, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. II. 539.

For instance, C. Up. I.6.6; iii.14.2.

RADHAKRISHNAN, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. II, 564.
STEPHEN H. PHILLIPS, Aurobindo’s Philosophy of Brahman, 64, Note 26: “Note that in the thirty volumes of his collected works only four classical philosophers beside Sankara are mentioned and these are never more than twice, to judge from the enormous index compiled for the SABC. Compare this with the more than forty mentions each for Kalidasa and Sankara, authors whom it is sure Aurobindo read in Sanskrit. There are, by the way, several interesting Western philosophical titles on the list of his books, for example, William James’ Principles of Psychology. ... Also among his books were secondary works on Locke and Hume and many of Plato’s dialogues, some in the original Greek.”


STEPHEN H. PHILLIPS, Aurobindo’s Philosophy of Brahman, 64, Note 28. Principally he has carefully studied Sankara’s Upanisadic commentaries.

STEPHEN H. PHILLIPS, Aurobindo’s Philosophy of Brahman, 67. Italics added.

N. K. DEVARAJA, An Introduction to Sankara’s Theory of Knowledge (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972) 48-9 says: “... rationalizing tendency in Sankara forbids us to class him as mystic. Nor is it apt to compare him with the schoolmen. [Scholasticism according to Dr. Stecherbatsky, ‘is either (1) philosophy in the service of religion or (2) excessive subtlety and artificiality in philosophical constructions’ (Buddhist Nirvana, p.23.). None of these definitions applies to Sankara’s work. (Devaraja’s Foot Note)] It is seldom that Sankara rests content with merely quoting the scripture on a vital metaphysical issue. Authority of reason is invariably invoked to defend, strengthen and reinforce the authority of the scripture. ... Purely logical considerations must be shown to lead to the same conclusion. Therefore, Sankara adds a series of arguments. ... It is a quality and the extent of the rational and empirical elements in Sankara’s philosophy which largely determine his place as a metaphysical thinker.”


STEPHEN H. PHILLIPS, Aurobindo’s Philosophy of Brahman, 69: “Fundamental to the Mimasaka is to view these so called declarations as also injunctions, or as sentences ancillary to injunctions to perform certain rites or to behave in a certain way (‘dharma’). Sankara resists such assimilation. He maintains that though the greater mass of Vedic sentences is indeed injunctive, enjoining “right religious practice,” dharma, the performance of the rituals is necessary only for those who have not the capacity to understand the Upanisadic great declarations. These he does not believe are injunctive at all, but rather expressive truths about Brahman,...”

S.B. 1, 1, 2 cited in N. K. DEVARAJA, An Introduction to Sankara’s Theory of Knowledge, 65.

S.B. 2, 1, 6: “The statement that, because Brahman is something existent, other pramanas may apply to it, is gratuitous. For, being devoid of colour, form, etc., it cannot become an object of perception; and having no characteristic mark etc., it is not amenable to inference and other pramanas. ...” Cited in N. K. DEVARAJA, An Introduction to Sankara’s Theory of Knowledge, 66.

S.B. 1, 1, 4: “The aim of sastra is the removal of all distinctions created by Avidya or nescience, its purport is not to represent the Brahman as “this” object.” Cited in N. K. DEVARAJA, An Introduction to Sankara’s Theory of Knowledge, 66.

N. K. DEVARAJA, An Introduction to Sankara’s Theory of Knowledge, 67.

N. K. DEVARAJA, An Introduction to Sankara’s Theory of Knowledge, 67.

STEPHEN H. PHILLIPS, Aurobindo’s Philosophy of Brahman, 71-2.

See 2.3.1.3.

STEPHEN H. PHILLIPS, Aurobindo’s Philosophy of Brahman, 72 notes the similarity between Sankara and Sri Aurobindo: “Sankara often reveals motives that are more akin to those of a spiritual preceptor than those of a philosopher, that is to say, of someone concerned - like the Upanisads in part and decidedly like Aurobindo - with putatively actual transformations of ordinary awareness which are considered supremely or at least extremely valuable.”

S. M. SRINIVASA CHARI, Vaishnavism – its Philosophy Theology and Religious Discipline (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988) 1. Sri Vaishnavism is the oldest monotheistic religion of India.

M. HIRIYANNA, Essentials of Indian Philosophy (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1949) 175.

M. HIRIYANNA, Essentials of Indian Philosophy, 175.

However, these theistic thinkers are not Sri Aurobindo’s important intellectual sources. But, he mentions the Bengali mystic Caitanya.

Letters of Sri Aurobindo, 1947 Ed. 52-3.

Essays on the Gita, CWSSA, 19, 9-10.

STEPHEN H. PHILLIPS, Aurobindo’s Philosophy of Brahman, 82 argues on the other hand that the ‘world affirmativism’ as opposed to the Sankhya-Yoga, early Buddhist and Advaita ideal of ‘world-negationism’ is coming from Sri Aurobindo’s contact with the Western humanist values.

T. M. P. MAHADÉVAN, Outlines of Hinduism, 181; RADHAKRISHNAN, Indian Philosophy, vol. II. 662.
According to P.T. RAJU, *Structural Depths of Indian Thought*, 510, it is said to have developed its philosophy under the influence of Śaṅkara’s advaita to which it is very much similar, though, unlike Śaṅkara, Māya is taken by them as a real entity.

Śakti has five aspects: Consciousness (chit), Bliss (ānanda), Will (ichchha), Knowledge (jnāna) and Creativity (kriya). Among these five aspects, Consciousness (chit) and Bliss (ānanda) constitute the eternal essential nature of Śiva and the other three do not essentially belong to His nature, but are dependent on His Absolute freedom. Consciousness is the indeterminate and immediate spiritual experience of Śiva, which is nothing but His self-awareness about His own absolute freedom and eternal bliss. Will, Knowledge and Creativity are generally used in relation to subject-object duality and the creation of the universe. All the same, when they are used in the absolute sense, they all stand united as identical with Consciousness. It is in this sense that Creativity is called the spontaneous activity of the Self-Consciousness. Thus Creativity, as the natural and spontaneous activity of self-consciousness out of freedom and joy, has to be understood in contradistinction with action (karma), which is a physical or an ethical action that could be either voluntary, mechanical or automatic.


Tāntric scriptures are the most misunderstood religious literature in the Indian culture. It has been described as a mixture of black magic and esoteric mysticism. See, for instance, NICOL MACNICOL, *Religious Philosophy* of Upanīads (Delhi: Sanjay Prakashan, 2000) 187; “Its metaphysics is the metaphysics of Sankhya but it is the Sankhya linked to mythology that has its root in the darkest fears and the grossest passions of the human soul.” A convincing and a thoroughgoing presentation of Tāntric Philosophy is available in SIR JOHN WOODROFFE, Śakti and Śakta (Madras: Ganesh & Co Ltd, 1959). It is true that lot of malpractices have crept into the actual ritual performance of Tāntric cults. But its philosophical nuances are significant and still worthy of further exploration.

SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA, *The Spiritual Heritage of India* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1962) 144. And, regarding the specificity of Śaktism RADHAKRISHNAN, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. II. 662 says, “The Sankhya theory of purusa and prakṛti, offered a philosophical justification for Śakti, the principle of life and expression. As Siva is unknowable, unapproachable and entirely inactive, Śakti, who is one with him, ever active, became the source of divine grace.”

According to Śaktism, Māya is not a principle of illusion as it is employed in Buddhism and in Śaṅkara’s system.


This ritual is also known as Pancā-makāra-pūja. The five objects involved are Wine- madya, Meat- māṁsa, Fish-matya, Grain-mudra, and Woman-māthuna. The ritual of wine and woman gained some notoriety. However, as SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA, *The Spiritual Heritage of India*, Note 2, 149 says, “The symbols of wine and woman are employed in order to teach freedom from lustful passions by trying to see everywhere the Divine mother.”


For instance, see SWAMI NIKHILANDA (Trans.) *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Conversations recorded in Bangali by Mahendranath Gupta) (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942).

SIR JOHN WOODROFFE, Śakti and Śakta, 234. In this sense, if SIR JOHN WOODROFFE’S observation is factually right, conceiving the Tāntric traditions as non-Vedāntic may not be methodologically accurate. Yet the distinction is retained here for a merely heuristic purpose.


S. K. MAITRA, *The Meeting of the East and the West in Sri Aurobindo’s Philosophy*, 31 observes; “The West aims at a fuller realization of the evolutionary and cosmic character of its thought. But it is hampered by its intellectualism and its existential outlook. What it requires is the acceptance of a spiritual standpoint, leading to the abandonment of its existential outlook and a modification of its extreme intellectualism. Similarly, Indian thought is spiritual but individualistic and static. It must break its narrow walls of individualism and acquire a dynamic and cosmic character. Therein lies its fulfillment.”

In Essays on the Gita, CW 19, 10-11 he writes: “We are not called upon to be orthodox Vedantins of any of the three schools or Tantrics or to adhere to one of the theistic religions of the past or to entrench ourselves with in the four corners of the teaching of the Gita. That would be to limit ourselves and to attempt to create our spiritual life out of the being, knowledge and nature of others, of the men of the past, instead of building it out of our own being and potentialities. We do not belong to the past dawns, but to the noons of the future. A mass of new material is flowing to us; we have not only to assimilate the influences of the great theistic religions of India and of the world and a recovered sense of the meaning of Buddhism, but to take full account of the potent though limited revelations of modern knowledge and seeking; and, beyond that, the remote and dateless past which seemed to be dead is returning up on us with an effulgence of many luminous secrets long lost to the consciousness of mankind now breaking out again from behind the veil. All this points to a new, a very rich, a very vast synthesis, a fresh and widely embracing harmonization of our gains is both an intellectual and spiritual necessity of the future. But just as the past syntheses have taken those which preceded them of their starting point, so also must that of the future, to be on firm ground, proceed from what the great bodies of realized spiritual thought and experience in the past have given.”