

# A CRITIQUE OF SRI AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY

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BHOWANI SEN

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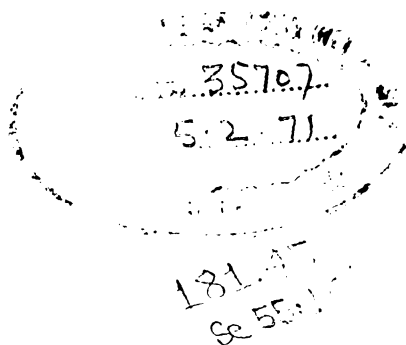
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THIS SMALL PAMPHLET GOES to examine the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo Ghose. In all history it has been found that idealist philosophy, under whatever garb it manifests itself and however profoundly it tries to hide its true face, has always been more this-worldly than other-worldly. Time and again, the philosophers have not hesitated to twist and turn in order to justify what has been, what is and to ridicule, refute and attack what is to be.

It is no secret that all religious movements have continuously interpreted and reinterpreted their own tenets to suit and conform with the existing reality. The christian church has seen three social formations—slavery, feudalism and capitalism—and taken them in its stride, every time accepting the powers that be as correct and reserving its special venom against the new social structure of socialism. The democratic Islam had the despotic monarchy of the middle ages thrust down its throat and is now choking trying to swallow capitalism, imperialism and neo-colonialism.

In socalled orthodox Hindu philosophy Sri Aurobindo has essayed a similar task—of accepting capitalism as valid while denouncing socialism. Idealism has been like myopia, allowing a little vision on the side but never ahead.

In this pamphlet Comrade Bhowani Sen analyses Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and proves on the basis of his own words its reactionary and backward-looking nature. The clear-cut analysis exposes before all the fact that idealism cannot under any circumstances take a forward step either in its understanding of the world as it is or in its vision as to what it should become.

It is the duty of all progressives and Marxists to refute and expose all idealist philosophies that divert the attention of the people from the future. And this pamphlet does signal service in this direction.



IS THE OBJECTIVE WORLD REAL or unreal or, in other words, is matter an objective reality or a product of subjective consciousness? An answer to this question is the key to all philosophical systems and doctrines. In understanding Sri Aurobindo's world outlook, we must start with an examination of his answer to this basic question.

Apparently, Sri Aurobindo does not deny the existence of matter independent of the mind but at the same time he affirms that matter is truth but not reality. In his philosophical discourse, truth is independent of the knowledge of it but reality is derived from consciousness, not the consciousness of the individual man but from superconsciousness as the sole objective existence. It is impersonal cosmic consciousness. Both matter and mind are its derivatives.

The following two extracts give an indication of his viewpoint:

"The states of existence through which we approach and enter into the Absolute must have their truth, for the untrue and unreal cannot lead into the Real: but also what issues from the Absolute, what the External supports and informs and manifests itself, must have a reality" (*The Life Divine*, p. 427).

He affirms the existence of absolute reality beyond the boundary of the material universe but unlike the Advaita Vedantis he does not consider the material world as Maya, i.e. "Cosmic Illusion" He goes further than even the agnostics and affirms:

"Therefore the matter is here the basis and the apparent beginning; in the language of the Upanishads, Prithivi, the Earth-Principle, is our foundation" (*Ibid*, p. 174).

If this is so, what follows? If these words have any real meaning, it means that the material universe and the laws of nature revealed by science are not creation of the human mind but objective realities, i.e. existing independently of human consciousness.

So far, materialism does not confront Sri Aurobindo with any difficulty.

But his attack on materialism begins just at this stage, because he realises that if matter is real, no absolute reality beyond the material universe can be postulated. He says:

“If matter were the principle of the universe as the materialist alleges, if the truth of things were to be found in the first formula arrived at by Bhrigu, son of Varuna, when he meditated upon the eternal Brahman, ‘Matter is the eternal, for from Matter all beings are born and by Matter all beings exist, and to Matter all beings depart and return’, then no further questioning would be possible” (*Ibid.*, p. 662).

But Sri Aurobindo refuses to abide by Bhrigu’s verdict and exclaims:

“But since the universality of Matter can no longer be held as giving any sufficient explanation of the existence of Mind—and indeed Matter itself can no longer be explained by Matter alone, for it does not appear to be selfexistent—we are thrown back from this easy and obvious solution to other hypotheses” (*Ibid.*, p. 662).

Sri Aurobindo’s flight into “other hypotheses” is justified by two fundamental postulates firstly, the universality of matter does not sufficiently explain the existence of mind and, secondly, matter cannot be selfexistent. It is on these two slender threads that his entire philosophical system hangs, while all idealists consider these two threads as very strong indeed.

For the sake of simplicity, let us take his second thread first. If matter cannot be considered as selfexistent, it is because in Aurobindo’s opinion “matter does not appear to be selfexistent”. He does not explain why he thinks so,



but stands from this premise as a selfevident truth. In his opinion the selfexistence of cosmic consciousness is beyond question. Thus he starts from faith and then the rest of his philosophy rests on this a priori assumption. If Bhṛigu's revelation is false, how can the Upanishads be justified to take Prithivi or the "Earth-Principle" as the foundation? If matter is created by something else which is not matter and precedes it, that something else existing beyond the material world and preceding it must be considered as the foundation, if by "foundation" is meant the base on which a superstructure is built. Sri Aurobindo's difficulty in this respect is easily understandable. If Brahman, the absolute reality or supermind, the real-idea is considered as the base and the matter as the superstructure built on this base, then it logically follows that matter is not lower than supermind or Brahman. If Brahman or supermind is relegated to the lower order than matter, it follows that it is matter which supports Brahman and not otherwise.

But such a conclusion is disastrous for the spiritualist and absurd for his philosophical system. The way out from this logical deadlock can be found either by denying Prithivi as the foundation or by interpreting Prithivi's reality as the outcome or result of a superior reality. Thus he comes to the conclusion:

"Brahman is not only the cause and supporting power and indwelling principle of the universe, he is also its material and its sole material" (*Ibid.*, p. 222).

Thus starting from the premise that Prithivi is the foundation, he arrives at a conclusion, that this foundation is founded upon Brahman—the absolute reality. He develops his arguments thus:

"Matter expresses itself eventually as a formulation of some unknown force. Life, too, that yet unfathomed mystery, begins to reveal itself as an obscure energy of sensibility imprisoned in its material formulation; and when the dividing ignorance is cured which gives us the sense of gulf between Life and Matter, it is difficult to

suppose that Mind, Life and Matter will be found to be anything else than one Energy triply formulated, the triple world of the Vedic seers. Nor will the conception then be able to endure brute material Force as the mother of Mind. The Energy that creates the world can be nothing else than a Will, and Will is only consciousness applying itself to a work and a result" (*Ibid.*, p. 15).

## MATTER, ENERGY AND LIFE

The conception that matter is ultimately reducible to "some unknown force" is a gross distortion of the modern scientific discovery, that matter is composed of energy. This energy is not an unknown force because its laws of motion have been discovered by science and those laws are verified in practice by harnessing this energy to practical use.

The "mysteries" of life have also been penetrated by modern science and though much about life remains, as yet, unknown, the key to the point of its departure has been revealed. Protein substance, composed of material elements, contains within it the basic characteristics of life-activity. Mind-activity originates in the central nervous system, nerves being a further complex development of living cells.

It is an old superstition, rejected by science, that "the Energy that creates the world can be nothing else than a Will".

To think that energy is possessed with a will is to involve oneself in an irreconcilable contradiction in thought and in opposition to science. The movement of any being or substance possessed with a will, cannot be correctly interpreted by laws whose basic assumption is that the thing is without a consciousness or will. By splitting a hydrogen atom, the hydrogen bomb could not operate as it does if the energy nucleus of the atom had any will. The scientist proceeds, in this case with an assumption that the energy content of an atom does not possess a will or consciousness. His calculations become proved as valid by practical test.

This proves that the supposed mind-content of energy is correctly equated to zero.

The growth of life would not be dependent upon protein substance, if life was immanent in all atoms, if mind was latent in energy. The telephone and the telegraphic systems work accurately according to laws negating the existence of will in energy. Will cannot but affect the course of operation of the laws of physics, unless it is equated to zero.

One may argue that potential energy is energy not in action; life and mind that is latent in energy to potential life and potential mind and therefore inactive.

But potential energy is inactive only in a relative sense. It is not equated to zero in the sense that its existence does remain inoperative when the radioactive substance is set in motion. If there is potential life or potential mind in energy, it cannot remain inactive when that energy is in motion. Matter is nothing but a form of energy and it is matter in motion that is objective reality.

When the atom bomb or the hydrogen bomb explodes, energy is put on the most hyperactive state of motion, and no potential life or mind or anything can remain potential in this hyperactive state of energy in motion, nor can it refrain from bringing into being enormous quantities of life.

Sri Aurobindo starts with the formula that matter cannot be selfexistent because the atom, which is composed of energy, cannot exist without life and mind in it. Why? Because, according to Aurobindo's logic, life and mind cannot come into existence unless it is latent in matter. Why cannot life and mind come into existence without being immanent in matter? Because matter cannot be considered as selfexistent and mind cannot be sufficiently explained by matter.

It follows that matter is not selfexistent because it is not selfexistent.

Sri Aurobindo arrives at this amazing conclusion because he thinks that, "All phenomenal existence resolves into Force" (*Ibid.*, p. 76). He assumes that energy which is the basic component of atom is nothing but force and it is an indefinable phenomenon. He arbitrarily isolates force from

matter by identifying energy with the scientific concept of force. But energy has a mass and is not an indefinable phenomenon.

According to modern science, energy to which matter is ultimately reducible is not the same thing as force. Energy has a mass and motion is its inherent attribute. Force stands for motion or capacity for motion and is therefore inseparable from matter. Newtonian physics regarded matter as mass with inertia as its inherent attribute and force as an external agency; but the epoch-making discoveries of science have done away with this idea. Sri Aurobindo's conception of matter is as outmoded as his conception of force. He abstracts motion from matter that moves and arbitrarily ascribes to force an independent existence.

Sri Aurobindo escapes this question by taking an abrupt leap and asserts that this "Force is nothing but consciousness". From this assumption he comes back to the original proposition that matter is not selfexistent. Force is consciousness because matter is not selfexistent and because energy is force and force is consciousness. His premises are unable to support his conclusion but he makes the conclusion support his premises.

Now, let us examine his first thread: he says that the universality of matter does not sufficiently explain the existence of mind. Sri Aurobindo poses the question thus: if matter is real and if mind evolves out of matter, it follows that mind must be immanent in the atom itself, otherwise how can something grow out of nothing? Evolution, in his opinion, does not bring into being anything new, it only unfolds what is immanent.

Matter, therefore, does not exist without the principle of mind in it because otherwise mind could not have evolved out of matter. He says:

"We speak of the evolution of Life in Matter, the evolution of Mind in Matter; but evolution is a word, which merely states the phenomenon, without explaining it. For there seems to be no reason why Life should evolve out of material elements or Mind out of living form, unless

we accept the Vedantic solution that Life is already involved in Matter and Mind in Life because in essence Matter is a form of veiled Life, a form of veiled consciousness" (*Ibid.*, p. 5).

From this account it follows that an atom of hydrogen contains within it both life and mind in a veiled form. If that is so, there is no reason why there should not be thinking men alive in the sun and the moon and why men alone should think, why the atom bomb should not think and restrict its behaviour. If all vital differences between living and nonliving bodies cease to exist, there is no reason why, for the sake of world peace, we should only appeal to the atom-bomb-makers and not to the atom bomb itself. Life has been discovered in plants and therefore he thinks that by a stretch of imagination it can be discovered in an atom of oxygen or in an electron.

## ORIGIN OF LIFE AND MIND

Modern science has discovered the elementary principles explaining the origin of life and mind. They originate at a certain stage of development of the material elements, organised in a specific way under peculiar conditions of material environment. As soon as these new properties or qualities appear in matter organised in a certain way, new branches of science have to deal with them.

But Sri Aurobindo's difficulty lies in a fundamental misconception about evolution. Advaita Vedanta of Sankara denied evolution because he affirmed that evolution signifies the growth of something that did not exist before out of some other thing. Sankara further observed that if the material universe is to be affirmed as real, evolution has to be accepted as the law of being and if evolution is to be accepted as the law of being, the emergence of something out of some other thing is inevitably to be accepted. Therefore Sankara regarded the world as Maya. Sankara was consistent but Aurobindo, in order to maintain a semblance

of scientific attitude, repudiates Sankara's Maya, though he regards evolution as something incapable of giving rise to new qualities in new quantities.

At this stage Aurobindo's relation between spiritualism and science breaks and his leap into world of phantasy begins. He then affirms like the solipsists that consciousness (i.e. mind) is embodied in matter, because "Matter is a creation of consciousness" (*Ibid.*, p. 216). Yet he discards solipsism as untruth and wants us to demarcate his philosophical outlook sharply from solipsism. He is thus involved in an irreconcilable contradiction with himself. He starts from science to repudiate solipsism but then again embraces solipsism in order to escape from the materialist viewpoint.

What is meant by mind being embodied in matter? Does it mean that: just as the mango-seed which develops into a mango tree and nothing else, so the atom must develop into mind because all the basic constituents of mind are already present in matter? If that is so, it is impossible to accept the fact that one form of matter can be changed into another without taking the life-content into serious account. Moreover, science tells us without a shadow of doubt that before thinking animals or men having mind appeared on the earth the earth came into existence out of material substance in the solar system where life does not and cannot exist. Sri Aurobindo does not deny this. He himself emphatically says:

"But, evidently, the individual embodied mind is not the creator of the phenomenon of matter, earth-existence. If we say that the world exists only in our minds, we express a nonfact and a confusion; for the material world existed before man was upon the earth and it will go on existing if man disappears from the earth or even if our individual mind abolishes itself in the Infinite" (*Ibid.*, p. 216).

Therefore, in his opinion, it is not the individual human mind but the cosmic mind that is embodied in matter.

It follows that the mind as the scientist knows it—the individual human mind—has grown out of matter though it is not embodied in matter itself. If it were embodied in matter as the properties of the mango tree are in the mango-seed, then between matter and mind, the order of precedence could never be determined—the seed first or the tree first? If we trace the order of precedence further back we will find that the mango tree, a particular species, grows out of something else in which it was not embodied.

Sri Aurobindo admits that the human mind grows out of the nonmind. This admission demolishes his starting point, the axiom that the principle of mind must be latent in the physical atom itself. He started from this postulate, but in the course of arguments he abandoned the position by affirming that the individual human mind is not latent in the atoms. Yet he concludes that matter is created by consciousness.

He arrives at a conclusion that contradicts his premises and as soon as this happens he takes a leap and affirms that this mind, the principle of which must be latent in matter, is not the individual human mind but the cosmic mind. How does the cosmic mind come into the picture, if the very starting point is untenable?

“Matter is created by consciousness”, i.e. by universal mind. We have already observed that Sri Aurobindo arrived at this hypothesis on the basis of two postulates: (i) matter does not appear to be self-existent, and (ii) matter does not sufficiently explain the origin of mind. We have also seen that both these postulates are unfounded even in his own chain of reasoning. He doubted the self-existence of matter because he isolated energy from mass and considered force as an independent entity. We have also seen that he did not find the materialist explanation of the origin of mind satisfactory because in his opinion mind cannot grow out of nonmind. We have seen how he himself is forced to recognise that the individual human mind has actually grown out of matter which is nonmind.

From these demolished premises, Sri Aurobindo deduces that matter is created by the cosmic mind or universal

consciousness. Suppose a man dies in an accident and the policeman starts with the premise that no man can die unless there is a murderer. Suppose a man on the spot is arrested and produced before the court and during the cross-examination of the witnesses, it is established that no one has killed the man, the policeman is in danger of being exposed as initiating a false case. But he refuses to yield and explains: "Perhaps no individual man is his murderer but then the murderer must be the universal man, man-in-general, because there is no killing without a murderer."

### AUROBINDO CONTRADICTS HIMSELF

If the individual human mind is not latent in matter, the *raison d'être* of matter being created by consciousness vanishes. But Sri Aurobindo begins afresh to prove that "Matter is created by Consciousness" with other premises, without recognising that he is shifting ground. He says:

"In a certain sense, Matter is unreal and nonexistent; that is to say, our present knowledge, idea and experience of Matter is not its truth, but merely a phenomenon of particular relation between our senses and the all-existence in which we move. When science discovers that Matter resolves itself into forms of Energy, it has hold of a universal and fundamental truth; and when philosophy discovers that Matter only exists as substantial appearance to the consciousness and that the one reality is Spirit or pure conscious Being, it has hold of a greater and complete, a still more fundamental truth" (*Ibid.*, p. 215).

Now, this is said on page 215 of his book, *Life Divine*, and it negates all that he had said about the reality of matter and about the main reasons for considering the principle of mind as latent in matter in the preceding 214 pages.

"In a certain sense, Matter is unreal". In what sense?



"Our present knowledge, idea and experience of Matter is not its truth, but merely a phenomenon of particular relation between our senses and the all-existence in which we move". In short, matter as we know it is a complex of sensations. This is subjective idealism which Aurobindo himself refutes in order to establish that an absolute reality exists beyond the borders demarcated by matter and mind. Again, in order to prove that matter is not this absolute reality, he regenerates subjective idealism and attests an affidavit for its identity.

But subjective idealism is either true or false. Either matter is real and knowledge is reflection of matter in mind, or it is a complex of sensations produced in the mind. He escapes this contradiction by affirming that the mind here spoken of is not the individual human mind but the universal mind.

But matter is said to be "merely a phenomenon of particular relations between our senses and the all-existence in which we move". The idea of matter that is formed by a particular relation between our senses and the world around us is certainly not an idea formed in the universal mind because according to Aurobindo the universal mind which creates matter is without sense organs and therefore without sensation. Matter is a "phenomenon of particular relation between our senses and the all-existence in which we move". He speaks of "our senses" and not the senses of the cosmic mind. It follows that the "earth-existence" is a result of the human mind, an idea formed by a particular relation between our senses and the world around us. But how can there be a relation between our senses and the world around us, unless the world around us really exists, independent of our senses? Sri Aurobindo himself asserts that "earth-existence cannot be the result of the human mind which is itself the result of earth-existence". Thus Sri Aurobindo moves on the circumference of a vicious circle, round and round, spinning phrases, ultimately jumping off from the area of the circle into the air. He then explains the origin of matter, i.e. why energy or consciousness takes the form of matter, thus:

“We must conclude then that there is a universal mind, subconscious to us in the form of the universe or superconscious in its spirit, which has created that form for its habitation” (*Ibid.*, p. 216).

In plain language, it means that: myself, my mind, the world that seems to exist around me are all fragments of the cosmic mind assuming independent forms created by the same cosmic mind out of its own self. It must follow that before the existence of the material world, there existed the universal mind or cosmic consciousness. If the material world is eternal, without any beginning or end, it is absurd to speak of its creation by consciousness. If nature has a beginning, the laws of nature have also a beginning and they are not eternally existing principles.

If the laws of nature have a beginning in point of time, and are creations of an entity existing beyond them, they cannot be affirmed as universal and eternal. If they are made, they can be unmade if the creator has a free will. It follows that the law of gravity can cease at any moment, the stars may fall down or the earth can move out of its orbit, jack fruits can grow on mango trees, the rocks can go up in smoke and human bodies can grow on trees. The scientists need not expect that the same laws of motion which were valid yesterday may be valid tomorrow and that  $H_2O$  may suddenly become a formula for something other than water. Science thus becomes the most absurd of all absurdities and superstition becomes real science.

Every disciple of Sri Aurobindo will agree that these are absurd deductions. But from a teleological view of the laws of nature, these absurd deductions have the right to be valid. We call them absurd, because laws of nature are objective laws, independent of any will and purpose belonging anywhere. Only objective laws, eternal and universal, are unchanging realities, everything else changes according to laws. If the universal mind is an existence that has a will to create and has created the law, it can change the laws when it so wills, because its will is free. If its will is not bounded by any external obstruction, there is no

reason why its leela will not freely unmake what it makes.

All these absurdities follow from the assertion: "Thus not any eternal and original laws of eternal and original Matter, but the nature of the action of the cosmic Mind is the cause of atomic existence" (*Ibid.*, p. 219).

In other words, there are no laws of nature, objective, universal and eternal. There is only a spirit with a will. It is therefore not the physical sciences but yogas that can give you the insight to reveal the secret of this creation. But unfortunately for Sri Aurobindo, it is not the yogis meditating about the spirit, but the scientists who have revealed the secrets of nature. The yogis who are supposed to have the real insight into the secrets of the absolute reality differ among themselves as to its nature and laws. Bhṛigu says: Matter is the Absolute Reality. Sankara says: The world is Maya, the product of Avidya. Buddha says: The world is real but you are the product of your karma. Sri Aurobindo refutes them all and asserts that the world is the creation of consciousness. Both Buddha and Sankara affirm: There is no such reality as creation and creator.

It is true that scientists too often differ as to the nature of things, but their differences are temporary because there is an objective test by which a scientist can examine the work of another. This is possible because the world is real and independent of consciousness. Bhṛigu maintained:

"Matter is the Eternal, for from Matter all beings are born and by Matter all beings exist and to Matter all beings depart and return."

Sri Aurobindo admits that if Bhṛigu is correct, "then no further questioning would be possible".

The superstition that matter cannot be self-existent instigates Sri Aurobindo to take the cudgel against Bhṛigu and against science, in order that "further questioning" can be made possible.

## SOCIAL EVOLUTION

We have seen that Sri Aurobindo's philosophical idealism is different from Sankara's Mayavad as well as from the

subjective idealism of Hume and Berkeley. According to Aurobindo, both matter and the individual human mind have relative validity as intermediary forms of existence of the "One Supreme Absolute Reality". Therefore, he does not reject sciences as absolutely unreal. He is thus supposed to have arrived at a synthesis between science and spiritualism. But this synthesis is more apparent than real. We have seen that his affirmation of matter as real is negated by his final generalisation that every entity is the manifestation or a form of existence of the "cosmic consciousness", the supermind.

Following this line, he has elaborated a social theory which exposes the contradictions of his philosophical system sharply and tangibly. He interprets the history of society by giving an idealist interpretation of history from the epoch of barbarism to communism and even beyond. The main trend of his analysis can be clearly detected in the following statement:

"Sociology does not help us, for it only gives us the general story of the past and the external conditions under which communities have survived. History teaches us nothing; it is a confused torrent of events and personalities or kaleidoscope of changing institutions" (*The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 18).

If sociology does not help us and history teaches us nothing, the so-called synthesis between science and spiritualism clearly turns out to be illusory. Such a conclusion is further strengthened by the following statement:

"It would seem then that reason is an insufficient, often an inefficient, even a stumbling and at its best a very partially enlightened, guide for human progress and the inner justification of our existence as souls, minds and bodies upon the earth" (*The Human Cycle*, p. 136).

If reason is not only insufficient and inefficient but also a stumbling guide for humanity, then of course sociology cannot help us and history cannot teach us anything. This is a challenge to science and all that humanity has achieved

though Sri Aurobindo, who throws the challenge, does not hesitate to take the side of science as opposed to crude superstition. But this partisanship for science and opposition to superstition is more apparent than real because, at the end of his enquiry, he rejects science and sublimates superstition; his final conclusion is that neither science nor any human endeavour will be able to liberate man and society from their maladies. Then where does the hope lie? The answer is:

“If the light that is being born increases, if the number of individuals who seek to realise the possibility—in themselves and in the world—grows large and they get nearer the right way, then the spirit who is here in man, now a concealed divinity, a developing light and power, will descend more fully as the Avatar of a yet unseen and unguessed godhead from above into the soul of mankind and into the great individualities in whom the light and power are the strongest” (*Ibid.*, p. 199).

Having traced the history of social development from barbarism to modern civilisation, Aurobindo arrives at the conclusion that at a certain stage reason becomes transformed from a lever of progress to a fetter on the same, while salvation lies in the descent of the supramental force as the Avatar.

It will be of interest to note how the rational mind was able to grow within the material prison and when it ceases to emit any light. Aurobindo describes the process in the following words:

“If we may judge from the modern movement, the progress of the reason as a social renovator and creator, if not interrupted in its course, would be destined to pass through three successive stages which are the very logic of its growth, the first individualistic and increasingly democratic with liberty for its principle, the second socialistic, in the end perhaps a governmental communism with equality and the state for its principle; the third—if that ever gets beyond the stage of theory—anarchistic

in the higher sense of that much abused word, either a loose voluntary cooperation or a free communism with brotherhood or comradeship and not government for its principle" (*Ibid.*, p. 125).

The three stages herein mentioned are—capitalism, socialism and anarchism. The chain will continue unless there is an interruption at any intermediary stage. But in his opinion the "age of reason" does not exist beyond capitalism, which is the "age of liberty". He regards socialism as the negation of liberty and sees no essential difference between fascism and socialism. Both are regarded as totalitarianism and collectivism as opposed to democratic individualism. He then concludes:

"If this trend becomes universal, it is the end of the Age of Reason, the suicide or the execution—by decapitation or lethal pressure, *peine forte et dure*—of the rational and intellectual expansion of the human mental being" (*Ibid.*, p. 230).

The cat is now out of the bag.

He thinks that social evolution is the result of rational progress up to the emergence of competitive capitalism but if the supramental being does not descend at this stage in the form of an Avatar and interrupt the course, we may find the end of the "age of reason" and its decapitation.

Aurobindo has already told us that the individual human mind is progressing towards the supermind and the result of this progress is social evolution. Now it appears that the supermind has a bias for capitalism. Its creative role becomes paralysed as soon as capitalism reaches the monopoly stage, when social revolution threatens the rule of the bourgeoisie. Just at this stage no further development is possible until the Avatar descends and liberates man from the fetters of reason.

The progress of society from primitive communism to competitive capitalism is rational progress—but its further progress to socialism and communism is the decapitation of reason. It follows that Aurobindo's supermind, which is a monistic entity, a universal reality and a collective whole,

is obsessed with a bias for the individualism of competitive capitalism. This strange conclusion is unavoidable unless Aurobindo's social philosophy ceases to be a philosophical system and is reduced to a heap of imaginary postulates.

This social philosophy is a specimen product of class bias. But Sri Aurobindo's class bias is restricted by critical observation against the profit notion of the capitalists, by his denunciation of imperialism and fascism, by his recommendations for a peaceful international order. So far as these go, he does satisfy the progressive urge of the working people and they do correspond to the needs of the modern world.

## LOGIC OF A FALSE PHILOSOPHY

But the logical elaboration of his idealist viewpoint on the problems of social history has led Sri Aurobindo to the conclusion that the danger of capitalism is now a thing of the past because of "the acceptance by Europe and America of the Asiatic resurgence and the eventual total liberation of oriental people". Therefore the main danger to human liberation comes not from imperialism but from communism. The light from the supramental world makes him discover that:

"Here again, as elsewhere, the actual danger presents itself rather as a clash between two opposing ideologies, one led by Russia and Red China and trying to impose the communistic extreme partly by military and partly by forceful political means on a reluctant or at least an infected but not altogether willing Asia and Europe and on the other side combination of peoples, partly capitalist, partly moderate socialist who still cling with some attachment to the ideas of liberty—to freedom of thought and some remnant of the free life of the individual" (*The Ideal of Human Unity*, Introduction p. 12).

In other words, the epoch of Adam Smith is his favourite world.

This social philosophy is tuned to the following analysis:

“In the old infrarational societies, at least in their inception, what governed was not the state, but the group-soul itself evolving its life organised into customary institutions and selfregulations to which all had to conform; for the rulers were only its executors and instruments” (*The Human Cycle*, p. 235).

Here the author refers to the old primitive communist society. History tells us that this society was based upon a specific type of social relations arising out of a specific stage of development of the productive forces—when productive labour in common necessitated common ownership of property. Then the “group-soul” did not grow from the extension of the individual souls. The communal institutions were the outcome of a long period of common labour in order to secure the means of subsistence. But Sri Aurobindo regards this material relation only as an outward manifestation of the growth of an inner reality—the group-soul. According to him it is not the material relation which determined the group-life of that epoch but it was the emergence of the group-soul which determined the former. To what conclusion does this formulation lead? Social changes come not as a result of any change in material relations but through a psychological transformation of man. Sri Aurobindo calls this the “law of being”.

But the “law of being”, if it is really a law and not the figment of Aurobindo’s imagination, must explain the evolution of society through all the stages. There is no reason why this law will cease to operate as soon as the zenith of competitive capitalism is reached. If this law is violated at this stage and socialism springs up in opposition to this law, social evolution must be capable of being free from Aurobindo’s mental being.

Social science tells us that competitive capitalism grows as the result of the development of the commodity production. Commodity production grows within the womb of feudal society and at its developed stage becomes incompatible with feudal private property initially based upon



selfsufficient economy. Similarly, the forces of socialism grow within the womb of capitalism and at a certain stage of its development capitalist property relations become incompatible with the growth of productive forces. At this stage social revolution replaces the old order by a new one. Ideological development follows this course and also influences it because interaction between matter and mind is a law of social development.

Setting his face against this law, Aurobindo actually sinks into a priori assumptions to suit his pet theory. In this thought-system even the semblance of science has disappeared—though he begins by paying tributes to science.

## FALSE THEORY OF STATE

Commenting on the origin of the state, Aurobindo writes:

“As the state government develops, we have a real suppression or oppression of the minority by the majority or the majority by the minority, of the individual by the collectivity, finally, of all by the relentless mechanism of the state” (*Ibid.*, p. 255).

Historical science tells us that in many parts of the world the emergence of the state corresponded to the rise of classes dissolving primitive communist society. It was first slavery that had grown within the womb of primitive communism. The slave state was based upon the domination of the slave-owning minority over the slaves. Slavery was ultimately replaced by feudalism and the result was the rise of the feudal-despotic state based upon the domination of the landed gentry over the peasant serfs.

Sri Aurobindo should have told us how the group-soul was split up and how the institution of state emerged, in violation of his principles underlying the cycle of existence. According to his principle, the supermind descends to matter and matter ascends to supermind, the individual human mind is an intermediary form. There is no scope for domination of one mind or a group of minds over

another unless there are two sources from which the mind springs—god and satan. But his supermind is a monistic entity and there is no reason why class conflicts should arise in society. Moreover, why does the human mind reject the primitive social institution which is, according to Aurobindo, superior to the state based upon class domination? His only answer is that it has just happened so. He then proceeds:

“Democratic liberty tried to minimise this suppression; it left a free play for the individual and restricted as much as might be the role of the state” (*Ibid.*, p. 235).

It appears that the cycle of existence from the mind to the supermind had lost its path in the epoch of slavery and feudalism but found it out with the emergence of bourgeois private property based upon private ownership in the means of production and free wage labour. But the path was again blocked as the crisis of capitalism began to develop.

We have thus seen that the evolution of society, according to Aurobindo's social philosophy, is complicated by an irreconcilable contradiction. On the one hand, this evolution is a process of the growth of the mind. On the other hand, the growth of mind at a certain stage becomes atrophied. As barbarism is replaced by civilisation, the mind is elevated within the prison of materiality but as soon as this happens, the further growth of civilisation is obstructed by new impediments to the growth of the individual mind. The question arises, if material relations are determined by the mental, where from do the impediments arise? Here are Sri Aurobindo's explanations:

“The perfection of the individual in a perfected society or eventually in a perfected humanity—understanding perfection always in a relative and progressive sense—is the inevitable aim of Nature. But the progress of all the individuals in a society does not proceed *pari passu*, with an equal and equable march. Some advance, others remain stationary—absolutely or relatively—others fall back. Consequently the emergence of a dominant class is

inevitable within the aggregate itself, just as in the constant clash between the aggregates the emergence of dominant nation is inevitable" (*The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 26).

In other words, nature prefers perfection of all individuals but unequal development of the individuals is the law of nature. In consequence, class division arises in society and the result is the domination of one class by another. If unequal development of individuals is responsible for the growth of classes, several questions arise.

Firstly, this law must have operated in the whole epoch of barbarism based upon collective labour, communal property and group consciousness. This epoch spread over thousands of years, until the rise of slavery, the first dawn of civilisation. Then there is no reason why classes and class domination should not have been in existence if the law of unequal development of individuals were operative throughout this whole epoch.

Secondly, the era of capitalist civilisation is also characterised by class-division and the domination of one class over another right from the beginning of the feudal epoch. Why should nature particularly select the capitalist epoch for the maximum growth of the individual free will?

Thirdly, why should all the individuals suddenly stop growing as soon as socialism emerges? Why should nature have particular abhorrence for the rule of the proletariat?

Finally, if the theory of unequal development of individuals is to determine the rise of classes, why does even the weakest individual of the bourgeoisie enjoy a share in the rule of its class, while the strongest of the individuals composing the class of the proletariat is under the domination of the former?

These questions by their very nature expose the bankruptcy of Aurobindo's social philosophy. They show the absurdity of putting the cart before the horse, of subordinating material relations to the mental. In fact, the rise of classes is the result of the growth of private property and the growth of private property is the result of the

advancement of productive forces under the pressure of which primitive communal ownership had broken down. The evolution of the human mind follows this course and also plays a creative role in the development of society. But in the last analysis, it is the social being that determines social consciousness.

## A TENDENTIOUS IDEA

Sri Aurobindo correctly emphasises that "Life...is a mobile, progressive and evolving force"; but if life is not determined by material forces, and social life by production relations, if on the contrary life is Brahman, compressed in the material prison, its evolution must be an operation of the will of the supermind instead of an operation of the law of nature. If that is so, there is no reason why there is such a law as "the unequal development of individuals". If the same supermind is compressed in innumerable individuals—and if its all-powerful will is active in order to free all of them from the material fetters, the law of unequal development is either a selfcontradictory concept, or it negates the supermind as the supreme reality.

Sri Aurobindo repudiates the theory that mind is evolved out of matter because he thinks mind cannot evolve out of nonmind. If the same argument is applied to the social question—it must follow that one social stage cannot arise out of another which is not itself. Consequently, the evolution of new social stages cannot be a reality. Yet Sri Aurobindo deals with social evolution. He regards social evolution as the evolution of the mind, but the mind ceases to evolve at a certain stage. These baffling contradictions constitute the structure of Aurobindo's philosophy whose complications arise out of its false foundation. To justify a theory of evolution only up to a certain extent and to serve a particular purpose is the negation of philosophy as a correct system of thought.

He demarcates three stages of the social evolution—the infrarational, the rational and the spiritual. The infra-

rational stage is identified with barbarism, the rational stage is identified with civilisation which is finally to be culminated in the spiritual age. The replacement of one stage by another is explained by the role played by ideological revolt. Marxism fully recognises the creative role of ideology in social development but ideology grows out of certain social relations from epoch to epoch.

Contrary to Marxism, Sri Aurobindo affirms that it is the ideological development which determines social development. If that is so, what are the causes that transform the infrarational stage of society to the rational and the rational to the spiritual? Aurobindo's answer is that the development from the infrarational to the rational is the result of intellectual development, the evolution of the mind. What is it that determines the evolution of the mind? In answer to this question Sri Aurobindo does not follow the Hegelian method of posing a union of contradictions in the supreme idea which is the supermind. If he affirmed the union of contradiction in the supermind, he could not deny the growth of mind from nonmind and consequently he could not deny the selfexistence of matter. If the supermind is free from contradictions, and if matter contains within it a fragment of the supermind veiled and compressed, the infrarational stage of society is nothing but the rational stage immanent and veiled. But Sri Aurobindo himself is unable to stick to this formulation and affirms that:

“Man proceeds by various stages out of these beginnings towards a rational age in which his intelligent Will more or less developed becomes the judge, arbiter and presiding motive of his thought, feeling and action, the moulder, destroyer and recreator of his leading ideas, aims and institutions” (*The Human Cycle*, p. 205).

### HIS REASON ENDS WITH THE END OF CAPITALISM

In other words, social evolution from the infrarational to the rational and from the rational to the spiritual age

indicates the birth of a new social reality out of something which was not itself. If that is so, then his ontological standpoint, according to which the mind cannot grow out of nonmind, is demolished. Once this is demolished his social theory that evolution is primarily mental loses its foundation. In that case the "spiritual age" is nothing but the continuation of an epoch in which humanity achieves the mastery over nature through the abolition of the exploitation of man by man and the immense growth of productive forces springing in that society. Such an epoch is not the result of the supramental Avatar but the continuation of the socialist epoch which Sri Aurobindo dreadfully characterises as the end of the "age of reason". In reality, it is an epoch which heralds the dawn of the final victory of reason over the directing impulse of class interests and the limitations set by ignorance or superstition.

## THE UNIVERSAL TRUTH

If there is nothing beyond the material universe, from where does the universe arise? With this question, the idealist challenges the materialist.

The world of nature is created by god—so answered the earliest believer. The ancient Indian philosopher was not satisfied. He was not satisfied because with the advance of rational thought in philosophy blind faith was replaced by reason.

Sankara, the Advaita Vedantist, asked if nature is created by god, god must have a will to perform action and if he has a will to perform action, he must be imperfect. Because perfection, from the very nature of the concept, cannot go together with an unfulfilled desire or a void of will to be filled up by action.

Naturally, the question arises, if god has created the world, who has created god?

Sri Aurobindo has an answer to this question. He replies:

“The divine is free and not bound by laws of any making, but still he acts by law and processes because they are the expression of the truth of things—not their mechanical, mathematical or other outward truth alone, but the spiritual reality of what they are, what they have become and have yet to become, what they have it within themselves to realise” (*Life Divine*, p. 320).

Aurobindo's answer raises new questions. If laws and processes are the expression of the truth of things and if god must act by these laws and processes, the laws and processes themselves must be independent of the acts of god.

God is either free, in which case he does not create by laws and processes, because he is not bound by them; or he is not free and in that case he acts by laws and processes, because he is bound by them. Either the one or the other is true. Finally, if laws and processes constitute the expression and the *modus operandi* of his creation, they must be selfexistent and selfexplanatory.

Amongst the ancient Indian philosophies, the Sankhya system was perhaps the first to recognise this, after the Lokayatas. Kapila, the propounder of Sankhya, maintained that Purusha and Prakriti together combined to give birth to the world of phenomena. Purusha is the inactive and Prakriti the active principle. Purusha and Prakriti are not created but selfexistent.

Obviously it is an atheistic doctrine which regards cosmic nature or Prakriti as selfexistent, coming into contact with Purusha which is neither creator nor created. Despite its inconsistency and arbitrary assumptions, the Sankhya school of thought won the victory over the theory of creation.

Even Aurobindo writes:

“There are certainly plenty of things in our existence which the Sankhya does not explain at all or does not explain satisfactorily, but if all we need is a rational explanation of the cosmic process in their principles as a basis for the great object common to the ancient philosophies, the liberation of the soul from the obsession of

Cosmic Nature, then the Sankhya explanation of the world and the Sankhya way of liberation seem as good and as effective as another" (*Essays on the Geeta*, p. 67).

The moment Sri Aurobindo admits that the Sankhya explanation of the world is as good and as effective as any other, he unconsciously demolishes the philosophical foundation of the theory of creation and unwillingly concedes the attribute of selfexistence of nature. From this position, the only logical course for him was to accept realism.

But the Sankhya dualism stands on an insecure foundation, Sankara attacked it with his incisive logic and established that the existence of two interpenetrating each other must be rejected as the ultimate reality because the ultimate must be one and indivisible. Sri Aurobindo accepts Sankara's monist view of reality. But Sankara poses the reality of the world of nature against the truth of Brahman, the Absolute. If the world is real, he asks what is its relation to Brahman? Is Brahman the cause of the world? No. Because, once the theory of causation is accepted, the cause of Brahman must be accounted for. Is then the world Brahman's manifestation? No. Manifestation presupposes change and once "change" is accepted as real, Brahman cannot be considered as changeless. If the world is neither caused by Brahman nor is it his manifestation, then what is the nature of this world of phenomena? Sankara answers—it is Maya or cosmic illusion.

Having accepted the Sankhya realism and Sankara's monist view of reality, Aurobindo rejects Mayavad.

Commenting on Sankara's Mayavad, Aurobindo observes:

"It is our first premise that the Absolute is the supreme reality; but the issue is whether all else that we experience is real or unreal... the states of existence through which we approach and enter into the Absolute must have their truth, for the untrue and unreal cannot lead into the real; but also what issues from the Absolute, what the eternal supports and informs and manifests in itself, must have a reality" (*Life Divine*, p. 427).



In order to prove that the world is real, Aurobindo had to contradict Sankara's main thesis that it cannot be the manifestation of Brahman. But how to meet Sankara's fundamental point that if the world is the manifestation of Brahman, how can Brahman be considered as perfect? Perfection, according to Sankara, precludes the characteristics of change and manifestation is a change of state.

Aurobindo is now unable to escape from the horns of his dilemma. His own answer is:

"At every turn it is the divine reality which we can discover behind that which we are yet compelled by the nature of the superficial consciousness in which we dwell to call undivine and in a sense are right in using that appellation; for these appearances are a veil over the Divine Perfection, a veil necessary for the present, but not at all true and complete figure" (*Ibid.*, p. 365).

Aurobindo is back to Mayavad at last. He is unable to reconcile Brahmadvad with realism and, after refuting Sankara's cosmic illusion as a philosophical theory, he asserts like him that our consciousness which perceives the world is "superficial" and the world of nature is a "veil" over Brahman. Does it mean anything else than that the material universe is Maya or a cosmic illusion?

From Sankhya to Vedanta, Aurobindo flies like a shuttlecock; from realism to Mayavad he hops like a frog in a bog. Unless the world is real, Brahman cannot be real; but Brahman is real, the world cannot be real. Brahman and world are both real and unreal. Reality and unreality, concludes Sri Aurobindo, are but two aspects of the same being. What is the solution of this paradox? Yes, it is nothing but a paradox and it calls for solution, otherwise the system of thought is to be regarded as a thoughtless lack of system.

So Sri Aurobindo answers:

"The only reasonable explanation of such a paradoxical manifestation or creation is that it is a cosmic game, a leela, a play, an amusement of the Divine Being" (*Ibid.*, p. 368).

The whole paradox is supposed to have been solved by calling it a cosmic game or leela of the Absolute. Let us now see where leela leads to.

## LEELA VERSUS LAW

The concept of leela does not solve the philosophical problem. It had its origin in debunking Sankara's Mayavad. In Vedic thought, the gods and goddesses were the governors of nature and wielders of her laws. But the Upanishads had abandoned this proposition with the advance of philosophical thought. The Vedic concepts had undergone slow and imperceptible changes through the Upanishads, because it was gradually felt that if the gods and goddesses are the dictators of nature, one cannot explain why evil forces are created and how men commit sins by defying the all-powerful dictators and what prevents nature from being wholly beneficial to man.

Hence, most of the Upanishads conceived the world of nature as the manifestation of supreme reality. This supreme reality is Brahman, the Absolute.

The idea was first repudiated by the Buddhists. They found that the liberation of man from the bondage of miseries cannot be dependent upon human action (or karma) if everything is the manifestation of a supreme reality which is all-powerful. The Buddhist revolt against fatalism dethroned Brahman from the position attained in the Upanishads.

Sankara revived Brahmanism by repudiating Buddhism and restored the concept of Brahman as the supreme reality. But he had to start from the Buddhist position that the mortal world of nature cannot be the manifestation of the infinite and the eternal. Naturally, he arrived at Mayavad which regards the cosmos as an objective illusion. But Sankara's Mayavad was incompatible with religion and religious rites because according to Mayavad even religious rites are illusory or Maya. While restoring Brahmanism, he produced a new crisis for the religious orders.

Ramanuja delivered religion from this crisis by imputing to Brahman the attribute of leela and thus explaining the world of nature not as Maya in Sankara's sense, but as the manifestation of Brahman.

Such is the genesis of this concept.

Evidently the doctrine of leela does not solve the logical problem and was never meant to solve it, it was invented rather to escape the issue. In logical terms—leela is incompatible with law. The uniformity of the laws of nature can be reconciled with leela either by putting Brahman the Leelamayam, under the operation of some uniform laws or by imputing of the laws of nature a separate existence independent of the leela of Brahman. In both cases, the basis of idealist metaphysics is demolished.

Turn and twist the philosophical foundation of idealism anyway you like, the irresistible alternatives are: either the world of nature is real, then there is nothing beyond it or if there is an existence beyond the world of nature, the world of nature turns out to be logically nonexistent.

Sri Aurobindo wants to reconcile both. He wants to reconcile both because his problem is as follows:

“There is precisely opposite view of reality and knowledge which affirms an objective reality as the only entire truth and objective knowledge as the sole entirely reliable knowledge... But it is evident that this solution cannot be accepted in its rigour, as it has no integrality in it but looks at only one side of existence, even only one province or district of existence, and leaves all the rest unexplained, without inherent reality, without significance. If pushed to its extreme, it would give to a stone or a plum-pudding a greater reality and to thought, love, courage, genius, greatness, the human soul and mind facing an obscure and dangerous world and getting mastery over it an inferior dependent reality or even an unsubstantial and evanescent reality” (*Ibid.*, p. 577).

If that is Sri Aurobindo's problem, then it is a very simple one. He confuses materialism with crude and unscientific

thought. The materialism of Marx and Engels does not ascribe to love or human greatness an inferior reality to a particle of stone nor is it warranted by the logical position taken by the dialectical materialist theory of knowledge. Marxism is the most progressive humanism and it regards spiritual phenomena as the highest thought products of human beings, arising out of a definite social order.

According to dialectical materialism, the knowledge of a thing is the reflection of the thing in the mind and the sources of knowledge are the senses. But it is not merely confined to the reflex actions of the physical sense organs. Engels says:

“In addition to the eye, we have not only the other senses but also our thought activity. With regard to the latter, matters stand exactly as with the eye. To know what can be discovered by our thinking, it is no use, a hundred years after Kant, to try and find out the range of thought from the critique of reason or the investigation of the instrument of knowing... What can be discovered by our thought is more evident from what it has already discovered and is every day still discovering” (*Dialectics of Nature*, Moscow, 1954, p. 318).

Therefore, dialectical materialism is perfectly in agreement with Sri Aurobindo when he says:

“In fact, subjectivity and objectivity are not independent realities, they depend upon each other; they are the Being, through consciousness looking at itself as subject on the object and the same Being offering itself to its own consciousness as object to the subject” (*Ibid.*, p. 578).

But the dialectical materialist goes a step further and asks, which is the foundation and which is the superstructure in this dynamic interpenetration?

Sri Aurobindo's answer is that consciousness is the foundation from which the object springs, while the Marxist answer is—the object is the foundation from which consciousness springs. The Marxist view is substantiated both by history and science.

Which of these two philosophies does really explain the unity between subject and object?

Sri Aurobindo starts by affirming this unity but ends in repudiating not only the absolute reality of the object and also knowledge as the source of truth. Otherwise the conclusion becomes irresistible that matter is primary and mind is secondary.

Let us quote some passages from Sri Aurobindo's *Life Divine* in order to show that in the last analysis and, step by step, he repudiates not only objective reality, but also the individual human mind as having an absolute existence.

"It is clear that a Mind of the nature of our surface intelligence can be only a secondary power of existence. For it bears the stamp of incapacity and ignorance as a sign that it is derivative and not the original matrix; we see that it does not know or understand the objects it perceives, it has no automatic control of them; it has to acquire a laboriously built knowledge and controlling power. This initial capacity could not be there if these objects were the Mind's own structure, creations of its selfpower. It may be that this is so because individual mind has only a frontal and derivative power and knowledge and there is a Universal Mind that is whole, endowed with omniscience, of omnipotence" (p. 575).

In this statement Sri Aurobindo starts with a great truth, that the mind through its act of consciousness does not create reality. The knowledge of reality is derivative and relative. From this he draws the arbitrary conclusion that there must be a universal mind (without body) of which the individual mind is a fragment, otherwise why should knowledge be derivative and relative? No. The real answer is—just because the mind itself is derived from matter, and just because knowledge is the reflection of matter in the mind, the knowledge of a thing is secondary, derivative and relative. But relative knowledge is not a false picture of reality but its approximate picture. With the advance of thought and experience, approximation approaches reality in a dynamic process of cognition.

By jumping from the individual mind to the affirmation of a universal mind (a mind without body and without individuality), Sri Aurobindo is forced to draw the conclusion that the objective reality as perceived by the human mind is nonexistent.

"It is true that there is no such thing as an objective reality independent of consciousness; but at the same time there is a truth in objectivity and it is this, that the reality of things resides in something, that is within them and is independent of the interpretation our mind gives to them and of the structures it builds upon its observation" (p. 576).

Either objective reality does not exist independently of consciousness, or it does so exist. In the former case, there is no question of an absolute divergence between reality and its mental image. Having denied this, Sri Aurobindo stands perilously on the border of solipsism. But at the next moment he would say "reality of things resides on something that is within them"; in other words, there is an objective reality independent of consciousness. Thus Aurobindo moves in a vicious circle.

"These structures constitute the minds' subjective image or figure. These are in essence creations of consciousness, but of a consciousness that is one with Being, whose substance is the substance Being, whose creations too are of that substance, therefore real" (p. 576).

This is identification of reality with consciousness by repudiating both objective reality independent of consciousness and individual consciousness independent of objective reality.

If consciousness is one with being, it follows that there is no being without consciousness and no consciousness without being. If there is no being without consciousness, the atom is a conscious being and Aurobindo affirms that the energy content of the atom is its consciousness. But energy even in its state of release from the structure of the atom is under the control and guidance of the physical

laws of motion. Then this so-called consciousness has nothing to do with the consciousness of the human mind which is controlled and guided by the mental laws of motion. These two differ in quality, it means that they are qualitatively different.

The other aspect of Aurobindo's logical structure is that there is no consciousness without being. In that case Aurobindo's cosmic consciousness, overmind or supermind from which being is supposed to descend, is not without being, therefore being cannot be supposed to descend from consciousness.

The obvious fallacy of the whole argumentation is that Aurobindo uses the term consciousness with different meanings when he deals with his different propositions and ultimately identifies everything with consciousness merely on the strength of the similarity of the name. The pattern of the reasoning is the same as this: ice is water—water is liquid—therefore: ice is liquid.

## THE CYCLE OF EXISTENCE

Let us now look at the whole problem from another angle.

Sri Aurobindo establishes the relation between matter and spirit by affirming that there is an ascending series from matter to spirit and also a descent from spirit to matter. "And as Matter is the last word of the descent, so it is also the first word of the ascent."

Matter is the first word of the ascent. It means that out of matter, life is evolved and out of life, the mind. The mind then transcends the physical limitations and becomes one with supermind. If there was no descending but simply the ascending series, the supermind would appear to be not a mind without the body but simply mental products and complex thought-constructs having the power to react upon the world of nature. But in that case the supermind loses its supernatural validity.

Therefore Sri Aurobindo constructs a reverse cycle by making supermind descend into matter. Now the question

is this: if there is a descent of the supermind to the atom, why should not the decent be gradual, from supermind to the individual mind and the individual mind to matter without mind? Unwilling to contradict science, Sri Aurobindo's supermind, at the time of descent, suddenly drops down to matter without passing through the intermediary points of the cycle. At the time of the ascent, it cannot so jump.

Without this theory of ascent and descent, Sri Aurobindo is unable to establish the desired synthesis between science and spiritualism. One-sided ascent divorces science from spiritualism and one-sided descent divorces spiritualism from science. But descent means climbing down and climbing down, in order to have logical validity, must proceed from the upper to the lower. In that case the thinking man must have appeared earlier than the nonthinking atom, as a result of the direct descent of the supermind.

Such is the logical contradiction involved in Sri Aurobindo's concept of the cycle of existence and this contradiction demolishes his philosophical structure.

When a philosopher upholds a law or a process to explain the relation of realities, he has no right to choose any formula according to his liking. It is not enough for him to show that this or that explanation just suits his purpose or proves his point. In that case every philosopher is free to follow the same course.

If Aurobindo's theory of the decent of the atom from supermind "explains", so to say, the origin of the material universe, so does Sankara's Mayavad which regards the atom as an illusion of the mind. The one is as good a utilitarian theory as the other. In that case "theory" ceases to be the interpretation of an objective process or law; it becomes reduced to a dictionary of doctrines devised by the subjective mind for the fulfilment of some desire. In that case we reach the end of logic and science becomes more incomprehensible than ever before.

The cycle of existence, discovered by the highest of philosophical thought corresponding to science, explains the origin of even the most complex and subtle thought-pro-

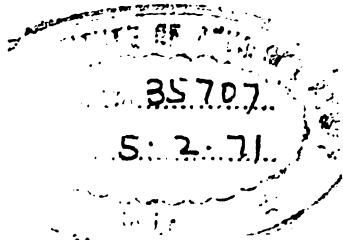


ducts, not by the ascent and descent of an imaginary entity called the supermind. The real cycle of existence is the constant coming into being and passing away of matter in motion in ever changing forms.


Engels writes:

“It is an eternal cycle in which matter moves, a cycle that certainly only completes its orbit in periods of time for which our terrestrial year is no adequate measure, a cycle in which the time of highest development, the time of organic life and still more that of the life of beings conscious of nature and of themselves, is just as narrowly restricted as the space in which life and selfconsciousness come into operation; a cycle in which every finite mode of existence of matter, whether it be sun or nebular vapour, single animal or genus of animals, chemical combination or dissociation, is equally transient, and wherein nothing is eternal but eternally changing, eternally moving matter and the laws according to which it moves and changes” (*Ibid.*, p. 54).

This eternal change of matter, of coming into being and passing away, is the universal truth. It is being which determines consciousness, being is not determined by it.





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