CHAPTER VI

A COMPARISON OF AUROBINDO’S CONCEPT OF ABSOLUTE WITH CONTEMPORARY WESTERN PHILOSOPHERS (BRADLEY, AND HEGEL)

6.1 Introduction.

Aurobindo is known as an integral philosopher. In his philosophy there is a meeting place for the opposite outlooks of East and West and each of these merge in his synthetic idea. In “The integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo” C.A. Moore says that

“Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy provides two great needs of the time, namely, a virtual synthesis of East and West by looking towards a philosophy acceptable to all mankind and second, a rich full interpretation of Indian thought correcting abuses and aberrations, thus providing a point of view.”

Contemporary western Idealism is the product of Hegelian philosophy. Hegel’s Absolute is an objective reason and he used it as if his own reason evolving the world through a dialectical process. So though the western is Idealism mainly existential we cannot strictly say anything about the standpoint of Hegel’s nature of reality. It is in between existential and the axiological viewpoint.

Bradley is Neo-Hegelian philosopher of England. Neo-Hegelianism is a response to the philosophy of Hegel. The main subject of this system is to understand the nature of spirit. Bradley expresses his indebtedness to Hegel in a footnote of “Appearance and Reality” in this way

“I may mention that in this chapter I am, perhaps even more than elsewhere, indebted to Hegel”

The influence of Hegel on Bradley is clear from his concept of degrees of Reality, as there is a hierarchy of realities in the dialectical system of Hegel. Bradley’s concept of concrete universe which is filled with sentient experience is like the Hegel’s concrete universal. But for Bradley the Absolute is not accessible to thought. So he does not agree with Hegel in this point that thought can get over the dualism of existence and content.
Influenced by the Indian traditional Idealism mainly Upanishads and Gita, Aurobindo conceives Supreme Reality as Sachchidananda (Existence Consciousness-Force and Bliss). Absolute is both Saguna and Nirguna. Sachchidananda, the concept of reality of Aurobindo, synthesises the existential and the axiological view point of reality. Bliss, the one aspect of reality indicates value. So the same reality has existence and value and they are inseparable like Bradley’s existence and content. Aurobindo does not deny the plurality and reality of the world. And this may be done because he conceives ‘Cit’ as Force or Shakti. So real self-projection of the Absolute is possible. In this chapter the “concept of Absolute” of Hegel and Bradley will be discussed and an attempt will be made to show a comparison with the Absolute of Aurobindo and how their conceptions of reality find their fulfillment in Aurobindo.

6.2 Hegel’s concept of Absolute: -

Hegel, the German philosopher is a metaphysical monist. As a contradiction embracing logician he applies the dialectical method in his speculative thinking. His philosophical style is very much complex. The manner of his presentation of “Encyclopedic der philosophichen wissenschaften in Grundrisse” which is his mature philosophical system is very much concise and condensed.

6.2.1 Foundation of Hegel’s Absolute: -

Hegel had proceeded from the foundations laid by his predecessors mainly Fichte and Schelling. Hegel gives importance on the logical method of Fichte which is a threefold rhythm of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, and tries to show how from the Absolute idea everything else can be derived or deduced by this method. And on the other hand by identifying logic with metaphysics i.e. thought with being he tries to give a scientific basis for the world-view of Schelling. By Absolute, Schelling means the true In-itself (An-sich) and the subject and object, mind and nature are two aspects of one Absolute Reality. The Absolute which includes both matter and mind is the principle of identity underlying them. Hegel dislikes Schelling’s one-sided emphasis on the aspect of identity and object, his undifferentiated absolute by saying that it is a night in which all cows are black.
6.2.2 Thought as Ultimate Reality: -

According to Hegel the Ultimate Reality is the Absolute spirit or Idea or Reason. This Absolute spirit is not an ego or mind limited by the non-ego, nor a transcendental principle beyond the ego and non-ego. The Absolute is immanent in nature and mind as universal reason. Thought is reality, but my thought is only partially real.

"Pure thought in the form of a Thing an Absolute without determinations, in which all distinctions are without a difference."

So the Absolute self or thought which is all inclusive and all coherent is the fullest reality.

6.2.3 The Absolute is a process:

The Absolute idea, according to Hegel, is an active dynamic spiritual principle. It acts, grows and develops. Hegel should be always understood as a kind of inverted Spinozist. Spinoza holds that "substance" is the Ultimate Reality, and it is one and infinite. This substance is neutral, i.e., neither mental nor material. Mind and matter are the two attributes through which we conceive substance. Manifold world of things are the limited modes of these two attributes. The attributes and modes are dependent on substance, therefore not ultimately real. All reality is identical with God or substance and nothing is real except God.

"But when the definition in Spinoza is said to identify the world with God, and to confound God with nature and the finite world, it is implied that the finite world possesses a genuine actuality and affirmative reality. If this assumption be admitted, of course a union a God with the world renders God completely finite, and degrades Him to the bare finite and adventitious congeries of existence."

Hegel has compared Spinoza's Absolute to a lion's den to which all tracks lead, and from which none return, such a reality is a total blank to our thought. Hegel conceives that Absolute is not a passive substance but a living subject. The Absolute is an active, moving process, a process of evolution. The Absolute is not a static, Parmenidean one. So Hegel says that,

"The true Absolute must not merely be thought of as a substance, i.e. something immediately there, whether this be a knower or something known. It must be thought of as a subject."
6.2.4 Pure Absolute self-fulfilling itself: -

The Absolute is the highest synthetic principle. The Absolute is purely spiritual, free and self-fulfilled as there are no contradictions in it, which it has to overcome. Thought as a pure Idea completely overcome the opposition of the objectivity, so perfectly self-conscious. Though the Absolute is self-fulfilled yet, according to Hegel, it is also self-fulfilling itself, because the self-fulfilled absolute in and by itself is pure identity, yet it is at the same time the ground of distinction also. The Absolute fulfils itself through the opposition of subject and object, finite and infinite, soul and body.

"The idea itself is the dialectic which forever divides and distinguishes the self-identical from the differentiated, the subjective from the objective, the finite from the infinite, soul from the body. Only on these terms it is an eternal creation, eternal vitality, and eternal spirit."\(^6\)

Unity cannot be real without plurality. It is in and through plurality that the unity realizes itself. Pure identity is meaningless. Reality is always identity – in – difference. Reality is a system in which identity realizes itself through the diversity of parts. So plurality is necessary to the life of one. The self-consciousness is the goal towards which the developing Absolute moves. The meaning of this developing process lies in the identity of being and non-being by the developed mind which identifies itself with the universal purpose. But this identification of beings and non-beings does not imply that these are not distinguishable but only means that distinction is not absolute. The whole truth therefore means identity in difference.

6.2.5 Dialectic method: -

"Wherever there is movement, wherever there is life, wherever anything is carried into effect in the actual world, there Dialectic is at work. It is also the soul of all knowledge which is truly scientific."\(^7\)

Both the finite knower and the known object are manifestations of the inclusive Absolute thought or idea. They are thus at bottom identical. For this reason, the object is not unintelligible to the subject. The Absolute idea, which is an active dynamic spiritual principle, goes on expressing itself according to the dialectic method through thesis, antithesis and synthesis. The first moment of the dialectic is called the thesis. Here the Ego posits itself in the form of the finite ego. In the antithesis the finite ego
passes over into its opposite. And the two are reconciled in a higher synthesis. This synthesis again gives rise to a new triad and that to another triad. This process continues till a synthesis in which all oppositions are resolved and preserved. Such a synthesis is the Absolute. So the Absolute is the highest and most concrete of all synthesis, where subject and object are identified. The final goal of the dialectic method is the Absolute, as the Absolute is eternally evolving and manifesting itself in and through the various objects of nature.

6.2.6 Absolute is concrete: -

The Absolute or thought, according to Hegel, is concrete. The concrete experience requires an object of knowledge as well as the knowing mind. The duality of subject and object is the indispensable condition of knowledge. Knowledge always implies the distinction between the subject and object, knower and known, self and not-self. No subject or mind can exist without knowing an object. No object also can exist without being known by mind. The subject and object, self and not-self, being necessarily related to each other and yet not identical with each other, must be regarded as correlative moments in the life of a higher principle, viz, the Absolute. The Absolute manifests itself as finite minds, on the one hand, and as finite objects on the other, and overcomes and transcends the opposition between them and comprehends them in its all-embracing unity of self-consciousness. The ultimate principle according to Hegel, is neither a mere subject nor a mere object, but the Absolute spirit which is expressed in finite spirits and nature. So Hegel says that,

"This surmounting of the object of consciousness is not to be taken one-sidedly to mean that the object showed itself as returning into the self, but is to be taken more specifically to mean not only that the object as such presented itself to the self as vanishing, but rather that it is the externalization of self-consciousness that posits the thing hood [of the object] and that this externalization has not merely a negative but a positive meaning, a meaning which is not only for us or in itself, but for self-consciousness itself".

Finite minds are the finite reproductions of the Absolute. Finite minds can understand nature, because it is an expression of the Divine Mind with which they have kinship. There is no opposition between thought and nature. Laws of thought are ultimately the laws of nature. I can know the reality as it is in itself because I am that reality. Hegel therefore, says that whatever is rational is real and whatever is real is

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rational. Hegel removes the opposition between thought and reality, and regards them as correlative and inseparable moments in the Absolute spirit.

"Becoming is the first concrete thought, and therefore the first notion: whereas Being and Nought are empty abstractions. The notion of Being, therefore, of which we sometimes speak, must mean Becoming; not the mere point of Being, which is empty. Nothing, any more than Nothing, which is empty Being. In Being then we have Nothing and in Nothing Being: but this Being which does not lose itself in Nothing is Becoming. Nor must we omit the distinction, while we emphasize the unity of Becoming: without that distinction we should once more return to abstract Being. Becoming is only the explicit statement of what Being is in its truth."9

Hegel asserts that the reality which is a unity behind the world is concrete in the sense that it is real in and through differences. The one realizes itself in and through the many. The world is not unreal or illusory. The Absolute One which is dynamic evolves from within itself the world of finite things and minds as manifestations of its own life.

6.2.7. Three divisions of Hegel’s logic:

The Absolute realizes itself by a process. Hegel tries to give a general scheme of this in his works, especially in Logic. Hegel’s Logic falls into three main divisions – ‘Doctrine of Being’, the ‘Doctrine of Essence’, and the ‘Doctrine of the Concept’. These three divisions deal with the three stages in the development of the subject’s view of the objectivity. Being is the starting point which corresponds to our simplest consciousness. Hegel is concerned with the most abstract of all.

"Pure Being makes the beginning: because it is on one hand pure thought, and on the other immediacy itself, simple and indeterminate; and the first beginning cannot be mediated by anything, or be further determined."10

Essence implies the attitude of the subject towards the objectivity. The essence of a thing can be understood only in relation to other things. Essence is concerned with the distinctions between thing – in – itself and its appearances, forces and their expressions, form and matter etc.

"Everything, it is said, has an Essence; that is, things really are not what they immediately show themselves. There is therefore something more to be done than merely move from one quality to another, and merely to advance from qualitative to quantitative,
and vice versa: there is a permanent in things, and that permanent is in the first instance their Essence.”

The subject and the object are assimilated and united together in an idea that is concept. This idea develops internally through the activities of thinking mind and of the natural world into the Absolute idea. This process of development is the overcoming of all dualisms: subject – object, ideal – real, finite – infinite, soul – body, possibility – actuality etc. In the idea, all relations of the understanding are contained

“In their infinite self return and self identity.”

6.3.0 Francis Herbert Bradley’s concept of Absolute: -

Bradley, the best known of the English idealistic thinkers, about the great originality of his thinking and of his impact, there is hardly any doubt. Professor J.H. Muirhead in his “The platonic Tradition in Anglo – saxon philosophy” pays tributes by saying that Bradley’s work is epoch making in the history of Anglo-saxon Idealism, and ascribed him as its fourth founder. The greatest living philosopher of his period presents his mature form of metaphysical thinking in his “Appearance and Reality.”

The concept of Bradley’s Absolute may be summarized in few lines which runs as follows: - The ultimate reality is a self consistent whole. It includes in itself all differences and forms in an inclusive harmony. The perplexing diversity of the phenomenal world must be brought into unity and made self-consistent. The content of reality is nothing but sentient experience. Thought, feeling, volition are the only materials of existence. The finite minds should be in a position to give a general outline of the nature of the Absolute, but the detailed description of the Absolute is impossible.

6.3.1. The criterion of Reality: -

Bradley arrives at the absolute standard of reality by a dialectical examination of all the notions commonly accepted as valid. He examines all the categories such as primary and secondary qualities, substantive and objective, relation and quality, space and time, motion and change, causation and activity with which our intellect or thought interprets the world, and finds them all self-contradictory. So Bradley condemns all these contradictory notions as appearances because
Ultimate reality is such that it does not contradict itself.\textsuperscript{13}

Therefore non-contradictions must be the criterion of reality. Non-contradiction also means consistency. Reality not only self-consistent, it must be self-subsistent. So the self-consistency of reality demands that

“All appearance must belong to reality. For what appears is, and whatever is cannot fall outside the real. And we may now combine this result with the conclusion just reached. We may say that everything, which appears, is somehow real in such a way as to be self-consistent. The character of the real is to possess everything phenomenal in a harmonious form.”\textsuperscript{14}

6.3.2. Positive nature of Reality: -

The criterion of reality is non-contradiction. As a denial of inconsistency it does not give us any positive knowledge about reality. But according to Bradley such an objection is untenable. Bradley says that our standard denies inconsistency, and therefore asserts consistency. Again he says

“Reality is known to possess a positive character, but this character is at present determined only as that which excludes contradiction.”\textsuperscript{15}

Negative assertions about an object do not mean complete ignorance. The real is individual and an all inclusive harmony and self-consistent. The Absolute is one comprehensive reality. It reconciles the existence of Supreme Reality with the manyness of the world in which all things coming together are transmuted and changed by the degrees of reality. Nothing can be outside of it, as it is self-subsistent. For Bradley to save the self-consistency and non-contradiction of reality the appearances must be affirmed and absorbed in it.

6.3.3. Concrete nature of Reality: -

So far Bradley gives the description of the abstract nature of Absolute, and then he proceeds to its concrete nature. The matter, according to Bradley which fills up the outline of the Absolute is nothing but experience. If we remove all perception and feeling from a piece of existence then nothing will remain. So it implies that the constituent of existence is experience.

“............ The Absolute is one system, and that its contents are nothing but sentient experience. It will hence be a single and all inclusive experience, which embraces every
partial diversity in concord. For it cannot be less than appearance, and hence no feeling
or thought, of any kind, can fall outside its limits."

But this assertion of Bradley should not be confused as that the self is an
independent entity besides the object. Sentient experience is a whole in which
divisions do not exist. Subject is not different from the universe. The relational form
of our knowledge also points to a substantial totality which transcends and yet
contains all diversity.

So Bradley says that we have the knowledge of a whole in immediate
experience. The subject and object are one here. The conception of the Absolute as
experience is inevitable, but the immediate experience cannot be defined, because
reality is a matter of definition but not of observation. And on the contrary experience
cannot be defined but observed. But still, Being and reality are, in brief one with
experience.

6.3.4. Knowledge of the absolute Reality: -

Our knowledge is in essence relational and discursive. So Bradley says

"Fully to realize the existence of the Absolute is for finite beings impossible. In order
thus to know we should have to be, and then we should not exist."17

Kant rejected the things-in-themselves as unknown and unknowable. So his concept
leads him to agnosticism, as he states that we know that noumena or things-in-
themselves exist, but we do not know what they are. Against this Kantian argument,
Bradley says that if reality were not a subject of knowledge we could not know that
such a thing even existed. Our knowledge of the Absolute is limited. But this is not
good ground for our declining to entertain it. Mere thinking, by its nature relational,
and does not give us the complete knowledge of Reality. Thought yields a dissection
of experience. In order to transcend its relational form, thought commits suicide. In
anything real for Bradley there are two aspects an existence and a content, a ‘that’ and
a ‘what’ and these two are inseparable. Thought cannot join these two aspects and
therefore is unable to arrive at its goal.

6.3.5 Thought and Reality:

The very nature of thought is ideal. Thinking is impossible without an idea,
and an idea implies separation of content from existence. Thought is relational. In
judgment an idea is predicated of a reality and thought distinguishes the predicate from the subject. The predicate is an ideal content while subject is an actual existence. Judgment is a reunion of ideal content and actual existence, ‘what’ and ‘that’ which are provisionally estranged. Existence and content are inseparable in reality.

“But it is the alienation of these aspects in which thought’s ideality consists.”

So thought is inadequate to give us knowledge of reality, for reality in itself is non-relational. But if thought ceased to be relational then it would cease to be thought.

“Thought, in its actual processes and results, cannot transcend the dualism of the ‘that’ and the ‘what’”

Thus thought by its very nature fails to grasp the reality. Bradley therefore reaches the conclusion that by transcending its relational form i.e. by committing suicide thought can grasp the supra-relational whole. Suicide of thought means the transcendence of its inherent dualism between ‘that’ and ‘what,’ when thought attains immediacy of feeling as a harmonious whole, it would be transformed into a supra-relational immediate experience and it would cease to be thought.

6.3.6 Degrees of Truth and Reality:

Bradley believes that the Absolute is one all-comprehending reality. He reconciles the existence of this Ultimate Reality with everything finite that exists by his doctrine of Degrees of Truth and reality. Bradley considers all finites as appearance of reality. But like Sankara he does not conceive that appearances are non-existent or disappear at the dawn of knowledge. The apparent plurality of the world is constituent elements of the Absolute and reveals the nature of the whole in same degree, but not in some degree.

We should clearly note that according to Bradley, Reality has no degrees. He says,

“The Absolute, considered as such, has of course no degrees; for it is perfect, and there can be no more or less in perfection. Such predicates belong to, and have a meaning only in the world of appearance.”

The perfect Absolute is unmoving. Appearances are conditioned by change, movement and are therefore imperfect. So the doctrine of degrees of reality has a meaning and applicability only in the realm of appearance. The Absolute is present
among the finite appearances in different degrees. Appearances can be arranged in an
ascending scale from lower to higher position. Lower elements are less real compared
to the higher. Nothing is absolutely real or false, because Absolute is all-inclusive. So
reality is a matter of degree, in respect of finite appearances.

The concept of degrees of reality is related to the concept of degrees of truth.
Bradley denies the absolute truth and absolute falsity. The false judgment means that
it is incapable of giving a complete picture of reality. On the other hand every
judgment is true because all refer to reality. So every judgment is both partially true
and partially false. Bradley says,

"Of two given appearances the one more wide, or more harmonious, is more real. It
approaches nearer to a single, all-containing, individuality. To remedy its imperfections,
in other words, we should have to make a smaller alteration. The truth and the fact,
which, to be converted into the Absolute, would require less rearrangement and addition,
is more real and truer. And this is what we mean by degrees of reality and truth. To
possess more the character of reality, and to contain within oneself a greater amount of
the real, are two expressions for the same thing."21

6.3.7 Absolute and God:

Bradley conceives the God of religion as an appearance and holds that God
and religion are equally lost in the Absolute. He makes a sharp distinction between
Absolute and God. Philosophical speculations aim at the knowledge of the ultimate
truth, while religion always relates with the practical truth. Bradley believes in God
but he denies identifying God with Absolute. God is different from Absolute and
cannot be called that God is one with Absolute. Bradley explains this in the following
way –

"If you identify the Absolute with God that is not the God of religion. If again you
separate them, God becomes a finite factor in the Whole. And the effort of religion is to
put an end to, and break down, this relation – a relation which, none the less, it
essentially presupposes. Hence, short of the Absolute, God cannot rest, and having
reached that goal, he is lost and religion with him. It is this difficulty which appears in
the problem of the religious self-consciousness .God must certainly be conscious of
himself in religion, but such self-consciousness is most imperfect. For if the external
relation between God and man were entirely absorbed, the separation of subject and
object would, as such, have gone with it. But if again the self, which is conscious, still
contains in its essence a relation between two unreduced terms, where is the unity of its
selfness? In short, God as the highest expression of the realized good, shows the
contradiction which we found to be inherent in that principle. The falling apart of idea and existence is at once essential to goodness and negated by Reality. And the process, which moves within Reality, is not Reality itself. We may say that God is not God, till he has become all in all, and that God which is all in all is not the God of religion. God is but an aspect, and that must mean but an appearance, of the Absolute."22

Religious activities like worship, prayer etc implies person. There is relation between finite beings and God. But relation makes the God imperfect. Bradley's Absolute, therefore neither a self-conscious spirit, nor a person. Selfhood and will are marks of imperfection. So God cannot be the perfect real or the all-inclusive whole of Bradley. The Absolute is not personal, it is super-personal. So Absolute is not identical with the God of religion.

6.3.8 Absolute and individual: -

Bradley seeks to integrate the individual selves in the Absolute and regards the Absolute as a coherent system of finite existences. The Absolute is an all inclusive whole, harmonious blend of the appearances. The qualities and contents of different finite selves are transmuted, and are changed all like. We cannot preserve the Absolute and the individual both. The preservation of one demands the loss of the other. So for Bradley Absolute is the only real individual and finite beings are the adjectives of the Real. In the Absolute no appearance can be lost, but finite selves must blend and undergo complete transformation. But Bradley says that how the finites blend in the Absolute, it is inexplicable.

6.4 Aurobindo and Hegel: -

The Ultimate Reality for Hegel is thought. The reality is a living dynamic process, a process of evolution. The Absolute manifests itself as finite minds and finite objects and overcomes and transcends the opposition between them and comprehends them in its all embracing unity. The world or nature is the externalization of the Absolute. So Hegel says

"The Idea, or mind implicit, slumbering in Nature, overcomes, therefore, the externality, separateness, and immediacy, creates for itself an existence comfortable to its inwardness' and universality and thereby becomes mind which is selected into itself and is for itself, self-conscious and awakened mind or mind as such."23
The thoughts of Aurobindo in this respect are same with Hegel. As a monist philosopher Aurobindo also says that Brahman manifests itself in the world, though the multiplicity of the universe does not affect the essential oneness of Brahman.

Aurobindo’s philosophy covers the whole range of mind, life, matter, and the truths of the soul and the higher regions of the spirit. His integral Absolute demolishes the fundamental difference between matter and spirit, mind and life and conceives that lower principles are essential ingredients and work harmoniously together. Truth is achieved by the transformation and transmutation of the lower principles in the light of the Highest, not by a negation or annulment of any of these. Hegel comes nearer to Aurobindo in this respect. Hegel says that Absolute Idea is a moving dynamic process. The Absolute takes its onward march through the realms of Nature and History. Hegel does not treat these as negations to be annulled or oppositions to be conquered but as progressive stages in the evolution of the Absolute in time. Dialectic is a movement; it is negative and a positive function of reason. But

“Negation is not total annulment but comprehension without abstraction. This new idea itself is the starting point for another process, the thesis of a newer triad. The dialectical movement is a spiral. Rather, it may be conceived as an inverted pyramid. Its beginning is determined by the idea with the least content (Pure Being), and the end by the most comprehensive concept (Absolute Idea)"²⁴

But according to Hegel, the Absolute works unconsciously in Nature and consciously, but not self-consciously in History. So to reach the final stage, evolution must go beyond the world of finite things and minds. So there is no possibility for man to receive the light from above which will convert him into a Divine man. But Aurobindo holds that the transformation of man in his terrestrial life, the emergence of a race of superman is not only possible, but it is certain.

Hegel says that the Absolute as a pure identity is self-fulfilled. Again he says that the Absolute fulfils itself in and through the dialectic method, through the opposition of subject and object. Here the question arises why the Absolute that is perfectly self-fulfilled should give up its contented state and undergo all the trouble by differentiating itself into subject and object. Hegel tries to solve this problem by saying that it is a logical moment. But these answers hardly contribute towards the solution of the problem.
Aurobindo deal with the question of the 'why' of creation and gives a satisfactory answer by employing the traditional Indian concepts 'Lila' and 'Maya'. Creation, according to Aurobindo is an expression of joy, creation is nothing but a joyful game and delight is the secret of it. There is no compulsion to do so and there is no any external law governing the creative process. The Absolute has full of possibilities. The Absolute realizes all of its power in an evolutionary world. The evolutionary process presupposes a graded concealment of Sachchidananda into nescience, after which its power reveal them in sequential order.

Hegel identifies thought with reality. Thought constitute the very texture of the real. Relativity is inherent character of the Real. Unity without plurality is a logical abstraction. The finite things and minds are forms of thought and can return to thought. Hegel therefore asserts that inaccessible to reason is nothing. So the end of evolution, according to Hegel is an end conceived by thought. Aurobindo does not conceive that, thought is the Ultimate Reality. There are various grades of reality above thought. Bradley also maintains a distinction between thought and reality and holds that thought is something less than reality. So Absolute is beyond the reach of thought. Yet Bradley asserts that we have some idea of the Absolute but this does not indicate the identity of thought with reality. Thought by its very nature endeavour and by its very nature fails to grasp the reality, because it is the very nature of thought to divide the real into parts, to make distinction and yet tries to synthesize into a whole. Thus thought moves in a realm of relation and cannot transcend its relational form. If thought ceased to be relational it would cease to be thought. If thought necessarily involves relatedness, then it must be inadequate to reality for reality in itself is non-relational

"It takes us straight to thoughts suicide"25

Regarding the Absolute of Hegel, Aurobindo says that

"For Sri Aurobindo the whole conception of the Absolute, as we find it in Hegel, is artificial. It is in fact, a man-made Absolute, and differs from the real Absolute as an artificial flower differs from a genuine one."36

The formation of the concept of Hegel’s Absolute is wholly depended on the continuity of thought and the principle of consciousness of the present people. But
these two factors are not sufficient to construct the Absolute because Absolute is same for all the time. But the formation of Absolute by depending on present principles of consciousness may not be same in the future also.

Aurobindo mentions the Divine life towards which human life is moving. People are work under a sense of disquiet at the existing order of things. This spiritual dissatisfaction at the present order of things has actuated the philosophical speculations. This dissatisfaction implies that Absolute is not confined to our present life. It is to exceed the present life to rise to a higher and higher level. Though the Absolute manifests in our present life, this manifestation is not finished in this mental stage.

The Ultimate Reality according to Hegel is the Absolute spirit or Idea or Reason. All our consciousness, (perception, conception, emotion) is reducible to thought. So thought is Absolute. But for Aurobindo the emergence of the Supermind does not take place till now, which will bring a radical change to human beings by transforming into Gnostic beings who have shed all ignorance and are illumined by the light of knowledge. So Absolute cannot be identified with the present human thought. Moreover Hegel cancels the transcendental ego (subject) and the transcendental object by identifying them with our reason. But these can be identified in the Absolute reason not in our reason.

"Absolute reason, for us is only an ideal. Hegel ignores its transcendence of finite reason and built up his idealism, as if he were the master of Absolute Reason"^27

For Hegel the Absolute is thought and it is one of continuity. And this self-fulfilled Absolute is fulfilling itself through the process of dialectic. We can automatically arrive at the Absolute by climbing steps of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. But Aurobindo is an advocate of emergent evolution. At every stage of evolution according to Aurobindo there is a light from above that can raise us to higher and higher levels and ultimately we reach to the Absolute. Aurobindo’s Divine evolution is a double process of ascent and descent. Descent means that the spirit involves itself in matter and ascent means the manifestation of Divine Existence, Consciousness and Force. While Aurobindo’s evolution is emergent and creative, Hegel propounds a continuous theory of evolution. Hegelian conception of evolution is not completely spiritual. For Hegel Mind is the Highest Reality. But on the contrary
of Hegel, Aurobindo says that, mind is not the highest end of the evolutionary process and it is intuition only that can visualize the entire process of evolution. Hegel conceives that the course of evolution is in a triadic form. The evolution proceeds with an abstract universal concept; this concept gives rise to a contradiction; the contradictory concepts are reconciled in a third concept, which is a union of the other two. Divine proceeds in terms of contradiction and synthesis. Aurobindo is truly a spiritualistic philosopher. The movement of Divine for him is not fixed in three ways – thesis, antithesis and synthesis. On the other hand progress of Divine is free and many sided.

6.5 Bradley and Aurobindo: -

It is very natural that the thought of Bradley and Aurobindo are similar in many respects. Both of them affirm that the real is one and the world of appearance is a form of that one which is Absolute.

“It is Bradley’s emphatic contention that each single appearance is preserved in the Absolute, though it undergoes a transmutation, and that each one is as essential as another to the Absolute” 28

For Aurobindo Sachchidananda is the Ultimate Reality and the world is made out of Divine existence. Ultimate Reality is eternal, infinite, real and devoid of any limitation and relation. The triple aspects of Sachchidananda are not only inseparable but also not distinct at all. In similar way Bradley also holds that the nature of Ultimate Reality is such that it does not contradict itself.

Aurobindo conceives the Absolute to be indefinable. The description of the nature of supramental being in terms of mental category is impossible. Though it is indeterminable but is not altogether unknowable for us, because the spiritual being in us is nothing but the supreme existence. Similar statement is made by Bradley also. He says that our finite mind is unable to understand the concrete unity in details and also affirm the impossibility of mind to construct Absolute life in detail. But Bradley contradicts himself by ignoring the direct knowledge of the Absolute on the one hand and by affirming that the knowledge of the Absolute is both positive and certain on the other hand. But for both of them Absolute is realizable. For Aurobindo Brahman
can be realized in intuitive experience. Bradley also says that we have the experience of a whole in immediate experience.

Absolute according to each thinker is both abstract and concrete and spiritual in nature. The Nirguna Brahman or what Aurobindo calls the Paratpara Brahman is the Absolute- in- itself, whose transcendence defies all human characterizations. And the world is the real manifestation of Brahman in space and time and therefore it has a deep significance. Bradley also says that experience is that which fills up the empty outline of the reality. Reality is not only that which is experienced, it is the experience itself.

"Reality as the concrete all inclusive whole is not, therefore, to be confused with the abstract Kantian Things-in-itself, which does not include phenomena but excludes them completely."29

Despite all these similarities there are certain aspect of Aurobindo’s idealism which are sharply at variance with Bradley’s own. For Bradley experience is same as reality. Reality is experience itself. Our mental faculties like feeling, thought, and volition all are material of existence. So he says that reality is nothing but sentient experience

"Being and reality are in brief one thing with sentience."30

But for Aurobindo the Absolute can be identified neither with thought, nor with feeling or volition or intuitions as so far emerged. It is altogether different consciousness from any of which we have knowledge. So its content cannot be sentient experience. It is both sat-asat, limited-unlimited, phenomenal and noumenal.

"The transcendent, the Supracosmic is absolute and free in itself beyond Time and Space and beyond the conceptual opposites of finite and infinite."31

In anything real for Bradley there are two aspects an existence and a content, a that and a what. And these two are inseparable. But thought as an ideal implies separations of content and consciousness but these two aspects are inseparable in reality. So thought in its very nature is inadequate to give us knowledge of reality.

"Thought is relational and discursive, and if it ceases to be this, it commits suicide."32
By committing suicide thought can transcend the dualism of content and existence and then only the knowledge of Absolute is possible. But Aurobindo’s conception of emergent evolution

"Is based not upon the suicide of the lower principles, but upon their transformation. This transformation we may call a rebirth."33

Aurobindo’s process of evolution is a development and growth towards higher forms. In this transformation the lower principles undergo a radical change, but nothing (lower principle) is to be completely rejected, lower ones are uplifted, everything has to be finally integrated.

The Brahman of Aurobindo is of the nature of Bliss. In its transcendental aspect, the Absolute is Existence-Consciousness-Force and Bliss. So Bliss is not an attribute or predicate of Brahman, Bliss is an essence of Brahman. To Bradley also there is a balance of pleasure in the Absolute. Bradley says that Absolute possesses and enjoys somehow this balance of pleasure. But somehow is not an actual explanation. Again after this statement he says that

"The Absolute then perhaps strictly, does not feel pleasure."34

Absolute of Bradley is all inclusive harmonious whole and appearance gets its reality in the Absolute. So as an appearance, pain is also included in the Absolute. But Aurobindo’s Brahman is an eternal, infinite and absolute self-existence, self-awareness, self-delight being.

Sachchidananda for Aurobindo is both impersonal and personal, consciousness and force. The Absolute has an eternal, real and creative power which creates the universe. Force is one with existence, and is real power of Sachchidananda. So Aurobindo says that it is a great error of Advaita Vedanta of Sankara, which conceives God and its power as unreal. Saguna and Nirguna, Shiva and Kali are two different poises of the same Reality. But for Bradley God is different from the Absolute. God is less real compared to the Absolute. As he says

"God is but an aspect, and that must mean but an appearance, of the Absolute."35

From this point of view Bradley states that creativity and activity is alien to the Absolute. But Aurobindo’s Absolute is both passive and active.
The nature of the world of appearance for Bradley is imperfect and finite, so not real. But Bradley's Absolute is a harmonious whole, in which all-finites are put together. So Bradley's finite is unreal only provisionally. It gets its reality in the Absolute. But the process how the plurality of finites becomes merged into the Absolute is inexplicable. So Bradley is not able to give a satisfactory reconciliation of the multiplicity of appearances with the unity of the Absolute. So S.N.L. Shrivastava says that,

"The entire attempt of Bradley to condemn all finite existences as appearances and yet seek to retain their being in the Absolute seems to us to be an attempt to hunt the hare and also run with the hounds."36

But for Aurobindo the world is nothing, only an involved form of Supreme Reality. So the question of unreality regarding the multiplicity of the world does not arise. He conceives the world as God. The world is made out of supreme Reality, so it is Divine. It is spirit which manifests, uncovers and unveils itself on this earth.

6.6 Conclusion: -

Aurobindo is clearly a monistic idealist as he believes that there is nothing but Brahman, an inclusive whole from which everything is born and ultimately enters into Him. In this respect Bradley's philosophy comes close to Aurobindo in upholding one all comprehending Absolute. Like Aurobindo, Hegel also maintains that all finites are expression of the Absolute Reality in different ways.

In Aurobindo's philosophy there is an integral relation between Absolute and finite selves. Aurobindo conceives the transcendental Absolute with the reality of this world. While Aurobindo maintains the reality of the world and finite beings, Bradley claims the provisional unreality of the finite beings. Aurobindo's view of distinct existence of finite beings within the whole has similarity with Hegel, according to whom each individual has distinct though, not separate existence. Again Hegel states that Absolute is an organic whole, a perfect and harmonious system of an infinite number of finite selves and ultimately there is an identical relation between the finite and the infinite. Aurobindo's evolutionary account in this regard is that spirit and finite beings stand in close relation to one another as finite beings are the
manifestation of the involved nature of spirit and have to be transformed and transmuted into spirit someday or other.

The Supermind (God) for Aurobindo is Sachchidananda in its creative aspect. Hegel identifies God with the Absolute and thereby dissatisfies both the theologians and the philosophers. Aurobindo could maintain the essential unity of the Supreme Reality without identifying God with Absolute. In this respect Bradley's concept comes close to Aurobindo who does not identify God with the Absolute. But Aurobindo differs from Bradley in this point that Bradley places God on the same footing as other finite objects and reduces God to mere appearance like other objects. A God with marks of finitude cannot be the Highest Reality. For Aurobindo Supermind is not mere appearance of Absolute. Supermind is Sachchidananda extended in time and space, whereas Sachchidananda is the transcendental principle and exists beyond the universe, the Supermind or God is its immanent aspect.

The Ultimate Reality, according to Hegel is thought. So Hegel identifies thought with reality. The ideas are one with facts. Hence there is no difference between Truth and Reality. Ultimate Reality according to Bradley lies with a condition known as Absolute in which thought and reality are fused. In this obscure condition thought commits a happy suicide. But Aurobindo says that neither the Absolute can be identified with the present human thought nor the Absolute demand the suicide of lower principles. Aurobindo advocates the emergence theory. For him the emergence of Supermind brings a radical change to human beings. This transformation means that nothing is to be completely rejected, lower ones are uplifted and everything has to be finally integrated.

The reality according to Hegel is self conscious unity. It is neither passive nor indeterminate nor devoid of self-determination. It is not indeterminate consciousness but self conscious existence. The Absolute is not unitarian and identity consciousness but it is the self-conscious existence which unites all the principles and powers within itself. Hegel admits that Absolute is a self-conscious individual person, determinate and real. Bradley says that experience is the same as reality. Inspired by the Upanishads Aurobindo tries to fuse all these conception into one in his integral Brahman by affirming that Brahman is knowable and unknowable, immanent and transcendent, indeterminate and determinate.

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