CHAPTER 7

FROM INTUITION TO MEDITATIVE THOUGHT

In the preceding chapters I have presented some theories of intuition in western philosophy which are concerned mainly with the epistemological aspect. But philosophers are not in agreement with one another. The main thesis that has emerged from the foregoing discussion is that the epistemological intuition is of three kinds: (i) sensuous intuition, (ii) intellectual intuition and (iii) intuition as an immediate experience of objects like reality, self, moral good, beauty, etc. Sensuous intuition does not give rise to any difficulty. In this sense objects of intuition are sense-data and it is obvious that in sense-experience we become directly aware of the sense-data. Moreover, sensuous intuition does not claim to give us knowledge in the pregnant sense because sense-data have to be organized to become definite and determinate objects of knowledge. Sense-data form an element of knowledge and appear prior to thought. But a problem arises when intellect claims to give us intuitive knowledge or intuition as a non-sensuous direct experience makes a knowledge claim. In either case there is a close relation between intellect and intuition. In the case of intellectual intuition the adjective 'intellectual' directly points to the most intimate relation between
intellect and intuition. In the latter case also the close relationship between intellect and intuition has been admitted though implicitly. The advocates of the theory of intuition, as an immediate experience, do not deny the function of intellect in intuitional knowledge. The chief exponents of the theory of intuition like Bergson or Sri Aurobindo in India felt the necessity of reason or intellect for the interpretation of intuitional knowledge. According to them, intellect has a definite and an important role in intuition. This suggests that intuition must somehow be related to thought or reason. Otherwise, knowledge is impossible. An experience qua non-sensuous does not amount to knowledge as thought has not given it a definite form. If thought were not necessary, hunches, premonition and all other sorts of non-sensuous experiences would amount to knowledge. But the knowledge-claim of such experiences cannot be justified. The word 'intuition' attached to such experiences has already been excluded from the study of epistemological intuition. In fact, to know means to have an experience but to have an experience is not necessarily a case of knowing unless thought or reason has given it a definite form.

The point to be stressed is that the epistemological intuition as an immediate, non-sensuous experience is also related to thought or reason. Whatever the case of epistemological intuition the close relation between intellect and
intuition has been admitted, precisely, how is the question. A further question is: whether the knowledge-claim of such intuitions can be justified. We have already answered the questions in the preceding chapters but the answers were given with reference to particular theories of knowledge of the individual philosophers. This chapter does not intend to give a summary of the results of the previous discussion. Rather, it would try to answer the above questions irrespective of any particular system of philosophy and then only may it be possible to indicate some general characteristics of intuition.

There may be two things - problem and mystery as suggested by G. Marcel.¹ The ontological status of the being, the relation of the mind-body, the existence of the self, reality, freedom, aesthetic beauty, etc. are the things among the mysteries of the world. G. Marcel mentions only the first three which he thinks to be mysterious objects. The problem which deals with matters of ordinary interest can be investigated by science and intellect; but the mysterious things ('thing' in the broad sense) like these cannot be the objects of thought. There is also a certain kind of objects which we cannot class under the title of mysterious objects

but such objects are neither the objects of a physical sort. Even we cannot reject them as insignificant since without them the world may not be explained. Such things may include logical and mathematical entities, the universal character of things, categories, etc. Such things as well as the mysterious objects referred to earlier are beyond the reach of the senses, and reason in the ordinary sense of the term also fails to conceive of these objects. The objects like categories etc. though not exactly mysterious in Marcel's sense of the term cannot be obtained by ordinary experience; it is possible to grasp them by a sort of non-sensuous faculty. But the mysteries to which Marcel refers are objects which demand an intuitive grasp and may be higher form of reason works there, which may not be the same as that of the faculty which apprehends the categories.

Intelleot may have an analytic function when it is concerned with logical arguments and mathematical deductions. But in the process of the rational inquiry, intellect may reach a stage where the total structure of the knowable becomes grasped in a single act. Intellect at this stage undergoes a change and loses its analytic, discursive character. It is elevated to a synthetic level and acquires a total approach. Intellect working as synthetic and integrative possesses a comprehensive nature in which it becomes concrete.
When intellect is thus aiming to realize the whole at a stroke, it is no longer abstract. As it has been pointed out, it becomes concrete, and to borrow an expression from Heidegger, it becomes meditative. Intellect developing the character of intuition may be called 'meditative thinking', 'intellectual intuition' or 'intuitive thought'. It is not impossible that intellect may develop the capacity of a concrete and comprehensive knowledge. If intellect tries to understand the way things are in the world in their ontological foundation and if we give up the habit of thinking in an abstract way and try to understand the things in relation to one another, it is possible for us to develop reason to a higher level where reason can gather together all the elements of the world in a synthetic whole. The logical intellect is confined to the abstract aspects, ignoring the total whole in which an object has its real existence. The discursive intellect fails to recognize the total structure of which only a part is considered by it.

Thought or reason as it is understood in our contemporary world is identified with what is done in the sciences whose foundation is ultimately logico-mathematical. The basic feature of our modern thought and knowledge in the authentic sense is mathematical. Science has become the paradigm of thinking. Thinking is what the scientists do. The rules which govern
its operation and give it rigidity are controlled by logic and mathematics. But the question must be asked, is this the only (italics author's) way of thinking and further, is the logico-mathematical-scientific method of thought the ultimate ground and measure of thought or do logic, mathematics and sciences themselves stand in need of a foundation? It has been pointed out by Heidegger, that science does not think at all, at least as Heidegger understands the word, as thinkers do - "Science does not think in the sense of the thinking of the thinkers". It was born at the precise moment in history when thought ceased. As Heidegger says, "Science appears, thought disappears". Science and Logic as the explication of the formal structure and rules of thought came into existence, when Being was transformed into idea. Thinking which had been experienced as knowing which was united to Being is transformed into 'philosophy' and 'philosophy' becomes a science. By the severing of truth and thinking from Being, thought is torn away from its life-giving element. Just as a branch can only live when it is in vital organic unity with the vine, so thought can only flourish according to its true nature when vitally united to Being. Cut from its source it is fore-doomed.


3 Ibid.
to wither and eventually die.

According to Heidegger, thought in the modern world is calculative thought which reduces Being to the status of an object. Thinking can be thinking only so long as it remains dependent on Being and directed towards it. Only then will it live in its element, Being. Thinking is thinking of Being. The Heideggerian analysis of thinking thus shows that when reason understands objects separately and independently of its foundation in Being, reason becomes abstract. But the same reason united with the foundation taking into account all the multiplicity of aspects, reason becomes concrete. It comes to understand Being or reality in one intuitive grasp. Thus, it is possible that thought which shakes off the abstract framework of logic and approaches reality on a higher level develops the nature of meditative thought, which is thought in its character of fulness, concreteness and intuitive realization.

That there is a higher capacity than understanding or logical thinking and that it enables us to grasp the concrete in its fulness is admitted by most philosophers at the present day. But in our everyday life we are not conscious of this aspect of reason. Even when philosophers (except a few) emphasize on this aspect of reason, they do not clearly distinguish

4 Ibid.
between these aspects and for both aspects they use the word reason and this is the cause of confusion or misunderstanding and the problem centres round the question: how reason can be intuitive?

The problem is only apparent. The Sanskrit word 'buddhi' stands for English word 'reason' or 'philosophical reason'. The logical or scientific reason is a limited aspect of buddhi or philosophical reason and the word intellect stands for logical and scientific reason. If we keep this in mind no confusion will arise. Reason or buddhi is an adequate instrument for seeking the objects like universals, categories, etc. But knowledge must be an experience though any experience is not knowledge. If reason is to give us experience which is different from sense-experience, it may be understood to be a sort of intuition. The use of the phrases like 'rational intuition', 'meditative thinking', etc. suggest that by means of reason a distinctive type of experience is possible. Intuition means a non-sensuous experience the characteristics of which are clarity and distinctness. When reason develops its intuitive character, its knowledge is also clear and distinct. It has been suggested by Husserl that for each type of object, we have a distinct type of intuition which includes also rational intuition.

If we leave aside the knowledge of mathematical axioms, principles, universals, etc. for the knowledge of which we
may begin with intellect and proceed to an intuitive grasp, there are mysterious things like self, moral truths, beauty, reality, etc. where we cannot approach the things in the abstract intellectual way, as these things are to be grasped in their concreteness. These truths have a significance for our life and we cannot exclude them from the sphere of our experience. Even if it is possible to be unaware of the important truths of life such as truth, beauty, etc. the existence of self is an undeniable fact. Our objective attitude to the things of the external world may make us forget the existence of the self, but it is the foundation of all our experience. It is the basic presupposition of every knowledge, as it is the self which is, to use a Kantian expression, the transcendental unity of apperception. Our mind aspires for the values, for knowledge of facts obtained by sense-experience cannot give us the ultimate satisfaction. Only values, such as truth, beauty and goodness can give our life the foundation of an integral being. These things, the self and the values have to be realized in an intuition and it was also the effort of Kant to show that self has to be accepted as true in a moral situation or aesthetic appreciation can have meaning on the basis of the grasp of beauty as a work of art. This is also similar to the idea of Bergson who shows that self or reality can never be caught in the network of intellectual categories. The expression of the same idea is found in Bradley's theory of
Reality. According to him, thought is discursive and relational in form, so it cannot reach the Absolute. Therefore, an emphasis has been given on an immediate apprehension of the Absolute.

According to G. Marcel the mysterious things are to be approached through intuition. Things like knowledge of the self, a grasp of reality as a whole, whatever that may be, have to be approached, on the philosophical level. How these things will be realized in intuition may differ according to the opinion of the philosophers. Husserl thinks that lived experience will make us merge with the self, while Bergson speaks of intuition as the mode of realization of these truths; since in these cases we have to respond to a total situation on the basis of our lived experience or intuitive realization. I have to know myself from within and not from outside. The world in which I live has to be grasped on the basis of my lived relation with it. Of course, Marcel did not use the word intuition either for self-knowledge or for its relation to the being. He introduced the word 'recollection' for the apprehension of the ontological mysteries. In his own words, "... no apprehension of ontological mystery in whatever degree - is possible except to a being who is capable of recollecting himself, and of thus proving that he is not a living creature pure and simple, a creature, that is to say, which is at the mercy of its life and without a hold upon it". 5 In recollection we become

5 G. Marcel, op.cit., p. 23.
conscious of ourselves though not a pure subject of cognition. We know the meaning of life and its relation to the world.

".... I encounter myself within recollection beyond all possible judgment and,..., beyond all representation". G. Marcel continues that recollection ".... does not consist in looking at something, it is an inward hold, an inward reflection,..."6

In English "recollection" also means "revealing".

The nature of recollection as described by Marcel is similar to that of intuition. It is not difficult to understand that intuition also has got such and such characteristics. Marcel prefers the word 'recollection' for he thinks that we do not possess intuition. We may use the word intuition in place of 'recollection'. But intuition or recollection is not blind or irrational faculty, neither is it mysterious. Marcel's use of the word 'reflection' in the above quotation suggests that there is a rational element in intuition. The expressions 'inward hold', 'inward reflection' entail the idea that the mind turns on itself from the study of facts to the study of meaning and value.

But this is a function ascribed to reason by many thinkers. We have already seen that reason has a different aspect other than the logical one. In India the same idea has been expressed.

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6 Ibid., p. 24.
Swami Vivekananda says: "On reason we must have to lay our foundation, we must follow reason as far as it leads, and when reason fails, reason itself will show the way to the highest plane". In *Katha Upanisad* (11.12) it is said that the Ātman or self can be realized only by those seers who are endowed with keenest reason. In the *Gītā* (XVIII.30) also the primacy of reason has been upheld. According to the *Gītā*, only purified reason can help us to distinguish between right and wrong, fear and fearlessness, bondage and liberation.

Perhaps, Heidegger, as already suggested, is one of the modern thinkers who has explicitly distinguished between the two aspects of reason or thought: calculative thinking and meditative thinking. This latter aspect of thinking approximates to what we generally mean by intuition. According to Heidegger ".... science is not an original happening of truth, ....". Whenever a science ".... arrives at the essential disclosure of what is as such, it is philosophy". The problem of Being involves truth. Heidegger advises us to approach Being directly.


9 Ibid.
since "To know means to have seen, in the widest sense of seeing, which means to apprehend what is present, as such". According to him, the direct approach to Being is possible through meditative thinking because Being is partially identical with the nature and movement of meditative thinking.

The logical or calculative thinking is engaged in scientific disciplines like science, mathematics and logic. In contrast to this meditative thinking transcends what is merely human and relates directly to Being. For there is a level of existence where human being (Dasein) wants to establish a relation with Being. Such a relation has to be based on the tuning of human being with Being. Such tuning or harmony takes place with the help of man's total response to Being, but it is also done with thought, but thought which takes into account all the concrete aspects of life, thought which unveils the covering of Being. Such thought is intellect becoming intuition or intuition and thought merging into one another. It is the meditative thinking in which Being is revealed.

Such thinking is implicit in man's nature. Though difficult and mysterious, human beings are capable of such thinking. Meditative thinking is necessary for uncovering the mystery of Being.

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10 Ibid., p. 59.

Like Marcel and Heidegger Jacques Maritain holds the problem of Being to be of the utmost importance and invokes intuition for the knowledge of the Being. Maritain also describes intuition as a direct and immediate perception. It is superior to demonstrative reasoning since intuition is the source of demonstration. In intuition "...the soul is in contact, a living, penetrating and illuminating contact with reality which it touches and which takes hold of it". 12

As Maritain observes, knowledge through connatural or intuition is a kind of knowledge, though not through concepts, it has its source in intellect. This kind of knowledge plays an immense role in human existence and it makes us understand the deeper significance of the concept of knowledge. 13 Reason which he condemns is logical, discursive reason. He believes that the only function of reason is not to connect, to infer or to articulate. Reason can see and its "...intuitive grasping, intuitus rationis, is the primary act and function of that one and single power which is called intellect or reason. In other words, there is not only logical reason, but also, and prior to it, intuitive reason". 14 Maritain, therefore, describes

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12 J. Maritain, Lectures on Metaphysics in Readings in Twentieth Century Philosophy, op. cit., p. 98.
intuition as 'intellectual perception', 'intellectual intuition'. He cites examples from poets and points out that Coleridge and Milton agree on 'reason's intuitivity'.

The main point so far reached is that the mysterious things like reality, self, moral good, beauty, etc. are the objects which can be investigated by means of reason but reason that has been freed from its limitations to the sense-experience and the abstract tools of logical reason. Such a reason may have an intuitive grasp. Intuition here means a kind of non-sensuous experience that is most clear and distinct. The insight grows in and through reason itself. A non-sensuous experience qua non-sensuous is meaningless. It must have some rational basis. In fact, none of the advocates of the theory of intuition seems to hold the view that intuition is antagonistic to reason. What they condemn is the logical or discursive thinking. Usually, by reason or intellect we emphasize its logical aspect and forget that reason has also its own objects and it knows them by itself. In fact, before Kant, there was no distinction between intellect's discursive function and its intuitive function. Reason was held to be an adequate instrument for knowing the non-sensuous objects. Kant, for the first time, drew the sharp distinction between discursive thinking and intuitive thinking and says with emphasis

15 Ibid.
that intellect in human being is only discursive, it has no object of its own. From then on the controversy between reason and intuition has begun. Those who feel that all the aspects of life and nature cannot be explained by discursive thinking advocate the theory of intuition as a distinct faculty for investigating the mysterious things. But we need not commit ourselves to the faculty psychology. Kant's discursive understanding is an adequate method so far as physical objects are concerned. But this is not the reason's sole function. Kant himself admits that reason in its practical employment creates its own objects and knows them though he refuses to call such experiences knowledge in the pregnant sense.

Some of the twentieth century philosophers, like Husserl, Marcel, Heidegger, Maritain, are reviving the ancient view of reason. They do not believe that reason's sole function is discursive one. According to them, it is only one aspect of reason. It may also be intuitive, that means reason has its own objects and knows them by reason itself and they use the phrases like 'essential insight', 'reflection', 'meditative thinking', 'intellectual intuition', etc. Even those who do not want to characterize intuition as intellectual or rational, do not hold that it is antagonistic to reason. Rather, they believe that even in intuitional knowledge there is a definite role of intellect. Unfortunately, the advocates of intuition are often accused of anti-intellectualism. In fact, the
intuitionist believes that "Intuition which ignores intellect is useless. The two are not only incompatible but vitally united..... Intuition is beyond reason, though not against reason". 16 Intuition may be distinguished, as P.A. Schilpp suggests, between two kinds: integral insight and perceptual knowledge. 17 "When intuition is defined as integral insight, the suggestion is that the whole mind is at work in it". 18

Sri Aurobindo in India has given us a more comprehensive view of reason and intuition. It seems that Sri Aurobindo gives a higher status to intuition than reason. Intuition is our first teacher. Most of the writings of Sri Aurobindo suggest the view that according to him intuition and reason are two distinct faculties of knowledge. S.K. Maitra points out that Sri Aurobindo did not believe that intuition is a phase of reason. Sri Aurobindo's use of the phrases 'intuitive mind', 'intuitive reason' do not suggest that the mind or reason is intuitive. Reason is intuitive in so far as it receives the intuition of the higher realm. S.K. Maitra quotes the following passage from the Life Divine in order to justify his view


18 Ibid., p. p. 790.
that Sri Aurobindo accepts intuition as distinct from and higher than the faculty of reason. "A consciousness that proceeds by sight, the consciousness of the seer, is a greater power for knowledge than the consciousness of the thinker. The perceptual power of the inner sight is greater and more direct than the perceptual power of thought; it is a spiritual sense that seizes something of the substance of Truth and not only her figure; but it outlines the figure also and at the same time catches the significance of the figure, and it can embody her with a fairer and a larger comprehension and power of totality than thought conception can manage".19

But the passage does not necessarily suggest the idea that reason and intuition are distinct faculties. Perhaps, the perceptual power of the inner sight suggests that knowledge is not possible without an experience but that experience may be based on reason or thought. There is plenty of evidence for this in Sri Aurobindo's writings. Sri Aurobindo distinguishes between different levels of mind - Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition, Over Mind and Super-Mind. All the

Quoted by S.K. Majtra in his *The Meeting of the East and the West in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry,1968; p. 79.
higher levels of mind except the first one are intuitive in the sense of a non-sensuous direct experience. But the intuitions are not of equal value. The value of intuition, according to Sri Aurobindo, depends on the source from which intuition has emerged. A non-sensuous experience qua non-sensuous is insignificant. Does it not suggest that intuition is not a distinct faculty of knowledge, rather, it must be based on some other faculties of knowledge? The evolution of the mind from the higher one to the Supermind shows the gradual development of reason and the more and more purified reason gives us more distinct, more direct knowledge. It seems that intuition based on purified reason is the most valuable. In Sri Aurobindo's words: "Intuition is unable to give us the truth in that ordered and articulated form which our nature demands. Before it could effect any such completeness of direct knowledge in us, it would have to organise itself in our surface being and take possession there of the leading part. But in our surface, it is not the Intuition, it is the Reason which is organised and helps us to order our perceptions, thoughts and actions."

Human reason, as Sri Aurobindo observes, has a two fold action - mixed or dependent (which approximates to logical

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understanding) and pure or sovereign. Reason in its former aspect cannot penetrate into the "depths of being", it knows only the phenomena. But in its pure aspect reason starts with the sensible experience but comes out of this narrow sphere and arrives at extra-sensuous concepts which are not justifiable by the facts of the sensible world. In his analysis of pure reason Sri Aurobindo distinguishes some grades of pure reason and the highest grade, the peak of thinking activity which he calls 'pure ideative mind' acts itself, by itself and for itself independently of anything external or sensuous. Thus the complete use of pure reason ultimately gives us metaphysical knowledge if we have an experience of the ideas of pure reason. The concepts of pure reason cannot fully satisfy the demand of our integral being. For we see things doubly as idea and as fact and therefore an idea itself is incomplete and unreal until and unless it becomes an experience. The insight or experience may come out through reason itself.

The distinction between reason and intuition may be referred back to the Husserlian distinction between symbolic thought and intuitive thought. According to Husserl, every thought has its meaning-intention. Thought is symbolic in so far as its meaning-intention is empty but it is intuitive.

21 Ibid., p. 60.
22 Ibid., pp. 60-61.
when the meaning-intention becomes fulfilled. 23 Husserl also speaks of different kinds of fulfilment and so we do not feel any difficulty in understanding the possibility of intuitive grasp by means of reason. Perhaps, all the controversy between reason and intuition may be silenced by the phenomenological distinction between symbolic thought and intuitive thought.

Still, the question remains: can intuitive experience give us knowledge? Some thinkers refuse to call each type of experience a knowledge though it possesses the characteristics of knowledge. Kant did not call the moral and aesthetic experiences knowledge though he assigned the characteristics of knowledge to such experiences. Bradley refuses to characterize the experience of the Absolute as knowledge. He prefers 'faith' for that experience. On the contrary, Plato would not admit the possibility of the knowledge of the physical objects. According to him, Ideas are the true objects of knowledge. In India the word 'knowledge' has been used for the highest kind of experience. It is better not to be prejudical against calling each type of experience, containing the characteristics of knowledge, as a cognition. It seems also unreasonable to give any experience a higher status. Each type of experience has its value in its own sphere.