A Comparative Study of Vivēka-Darsāna, Nījaguṇa-Darsāna
and Aurobindo-Darsāna.

In all religions, intuitions and experiences count a good deal—experience of the world and man, experience of oneself and experience of the transcendent and the ineffable. If experience is the core of every religious movement and thought then only a proper comparative study can permit or facilitate sharing of that experience in the proper atmosphere and with proper attitudes of correct understanding and interpretation. Such studies give results as renewed and updated in the challenge of modern thought and in the confrontation of technological cultures, and above all as practised and lived by their followers today. Hence the vital and personal contact with other religionists in their own life milieu is an indispensable source of study which is required not only to make clear and tangible our own concepts but also in a wider sense to develop a broader outlook inclusive of other worthy views of experience.

This study is a devoted attempt to study in comparison the powerful, thought streams of the three great personalities Śrī Swāmi Vivēkānanda, Śrī Nījaguṇa Shivayōgi and Śrī Aurobindo who surged medival and modern India with the flood of their thoughts and experiences and brought down to humanity the revived, age old facts to be understood experienced and lived in modern light. So, it is but truism to say that all these religionists cum Vedāntists namely Śrī Nījaguṇa Shivayōgi, Śrī Swāmi Vivēkānanda and
Sri. Aurobindo are the true revivalists of traditional Indian thought and religion - Sanatana Dharma. In studying their views comparatively, it is found that they have more points of affinities rather than fundamental differences with regard to their method of approach, objectives and the final goal. Again as regards the nature attainment of the final goal there seems to be no fundamental difference in their views, but the process of its attainment varies depending upon their intellectual capacities, emotional temperaments and their mystical insights.

Sri. Nijaguṇa Shivayōgi was a renowned philosopher, mystic and a celebrated saint of Southern India, who lived in Karnataka during the medieval period. His religo-philosophical tendencies and mystical attainments have made him a great saint - philosopher of his period whose influence is for all time to come. His achievements have been compared with the distinctive features of Upaniṣadic saints and seers. His penetrating insight into the nature of the Absolute Reality, the deeper vision of truth, the originally of his poetic and philosophical expositions and his genuine contribution to social concern have striking similarities with the dynamic thoughts and vision of both Swāmi Vivēkānanda and Sri. Aurobindo.

Swāmi Vivēkānanda and Sri. Aurobindo were great contemporary patriot saints and philosophers of modern India. The young and energetic representative of Indian religion, at the Chicago Parliament of Religions in the year 1893, had done a valuable service to humanity by restoring among Indians 'a faith in
themselves. To have pure faith in one’s own Self and its realization in all things and persons constitutes the main core of the practical Vedānta of Swāmi Vivēkānanda and this resembles the ideal of Śrī. Nīlaguṇa Śhivayōgi namely the identity of Ātman and Brahman.

Unlike Śrī. Nīlaguṇa Śhivayōgi, Swāmi Vivēkānanda was brought up in a Western cultural background and as a natural consequence he tried to bring about the synthesis between Eastern and Western religio-philosophical thoughts. He had discovered a new way of looking at the old religious tradition of India and interpreted its religio-philosophic thought in a modern and scientific way. He also like Śrī. Nīlaguṇa Śhivayōgi, was aware of the social and political problems of the people of Indian society and tried to find proper solutions for them. He lay great emphasis on the need to help the poor and downtrodden and to remove the ignorance and sufferings of the masses. And to give direction to this need he set up a chain of missions. He also initiated a double mission—one at the social level and another at the intellectual and religious level.

Śrī. Aurobindo Ghose, born in the home of an extreme Anglophile, received his entire education abroad. He was not only a master of English language but was also proficient in the classical languages of Europe and conversant with the classical background of the Western way of life. Śrī. Aurobindo not only worked to master the Indian intellectual and religious tradition but also tried to extend and develop the intellectual framework and spiritual aspirations that Swāmi Vivēkānanda had provided to
Taking into consideration the conception of metaphysics, ultimate Reality, according to Sri. Nijaguṇa Shivayōgi is non-dual. 'It is an undivided, indivisible unity of existence, the ultimate principle of consciousness and infinite bliss.' This non-dual reality is termed as 'Shambhu - Linga'. Sri. Nijaguṇa Shivayōgi has used several synonymous terms to refer to the same Absolute Reality which is also referred to as 'Para Brahma'. The nature of this Reality is described as pure existence perfect in knowledge, ever blissful and unique in appearance. It has been stated by Dr. Siddhasharma, that this conception of the ultimate reality has been compared with the description given by Bādarāyanā, as contained in the verse 2:1:4 of his Vedānta Sūtras. Ultimate Reality is Sachidānanda. Truth-Consciousness and Bliss. This dynamic conception of Absolute Reality resembles in all respects the concept of 'oneness' of Swāmi Vivēkānanda. Both the thinkers are in agreement when they uphold the idea of oneness of 'Absolute Unity' as the central conception of Advaita Vedānta religion. This conception of 'oneness is found not only in the multiplicity of the universe, but also in all facts and ideas, present and future as it is regarded as eternal being (Nityā). Taking a look at the parallel concepts of Swāmi Vivēkānanda, he says "The actual should be reconciled to the

1. Dr. Siddhasharma, B.P.; The Metaphysics and Mysticism of Sri. Nijaguṇa Shivayōgi. (Published by Siddha Prakashana, Bangalore 1992), P.38-40
2. Ibid - P.42
3. Ibid - P.43
ideal; the present life should be made to coincide with the life Eternal". He further goes on to say that, "there is but one life, one world, one existence everything is that one". Being a revivalist of the monistic conception of Reality, he asserts that "All is one, which manifests itself either as thought or life, or soul, or body and the difference is only in degree". This 'oneness is termed as oneness of Atman and Brahman and this view may be found to be similar with Sri. Njaguna Shivayogī's realisation that when jīva throws away its jīvahood it attains mukti or release and shines forth as 'Shambhulinga' in its pristine purity. Jīva becomes identical with Shambhulinga, this is the highest kind of experience, which is described as 'Ekarāsa' or the experience of oneness.

According to Sri. Aurobindo's views all the different approaches to Upanishadic teachings are one sided, though they may bring to light a particular aspect of reality. He remarks that their only mistake is the deification of the part as whole. Sri. Aurobindo seems to have accepted all such interpretations but yet points out to their limitations. So, Sri. Aurobindo's view may be characterised as a philosophy of absolute affirmation or integral view of reality. According to Sri. Aurobindo "the being is one but this oneness is infinite and contains in itself an infinite plurality or multiplicity of itself; the one is the all; it is not only an essential existence

1. Swāmi Vivekananda - Practical Vedānta P.11
2. Ibid P.10
3. Ibid P.13
but an all Existence". Along with Upanīṣads he takes the Ultimate Reality to be Sacchidānanda. The Absolute is Sacchidānanda - Existence Consciousness and Bliss. According to Aurobindo, Sacchidānanda is one with triple aspects and in the Supreme, these three are not three but one. Existence is Consciousness and Consciousness is bliss and they are thus inseparable, not only inseparable but so much like each other that they are not distinct at all".

In the philosophy of Śrī. Aurobindo, knowledge and reality always go together. Just like Swāmi Vivēkānanda he speaks of the practical aspect of Indian philosophy and religion, without sacrificing the theoretical consistency. According to Śrī. Aurobindo the true philosopher has not only to know but to be, and to be is to know, thus philosophy is very close to life. And with such an integral approach one should transcend all conflicts and contradictions in both thoughts and deeds and then ascend to the highest integral experience that includes everything. The greatest contribution of Śrī. Aurobindo is the revelation of the true nature of spirituality as it is explained in the Upanīṣads and Gītā. Such spiritual reality is to be realised by means of integral yōga. Being a great mystic Śrī. Aurobindo points out that Brahman consciousness in the process of the realisation of ultimate reality - Sacchidānanda is only a lower grade. Thus the Absolute stands over and above the levels.

2. Śrī. Aurobindo - Lights on Yoga, P.35
of Iswara and Brahman consciousness. It is thus para Brahman or Absolute Spirit. Thus the conception of the 'Shambhulinga' of Śrī Nījagūṇa Shivayōgi and the idea of 'oneness' in the teachings of Śvāmi Vivēkānanda are similar to Śrī Aurobindo's conception of Integral reality of Absolute Spirit or Sacchidānanda, for all these conceptions are one in their kind.

Again in a very important way these three thinkers appear to be highly aware of the principle that philosophy and religion do not stand asundered in India thought. For the regeneration of man both are equally indispensable. So the conception of Ultimate Reality must satisfy the aspirations of both philosophy and religion. It must be both theoretically consistent and practically realisable. According to Śrī Aurobindo both the Absolute and God are integrated in the Absolute Spirit.

Although we have moved a great deal in the direction of monistic ideal with Śrī Nījagūṇa Shivayōgi and Śvāmi Vivēkānanda none the less, the old distinction between material and spiritual persists. Śvāmi Vivēkānanda says that the "Hindu faith has developed spiritual in its devotees, at the expense of the material, ....... in the Western world the contrary is true". And each of these types has its own grandeur and glory. Hence what is necessary would be the harmonising, the mingling of these two ideals" - Spiritual and material "whenever there is

1. Śvāmi Vivēkānanda - Complete works Vol. VII P.284
spiritual adjustment, it should come from the orient”. Such was the responsibility revolving upon India in the modern world and it was in the spirit of this great opportunity that Vivekānanda called upon the youth - "Young men of Madras, I specially ask you to remember this. We must go out, we must conquer the world through our spirituality and philosophy. There is no other alternative, we must do it or die. The only condition of national life, of awakened and vigorous national life is the conquest of the world by Indian thought". Swāmi Vivekānanda wanted his country men not only to respect and reinterpret their own ancient tradition and religion, but expected them to share this spiritual wealth with the world at large. He inspired them to bring about a new phase in human development through a synthesis of the wisdoms of the East and the West.

This distinction between spiritual and material takes a more definite turn towards disappearance when we turn to the Advaitic philosophy of Śrī. Aurobindo. Normally, political involvement and spiritual realisation are seen to correspond to opposite poles. But for Aurobindo they represent the two sides of the same coin. Material is not necessarily opposed to the spiritual and could be made to serve to its purpose, for matter is a necessary phase in human evolution. Śrī. Aurobindo tried to justify his dissolution of the distinction between matter and spirit or Māyā and Brahman, philosophically, on the grounds of monism itself. The followers

1. Ibid. Vol. IV p.151 - 152
2. Ibid. Vol. III p.277
of Śāṅkara's Advaita had expounded a monistic doctrine, yet they had created a distinction between world and Brahman. 'The real monism' Śri. Aurobindo argues "is that which admits all things as the one Brahman and does not seek to bisect its existence into two incompatible entities, an eternal truth and an eternal falsehood, Brahman and not Brahman, self and not-self, a real self and an unreal yet perpetual maya. If it be true that the Self alone exists, then it must also be true that all is the Self. And if this Self, God or Brahman is no helpless state, no bounded power, no limited personality, but the Self Conscient All, there must be some good and inherent reason in it for the manifestation to discover which we must proceed on the hypothesis of some potency, some wisdom, some truth of being in all that in manifested'. Thus in Śri. Aurobindo's views like Śvāmi Vivēkānanda and, Śri. Nijaguna Shivayogi, we find an overriding concern to do away with the traditional dichotomy between the material and spiritual. Instead of rejection and exclusion, they prefered extension, inclusion, transformation. No activity in life, no vital energy, no experience, was to be set aside as irrelevant. With one's own entire personality one could move forward on one's totality towards a higher plane of existence in which all distinctions would be dissolved. And such a spiritual evolution would be if anything multi-dimensional and not one-sided.

Another important and striking similarity of thought which brings out the close mental relationship that Śri. Aurobindo

1. Śri. Aurobindo's Centenary Edition, Pondicherry XVIII P.315

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shared with Swāmi Vivēkānanda, involves Śrī. Aurobindo's translation of Swāmi Vivēkānanda's insistence that India has a distinct spiritual identity of its own into the concept of the 'Great Mother'. Being influenced by Śrī. Rāmakrishna Paramāhamsa Swāmi Vivēkānanda has spoken much of the Mother as the highest ideal of Indian womanhood. Śrī. Aurobindo not only transposed their ideal into the set up of his Ashram at Pondicherry, but also viewed the nation - India as a sort of spiritual Mother.

This concept of 'the Mother India' or 'Great Mother' formed the symbol of the socio-political philosophy of both Swāmi Vivēkānanda and Śrī. Aurobindo, Śrī. Aurobindo inherited from Swāmi Vivēkānanda this concept not so much for its own sake as for that of the world at large, Swāmi Vivēkānanda affirms that "the individual's happiness is in the happiness of the whole, apart from the whole the individual's existence is inconceivable. This eternal truth is equally applicable to nations". For it is "when you give life you will have life; when you receive you must pay for it by giving to all others". In India religious life forms the keynote of the whole, music of national life and its mission, its gift to the world had to be the gift of religion and philosophy, and wisdom and spirituality - wisdom and spirituality do not march upon bleeding human bodies, do not

1. Collected works of Swāmi Vivēkānanda, (Ed. by the Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta), Vol. VIII, P.57
2. Swāmi Vivēkānanda, Complete works, Vol. IV P.396
3. Ibid. P. 397
march with violence but come on the wings of peace and love. Swāmī Vivēkānanda like Śrī. Aurobindo felt that the world needs the Indian message of inner strength and inner fulfilment and India in turn needed to master the West's application of knowledge and energy to uplift, the country's social, economic and political issues. Hence Swāmī Vivēkānanda insisted that 'Spirituality is lived in vain which led to the neglect and decay of man's physical health and material well-being'. So he called for a synthesis of the East and West and felt that India was peculiarly fit to attempt such an integration.

With a similar conviction with respect to Indian heritage is the conviction regarding the principle of Sanātana Dharma. Śrī. Aurobindo expressing his concern in this field and says in one of his Uttarapara speeches, "when you go forth, speak to your nation always these words, that it is for the Sanātana Dharma that they arise, it is for the world and not for themselves that they arise. I am giving them freedom for the service of the world. When, therefore, it is said that India shall rise, it is the Sanātana Dharma that shall rise. When it is said that India shall be great, it is the Sanātana Dharma that shall be great, when it is said that India shall expand and extend herself, it is Sanātana Dharma that shall extend itself over the world". These words of Śrī. Aurobindo mirror the same passion and intensity of

1. Swāmī Vivēkānanda Complete works Vol. III P.273
2. Ibid Vol. IV P.313
3. Śrī. Auribindo - Uttarapara speech - Pondicherry, 1968, P. 16 -17
the charms of spiritualism that characterised the thoughts of Śrī. Nīguna Śivayōgi and activities of Swāmi Vivēkananda.

Just as Śrī. Auribindo had translated Swāmi Vivēkananda’s scattered assertions on liberty, freedom, unity etc. into an elaborate socio-political philosophy, so also did he develop his views on the need for synthesis into a highly sophisticated philosophy of ‘the Life Divine’ and the yogic technology of " the Synthesis of Yōga".

Coming to the practical aspect of Advaita Vedānta, Swāmi Vivēkananda says that though Vedānta is intensely practical, it is always so in the sense of the Ideal, this Ideal is that you are divine ‘thou art that’ this is the essence of Vedānta and Vedānta teaches men to have faith in themselves”. Faith is considered to be above everything else. He believed that the main cause of the present degeneration of Indians is the lack of faith in themselves. Swāmi Vivēkananda urges men to have faith in themselves, in their heritage, their philosophy, religion and their physical, mental and spiritual strength. This faith is essentially in the Ātman, the universal force present everywhere. In the words of Swāmi Vivēkananda "you are that Sat-Chit-Ānanda, not the small, miserable being that you ignorantly think yourself to be. Your self is the Universal Self, that is one with all things and beings. Think of yourself as the birthless, the deathless, the blissful, the omniscient, the omnipotent and the omnipresent, the very glorious soul which is identical with

1. Swāmi Vivēkananda - Practical Vedānta' P 5-6

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Brahman. You realise your real self as none other than Brahman itself with this realisation there comes a total transformation of your life and activities. Then you live the Vedantic ideal, it becomes a matter of your practical life". These words are again a reminiscent of Ātman, Brahman, Shambhulinga conceptions as expounded by Śrī. Nijaguṇa Shivāyōgi.

According to Śvāmi Vivēkānanda God realisation in oneself and in society is one of the practical teachings of Vedānta and emphasising this practical aspect he says "He who sees Śiva in the poor, in the weak, in the diseased, really worships Śiva (God)". Śrī. Nijaguṇa Shivāyōgi also can be compared to a practical saint, who motivated no selfish motives. His conception of jīvanmukta does not exclude the worldly activities. His view is that a jīvanmukta becomes absolutely free from the clutches of the worldly life even though he lives a social life, for the social life is lived with dispassionate concern. Śrī. Nijaguṇa Shivāyōgi shares a secularistic attitude with Śvāmi Vivēkānanda and Śrī. Aurobindo. He had no caste, creed of any particular identity but on the other hand, lived a life which was universal in its outlook, preaching universal ideals, which held good for all times to come.

Thus, it is seen that the teachings of Śrī. Nijaguṇa Shivāyōgi, Śvāmi Vivēkānanda and that of Śrī Aurobindo carry a practical relevance to the modern world. They represent the

1. Śvāmi Vivēkānanda - Centenary Memorial Volume P.279-80
2. Thus spake Vivēkānanda, P-42
crying needs of this age, for they proclaim, acceptance and synthesis of the truth of religions. They claim that a type of secularistic attitude requires to be developed in modern India since it houses the followers of almost all religions of the world. Sṛi. Nīgāṇa Shīvāgī identified 22 different yogas to facilitate different followers in their spiritual pursuit. They lay emphasis on the integral ideal which could bring out the synthesis of the old and new, East and West, pragmatism and spiritualism and all other aspects of human experience. For it is only the ideal which finds place for all the aspects of human life and experience and which can weld all knowledge into an integral whole, alone can save and serve the disintegrating humanity from its modern predicament.

Hence these three great personalities Sṛi. Nīgāṇa Shīvāgī, Swāmi Vivēkānanda and Sṛi. Aurobindo have all thrown light upon and shown the way towards the ideal of oneness - of the Absolute Spirit. It is now left for men of religions and humanity to follow in their wake and develop that true religion which is worthy of its name and truely performing its role in the regeneration of human race and its peaceful harmony.
SECTION - V

ADVAITA VEDĀNTA & IT'S RELEVANCE IN MODERN AGE.