THE RELIGIOUS ROOTS
OF
INDIAN NATIONALISM
THE RELIGIOUS ROOTS OF INDIAN NATIONALISM
AUROBINDO'S EARLY POLITICAL THOUGHT

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PREFACE

To provide a religious analysis of a man’s thinking about nationalism may appear to be presumptuous and even reductionist to some. Indeed, if the aim here were to reduce the nationalist thought of a subject to nothing but religion—not unlike the psychoanalyst who reduces religion to neurosis—the charge would be a valid one. However, I am not interested in reducing Aurobindo’s nationalist thought to something less than political thought or something prior to political thought. Nor do I want to see nationalist thought to be thought about something else. Rather, I am interested in applying a method of study which can reveal for ideas a significance both religious and political. In other words, the method of analysis in this study is really an attempt to show the integration of religion and politics in the thought of Aurobindo Ghose.

There has been a tendency among students of modern India to see Aurobindo as a nationalist at one point in his life and as a religious philosopher at another point—and the one usually has been regarded as somewhat independent of the other. Aurobindo the nationalist thinker is quite clearly the Aurobindo of 1893 to 1910, at which time he retires from an active involvement with the nationalist movement and retires to Pondicherry to live the life of a yogi. Aurobindo the religious thinker is generally confined to the post-1910 years.

Even a cursory examination of the writings of Aurobindo, however, disproves this sort of bifurcation. Indeed, as Karan Singh has pointed out in his book *Prophet of Indian Nationalism*, “... it would not be incorrect to say that Sri Aurobindo’s political theory was firmly grounded in and grew out of his deep spiritual convictions.” But even Singh proceeds to study

Aurobindo in terms of his political thought, admitting only that religious presuppositions generated many ideas. The assumption again is that religion and politics are two different things, and they do not focus on the same issues.

My analysis of Aurobindo as an Indian nationalist thinker, on the contrary, assumes no such bifurcation. In fact, it argues that for Aurobindo political and spiritual aspects of life are integrated. That is, mundane political affairs and even esoteric spiritual matters must mutually support one another to create a consistent and wholistic philosophy of life. Further, to attempt to isolate political from spiritual or national from religious in the thought of Aurobindo is to do violence to the thinker. It is to isolate what cannot, for the thinker, be isolated.

A methodology for such a study entails treating such things as nationalism, religion, spirituality, and politics as concerns rather than as reified entities. For such a methodology I have borrowed suggestive ideas from my mentor, Professor Robert D. Baird, concerning the crucial significance of a definitional starting point in the study of religion. I have then extended that methodological insight into a study of Aurobindo's nationalist writings prior to his retirement to Pondicherry in 1910.

It is my argument that the objectivity provided by the definitional starting point reveals the synthetic and inclusive thought of Aurobindo. In fact, it points up a system of thought which integrates all areas of life in terms of what Aurobindo sees to be the goal of existence. The study describes first the structure of Aurobindo's thought—a structure which integrates normally disparate notions by positing the goal of existence to be realized freedom. Then the study indicates how Aurobindo conceptualizes and maps out the relation of things and concerns in the universe in terms of the goal of freedom. Next the study indicates how, for Aurobindo, the implications of such a structure and its conceptualization require the integration of political activism with the disciplines
of yoga. Finally, the study summarizes the synthetic approach of Aurobindo (calling the whole system "synthetic religion"), and describes the apparent limitations which the syntheses themselves imply.

The paper is arguing, therefore, both for the viability of a certain method of study in the field of history of religions and for a particular interpretation of Aurobindo's religious thought. The method reveals Aurobindo's thought to be a manifestly inclusive system which allows him to include within it many apparently antinimous concepts and ideas; and yet it reveals at the same time that the synthetic urge carries for Aurobindo certain limitations which finally threaten the viability and consistency of the system itself. The intention of the method, then (as will be shown in Chapter I), is to describe rather than evaluate. But, at the same time, I will not hesitate to point out the limitations and incongruities where they appear. But such limitations do not constitute my preferences or values. Rather, the limitations will be shown to be contained in the system itself.

A word of acknowledgment to Professor Baird must be added. The rationale for the definitional starting point I use clearly belongs to him; but even more, it was from the heat of his sustained analysis and argument both within the classroom and without that ideas were generated in my mind. From those years of initially uncomfortable incubation under the watchful eye of Professor Baird any clear and constructive ideas contained in this paper must ultimately be traced.

D. L. J.
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Chapter 1

METHODOLOGICAL PROLEGOMENA: THE FUNCTIONAL DEFINITION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDY OF RELIGION IN MODERN INDIA

To introduce the content of this study I will in this chapter briefly review a significant methodological problem for the field of History of Religions, then indicate how such a problem has been resolved by Professor Robert D. Baird through the use of a functional definition as a point of departure, and finally show certain methodological implications which I will develop and expand as the content of this dissertation.

To define religion is for the historian of religions a recurring problem, and one which could be said to challenge, indeed, the academic integrity of the field. Whereas historians of religions concern themselves with the study of religion in its historical and cultural manifestations, no consensus ever seems to emerge about the nature of religion itself. The result is the existence of a field of study, the object of which is ambiguous and the methodologies diverse. And since no clear agreement about the nature of the object of study exists, the integrity of the methodologies must be questioned. A conclusion obvious to many is that the field of study therefore is without academic validity.¹

1. The argument summarized above implies that consensus concerning definitions of subject matter and academic validity are related in the sense that the former produces the latter (and that the former is a necessary condition for the latter). Such an argument, though interesting, might well bring the liberal arts tumbling down with religion. The argument finally is untenable, however, since one might as easily argue that disagreements concerning definitions fostered the very values which eventually are prized as academic values. But the argument does introduce the unique dilemma of the historian of religions who is faced with
So far as the historical study of religion is concerned, the problem of definition grows out of a concern for objectivity. The ideal—as stated by Wilfred Cantwell Smith—is to provide a descriptive statement about a given faith-system which can be certified as accurate by persons who confess the faith-system. Thus objective description as a condition to understanding is maintained as an ideal. But objectivity in such terms requires an impartial point of departure—that is, a definition of religion which is not itself a part of any particular doctrinal system, but which nevertheless provides a rubric under which numerous doctrinal systems may be impartially examined. Quite simply put, one needs a definition of religion which is not, in and of itself, a religious assertion.

Professor Robert D. Baird, in a series of articles, has surveyed and critically commented upon the quest for a definition of religion. He suggests that there are two general definitions of religions closely tied to truth-claims about religion. And, as we shall see, failure to select the right definition can result in a study turning out to be no more than a religious proposal.


3. Definitions of religion which clearly are religious assertions are those which state, for example, that “religion is worship of God,” or “religion is Vedanta,” or “religion is a total orientation and way of life that aims at enlightenment.” These clearly structure the study of religion in terms which would in fact shape the data toward recommending certain thought systems or cult forms as more truly religious than others. The definition, then, does not answer the question of “what is religion?” but rather the question “what is the best religion?” The goal of the historian of religions is not the discovery of the best religion.

ways in which the study of religions can be pursued by historians of religions. The one approach is the “Functional Definitional” and the other is the “Essential Intuitional”. The former is Baird’s contribution, and it will be outlined subsequently. The latter proceeds either by assuming (by implication) that everyone knows what is meant by the word religion—and thereby covertly assuming a definition (else how would one know what to look for?)—or by stating what is “real” religion or the “essence” of religion.\(^5\) Baird concludes that neither the intuitional manner of study nor the essentialist manner can avoid the surreptitious assertion of what can only be regarded as a religious proposal.\(^6\) Yet he finds no representatives of essential intuitional methods willing to assume the responsibility of presenting an argued defence of such ontological assertions. Thus not only is the desired objectivity obviated, but the implications of such a method are ignored. The essential intuitive method as advocated by Eliade has been particularly faulty in this respect. Eliade,

succeeds not in eliminating an ontological stance, but only in making that ontology less clear. It is still assumed that there is something out there that corresponds to the term “religion” or “the sacred”, and also that the historian of religions can identify it intuitively.\(^7\)

Baird suggests that the ontological morass may be avoided by historians of religions if they eschew the essential intuitional method (and the “real” definitions implied or stated) and choose functional (or stipulative) definitions. The functional definition—though admittedly arbitrary in selection—provides

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6. Baird’s essay on Eliade’s phenomenology of symbols is probably his most forceful explication of the ontological implications of the “intuitive” approach to the definitional problem.
a necessary tool for research, but it need not commit the researcher to an ontology. The functional definition posits no real status to its definiens, makes no truth claim, and rests upon a purely arbitrary assignation of meaning. The functional definition is judged simply by its utility (does it allow the scholar to suspend the truth-question and search for an understanding of the data?), and it leaves the question of the real status of religion to the work of the philosopher and theologian.

A recommended functional definition of religion is Paul Tillich's assertion that "religion, in the largest and most basic sense of the word, is ultimate concern." The definition must be modified, however, to free it from normative connotations intrinsic to Tillich's theological stance. The modification is merely to withhold or set aside one's personal decision or commitment as to what is ultimate in the universe, and thereby to use "ultimate concern" as a purely descriptive category. In other words one uses the definition as a tool for describing religion, not as an instrument or category for making decisions about the truth of religion or the nature of religion.

Such a definitional approach avoids the labyrinth of other definitional approaches by remaining purely functional and utilitarian. No ontology need shape the study of religion.

10. The ontological and normative connotations to such a definition as presented by Tillich have been examined by William A. Christian in Meaning and Truth in Religion (Princeton, 1964) and John Macquarrie in Principles of Christian Theology (New York, 1966) and Twentieth Century Religious Thought (New York, 1963). The main objection relevant to this context is that Tillich's use of such a definition is often theological (thus normative). For example, he shows a tendency to suggest that "there is something—God—which is the true objective of all ultimate concerns." But that tendency results in a theological assertion, not a general definition for the study of religions. See Christian, page 38, footnote 4.
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The utility of the definition is clear. It first of all enables the historian of religions to clearly identify the object of his study and to distinguish it from other areas of study. It remains open to the question of what religion among many is the true religion (i.e., it does not by itself decide a priori in favor of any particular religion). And it enables the investigator to conduct his study on the levels of both the ideal (the adherents' preferred description of the faith) and the real (the empirical evidence of what is indeed religion for a person or a people). 11

That Baird has resolved the definitional problem for the historian of religion is apparent, so long as one attends to his cautionary words that the functional definition is purely "stipulative" (in the sense that the scholar himself decides what he wants to study under the rubric of religion), and that the definition thus selected is to be valued only by its utility. If a definition is not useful (and, in principle, one has to admit that "ultimate concern" might not apply to some persons or groups) then it could be judiciously retired and another substituted. The point is that the functional definition refuses to isolate an essence to religion in the manner in which the so-called "real" definitions do. The functional definition allows the historian of religions to get on with his work without having to posit and defend judgments about truth, value, or ultimate reality.

This point of departure for the study of religions suggests not only that the scholar is freed from tasks better undertaken by the philosopher or theologian, but also provides some implications which broaden the subject matter of history of religions and, indeed, complicate it as well. The study of religion is necessarily broadened by such a definition because it contains certain suggestive implications. Religion as "what concerns men ultimately" surely implies that religion might conceivably be found in any area of human activity. This

requires, then, that all spheres of human activity become, in principle, the object of study for the historian of religions. And it implies as well that some attention be given to all spheres of activity of a particular people studied before the historian makes any general pronouncements about their religion.

Such a conclusion suggests further that if the intellectual, moral, aesthetic, and political preoccupations of men are to be subjected to analysis in terms of ultimate concern there can be no doubt that religion might be found to inhabit areas of human life previously ignored or designated secular. Where historians of religions in the past have fumbled to explain how religion somehow crossed into the political or economic realm, they now must confess that in all likelihood religion as defined is expected to relate to all spheres of human activity. What this really suggests is that wherever human activity takes place in a given society, there the historian of religions will find materials for his research. What concerns men ultimately is research material for the historian of religions.

But a second implication follows from the previous observation. Such a definition implies that for the historian of religions the object of study does not exist alongside any given culture, but at its depths, not on the margins, but at the core. It implies that the culture moves and grows by what we have defined as religion. This, indeed, might suggest to some that religion is universal—that all men and all cultures have ultimate concerns which underlie their values, their thought systems, and their institutions. Such a conclusion need not be drawn from the definition itself, but it can be said that the definition surely implies that religion must, at times, be uncovered or revealed by the historian of religions at points where it might be least expected. Here the suggested definition risks complicating the field of study: it could be that much of the research done in the past is irrelevant to the study of the ultimate concerns of contemporary men. And if this is the case, historians of religions then are forced to
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revise old methods of research and devise new methods which can produce data corresponding to such a functional definition. The point is not that research done in the past is irrelevant to religion; it is only that it may be irrelevant to the functional definition that religion is "ultimate concern". 12

A third implication follows. Given such a functional definition of religion it could be the case that certain areas of concentrated study might be neglected or ignored by the historian of religions using the functional definition. When traditional concerns of men clearly lose their position of ultimate within a society, when only a tiny minority retain traditional notions of ultimacy, then the historian must investigate the new concerns. Whereas the old concerns might be both relevant and interesting to the historian's academic specialization, an analysis of religion in terms of ultimate concern must move toward investigation of the new concerns. In fact, if the great majority of people (or even an elite minority who possess powers to shape public concerns) become totally preoccupied with intellectual, moral, aesthetic, or political concerns other than those traditionally espoused, it would be absurd for the historian of religions to assume that he is describing the religion of a culture when he has examined only traditional forms. 13 (The obverse is also true, of course,

12. The data, for example, which brings Eliade to the conclusion that contemporary man is "profane" and therefore nonreligious is irrelevant to the definitional approach which sees religion as ultimate concern. See Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, translated by Willard R. Trask (New York, 1961), pp. 162-213.) Eliade's intuitive definition has shaped the data to the point where he must conclude that man in the twentieth century is without anything but "vestiges" of religion.

13. J. N. Farquhar's Modern Religious Movements in India, The Hartford-Lamson lectures on "The Religions of the World" for 1913 (Dehli, 1967) illustrates this point. In a book of more than 450 pages he devoted only 32 pages to what he calls "religious nationalism"—the movement which through a judicious use of language, history, and traditional spiritual values eventually drove Imperial Britain to her knees. Whereas the 408 remaining pages are surely not irrelevant to the study
since no new concerns can develop without relation to antecedent concerns; new ultimate concerns do not develop in an historical vacuum, and therefore the past is always important).

Thus the functional-definitional method advocated as a resolution to the definitional problem in the field of history of religions suggests a new orientation for history of religions. It is an orientation which values a careful analysis of any given people in terms of their ultimate concerns. Such an orientation requires an interest in antecedent concerns which have formed a tradition, new concerns which might constitute either borrowings or innovation, and developments which suggest synthesis.

I contend that a study of the history and culture of modern India provides data for the application of such a method. The people of India since the nineteenth century have experienced simultaneously both a waning and an intensification of traditional values and concerns. To the extent that the economic, political, aesthetic, and religious values of Great Britain had impact upon India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was a tendency of the traditional values to erode and decline. To the extent that nationalism affected the masses of India, the traditional values tended to revive. For historians of religions who

of religion in India, they are—in retrospect, and with the above-named goals in mind—clearly deficient. And it is, indeed, his implied definition of religion which so restricts his study that he cannot regard the nationalist movement as of any religious significance.

14. Such a generalization surely oversimplifies, since some movements in modern India which espoused traditional values employed some of the very up-to-date techniques of mass communications. And some Indians who argued for social reforms based upon ideas foreign to traditional India, used ancient texts to buttress their arguments. But the thrust of the generalization, nevertheless, holds, since even attention to the complexities of modern Indian social and political thought only supports the point of the generalization, that is, that modernization of
proceed to the study of religion in modern India with an “intuitive” or “real-definition” approach, the cultural situation of an emerging nationalism tinged with the traditionally religious and modern secular values provides an overwhelming cacophony—the elements of which must be clearly separated before any analysis of “real” religion can be attempted. Such attempts can succeed only to the extent that the historian of religions clearly delineates the religious dimensions of life and the secular dimensions. Books ranging from J. N. Farquhar’s *Modern Religious Movements in India* (1913) to Donald Eugene Smith’s two books, *India as a Secular State* (1963) and *South Asian Politics and Religion* (1966) to the books by Professors Haridas and Uma Mukherjee wrestle with the same problem—namely, how to separate the strands of what the authors assume to be “real” religion (which in all cases seems to be the traditional forms of devotion and their institutionalized value systems) from the more recent movements of nationalism, communism, and secularism. All of these scholars, because of their largely assumed real-definings of religion, struggle to show that religion ought to have a place apart from the values and goals of a secular state. And all fail to understand that the difficulties they find to exist between religion and state or religion and nationalism are problems largely of their own creation, since the complications emerge primarily from the reified status attributed to religion. The scholars assume that there is something “out

India involved both a search for an Indian identity and the utilization of technical and scientific ideas from the West.

15. *India’s Fight for Freedom or The Swadeshi Movement* (1905-1906) (Calcutta, 1958) by Professors Haridas and Uma Mukherjee provides the clearest case. But also the volumes *The Growth of Nationalism in India* (1857-1905) (Calcutta, 1957) and *The Origins of the National Education Movement* (1905-1910) (Calcutta, 1957), illustrate the problem as well.

The books by Donald Eugene Smith are published by Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. Farquhar’s book was first published in America and is now available only in an Indian edition, Dehli, 1967.
there” called religion, and that it is their task to clearly distinguish it from other things “out there” called nationalism, politics, secularism, or whatever. Thus Farquhar faults some Indians for confusing the aims of nationalism with the aims of religion. And Smith sets up an ideal construct of “secular state” and “religion”, conformity to which would resolve conflict of competing values in India. And the Mukherjees are forced to deny an intrinsic role to religion in the nationalist movement, but then to affirm—paradoxically—a religion of nationalism—that thus contradicting themselves by equivocating on their definition of religion.

The Mukherjee volume titled India’s Fight for Freedom (Calcutta, 1958) is of particular interest because it shows that failure to treat religion and nationalism in an unbiased manner is not restricted to British or Anglo-Indian historians. Many studies of the nationalist movement, such as Farquhar’s, have considered the introduction of religious vocabulary into the nationalist movement prior to 1910 to be a political tool used to inspire and enflame the masses. Traditional religious symbols and ideas are regarded as propaganda weapons only which were wielded by unscrupulous politicians. It is to be admitted that such studies were done mainly by scholars sympathetic to British policy in India at the time, and in some cases the scholars were themselves embroiled in the political controversy itself. But not only pro-British students of the pre-1910 nationalist movement so err: the Mukherjees as ardent nationalists have themselves made similar misjudgments. Professors Haridas and Uma Mukherjee, who have made the early years of the nationalist movement in India a life-time research project, create the same sort of dichotomy between the goals of nationalism and religion as do the British and Anglo-Indian historians. In India’s Fight for Freedom they take issue with scholars from the British side of interpretation who charge that “the national upheaval of 1905 assumed a religious and reactionary character.”

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Their [British scholars'] contention is alleged to be confirmed by the repeated appeal made by the popular leaders in those days to the religious sentiment of the masses through their writings and speeches, by annual celebration of the Shivaji festival, by the frequent reference which the great leaders, including Aurobindo Ghose, made to the Gita, the Mahabharata and such other Hindu Classics, as well as by the constant use of the slogan Bande Mataram, supposed to signify the worship of the goddess Kali.\textsuperscript{17}

In particular the Mukherjees take issue with Valentine Chriol's interpretation of the nationalist movement which contends that it was the association of Hindu revivalist sentiment with political aspirations that generated the nationalist movement and gave it a conservative or reactionary character.\textsuperscript{18} The Mukherjees then present nine arguments intended to refute the alleged religious and reactionary character of the nationalist movement. The arguments are of a historical nature which attempt to document certain attitudes and present evidence suggesting that,

the introduction of religious idealism into the scene, the frequent tendency to appeal to the glories and exploits of ancient and medieval India, was not the outcome of social conservatism or religious orthodoxy, but mainly a part of the political strategy, designed to intensify and popularise the movement by linking it with the historic traditions of the soil.\textsuperscript{19}

In other words, the Mukherjees argue, religion was a political tool, and "if any religion was preached at all by the Extremist political leaders of that time, it was the religion of patriotism of which Aurobindo Ghose was the greatest embodiment.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{17} India's Fight for Freedom, p. 206.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 209.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 212
The Mukherjees’ error is twofold: they implicitly admit Chirol’s equation of Hindu religion with reactionism and social conservatism, and they misconstrue the role of religion in the struggle as one of political utility. The result is that the long-dead Valentine Chirol has the best of them even in their attempted refutation of him. In their eagerness to deny that the nationalist movement was reactionary, they deny religion an intrinsic place within the nationalist movement and relegate it to a marginal role of a propaganda device. Apparently the Mukherjees’ implicit acquiescence to Chirol’s equation of religion with social conservatism motivates the hasty denial of religion a place within nationalism. But they then find a place for a new religion when they suggest that Aurobindo’s religion of “patriotism” was preached “if any religion was preached.”

This new and invigorating ideal of Indian nationalism was not based nor was ever intended to be based on rotten and decadent social ideas. It aimed at the liberation of India from alien subjection by whatever means the circumstances suggested and through India’s liberation the salvation of Humanity...21

The quibble between the Mukherjees and Chirol is based both on a failure to treat religion in an objective and unbiased manner, and on a failure to use a consistent and impartial definition of religion. Chirol’s implied equation of religion with reactionary social conservatism is itself a religious assertion: he is implying something about the value of religion. The Mukherjees unwittingly accept that definition, and then are forced to deny religion an intrinsic role in nationalism in India. But then they equivocate and contend that a religion of patriotism did play a role. Obviously the problem consuming so much scholarly energy is not so much factual as definitional. I contend that such misunderstandings need not consume the time or the documents of scholars if they start their analysis of the religious factor in nationalism by positing

a general theory or definition of religion which meets the requirements of objectivity and allows one to suspend value judgments. Whereas the issue of religion and nationalism is important enough to demand careful analysis, the failure of either Chirol or the Mukherjees to begin with a neutral definition lands them both in an interminable argument. The result is that the Mukherjees are forced to both deny and affirm within the confines of six pages the intrinsic place of religion within the nationalist movement. Indeed, the topic under discussion is an important one for the understanding of the history of both the nationalist movement and the history of Indian religions. But so long as such scholars posit and acquiesce to definitions—implied or stated—which amount to no more than religious assertions, the topic will remain in the quagmire of charges and counter-charges over the use of words.

The definitional method sketched above would avoid such problems and break fresh ground in religious studies. Religion as ultimate concern assumes no such clear distinction between sacred and secular; it says that religion is found not beside other cultural happenings, but, as it were, “in, with, and under” them. In terms of the definitional method outlined above, I would like to proceed to a study of one Indian thinker whose life and work was closely tied to the nationalist movement in India prior to 1910. The man is Aurobindo Ghose, who as both a revolutionary and a contemplative, an activist and yogi; synthesizes in one life the forces of modern nationalism and traditional Indian spirituality. The approach outlined provides a basis for an analysis of Aurobindo’s ideas and reveals the implications of those ideas for both political and religious concerns. The study will concentrate upon that segment of his life in which concern for both revolutionary action and spirituality were held simultaneously. This period spans the years from 1893 until 1910—from the time he returned to India after schooling in Britain until he retired to live the contemplative life at Pondicherry.

Source materials for a study of Aurobindo’s thought in his
activist years include primarily his contributions to newspapers and journals. In 1893-94 Aurobindo wrote a series of eleven essays for a newspaper published in Bombay called Indu Prakash. Of these eleven essays, nine have been traced and reproduced in a volume titled Sri Aurobindo’s Political Thought, edited by the Mukherjees. The essays appeared under the title “New Lamps for Old,” and constitute a severe criticism of the methods and goals of the Indian National Congress. A second source includes selections from the daily and weekly editions of an English language newspaper entitled Bande Mataram. The articles in Bande Mataram constitute a statement of Aurobindo’s goal of complete independence for India, and he states such a goal in terms of “political vedānta”.

Other sources for the thought of Aurobindo during this period come from articles contributed to the Karmayogin in 1909-10. Most of these articles have been reproduced in book form by the followers of Sri Aurobindo and published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram of Pondicherry, India. Of considerable interest also are the numerous speeches and lectures delivered by Aurobindo during his years of political activism. The

22. Published in Calcutta, 1958. Essays numbers 9 and 10 are untraced.

23. Bande Mataram existed from August, 1906, until October, 1908. Editorials from January, 1907, until October, 1908, are in existence in the form of bound volumes in the Prabartak Sangha Library at Chandernagore, West Bengal. The condition of the volumes is reported to be that of extreme deterioration, with many pages crumbled and partially destroyed by ageing. The Mukherjees have reprinted Aurobindo’s editorials in three volumes: Sri Aurobindo’s Political Thought (Calcutta, 1958) which contains fifteen articles; Bande Mataram and Indian Nationalism (Calcutta, 1957), containing sixteen articles by Aurobindo; and Sri Aurobindo and the New Thought in Indian Politics (Calcutta, 1964) containing 109 articles. The Sri Aurobindo Ashram has also published a collection of Aurobindo’s editorials in On Nationalism (Pondicherry, 1965). Authorities at the National Library, Calcutta, have recently microfilmed the six volumes contained in the Prabartak Sangha Library at Chandernagore. The University of Iowa Libraries has purchased the microfilm.

writings in Bengali for the journals *Yugantar* and *Dharma* have been translated by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and appear in the *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual* numbers 26 and 27, 1967 and 1968. Also of considerable importance is the pamphlet "Bhawani Mandir" of 1905.25

My analysis of Aurobindo Ghose and his religious thought as it develops in his activist years will consider only those essays written during the years of involvement with the nationalist movement (1893-1910). Works from later years will not be consulted for the specific reason that the study is an attempt at analysis of Aurobindo's synthesis of nationalism and traditional spirituality.

This chapter has been a brief survey of a methodological problem in the History of Religions and my interpretation of Professor Baird's suggested resolution. I have indicated some methodological implications of such a resolution for the study of religion in modern India. In the following chapter I will indicate the structure of Aurobindo's religious thought as it synthesizes normally disparate ideas and values to provide a rationalization for a spiritualized nationalism.

Chapter II

THE STRUCTURE OF AUROBINDO'S RELIGION

Aurobindo Ghose lived from 1872 to 1950. He belonged to an important Bengali family. His father was a physician, educated in England, and seems to have been an admirer of British culture. Aurobindo as a boy was sent to a school in which English was the language of instruction. Later, at age seven, he was sent to England with two brothers, and he remained there until age twenty-one. He proved to be a bright student, and in the course of his studies, he learned several European languages, read considerably in English literature, and imbibed a great deal of knowledge of European history and culture.

He completed studies for the Indian Civil Service, but for a technicality—of which accounts differ—he was not accepted in the Civil Service.¹ Instead he entered the State Service of Baroda, the dominion of a Maharaja in western India. He also taught French and English in Baroda College and served that institution for some time as a vice-principal.

¹ The technicality was the failure to pass the riding examination. Accounts differ as to why Aurobindo failed and why such a failure would disqualify him for the Indian Civil Service. A. B. Purani in Sri Aurobindo in England (Pondicherry, 1956) notes that Aurobindo failed to appear for four scheduled riding examinations (though he did in fact pass the written examination on horsemanship). His reasons for not appearing differ: Purani quotes Aurobindo to the effect that he wanted a way to avoid the Service without actually rejecting it (a move his family would not have allowed). But Purani also takes seriously the argument that Aurobindo could not have passed the examination without riding instruction (and he could not afford special instruction). Some differences did exist among officials concerning the need for demonstrated horsemanship as necessary for the Civil Service. And the question of whether failure to take the riding examination actually constituted disqualification from the Civil Service competitions or whether it was merely a bureaucratic blunder appears to have troubled the Bengal Government later. See
Aurobindo remained in Baroda until age thirty-four. The time in Baroda was of some significance to him, since he familiarized himself with a few Indian languages, including his native tongue, Bengali, and India’s literature. He also studied Sanskrit, and he began to practise yoga. The years at Baroda also engrossed him in the political and social turmoils which led to an association with the underground nationalist movements in Baroda and later in Bengal.

Aurobindo’s first nationalist writing appears in the journal Indu Prakash published in Bombay. He wrote a series titled “New Lamps for Old” which he contributed anonymously. The articles appearing in eleven installments over the period 1893-94, created such a stir that Aurobindo was asked to end the series. He then contributed a second series in praise of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the Bengali poet. Again Aurobindo’s name was not published, but only the words “by a Bengali” were given.

The association with the nationalist movement was, until the time of the Bande Mataram beginnings in 1906, largely unknown or ignored by British authorities. Except for the articles to the Indu Prakash—chiefly critical of the Indian National Congress and only indirectly critical of Britain—Aurobindo’s role in the nationalist movement is obscure. Some have suggested that in 1900 he began undercover work for espionage and sabotage among Baroda army recruits. Letters to Lord Minto in England from Andrew Fraser, the Lieutenant-Minter Papers, Correspondence, 1908, Vol. I, no. 239, Confidential Note in M. N. Das, India Under Morley and Minto (London, 1964), p. 114. But Purani reveals official correspondences which suggest that disqualification may have had something to do with either personal malice or religious and racial prejudice; The Earl of Kimberley’s letter of December 2, 1892, reads in part: “......I should much doubt whether Mr. Ghose would be a desirable addition to the Service—and if Mr. Prothero or anyone else is under the impression that a Hindoo ought to have a special exemption from the requirement of being able to ride, the sooner he is disabused of such an absurd notion the better.” (See Purani’s discussion in Sri Aurobindo in England, pp. 37-73.)
Governor, claim that a full account of the activities of Aurobindo had been gathered by British Intelligence in India by 1908. Such information asserted that Aurobindo was the "ringleader" of a band of anarchists as early as 1900—possibly as early as his assignment to the college post at Baroda in 1893. The report sent to Minto claims that Aurobindo studied "works of a political and revolutionary character" and then returned to Bengal in 1902 to preach sedition. The report traces Aurobindo to Calcutta in 1906 where he taught in the National College. The report continues:

He has ever since been the principal advisor of the revolutionary party, and has been consulted about and in touch with their proceedings and crimes. He has been very careful, as far as possible, to keep himself out of sight, and to prevent any trace of his presence or work being left behind. The result is that though we have valuable proof of his important share in this conspiracy, the legal evidence is not so strong. But it is of utmost importance to stop his power for mischief; for he is the prime mover, and can easily get tools, one to replace another.

In May of 1908 Aurobindo was arrested in connection with the Maniktolla bomb incident, and confined as an undertrial prisoner in the Alipore Jail. Issues of the Bande Mataram, for which he was co-editor, continued until as late as June 14, 1908, with articles attributed to him. The newspaper itself was shut down by the British in October of 1908. Aurobindo remained in jail for one year.

In terms of his life's history, the imprisonment appears to have determined his future; in jail, through the practice of

2. See Minto Papers, Correspondence, 1908, Vol. I, no. 239, Fraser to Minto, May 19, 1908, India Under Morley and Minto, p. 114. See also Sisirkumar Mitra, Sri Aurobindo and Indian Freedom (Madras, 1948), p. 38.

yoga and meditation, he reached the highest realization. Upon his acquittal, he inaugurated two new journals: one printed in English and titled *Karmayogin*, and the other printed in Bengali and titled *Dharma*.

In 1910 Aurobindo withdrew from public life, travelled in secret to Pondicherry (at that time French territory south of Madras), and stayed there until his death in 1950. At Pondicherry he wrote many of the works for which he became famous as a poet and philosopher, and he developed his own system of yoga, the Integral Yoga. An Āśram grew up around him (which today numbers some twelve hundred persons) and at the head of the āśram he installed "the Mother," a French woman whom he met in 1914 and who stayed with him permanently from 1920 until his death. The Mother governed the āśram until recently, and the inmates regarded her as the principal guru.

Aurobindo’s association with the Extremist faction of the Indian National Congress earned him the title of a "religious Extremist". The essays written by Aurobindo are indeed replete with religious terminology as well as revolutionary rhetoric. But it is more the structure of his arguments which betray his fundamentally religious commitment to nationalism rather than his vocabulary. He argues for national autonomy and freedom with evidences from history, economics, politics, and ethics. But all arguments rest upon a prior commitment to a notion of the essential divinity of man and what he conceives to be the goal of human existence. Such a conviction during the period of political activism gets termed by him "political vedānta."


The writings prior to 1910 reveal an intense concern for political liberation. His numerous articles provide his interpretation of India as a subservient nation, and they suggest what to him is the most effective avenue toward independence. He sees the country to be in a state of intellectual, moral, economic, and political poverty. The subservience of India is not only military, but intellectual and moral; the best evidence of such total slavery is the state of the Indian leaders themselves, who are reduced to weak appeals to Britain based upon a poor imitation of a learned system of government. For Aurobindo, the tragedy of India is not only its domination by a foreign power, but its lack of a sense of its own past, no awareness of present strength, and, therefore, little hope for a national future.

The program for renewal and resurgence of Indian national life is a major preoccupation of Aurobindo’s literary output. And it is in the delineation of this program that the religious dimension is revealed. The structure of his religious thought is revealed by his adroit synthesis of commonly disparate elements on two levels. He unites the spiritual goal of moksha with the political goal of swarāj at one level; and to support such a synthesis he joins two more disparate elements of traditional Indian thought: the Upanishadic ideal of the Absolute as the essence of man and nature with devotionalism to the Mother as Kāli, Durgā, or Jagadānandini. Thus the traditional language of the divine in man together with intense worship of the Mother Goddess combine to create the impetus for national liberation as well as spiritual liberation.

Aurobindo manages a transference from the abstract and traditional to the concrete and contemporary—from the metaphysical to the political—in the two syntheses. He joins a form of Absolutism and cult devotion in such a way as to indicate that reverence for Vedic texts as well as worship of gods and goddesses are inextricably bound to the demands of patriotism. The nation is revalued as the vedāntic “self of selves,” “Innermost essence,” “the God within us.” And the
old worship of Puranic deities is revalued in terms of the present state of the nation: the Shakti—"Infinite Energy." Patriotism, then becomes a mode of worship.

Such a structure for nationalism is revealed in the documents Indu Prakash, Bande Mataram, and Karmayogin, as well as The Speeches. The documents contain Aurobindo’s analysis of the present state of India, the nature of the freedom desired, the teleology of nationalism implied in freedom, and the consequent mission of India to the world.

The Present Condition

Aurobindo’s clearest summation of the condition of India under British Imperial Rule is contained in the series written for Indu Prakash as early as 1893. The series is designed to call into question the procedures of the Indian National Congress as an indigenous and representative body serving the interests of Indians. But the critique of Congress is muted by Aurobindo’s view of India as a conquered nation, without a military, without adequate economic means—in short, a people wholly dependent upon the political structures of Britain. Under such duress, even Congress contains a modicum of hope, since “it is still our only grand assurance of a living political energy in the country.”

But while Congress is a manifestation of national life, it is a sickly life at best. And it is sickly because it has succumbed to the pressures of Imperialism and the British program for remaking India according to the pattern of the British Commonwealth. In short, the Congress has sold out to the interests of the foreign rulers, and until it can assert India’s own will and India’s own indigenous life it is not fully alive and healthy.

For Aurobindo the clearest manifestation of India's slavish condition is found in the Indian National Congress itself—an ironic assertion, since the Congress was intended by its members to manifest India's independent mind and will. But Aurobindo finds it to be the most degrading mark of servitude. The greatest fault of Congress is that it is not really a representative body. As a body of the aristocratic elite, it does not stand for the interests of the common men of India. As a body of men educated and trained by the British, it is neither wholly Indian nor wholly British. The Congress is therefore caught and paralyzed between an implacable and unhearing government of foreigners and a suppressed populace of nationals. And it functions as merely a convenient instrument of suppression for the government: while Congress asserts its leadership over the masses it neutralizes any significant movement by the masses to acquire power. Thus the Congress is but a dupe of the government. It accepts the flattery of the British, but pays the price of servitude; it accepts the position of appealer before British parliament, but pays the price of irrelevance at home.

Aurobindo argues that the masses must make the move for freedom in the face of an impotent Congress. The legitimacy of popular movements is evidenced in two ways (and these two evidences marshalled by Aurobindo in the early 1890s indicate the method of argumentation for Aurobindo in later documents as well). He argues first from historical precedent to buttress his claim to truth. But his use of history is more a selective interpretation than a careful cataloguing of facts. Secondly, he revalues particulars into abstractions—that is, he transforms particular ideas and events into abstract ideals in order to enhance their significance and reveal their power. Sometimes particulars are transformed and revalued as ultimates. In this case, to show that the masses must revolt, he cites history to show that the great liberal revolutions of the past were revolutions of the people, and he revalues the notion of the political life of a people into a general law of existence.
As for history, Aurobindo argues that in all countries (except England) the movement to overthrow despotic rule was initiated not by the learned but by the ignorant, not by lawyers but by workers. For example, France:

It was not a convocation of respectable citizens, but the vast and ignorant proletariat, that emerged from a prolonged and almost coeval apathy and blotted out in five terrible years the accumulated oppression of thirteen centuries. Is it true that the initiators of Irish resistance to England were a body of successful lawyers, remarkable only for a power of shallow rhetoric, and deputed by the sort of men that are turned out at Trinity College, Dublin? ...That is not what history tells us. We do not read that Irish leaders annually assembled to declaim glib orations, eulogistic of British rule and timidly suggestive of certain flaws in its unparalleled excellence, nor did they suggest as a panacea for Irish miseries, that they should be given more posts and an ampler career in the British service.7

The idealistic justification of popular movements for freedom comes from Aurobindo’s revaluation of political life into a general law by treating all varieties of life—political, cultural, biological—as self-assertion. He concludes, then, that if political life is self-assertion, it cannot be transferred from a foreign source; it must grow out of the body in which it resides:

Life being, as science tells us, an affirmation of one’s self, any aggregate mass of humanity must inevitably strive to emerge and affirm its own essence, must by the law of its own nature aspire towards life, aspire towards expansion, aspire towards perfecting of its potential strength in the free air of political recognition and the full light of political predominance.8

The method of ratiocination is suggestive because it is used

7. Ibid., p. 84.
8. Ibid.; p. 112.
over and over by Aurobindo, and its repetition drives the reader toward Aurobindo’s own conception of ultimate reality. The present condition of India, however, is far from conformity to what Aurobindo conceives to be the laws of life. Congress has been advocating and employing a form of political activity which can only be termed mendicancy. Rather than engage in political agitation which would assert the autonomous life of India, the Congress contents itself with respectful speeches and appeals to the sense of justice which the Congress is convinced the British possess. To the extent that Surendra Nath Banerji stands as spokesman for the Congress, it is committed to belief in the benevolence of the British system. “We rely ...on the liberty-loving instincts of the greatest representative assembly in the world ... the sanctuary of the free and brave, the British House of Commons,” Banerji has said.9 Thus the Congress actually operates as a denial of the principle of life; it attempts to gain life and power by appeals to a foreign power. To assume that the British, whose well-being is increasingly dependent upon India’s servitude, will for the sake of justice free India, is a political absurdity. Thus he charges that the Congress’ program is both politically impotent and intellectually incompetent.

It follows that all the present evils of Indian society so carefully catalogued by the British and the Anglo-Indians as evidence of the need for Indian dependence, in fact, result from political bondage. To speak of social and economic reform as a government responsibility (in the manner of the Congress) is to confuse the cause and effect relation between political subservience and social decay. For Aurobindo “British rule and increasing poverty [stand] in a relation of cause and effect”.10 The removal of the effect must be done by removal of the cause. The conditions of poverty, crime, disease, and

9. Ibid., p. 87.
even public apathy result from political subjection:
Where the people have no voice in the administration of the country...where they are treated as mere children unable to think out their own good...the necessary first condition for turning our attention to the deep-rooted evils of society is wanting. Where the people have to commit their destinies to the aliens and cannot claim the legitimate and elementary right of governing themselves they can hardly be moved by any philanthropic and humanitarian impulse to do their best to lessen the sufferings of their fellow beings. Subjection naturally makes them take a very poor view of life. It seldom occurs to a member of a subject race that he has a noble mission in life, that he belongs to a society with the well-being of which his own well-being is inseparably bound up, he never looks upon himself as a part of an organic whole. In a subject country society is deprived of its normal tendency towards progress.\textsuperscript{11}

Decay and death in the life of a nation such as India is the result of political subjection and bondage. The move for national freedom must then be a movement of self-discovery, self-realization, and self-assertion:

Liberty is the first requisite for the sound health and vigorous life of a nation. A foreign domination is in itself an unnatural condition, and if permitted, must bring about other unhealthy conditions...which will lead to fatal decay and disorganization.\textsuperscript{12}

\textit{The Nature of Freedom}

Aurobindo speaks of political freedom as independence from British rule; but at the same time he affirms the Upanishadic ideal that the aim of human existence is the realization

of moksha—spiritual liberation through self-knowledge. The result is a synthesis of the Upanishadic moksha and the political swarāj. The content of self-knowledge is the discovery that one is essentially united with the Absolute. In the past the sages of India referred to such self-discovery as moksha, and they identified moksha largely with liberation from the phenomenal world. But Aurobindo contends that talk of moksha is premature for men who are in political bondage. A better word for man's immediate need is the experience of swarāj. Swarāj is a word with both political and spiritual implications. It is "the direct revelation of God to this people,—not mere political freedom but a freedom vast and entire, freedom of the nation, spiritual freedom, social freedom, political freedom".

Political freedom is the first necessity for India. All other national considerations rest upon the realization of political freedom. Where there are spiritual, economic, social, and educational problems, their resolution depends upon the acquisition of political freedom. But Aurobindo insists it is not merely a political necessity; it is an ontological necessity. Again he revalues the particular into a universal. It is for Aurobindo self-evident that the aim and purpose of human existence is realized freedom. Thus he revalues a particular democratic ideal into an ontological norm. And he argues that European history supports the valuation. He refers to the democratic tradition as it developed in England, France, Italy, and even America to support the idea that political liberty is a means toward realization of the spiritual goal:

Three words have the power of remoulding nations and governments, liberty, equality, fraternity. These words ... point to the ultimate goal towards which human evolution ever moves. We move from a state

of bondage to an original liberty. This is what our religion teaches. This is Mukti or Moksha.\textsuperscript{14} Whether English, French, Italian, or American political theorists ever spoke of freedom in such a way as to corroborate Aurobindo’s assumption is, in fact, doubtful, but also irrelevant to Aurobindo. His concern is to revalue particulars in terms of ultimate universals, and whether European or American theorists actually made moksha a conscious aim does not matter. That they pursued liberty is enough, since that draws them into the sphere of the universal.

To Aurobindo political freedom is the first condition to a greater life. Without such freedom, advancements economic, social, even spiritual are impossible:

It cannot be for a moment contended that we can again be spiritually great without being politically dominant. The Indian of today is not the noble, heroic, and self-sacrificing Indian of a bygone age, only because with the loss of political freedom his soul has also begun to pine and wither. Those who allow others to take possession of their body, cannot long remain in possession of their soul. There cannot be a more mischievous delusion than to suppose that we can advance our soul by committing our bodies to the care of the foreigners.\textsuperscript{15}

Salvation as liberation is the goal of life. But political freedom is the precondition of such a salvation. “We do not desire political freedom for its own sake, but only and absolutely for the opportunities it offers for the cultivation of our highest manhood....”\textsuperscript{16} Swarāj is both a political and a spiritual goal; for a man to be a man he must realize both dimensions.

The nationalist movement, then, is not to be understood as

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{BM}, 8/2/07, \textit{SANT}, p. 129.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{BM}, 6/14/08, Mukherjees, \textit{Bande Mataram and Indian Nationalism (1906-1908) (BMIN)}, (Calcutta, 1957), p. 95.
a complaint against bad government by the British, nor the result of disappointed hopes and expectations of admission to British citizenship. The justness or unjustness of British control, the adequacy or inadequacy of the government to respond to Indian needs, all are questions of secondary concern. Improvement of government procedures and methods cannot right the fundamental wrong of political bondage. Independence is the first condition; secondary measures granting representation on councils, hearings before Parliament, and even a part in decision-making cannot substitute for the primary requisite of autonomy. Reform of British procedures is not a valid aim. Only swarāj—self-rule—can right the situation. And "the choice is not between freedom and dependence but between freedom and national decay and death".17

The nature of political freedom is summed up in the democratic ideal of government. There are three aspects to political liberty, he argues: national liberty (freedom from foreign control), internal liberty (freedom from control by another individual or class), and individual liberty (freedom from unnecessary and arbitrary controls imposed by a society or government).18 All forms of liberty are meant to be the possession of all men. Foreign rule is unnatural, and political or social despotism equally unnatural. The realization of the divinely intended condition of complete liberty is the goal of democracy. But democracy does not belong to Europe and America exclusively; it originally came from the East to the West in the form of Christianity. It must return to Asia to be transformed to its pure state. And its pure state is revealed in vedānta, in the Upanishadic wisdom of the ancient rishis.19

True democracy is discoverable only through a return to the teachings of vedānta and its ideal of moksha. The same Christian teachings which gave rise to the European and

17. BM, 4/26/07, SANT, p. 18.
19. BM, 3/16/08, SANT, pp. 289-190.
American experiences of democracy were also the source of its eventual failure. Europeans took as the motive for democracy a notion of the "rights" of man to liberty, equality, and fraternity. To construct a democratic society upon a conception of the rights of man is to base democracy ultimately upon an appeal to selfishness, pride, hatred, and enmity. This, in effect, makes internecine war the permanent ally of a Christian ideal. Equality is valued, but it is gained and maintained only by aggressive assertion of one's private concerns. The Europeans based democracy upon a false doctrine, therefore. The end result is to compromise the very Christian ideals which inspired the democratic tradition. The case presented by the French Revolution is the curious spectacle of Christian ideals attempting to establish themselves through a destruction of the very institution created to preserve those ideals.20

The teaching of vedânta, on the other hand, seeks to affirm the unity of men through their unity with the divine. "The ideal is that of humanity in God, of God in humanity, the ancient ideal of Sanātana Dharma".21 Such a doctrine is the true basis for a democratic society. The true source of human liberty, human equality, and human brotherhood is found in the realization of man's unity in the divine. True democracy is not based upon the real or imagined rights of men, but upon the unity of mankind with the divine. Democracy based on rights provides merely an external liberty, thus a partial freedom. A complete freedom and a true democracy must find its basis through recognition of the spiritual reality of human unity with the divine.22

Such a unity of man with the divine is the Dharma of humanity: it is the true state, the real condition. And democracy is then vedânta applied to the political sphere.

It is the Dharma of every man to be free in soul, bound

20. BM, 3/16/08, SANT, p. 290.
21. BM, 4/7/08, SANT, p. 347.
to service not by compulsion but by love; to be equal in spirit, apportioned his place in society, not by the interested selfishness of others; to be in harmonious relations with his brother men, linked to them by mutual love and service, not by shackles of servitude, or the relations of the exploiter and the exploited, the eater and the eaten. Dharma is the basis of Democracy which Asia must recognize, for in this lies the distinction between the soul of Asia and the soul of Europe.

The synthesis of political freedom with spiritual freedom forces Aurobindo to conclude that Indian independence is not only analogous to the ideal of vedānta, it is part of vedānta. Political freedom is a condition of the complete and wider freedom spoken of in the ancient texts. But political freedom in such a context has some social implications. Even as political bondage is a contradiction of vedānta, so social inequality and caste rigidity contradict vedānta. Aurobindo maintains that the institution of caste originally served the purpose of ordering society according to a spiritual and moral pattern. Such an ordering provided for the necessary distribution of duties in society. Duties were distributed by the inherent capacity of individuals to function integrally within a society. "According to the Hindu conception every class of men have their [sic] special instincts and proclivities." Men by nature distribute themselves into functional groups that work toward the stability and progress of a society. "There is a divine impulse in man to check his selfish tendencies and to act for the promotion of the commonweal."

The perversion and degeneration of caste resulted from an attempt to wrest the essentially spiritual base from it and to

23. BM, 3/16/08, SANT, p. 292.
24. BM, 9/22/07, ON, p. 12.
substitute material qualifications of occupation and birth.\textsuperscript{26} But the movement for nationalism is an attempt to restore that foundation of Indian society:

Nationalism is simply the passionate aspiration for the realisation of the Divine Unity in the nation, a unity in which all the component individuals, however various and apparently unequal their functions as political, social, or economic factors, are yet really and fundamentally one and equal.\textsuperscript{27}

Thus the work of the nationalist devoted to the \textit{vedāntic} ideal is to transform Indian society according to a spiritual pattern.

\textit{The Absolute and The Mother}

Aurobindo’s synthesis of \textit{moksha} and \textit{swarāj} rests upon his understanding of the older Upanishadic notion of the unity of humanity and divinity. But the affirmation of the \textit{vedāntic ātman-Brahman} by Aurobindo is joined by an affirmation of devotion to the Mother Goddess so as to create a new synthesis. If the ontology of the nationalist movement is based upon \textit{vedānta}, the motivation for intense patriotic feeling, sacrifice, discipline, and activity is found in realization of the Mother. The theoretical justification for nationalism lies in the structure of reality; man is one with the divine and thus free. The manifestation of the power of the universe, however, is found in the image of the Mother.

The Mother is manifested as the symbol of the power of the country. But for Aurobindo it is not a simple equation of the country and the goddess. In a 1905 pamphlet titled “Bhawani Mandir” Aurobindo spelled out his view of the goddess, the universal energy through which India’s rebirth and resurgence derive meaning and significance.\textsuperscript{28} Energy

\textsuperscript{26} BM, 9/21/07, \textit{SANT}, p. 158.

\textsuperscript{27} BM, weekly edition, 9/22/07, \textit{SAPT}, p. 127.

\textsuperscript{28} See A. B. Purani, \textit{The Life of Sri Aurobindo (1872-1926)} (Pondicherry, 1960), pp. 84-97.
is understood as the feminine principle of the universe; but as incarnated into material stuff or the universe. Energy is continuously changing and thus ambiguous; and, therefore, it is often incorrectly identified or misunderstood:

In the unending revolutions of the world, as the wheel of the Eternal turns mightily in its courses, the Infinite Energy, which streams forth from the Eternal and sets the wheel to work, looms up in the vision of man in various aspects and infinite forms. Each aspect creates and marks an age. Sometimes She is Love, sometimes She is Knowledge, sometimes She is Renunciation, sometimes She is Pity. This Infinite Energy is Bhawani, She is also Durga, She is Kali, She is Radha the Beloved, She is Lakshmi, She is our Mother and the Creatress of us all.29

Aurobindo identifies the present age as the age of Shakti, the manifestation of the Mother Goddess as Strength, or "the Mother of Strength":

Let us raise our eyes and cast them upon the world around us. Wherever we turn our gaze, huge masses of strength rise before our vision, tremendous, swift and inexorable forces, gigantic figures of energy, terrible, sweeping columns of force. All is growing large and strong. The Shakti of war, the Shakti of wealth, the Shakti of science are tenfold more mighty and colossal, a thousandfold more prolific in resources, weapons and instruments than ever before recorded in history. Everywhere the Mother is at work; from her mighty and shaping hands enormous forms of Rakshasas, Asuras, Devas are leaping forth into the arena of the world. We have seen the slow but mighty rise of great empires in the West, we have seen the swift, irresistible and impetuous bounding into life of Japan. Some are Mleccha Shaktis clouded in their strength, black or

blood-crimson with tamas or rajas, others are Arya Shaktis, bathed in pure flame of renunciation and utter self-sacrifice; but all of them are the Mother in Her new phase, remoulding, creating. She is pouring Her Spirit into the old; She is whirling into life the new.30

To realize identity with the Absolute as a national goal requires that India read properly the characteristics of the times which indicate the manifestations of the Mother. Ambiguity is clearly a problem, since the divine energy is behind all happenings in the world. Therefore misdirection and mistake on the part of the devotees to the Mother is a possibility. It must be remembered that the present age is the Kāliyuga, the age of Kāli, therefore, of darkness, evil, and destruction.31 Yet great manifestations of strength are also apparent in this age. In the face of such ambiguity, all depends upon the proper recognition of the Mother, since from her proceeds the energy for rebirth and renewal. The national ideal lies in a return to the Mother through the realization of the source of strength and power. Aurobindo found India to be as an old man “with stores of knowledge, with ability to feel and desire, but paralysed by senile sluggishness, senile timidity, senile feebleness”. Aurobindo goes on to further deplore the state of India:

We have all things else, but we are empty of strength, void of energy. We have abandoned Shakti and are therefore abandoned by Shakti. The Mother is not in our hearts, in our brains, in our arms.33

30. Ibid., p. 85.

31. The Kāliyuga, traditional Indian thought is the age of darkness and obscurity; the Kāliyuga according to the tradition began in 3102 B.C.E.: The end of the Kāliyuga is marked by confusion of classes, overthrow of established standards, cessation of all religious rites, and the rule of cruel and alien kings. See A. L. Basham, The Wonder That Was India. Evergreen Encyclopedia (New York, 1954), I, 321.


33. Ibid.
Regeneration must come by realization of the Mother and proper devotion to her. And all of the ascetic discipline which traditionally was exercised for individual realization of moksha must now be directed toward incarnating the divine energy into the national life. "What is needed now is a band of spiritual workers whose tāpsyā will be devoted to the liberation of India..."34

The hope of national regeneration must absorb our minds as the idea of salvation absorbs the minds of the mumuksha. Our tyāga must be as complete as the tyāga of the nameless ascetic. Our passion to see the face of our free and glorified Mother must be as devouring a madness as the passion of Chaitanya to see the face of Srikrishna. Our sacrifice for the country must be as enthusiastic and complete as that of Jagai and Madhai who left the rule of a kingdom to follow the sankritan of Gauranga. If any reservation mars the completeness of our self-abandonment, if any bargaining abridges the fulness of our sacrifice, if any doubt mars the strength of our faith and enthusiasm, if any thought of self pollutes the sanctity of our love, then the Mother will not be satisfied and will continue to withhold her presence.35

The intensity of dedication and devotion is necessitated by the need of the moment—the contradiction of nature as experienced by India’s subjection to foreign control. The condition remains because of the failure of the nation to wholly give itself over to the divine Shakti:

We call her to come, but the call has not yet gone out from the bottom of our hearts. The Mother’s feet are on the threshold, but she waits to hear the true cry, the cry that rushes out from the heart, before she will enter. The Mother asks for all before she will give

34. BM, 3/22/08, ON, p. 93.
herself. ... Those who aspire to free India will first have to pay the price which the Mother demands. Regeneration is literally re-birth, and rebirth comes not by intellect, not by the fullness of the purse, not by policy, not by change of machinery, but by the getting of a new heart, by throwing away all that we were into the fire of sacrifice and being reborn in the Mother. Self-abandonment is the demand made upon us.36

To recapitulate: Nationalism has religious significance because its goal is self-rule; and self-rule is self-knowledge. Self-knowledge is the discovery of the ideal of the unity of man and God—ātman-Brahman. Such a discovery at the national level, given the present conditions, demands a rebirth, a renewal, a transformation by the creative energy of the universe—Shakti. Thus ātman-Brahman is one side of the realization of freedom; Shakti is the other side. The conditions for realization in the nation are conditions not unlike those of yoga in Indian religion. The yoga, however, aims not at the traditional concern over kundalini—or at least the kundalini closely associated with individual ascetic disciplines and nothing more. Rather the prior syntheses provide a context in which yoga must be directed toward realization of divine energy and power in the public and national sector—an energy directed toward a revival and regeneration of a nation so that it can drive out the oppressor.

The Teleology of Nationalism

Aurobindo maintains that to the extent that the nationalist movement is successful the divine energy is behind it. The divine will is being worked out in India. And again the argument by revaluation occurs: such a particular work as India’s resurgence is really a part of a universal pattern in the whole

36. BM, 4/12/08, ON, p. 118.
world. And a divine purpose is as much revealed in the political bondage India suffers as in her revival. Foreign rule is but a provision to restore a weak and decaying people to a healthful condition:

The subjugation of India is explicable neither in the ability of the men whose names figure as the protagonists nor to the superior genius of the conquering nation nor in the weakness of the conquered people. In other words, it was one of those cases in which a particular mission was assigned to a people not otherwise superior to the rest of the world and a special fousitas or decreed good fortune set to watch over the fulfillment of the mission. Her mission once over, the angel of the Lord who stood by England in her task and removed opponents and difficulties with the waving of his hand, will no longer shield her. She will stay so long as the destinies of India need her and not a day longer, for it is not by her own strength that she came or is still here, and it is not by her own strength that she can remain.37

Aurobindo insists that the time has come for India to assert her actual condition of freedom and independence. The prosecution and persecution of nationalists is a sure sign that the government is doomed to dissolution. And withdrawal of divine favor from the British is evidenced most clearly in the manifest injustice of the authorities:

Injustice is an invitation to death and prepares His advent. The moment the desire to do justice disappears from a ruling class, the moment it ceases even to respect the show of justice, from that moment its days are numbered.38

Aurobindo suggests that the British have come to the point where they must either willingly give up their control or be

subjected to the divine judgment of blindness and obduracy which will mark their eventual fall. God is behind the British attempts at suppressing dissent as much as he is behind the movement for freedom. And from the clash of the two forces a renewed India emerges. God confuses the understanding of the British to force them into policies which can lead only to ruin:

Mr. Morley is the victim to this Biparita Buddh as his predecessors were on the eve of the American Revolution, as Duryodhana and Dhritarashtra were on the eve of the battle of Kurukshetra, as Ravana was before the fall of the mighty Rakshasa kingdom, and the ancient tyrants or the French monarchs were before they made way for the emancipation of their section of humanity.

The Biparita Buddh that helps the regeneration of weak and oppressed peoples is manifestly at work. We welcome it and pray for its complete ascendancy for some time in Mr. Morley and other British statesmen. 39

Since freedom is the divine intention, the work of God, all events—oppressive measures by the British as well as renewed patriotism of the masses—fit into the divine plan for the liberation of India:

We...feel that the motions of humanity are determined by forces and not by individuals and that the intellect and experience of statesmen are merely instruments in the hands of the Power which manifests itself in those great incalculable forces.

One thing only we are sure of... This is the fixed and unalterable faith in an overruling Purpose which is raising India once more from the dead, the fixed

39. BM, 6/26/07, SANT, p. 100.
and unalterable intention to fight for the renovation of her ancient life and glory.\textsuperscript{40}

\textit{The Mission of India}

The teleology discernible in the movement for autonomy does not stop with the political liberation of India. Since the political goal of freedom is based upon the structure of reality, the resurgence of India is to be a manifestation of that reality to the world. Providence resurreets India for a purpose—the reinvigorization of the entire world. Thus in Aurobindo's conception of mission the synthesis of \textit{ātman-Brahman} and \textit{Shakti} reappears.

The first marks of such a mission are political, but the end is to be a spiritual consummation. "India is the \textit{guru} of the nations, the physician of the human soul in its profounder maladies; she is destined once more to new-mould the life of the world and restore the peace of the human spirit."\textsuperscript{41} Thus the movement for national autonomy is no mere political or economic movement. It is revalued as an essentially spiritual movement, with spiritual goals as its goals. It carries a message for the world. "It is a great religious movement disguised for the moment in political and western garb . . ."\textsuperscript{42} Aurobindo contends that the world needs India, and it needs her free. The hopes and aspirations of nations and peoples—resulting in political and economic systems designed to insure health and fulfillment to all—must have the additive of Indian spirituality to make them work. The aim of Indian civilization has always been to realize the conditions which will allow mankind the leisure and peace to develop the higher self. "The fulfillment of Hinduism is the fulfillment of the highest tendencies of human civilization and it must include

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{BM}, 3/2/08, \textit{SANT}, pp. 269-27\textsuperscript{0}.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 271.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{BM}, 9/10/08, \textit{SANT}, p. 283.
in its sweep the most vital impulses of modern life."\textsuperscript{43} The nationalist movement, based upon the teachings of \textit{vedānta}, is commissioned to bring all the world to the ideal of man's unity with God. Aurobindo acknowledges that such teaching has been in the past particularized under the name "Hindu" and the locale of India. But now this teaching is to be actualized in a political and national form as a witness and example to the whole world:

To evolve God out of man is its highest aim. It seeks to bring the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, in a sense not yet realized by Christian consciousness in Europe or America. It seeks to establish a New Jerusalem in this world... It aims at realising an ideal of democracy which proclaims that man is only your brother, but yes—your God.\textsuperscript{44}

And as for India,

her mission is to point back humanity to the true source of human liberty, human equality, human brotherhood. When man is free in spirit all other freedom is at his command; for the Free is the Lord who cannot be bound.\textsuperscript{45}

Aurobindo’s nationalism is clearly derived from a metaphysic he finds revealed in traditional Indian scriptural texts. Nationalism, however, is but the form of the religious commitment, since the basis is the nature of reality itself. The substance of the religion is such that it must work itself out into all areas of human life. Politics is but one necessary manifestation:

[India] has evolved a religion which embraces all that the heart, the brain, the practical faculty of man can desire. But she has not yet applied it to the problems of modern politics. This therefore is the work she

\textsuperscript{43} BM, 9/21/07, \textit{SANT}, p. 159.
\textsuperscript{44} BM, weekly edition, 3/16/08, \textit{BMIN}, pp. 94-95.
\textsuperscript{45} BM, 3/16/08, \textit{SANT}, p. 291.
has still to do before she can help humanity; the necessity of the mission is the justification for her resurgence, the great incentive of saving herself to save mankind...

This chapter has given an analysis of Aurobindo’s religion as it is contained in his nationalist writings of the pre-Pondicherry years. The structure is based on a synthesis of moksha and swarāj at one level and a supporting synthesis of the notions of ātman-Brahman and Shakti. The method of argument is to revalue the particular concrete political and national conditions into abstract universals in such a way as to reveal ultimacy behind the movement for Indian freedom.

The next chapter is an examination of Aurobindo’s conceptualization of religion in such a way as to both justify the synthesizes created to spiritualize nationalism and to set the nationalist goal into the traditional intellectual framework. Such a conceptualization tends to reverse the revaluation process: he revalues traditional symbols in such a way as to obviate their traditionally universal and subjective tendencies and to direct them toward present and particular social, economic, and political demands.

46. BM, weekly edition, 4/12/08, BMIN, p. 76.
Chapter III

THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF AUROBINDO'S RELIGION

Aurobindo's synthesis of the Upanishadic notion of ātman-Brahman and Shakti-worship (which, as I have shown, supports the prior synthesis of moksha and swarāj) rests upon a particular conception of the universe—a cosmology. It is a cosmology in the sense that it is a theory which tries to explain the universe by reducing the multiplicity of phenomena to a unity corresponding to the religious goal. The cosmology does two things for Aurobindo's religion: it theoretically justifies the synthesis made between normally polar religious conceptions (such as ātman-Brahman and Shakti devotion), and it clarifies the path to realization of the goal.¹ The task of theoretical justification is somewhat complicated by the fact that it must provide a rationale for his immediate concern with a political issue (a somewhat unconventional concern for Indian philoso-

1. Ninian Smart in *Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy* (London, New York, 1964) shows schematically that belief in the Absolute as articulated under the Upanishadic ātman-Brahman rubric stands at the opposite end of a continuum of Indian metaphysics from Devotionalism. Smart supports the schematic polarity by showing that the religious goal is attained in each by theoretically exclusive means: in the Absolutism of ātman-Brahman the goal is attained by meditation resulting in the experience of the soul's isolation from the phenomenal world; in Devotionalism the goal is attained through prayer and adoration which results in union. The former view is not incompatible with atheism, while the latter depends upon belief in a personal God. Between these two polar religious viewpoints are others which provide some bridges between the two, as for example Vishishtādvaita, Dvaita (which advocates a form of Devotional Meditation), Yoga, and Sāmkhya. My argument is that Aurobindo's cosmology makes a case for reconciling the Absolutism of the ātman-Brahman notion with the Shakti Devotionalism.
phers of the past) at the same time as it remains within a general conceptual framework familiar to his readers. In other words, Aurobindo is involved with reinterpretation. But it is a reinterpretation which must show some continuity with the tradition at the same time as it indicates the relevancy of that tradition to immediate problems. The result, in general, is a monistic theory of the cosmos which affirms the reality and significance of both matter and spirit, yet which postulates the priority of spirit over matter.²

_The Identity of Ātman and Brāhman_

For Aurobindo “the real hides behind the apparent, spirit behind matter.”³ Whereas Europeans have tended—since the Enlightenment at least—to picture the universe as a machine,

2. Here I differ significantly from such interpreters as Haridas Chaudhuri, who argues that “monism” is an inappropriate term to apply to Aurobindo’s philosophy. Citing _Life Divine_ (American edition; New York, 1949) as his source, Chaudhuri argues that Aurobindo conceives reality as essentially _indeterminable_ (his emphasis). Reality is “indefinable and inconceivable by finite and defining minds; it is ineffable by mind-created speech; it is describable neither by our negations . . . nor by our affirmations . . .” (Quoted from _Life Divine_, p. 292). This means, according to Chaudhuri, that to Aurobindo reality is nondual, nonverbal, and nonconceptual. He says, “It is indeterminable, and logically indefinable, but accessible to direct experience on the nonverbal level. . . .” [Chaudhuri, _The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo_ (London, 1960), p. 20.] But monism, Chaudhuri argues, “commits the rationalistic fallacy of identifying reality with a conceptually formulated principle or intellectual scheme.” (Ibid.) Regardless of what Aurobindo says in _Life Divine_, he does in the writings prior to Pondicherry, fit Chaudhuri’s definition of monism, which “interprets the essence of reality in terms of the concept of unity, and endows the one with a determinate logical or dialectical structure or a sum of well-defined powers and qualities.” (Ibid.) I will refer to Aurobindo’s scheme as “monistic” both on the grounds that the scheme conforms to Chaudhuri’s definition above and on grounds that it is an adequate descriptive term for the kind of positive, determinate language Aurobindo uses to construct the conceptual scheme.

Indian philosophers used a variety of images, none of which relied significantly upon the machine as a model. The world is a spider and his web, or a fire with many sparks, or a pool of salt-water in which every drop is penetrated with salt. Or the world is a waking dream, an embodied vision, a mass of knowledge arranged in a variety of phenomena expressing many ideas, all of which are but a part of the unchanging source.⁴

Aurobindo opts for the latter image—the world as embodied Intelligence. "The Spirit manifest as Intelligence is the basis of the world".⁵ Thus the prime reality is Spirit which manifests itself as idea. Ideas are prior to all forms, all phenomena:

We see that tree and say "Here is a material thing;" but if we ask how the tree came into existence, we have to say, it grew or evolved out of the seed. But growth or evolution is only a term describing the sequence in a process. It does not explain the origin or account for the process itself. Why should the seed produce a tree and not some other form of existence? The answer is, because that is its nature. But why is that its nature? ... That is the law, is the answer. But why is it the law? The only answer is that it is so because it is so; that it happens, why no man can say. In reality when we speak of an idea, when we speak of the nature of a thing, we speak of an idea. Nowhere can we lay our hands on an object, a visible force, a discernible momentum and say "Here is an entity called Law or Nature".⁶

Ideas are prior to forms, ideas are the source of forms, and forms are but manifestations of ideas. "The form is phenomenon, the idea is reality".⁷ The ideas, however, are

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4. Ibid., p. 99.
5. Ibid., p. 100.
7. Ibid., p. 103.
but manifestations of Spirit. "Spirit, as existence, sat, is one; as Intelligence it multiplies itself without ceasing to be one". Therefore all material things contain the hidden spirit. Aurobindo calls the hidden spirit Prajñā, the universal Intelligence. "The energy of Prajñā is what the Europeans call Nature". Objects animate and inanimate do not shape themselves; they are shaped by the hidden Spirit—a power behind the objects.

Thus Brahman, the ultimate power, is Spirit manifesting itself as Intelligence; on a scale of descending levels Intelligence manifests itself in material substance. Matter, is formed into specific objects by a rational power. Man, as embodied Intelligence, has a direct relation to Brahman—a relation of unity by participation in Intelligence and Spirit.

If the universe is such a manifestation of one Spirit by Intelligence, two problems emerge for Aurobindo. The immediate problem is that of defining precisely the relation of matter to spirit; and a secondary problem (to be considered later as the problem of evil) has to do with how the Intelligence as shaper of the material world can be consistently maintained in a world which appears often to be irrational, arbitrary, and hostile. The first problem is broached by asking, if both matter and spirit are real, and if spirit is the one source of the material many, how are they related? How does the One become the Many? Or how can it be seen that affirming both One and Many there is no inconsistency implied? Aurobindo recognizes the problem as basic to his cosmology (and in his own way universalizes the problem by calling it "the greatest of all philosophical problems which human thought has struggled to solve"). He rejects the alternatives ascribed to "Idealism" and "Materialism"—that is, either to deny the existence of the phenomenal world or to deny the reality of

9. Ibid., p. 103.
a conscious Intelligence. Aurobindo does not really resolve the problem, but rather interprets the problem.\textsuperscript{11}

In terms of Aurobindo’s system the answer is that phenomena are Intelligence diversified. It is this assertion which provides the reconciliation between the One and the Many; and it also is the basis for his synthesis of Upanishadic Absolutism with Shākta, his theory of yoga, and even his program for freedom as national self-affirmation. For phenomenal reality as diversification of Intelligence means for Aurobindo a spiritualization of all reality.\textsuperscript{12}

Aurobindo insists that the Upanishads do not deny the reality of the phenomenal world; rather the texts identify it with Brahman who transcends the world. Brahman is the “One without a second”, “the All”.\textsuperscript{13} But if Brahman is All, then there can be nothing but Brahman. The One as the All and the All as One must be understood as “the one Intelligence looking at itself from a hundred view-points, each point conscious of and enjoying the existence of the others”.\textsuperscript{14} Therefore

11. I am drawing a distinction between “resolving” a problem (that is to say, providing a solution which makes it no longer a problem), “explaining” a problem (to reveal or clarify it as a problem), and “interpreting” a problem (to set the problem into a context and draw out its implications in terms of that context). Interpreting and explaining; of course, overlap at certain points, since an explanation usually involves providing a conceptual context. However, the intentions of the protagonist must be considered: Here I think Aurobindo intends to “resolve”, the problem; he ends up merely “interpreting”—that is, setting the problem into his conceptual framework. This indeed, clarifies it as a problem (and therefore “explains” it also), but that is clearly not his intention. So if he does not resolve the problem he does interpret it.

12. The problem still remains, since Aurobindo’s assertion just begs the question, how does the One become Many? That is, how can there be diversification: of one into many at the same time as the reality and the unity of both are maintained?


Brahman, the One, is eternal, and the phenomenal, the Many, are eternal as well:

The shoreless stream of idea and thought, imagination and experience, name and form, sensation and vibration sweeps onward forever, without beginning, without end, rising into view, sinking out of sight; through it the one Intelligence with its million self-expressions pours itself abroad, an ocean with innumerable waves. One particular self-expression may disappear into its source and continent, but that does not and cannot abolish the phenomenal universe. The One is forever, and the Many are forever because the One is forever. So long as there is a sea, there will be waves.\textsuperscript{15}

Aurobindo refers to the Isha Upanishad as the clearest expression of this notion of the One containing the Many. He insists that the Upanishad has been misinterpreted by wrongly applying Sankara’s notion of māyāvāda, and that such misinterpretation has resulted unfortunately in the “drive towards withdrawal that is Illusionism and the much-praised inaction of the Sannyasi...”.\textsuperscript{16} Aurobindo maintains that Sankara erred when confronted by the apparent contradiction of the Upanishad which speaks of both the “immutable Ishwara” and the “restless Prakriti.” But the law of contradiction which mutually excludes opposites from being true at one and the same time is itself contradicted by the Upanishad, according to Aurobindo. Whereas Sankara agreed with the law of contradiction, and therefore assumed that “if the Divine is one, then however omnipotent He might be, He cannot be many”.\textsuperscript{17} The result is the doctrine of Māyā, that the apparent phenomenal world is not real but illusion. Aurobindo calls this “a

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
totally ruinous deduction" :^{18}

The Seer-Rishi of the Upanishad at each step tramples on that law and in each sloka announces its invalidity; he finds in the secret heart of the opposites the place for the reconciliation and harmony of their contradiction. The oneness of the universe in motion and the immobile Purusha, enjoyment of all by renunciation of all, eternal liberation by full action, perpetual stability of the Brahman in movement, unbound and inconceivable motion in the eternal immobility, the oneness of the Brahman without attributes and the Lord of the universe with attributes, the inadequacy of Knowledge alone or of Ignorance alone for attaining Immortality, Immortality obtained by simultaneous worship of Knowledge and Ignorance. . . .

The Upanishad illustrates the infinite aspects of the infinite Brahman and, because it does not uphold any particular philosophic view, a thousand philosophic views have sprouted from this single seed.^{19}

The idea that the Many are contained in the One means that the phenomenal world is but a self-manifestation of the One. Aurobindo affirms a principle of evolution as the means by which an orderly manifestation occurs:

The stress of the hidden Spirit expresses itself . . . in events and the majestic course of the world. This is the Zeitgeist, this is the purpose that runs through the process of the centuries, the changes of the suns, this is that which makes evolution possible and provides it with a way, means and a goal.^{20}

Since the Many are contained in the One, the notion of causation as satkāryavāda (the identity of cause and effect) is implicitly affirmed by Aurobindo. Satkāryavāda implies that

18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., pp. 49-50.
the cause contains in toto all effects, so that whereas differences might manifest themselves as effects in a casual sequence, nothing new ever occurs. The effects are contained in the cause. Therefore, the One contains the Many.21

The “school” solutions of Advaita, Vishishtādvaita, and Dvaita, all of whom as well affirm satkāryavāda, are dismissed by Aurobindo as but relative viewpoints which have been erroneously absolutized. They function as points of view, but they fail as complete answers:

Advaita is true, because the Many are only manifestations of the One, Vishishtādvaita is true because ideas are eternal and having manifested, must have manifested before and will manifest again,—the Many are eternal in the One, only they are sometimes manifest and sometimes unmanifest. Dvaita is true, because although from one point of view the One and the Many are eternally and essentially the same, yet from another, the idea in its manifestation is eternally different from the Intelligence in which it manifests. If unity is eternal and unchangeable, duality is persistently recurrent. The Spirit is infinite, illimitable, eternal; and infinite, illimitable, eternal in its stress towards manifestation, filling endless space with innumerable existences.22

The key words are “infinite” and “eternal.” If one posits infinity and eternity, then the possibility of an infinite number

21. A satkāryavāda view of causation puts Aurobindo in agreement at this point with the traditional schools of Sāmkhya, Vishistādvaita Vedānta, Bhedābheda, Bhāmati Advaita, and Vivarna Advaita. (See Karl Potter, Presuppositions of India’s Philosophies (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963). Aurobindo is closest to Sāmkhya, Vishistādvaita, and Bhedābheda, all of whom assert that the whole is equal to the sum of the parts, whereas the remainder of the schools affirming satkāryavāda assert that parts are unreal. Thus it is more accurate to speak of the parts as Paripāma (transformation of the One) for Aurobindo than “manifestation” of the One (a term usually associated with vivarta, the advaitan notion that the parts are unreal or illusion (mâyā).

of perspectives is provided from which to perceive the relationship of the One and the Many. Aurobindo does not draw the conclusion that the universe is therefore unintelligible or that the evolutionary process is unintelligible. It may be ambiguous; but ambiguity is a subjective problem of perspective. And it can be removed by the clarification which comes through spiritual insight.23

Behind the phenomenal world of variety and change there is the stable, unmoving, unchanging, eternal soul, Purusha. “In the whole, the Purusha or soul is one,—there is One Spirit which supports the stir of the Universe. . . .”24 Within the individual person the One is manifested in three spiritual aspects. Man possesses within himself three different aspects of the One Spirit. Aurobindo recalls the Upanishadic figure of the two birds perching upon one tree to illustrate. One bird on a lower branch eats the fruit of the tree; the other, seated on a higher branch watches the eating bird. The eater is a figure of the “unknowing” soul (anisha, not lord of itself); the observer is the “knowing” soul (isha, lord of itself). “It is when the eater looks up and perceives the greatness of the watcher and fills himself with it that grief, death, subjection—in one word māyā, ignorance and illusion, cease to touch him”.25

23. This sort of argument is consistent with Aurobindo’s scheme as well, for it assumes that greater insight comes by realization of more spirituality. Since spirit is associated with Intelligence, the spiritually adept man will “know” more than the less spiritually adept man will. This becomes an even stronger commitment for Aurobindo during the āśram years, when he insists that the sadhaks at the āśram surrender themselves totally to himself and the Mother for guidance in all matters. “You have to develop the power and the habit of taking refuge in the protection of the Mother and myself. . . . You should repeat always to yourself . . . ‘Sri Aurobindo and the Mother know better than myself . . . they must surely be acting for the best and in a greater light than that of ordinary human knowledge.’ See Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother (Pondicherry, 1953), p. 403.


25. Ibid.
The figure is extended by Aurobindo to explain that the tree itself is female whereas the birds are male. The female is the tree with its sweet and bitter fruit. One of the birds enjoys the fruit of the tree; the other has put it away from himself. The tree is called Prakriti, "universal Energy", or "Nature". The birds are two Purushas; the observing bird is called akshara, "immutable spirit", and the eating bird is called kshara, "apparently mutable". But above the two Purushas is another, the Purushottama, the One, the All, who occupies and possesses not only the tree itself but the two birds as well. Therefore it is higher than either kshara or akshara and higher than prakriti.

According to Aurobindo the Bhagavad Gītā in the thirteenth and fifteenth chapters offers the correct interpretation of the figure:

"There are two Purushas in the world, the akshara and the kshara,—the kshara is all creatures, the akshara is Kautastha, the one on the summit. There is another Purusha, the highest (uttama), called also the Paramatma or Supreme Spirit, who enters into the three worlds... and sustains them as their imperishable lord." And in the thirteenth chapter, while drawing the distinction between the lower Purusha and the higher, Sri Krishna defines more minutely the relations of God and the individual soul to Nature. "Prakriti is the basic source of cause and effect and agency; the Purusha, of the sense of enjoyment, of happiness and grief; for it is the soul in Nature (Purusha in Prakriti) that enjoys the threefold workings of things caused by Nature... and it is the attachment of the soul to the gunas that is the cause of births in bodies, good and evil. The highest Purusha in this body is the one who watches, who sanctions, who enjoys,

26. Ibid., p. 88.
who upholds, who is the mighty Lord and the Supreme Soul”.27

But it must be remembered that the Supreme Soul—the Purushottama—is universal. He is contained in all creatures, all character, all ideas, all experience. He is all things at once. The individual is but a partial manifestation of the Supreme Soul. The individual (Jiva) is the kshara purusha, and between the kshara purusha and the Supreme stands the akshara purusha—the bird on the summit, the undisturbed observer of Nature’s activity. It is the akshara purusha which is the real self of man, it is “our divine unity with God, our inalienable freedom from that which is transient and changing”.28

Aurobindo admits an affinity to Sāmkhya dualism in such an explanation, but he rejects the dualism for a developmental monism. The developmental scheme out of which Intelligence forms itself into Matter is as follows: the Purushottama, then the akshara, then kshara, then prakriti. For Aurobindo, the Samkhya dualism is united under Purushottama, Brahman manifest as Intelligence. The evolution of the material universe is actually the self-manifestation of Purushottama through prakriti; thus a sharp line drawn between the spiritual and the material is avoided, and for Aurobindo all can be traced back to the One. The movement from ignorance toward realization of ātman-Brahman as a unity is from life as ordinarily experienced in prakriti toward existential awareness of Purushottama. “The akshara purusha is our real self, our divine unity with God, our inalienable freedom from that which is transient and changing”.29 Sāmkhya errs because it recognizes only the reality of the akshara purusha and does not consider the kshara purusha.30 Therefore Sāmkhya cannot satisfactorily account for differentiation within the realm of phenomenal experience

27. Ibid., pp. 88-89.
28. Ibid., p. 91.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
and must logically conclude that every individual is precisely like every other individual. The development and experience of any other soul in nature would be an exact replica of the development and experience of any other soul.31

But Aurobindo maintains:

It is the kshara purusha who is all creatures, and the variety of experience, character, and development is effected by a particular part of the universal swabhava or nature of conscious existence in phenomena, being attached to a particular individual or jiva. This is what is meant by saying that it is a part of God which becomes the jiva. This swabhava, once determined, does not change; but it manifests various parts of

31. I think that this is a misreading of Śaṁkhyā by Aurobindo. In fact, the Śaṁkhyā argument for plurality of souls rests upon the grounds that what happens to one does not happen to others, that is, that one experience is not like another. And in particular, the release of one soul does not entail the release of all others. Surendranath Dasgupta in his book Yoga as Philosophy and Religion (second edition; Port Washington, N.Y., 1970) argues that “the plurality of the purushas was the most consistent thing they could think of.” (p. 29) Any other view would have amounted to a compromise with the Vedanta doctrine which denies the plurality of souls and the reality of a substantial universe. And Ninian Smart in Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy (New York, 1964) when discussing Śaṁkhyā under the rubric of *Distinctionism says, “... *Distinctionism might have posited just one *soul, mirrored in different ways by the various *intelects (this would bring it close to Shankara’s *Non-Dualism). For there is some difficulty in individuating *souls who all have the same nature (consciousness) and who all, as it were, occupy the same place, being all pervasive. However, it is argued that there are innumerable *souls, on the ground that what happens to one does not happen to the others which ought to happen if they were all one. For instance, the *release of one *soul does not entail the release of all. This is detectably so, since one can discriminate those who have attained *release in the manner prescribed by *Distinctionism, and one can observe that other beings retain consciousness, which ex hypothesi is due to the conjunction of the *soul’s luminosity with the translucent medium of the various *intelects.” (p. 83) Aurobindo’s argument with Śaṁkhyā is, rather, that for him the universe must be united under the One.
itself, at various times, under various circumstances, in various forms of action or development it has to enjoy. It is for this reason that the purusha in Nature is called kshara, fluid, shifting, although it is not in reality fluid or shifting, but constant, eternal and immutable, sanatana. It is the variety of its enjoyment in Time, Space, and Causality that makes it kshara.\textsuperscript{32}

If existence within time, space, and causality determines the kshara state, then the akshara state is above and beyond time, space, and causality; it is "aware of, but undisturbed by the continual multitudinous flux and reflux of Prakriti".\textsuperscript{32} Purushottama, on the other hand, is even higher and more encompassing; it is both in prakriti and beyond it, embracing it, experiencing it, enjoying it, but unperturbed, unmoved by it.

Change and development in the world is determined by the kshara purusha. But it is not conducted by the kshara purusha. The distinction is important: "It is Prakriti, the Universal Energy, that conducts development under the law of cause and effect, and is the true agent".\textsuperscript{34} The soul is in reality not the agent of action or activity, but it is prior to prakriti (not, however, prior chronologically, since time is an irrelevant issue at the level of purusha). Confusion and bondage result from misunderstanding the proper agent of activity in the material world, and the proper order of the relation of matter to spirit. The individual soul "forgets himself and identifies himself with her [prakriti] so as to have the illusion of agency and, by thus forgetting himself, ceases to be lord of himself, becomes subject to Causality, imprisoned in Time and Space, bound by the work which he sanctions".\textsuperscript{35} The individual soul is in reality a part of the ultimate, made one in essence with the ultimate. He, however, experiences limitations of time, space,

\textsuperscript{32} "The Three Purushas," \textit{TIKY}, pp. 92-93.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid.}. 
and causality because he accepts the bondage through his ignorance or his failure to discriminate. The individual actually has a lordship over nature. But so long as he accepts bondage, his lordship cannot be realized and he remains limited.

For man to live as the highest ideal he must experience his oneness with the Supreme Soul:

The first step in self-liberation is to get rid of the illusion of agency, to realise that Nature acts, not the soul. The second is to remove the seige of phenomenal associations, by surrendering lordship to God, leaving Him alone to uphold and sanction by the abdication of one’s own independent use of these powers, offering up the privilege of the enjoyer to Him. All that is then left is the attitude of the akshara purusha, the free blissful self-existence watching the action of Prakriti, but outside it. The kshara withdraws into the akshara. When the sakshi or witness withdraws into God Himself, that is utter liberation.36

Aurobindo with such a cosmology is able to affirm the reality of the Upanishadic Brahman as the spiritual source of all reality. And at the same time he can affirm that the essence of man is one with Brahman—that ātman is Brahman. He rarely puts it into the Upanishadic formula of ātman is Brahman, however. Rather he speaks of Purushottama, of Intelligence, of Spirit, of God; and only rarely does he use the Sanskrit words ātman or Brahman.37

36. Ibid., pp. 96-97.
37. In the essay “The Three Purushas,” he speaks of Brahman as the All, One without a second. In another essay written also for Karmayogin, he laments the fact that he must translate everything into European terms because “our educated classes have become so unfamiliar with the deeper knowledge of their forefathers that it has to be translated into modern European terms before they can understand it.” See “The Need in Nationalism.” contained in Man—Slave or Free? (Pondicherry, 1966), p. 38.
Prakriti as the Shakti of the Universe

The other side of the synthesis of ātman-Brahman and Shākta—namely, worship of the Mother Goddess—is accounted for by Aurobindo’s treatment of prakriti as the feminine principle of the universe. Shakti is the Energy of the universe, the principle of activity. Shakti is feminine; she is the Mother of all things. Aurobindo attempts to show that there is both conceptual and scientific bases for maintaining the distinction between prakriti and purusha, and thus there is, in his view, a foundation for worship of the Mother. He argues that prakriti is an operative force which acts independently of spirit, but under the direction of a rational spiritual power; and he insists that science can confirm this through its investigations of hypnotism and other occult phenomena. “The first real proof which Science has had of the power of action independent of volition is the phenomena [sic] of hypnotism.” 38 The only problem with the scientific confirmation of the purusha-prakriti dichotomy for Aurobindo is that science has so far failed to properly understand what it is discovering. Science does not possess the necessary conceptual apparatus to rightly understand hypnotism. Scientists have wrongly assumed that in hypnotism the will of the subject has been given over to the control of the hypnotist. But this is an inadequate explanation on two counts. First the weak, passive personality would be the best subject for hypnotism on these grounds, whereas, in fact, the reverse is the case: the strong mind often forms a better subject than a weak-willed person. 39 On the second count, the explanation fails because if it were the hypnotist’s will commanding the will of the subject, then the subject himself could bring about the physical results quite independently of the hypnotist, since “the capacities of the instrument cannot be exceeded by the power working through the instrument....” 40 Thus, “we must suppose that it is neither the

38. “Yoga and Hypnotism,” Man—Slave or Free (M-SOF ?), p. 15.
39. Ibid., p. 16.
40. Ibid.
will of the operator nor the will of the subject nor the sum of these two wills that is active, but some other more potent force.” That other more potent force is prakriti—nature operative apart from purusha. This is the force which enables a man to become so rigid that strong men cannot bend him. This is the power which reverses the operations of the senses and nullifies pain. This is the agent which can change the fixed character of a man almost instantaneously.

A too radical separation of prakriti and purusha must be avoided, however, since in the order of the universe purusha is supreme over prakriti and therefore directs its activities. But prakriti is the agent of actions in the phenomenal world. The force is identified as Shakti. Thus one can regard the mind and the body as separate powers, but the proper order is for the mind (will) to exercise control over the body. For Aurobindo it is the volitional aspect of the mind which provides the contact between purusha and prakriti. The so-called feats of hypnotism, then, are nothing but an illustration of the truth that the mind (will) can alter the associations and conditions of the body.

According to Aurobindo:

...the mind is all and contains all. It is not the body which determines the laws of the body. It is the ordinary law of the body that if it is struck, pierced or roughly pressed, it feels pain. This law is created by the mind which associates pain with these contacts. ...

41. Ibid.

42. Aurobindo uses mind and will interchangeably, and unlike Sāṃkhya he does not argue that what is ordinarily associated with mind—namely, cogitation, analysis, judgment, volition—is really a part of prakriti. Rather Aurobindo seems to imply that what is of the mind is of purusha, so that the exact distinction between purusha and prakriti, while clearly maintained, is nowhere in these writings under discussion clearly articulated. But, of course, in terms of the system, Aurobindo must tie prakriti to purusha in terms of prakriti as a diversified manifestation of purusha at a lower level of spiritual refinement.
The pain and pleasure are not the result of the contact, neither is their seat in the body; they are the result of association and their seat is in the mind. . . . My emotions are like my physical feelings, the result of association, and my character is the result of accumulated past experiences with their resultant associations and reactions crystallising into habits of mind and heart summed up in the word character. These things like all the rest are not permanent or binding but fluid and mutable. . . . The associations of the mind are the stuff of which our body is made. They are more persistent in the body than in the mind and therefore harder to alter.43

Hypnosis is the inducement of a passive sleep which allows the hypnotist to form new ideas and associations in the subject's mind without being bothered by the old ideas and associations. The Indian yoga, however, provides a waking, conscious experience of the same sort. "Yoga similarly teaches passivity of the mind so that the will may act unhampered by the samskaras, the habits formed by experience in the body, heart of mind, that form the laws of our psychology."44

The existence and activity of the phenomenal world are explained by the subtle interaction of mind and matter. Mind is a species of matter, but it is not limited by matter, since it is related to purusha. There is therefore an ulterior, prior force working through the subtle medium called mind. The will of man is the jiva, which in turn is the individuated manifestation of the purusha. The other side of reality is the force, energy, prakriti or Shakti. But behind both is the single Self of the universe which contains at the level of individuation both the jiva and prakriti, both spirit and material substance. Aurobindo maintains that the scientific conclusions positing the material world to be prior to the psychical world are

44. Ibid., p. 20.
morally dangerous. They tend first to view man as a slave of matter, second to restrict the mind to its material constituents and therefore deny its independence from matter, and third, to see man as determined by heredity and environment rather than free. The reconstruction which Aurobindo provides asserts the mind over matter, spirit over nature, purusha over prakriti.

The role of prakriti as the female principle of Energy (Shakti) is of great significance to Aurobindo's view of the universe, man, and the nation. Prakriti is phenomenal existence shaped by the Purushottama, matter shaped by Intelligence. In action it is Shakti. This conceptual reality is symbolized by Aurobindo as the Mother Goddess, who gives birth to all things. The abstract concept of energy is Shakti; the concrete symbols are admitted as many—Kālī, Durgā, Jagatdhātrī, Umā, Pārvatī, Bhawani.46

Prakriti as Shakti functions for Aurobindo both at the level of concept and at the level of symbol. As concept it figures logically in the structure of Intelligence expressing itself in Matter. As symbol it personifies Shakti as Kālī, Durgā, Jagatdhātrī—all of whom point beyond themselves to Shakti, Prakriti, and finally Purushottama. At the conceptual level the purusha-prakriti distinction accounts for Spirit manifest in Matter. At the symbolic level prakriti as the Shakti of the universe personified in the Mother adds emotional fervor to worship, and particularly to Aurobindo's concept of nationalism as a condition to freedom. Aurobindo effects a transference from the popular symbol of the cult goddess Kālī to Kāli

45. "Man—Slave or Free?" in M-SOF ?, p. 4.
46. T. A. Gopinatha Rao, Elements of Hindu Iconography, Vol. I, Part II (Madras, 1914) discusses the devi and her many concrete manifestations as the personification of divine femininity. These are so numerous, Rao contends, that they can be only roughly classified according to the ages in which the personifications are said to appear, according to achievements accomplished, or according to her male companion or companions.
as a manifestation of the "Time-Spirit" in history:

In all movements, in every great mass of human action it is the Spirit of the Time, that which Europe calls the Zeitgeist and India kala, who expresses himself. Kali the mother of all, is the Shakti that works in secret in the heart of humanity, manifesting herself in the perpetual surge of men, institutions and movements, Mahakala, the Spirit within, whose energy goes abroad in her and moulds the progress of the world and the destiny of the nations.47

Kāli and Durgā had been incorporated into Indian nationalism prior to Aurobindo’s association with the movement. But Aurobindo’s conceptual scheme universalizes the cult of the Mother and makes intense devotion to her an activity of obedience to ultimate reality. Thus the nationalist effort takes on ultimate significance through identification of India as Mother, Mother as Shakti, and Shakti as the determinate activity of Purushottama. The implications of such a revaluation of the Goddess are developed by Aurobindo:

The work of national emancipation is a great and holy yajna of which boycott, Swadeshi, and national education and every other activity, great and small, are only major or minor parts. Liberty is the fruit we seek from the sacrifice, and the Motherland the goddess to whom we offer it; into the seven leaping tongues of the fire of the yajna we must offer all that we are and all that we have, feeding the fire even with our own blood and lives and happiness of our nearest and dearest; for the Motherland is the goddess who loves not a maimed and imperfect sacrifice, and freedom was never won from the gods by a grudging giver.48

The newspaper for which Aurobindo wrote, titled Bande

Mataram or "Hail to the Mother" was the voice of nationalism in Bengal for a time; selection of such a name suggests the extent to which mother-worship was incorporated into patriotism. It was Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the nineteenth century Bengali poet, from whom the title Bande Mataram came. Bankim wrote a poem and anthem with that title, and also provided the revaluation of the Mother Goddess as a symbol for national resurgence. Bankim reinterpreted the older Puranic mythology in such a way as to issue a call for a fervent patriotic religion. For example, Bankim revalued Krishna not as a god of the old mythology but as an ideal man or superman of all ages, under whose unifying influence the jarring and contending parts of the Indian community could be fashioned into a nation. "He held up the character Krishna as the symbol of national unity."

Bipin Chandra Pal, Aurobindo's co-editor, further revalued the older mythology by constructing an allegory of Indian history in terms of the Mother's manifestations. Jagatdhātri is the personification of Shakti riding a lion with a prostrate elephant underfoot; and this represents the Motherland in its jungle-clearing days, the Mother as She once was. Kāli, the grim goddess—dark, naked, with her garland of human skulls and bloody heads, dancing on prostrate Shiva—this is the Mother as she is, dark because ignorant of herself, bloody because her children are destroyed by famine and pestilence, desolate and decadent in social life because she tramples even her own god, Shiva. Durgā, the ten-headed goddess, armed with swords and spears in some hands, wheat sheaves in some, and offering courage and peace with other hands, rides a lion. She fights the demons, and is accompanied by Saraswati (goddess of knowledge and arts), is supported by Ganapati

49. See Haridas and Uma Mukherjee, Sri Aurobindo and the New Thought in Indian Politics, "Introduction," pp. xiv-xv; as well as Aurobindo's essays for Indu Prakash titled "Bankim Chandra Chatterjee."

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(god of wisdom) and Lakshmi (goddess of wealth), and is protected by Kartikeya (leader of the heavenly army). Durgā, resplendent in power, the conqueror, is the Mother as she will be. The cry "Bande Mataram" brings in the age of Durgā.51

Aurobindo adopts this sort of revaluation in many of his articles; he finds it consistent with his conceptual scheme of reality and with his immediate goal of national liberation. He identifies the goddess closely with India and even more closely with his native Bengal:

It is only a patriot who can understand the full significance of the Durga Pujahs in Bengal. It is a national festival. It is a sacrament which brings it home to us that the mother-land is no other than divinity itself,

51. Bipin Chandra pal, The Soul of India (Madras, 1923), pp. 95-99. The Mukherjees in SANT note how the cry "Bande Mataram" became a mantra of the nationalist movement in Bengal. "Hemendra Prasad Ghose informed us from her personal experience that it was in connection with the Town Hall meeting of August 7 (1905), that the cry of "Bande Mataram" was first uttered through a multitude of voices as a national mantra. From contemporary records we learn that the thousands of students, representing all communities, who had thronged on that day at the Calcutta College Square at noon, rent the sky with feverish shouts of "Bande Mataram" and other slogans in the course of their historic procession towards the Town Hall. From this moment "Bande Mataram" became a mighty battle cry of a subject nation in its fight for freedom.... Hardly a day passed in those days when the sky was not rent by the excited shouts of these two magic words." (p. xxii) The Mukherjees in another book titled India's Fight for Freedom or The Swadeshi Movement 1905-1906 (Calcutta, 1958) document instances of the specific repression of the cry "Bande Mataram" by the British. Of particular importance is the Lyon's Bande Mataram Circular issued to the commissioner of the Dacca Division on November 8, 1905, by P. C. Lyon, the Chief Secretary to the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam. The Circular is worded as follows: "I am desired by the Lieutenant-Governor to inform you that incidents have recently occurred which indicate that the shouting of the cry "Bande Mataram" in the streets or other public places is likely to provoke breaches of the peace. It should accordingly be stopped. I am to request that you will issue the necessary instructions to the Police to this effect." (p. 100)
that the divine energy and glory cannot but be intensely felt by every heart when meadows, groves and fields of the motherland appear to us appareled in celestial light. . . . With us Nature is one with Nature's God, . . . the Motherland in all her beauty and grandeur represents the Goddess of our worship. . . . 52

But he never forgets that the goddess really points to Shakti, the invincible and even ambiguous power which forms and shapes the material according to the divine plan. In an excur-sus on the Bhagavad Gītā Aurobindo shows how men must understand the action of Kāli in terms of the cosmology. The Battle of Kurukshetra illustrates the activity of Shakti. Arjuna wanted to retreat from battle because he was appalled at the thought of killing kinsmen. Sri Krishna convinces him intellectually of his error, and then manifests himself as Time:

"I am Time who waste and destroy the peoples; lo, I have arisen in my might, I am here to swallow up the nations. Even without thee all they shall not be, the men of war who stand arrayed in the opposing squadrons. Therefore do thou arise and get thee great glory, conquer thy foes and enjoy a great and wealthy empire. For these, they were slain even before and it is I who have slain them; be the occasion only, O Savyasachin." 53

What it means is that all had been moving inevitably toward Kurukshetra. Men did not know it; those who would have averted the battle actually helped its coming by their action or inaction:

In the lila of the Eternal, there are movements that are terrible as well as movements that are sweet and beautiful. The dance of Brindaban is not complete

52. BM, 10/9/07, SAPT, p. 149.

without the death-dance of Kurukshetra; for each is a part of that great harmonic movement of the world which progresses from discord to accord, from hatred and strife to love and brotherhood, from evil to the fulfillment of the evolution by the transformation of the suffering and sin into beauty, bliss, and good, *shivam shantam, suddham, anandam.*

Attempts to struggle against the current of *Shakti* are futile since it is the power of the universe manifest as Energy and Time which works. It is the *Purushottama* working through the lower realities of Time, Space, and Causality. And those who carry out the acts decreed by the Power are really but pawns in the hands of *Shakti*.

The man who slays is only the occasion, the instrument by which the thing done behind the veil becomes the thing done on this side of it. That which was true of the great slaying at Kurukshetra is true of all things that are done in this world, of all the creation, destruction and preservation that make up the *lila*.

Kali has entered... and Kali when she enters... cares nothing for rationality and possibility. She is the force of Nature that whirls the stars in their orbits, lightly as a child might swing a ball, and to that force there is nothing impossible.

The need of the moment for India, however, is to discover *Shakti* as the strength for resurgence. And India herself is one with that strength. *Shakti* revealed in this age as Strength:

What is a nation? What is our mother country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti, composed of the Shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation, just as Bhawani Mahisha Mardini sprang into being from the Shakti of all the millions

of gods assembled in one mass of force and welded into unity. The Shakti we call India, Bhawani Bharati, is the living unity of the Shaktis of three hundred million people; but she is inactive, imprisoned in the magic circle of tamas, the self-indulgent inertia and ignorance of her sons. To get rid of tamas we have but to wake the Brahma within.

Such a statement can be put into the conceptual scheme by saying that even as the essential life of man is united with Purushottama—the Ultimate Power—so the collective life of a people is united in the Shakti or Energy of their personal lives. And, as the manifestation of that power in the phenomenal world is also Shakti, a discovery of the corporate power of a people is a discovery of the Real, the Purushottama. Worship of the nation as the Mother, then, is penultimate in terms of the whole cosmology. But it is a necessary condition toward realization of the Ultimate. Since, for the man immersed in Prakriti the movement toward freedom is in the direction of the spiritual, the clearest manifestation of the spiritual outside of the individual psyche is the energy of Shakti (manifest now as Strength) shown in the world itself:

Strength then and again strength and yet more strength is the need of our race. But if it is the strength we desire, how shall we gain it if we do not adore the Mother of strength? She demands worship not for Her own sake, but in order that She may help us and give Herself to us. This is no fantastic idea, no superstition but the ordinary law of the universe. The gods cannot, if they would, give themselves unasked. Even the Eternal comes not unawares upon men. Every devotee knows by experience that we must turn to Him and desire and adore Him before the Divine Spirit pours in its ineffable beauty and ecstacy upon

the soul. What is true of the Eternal is true also of Her who goes forth from Him.57

Freedom is the goal of existence. Bondage is the condition of ordinary human experience, and bondage the state of India under British rule. Realization of freedom must come through liberation at the national level as well as at the personal level, since the conceptual order revealed ties the Many to the One in a unity of essence. The Many as exemplified in the nation must come to realize essential unity with the One. But even as personal realization cannot come to the man who is in bondage to prakriti, neither can the nation as a collective realize the unity while tied to the bondage of foreign rule. And even as prakriti is other than the essential reality of the person, so is the foreign power other than the essence of the nation. National freedom, therefore, is a necessary condition to collective spiritual realization.

Human Freedom and the Nature of Evil

Two problems emerge from the cosmology for Aurobindo. The one mentioned earlier has to do with the nature of evil in the world, given the notion of Shakti as the divine force behind all events. The other problem has to do with the nature of human freedom: if Kāli invariably is the cause of all action, the agent of all events, to what extent can it be said that man is free or that man has free-will?

The problem of free-will and determinism is the prior issue, since the question of the nature of evil depends for its amplification upon the question of freedom and determinism. In an essay for Karmayogin of 1910 Aurobindo recognizes the issue of free-will as problematic for his conceptual scheme. If all activity is carried on under the aegis of prakriti, can it be said that man is free to make morally significant choices? The word “freedom” is for Aurobindo's scheme a loaded one.

57. Ibid., p. 90.
It is the goal of existence, it is the realization toward which the divine force of evolution moves all things, and it is the inalienable condition of the purusha. The question of free-will, however, is significant, since the resolution of the problem of freedom-determinism depends upon the extent to which Aurobindo wants to see purusha and prakriti embodied as independent powers in the ordinary human condition. If Aurobindo sees the ordinary man's condition as one of absolute bondage to the forces of nature, then the independent and indeed prior power of purusha is present in a diminished state, and Aurobindo must account for such diminishment within the conceptual system. Moreover, if bondage of determinism is the case, possibility of achieving salvation by human effort is negated. If, however, he asserts that the ordinary man's condition is one of freedom in and above nature, then he must account for the experience of bondage to the powers of nature as they are revealed by the limitations of Time, Space, and Causality (as well as the traditional notion of Karma as the law which ties the individual to the effects of his acts).

Aurobindo contends that the answers of the West to the classical problem of free-will and determinism err on the side of determinism. He mentions only two such "Western" answers. The Calvinist position of the Christian tradition is really a form of fatalism, Aurobindo argues, which admits the absolute control of God over all events and acts. A second erroneous position is that of scientific determinism which posits heredity and environment, the laws of nature, as determinants. A third classical position recognized by Aurobindo is "Buddhism" and "post-Buddhist Hinduism." 58 This position states that Karma determines the state and condition of all men. But all three views are inadequate since an acceptable view for Aurobindo must synthesize both determinism of nature and freedom of spirituality into one view (in his terms relate

the reality of prakriti to the reality of purusha). And he finds such a synthesis possible. "If we go back to the true Hindu teaching independent of Buddhist influence we shall find that it gives us a reconciliation of the dispute by a view of man's psychology in which both Fate and Free-will are recognized." 59 The reconciliation is effected by the admission that there is both law and the possibility of realized freedom from that law. The Hindu conception of law Aurobindo treats under the notion of dharma—"that by which the action of the universe, the action of its parts, the action of the individual is held together." 60 *Karma* is the application of this general law to human experience: antecedent actions determine subsequent conditions. As a law of human experience it means that both thoughts and feelings as well as deeds are part of a causal matrix which makes a personality what it is, and that the ordinary experience of a personality is that of a life determined antecedently through habits, tendencies, fortunes, past lives, and deeds, all of which are bound to the chain of *Karma* through future lives.

But this view of a determined fate is merely that condition from which man needs liberation. It is existence in Time, Space, and Causality. If one posits nature as supreme and inexorable, then bondage through determinism is the whole of existence:

There can be no escape, unless there is something within us which is free and lord, superior to Nature. This entity the Hindu teaching finds in the spirit ever free and blissful which is one in essence and in reality with the Supreme Soul of the Universe. 61

The reality of freedom is contained in the spiritual life of man: "the Spirit does not act, it is Nature that contains the action." 62 Therefore the spirit is free and unbound; matter is bound.

60. *Ibid*.
The resolution of the problem is contained in the distinction held between purusha and prakriti: purusha stands aside from prakriti and watches the action of prakriti:

The thing which acts is Prakriti, Nature, which determines the svabhava of things and is the source and condition of Law or dharma. The soul or Purusha holds up the svabhava, watches and enjoys all the action and its fruit, sanctions the law or dharma. It is the king, Lord, or ishvara without whose consent nothing can be done by prakriti. But the king is above the law and free.63

Freedom is implied also in the teleological direction given to prakriti, which moves for the experience and liberation of all men. Bondage occurs from the original impulse of enjoyment of material experiences—a factor which creates a false identification of purusha with prakriti in the mind of the subject. Thus the ordinary human experience is to render purusha subordinate to prakriti and thus create a condition of bondage. The element of free-will in human life is the power of the soul over and above the workings of the agency of action. It assents to the workings of nature, and is actually the lord of nature:

It is this power of sanction that forms the element of free-will in our lives. The spirit consents not that itself shall be bound, but that its enjoyment should be bound by time and space and causality and by the svabhava and the dharma.64

It is because the soul enjoys the actions in space, time, and under the law of causality that habitual acts develop and that the removal of such habits must be effected by an established process and cannot be done spontaneously or instantaneously.

In order to experience freedom and mastery over the determinate laws of nature, the soul must reach back into itself

63. Ibid., p. 28.
64. Ibid.
for identification with the Infinite, the universal soul, Purushottama. "Its will must be one with the universal Will. The human soul is one with the universal Spirit, but in the body it stands out as something separate and unconnected..."65

The separate, unconnected appearance of the soul, however, is only for the purpose of differentiation of essences and things in the universe. In actuality the soul is tied to the universal Purushottama. Thus the choice open to all men is that of either apparent bondage to the law of action in nature or of realized freedom from nature through realization of identity with the free paramātman—the highest soul.66

The second problem—that of the nature and power of evil—is likewise raised when it is asserted that prakṛiti is the agent of all action and that the purusha remains above and apart from either the cause or effect of action. If it is prakṛiti as Shakti, the Mother, behind the rise and fall of nations, the creation, destruction and preservation of the universe, then what is the nature of evil? Can one speak convincingly of evil as opposed to good if the agent of all action is finally the divine power? Moreover, what ethical stance is possible in the face of concrete events of war, famine, disease, and destitution if the Mother stands behind it all? If it is Kali entering into men to accomplish acts or events of historical import, what ethical sense can be made of any given situation? And, for Aurobindo, an even more pressing issue is raised: how

65. Ibid., p. 29.
66. This again is "interpretation" of the problem. He is saying that in terms of his scheme, both freedom and determinism are the case. But freedom is prior to determinism on the scale of reality; therefore freedom is a possibility, though not the actual realization of every man. Moreover, the question of whether or not men have, in fact, the freedom to effect conditions and events in the realm of Prakṛiti remains. He implies that they do. But he does not show how. And the How remains problematic. If the present condition is bondage, and if the goal is freedom, it must be shown at what point the bound man is free to act for his own salvation.
does one know he is acting for righteousness by opposing the imperial rule of Britain?

In terms of the traditional philosophical problem of the relation of good and evil, Aurobindo comes out on the side of affirming the ultimate power of good. He sees the problem rather in the manner of the Greek and Christian traditions of philosophy: if the Ultimate Power is good, how then is there evil? is the form of the question. If the Power can remove evil but will not, then he is not good; if he would remove evil but cannot, then his power is not ultimate; if he has neither the power nor the will to remove evil, then he is neither good nor ultimately powerful. The options with such a formulation are clear: one can deny the reality of evil and call it disguised good; or one can deny the present power of the Ultimate and say it is an evolving power; or one can deny the notion of an Ultimate Power.

Aurobindo’s choice is to deny the reality of evil: he asserts that all things really are disguised good. He argues the position from previous premisses concerning the nature of Ultimate Reality:

To our mind there is no escaping from the belief that, if God exists, He is all. All proceeds from Him: from what other source can it proceed? Therefore evil must proceed from Him, evil must exist in Him. Since He is All-Wise, for all knowledge is His, it must exist for some wise and perfect purpose. Since He is All-Love, it must exist for good and not for anything which contradicts the good.67

Since God’s knowledge and wisdom are infinite, the talk about such wisdom must not be restricted merely to the surface conditions of events or things. To see evil to be disguised good demands a special insight into the workings of nature. The point is to learn to observe the will of the Power behind things. What appears as evil is really the good “disintegrating

to prepare for a higher good.” Aurobindo finds evidence in historical progress: what was at one time an ideal society is at a later time barbarous and evil. Therefore good is relative to the point at which it appears on the evolutionary scale; and evil is merely absence of correct perspective. Evil, therefore, is lack of insight, vision, or enlightenment.

Aurobindo recognizes that at the abstract level, evil is quite easily disposed of through such reasoning. But, at the level of personal suffering and pain, evil cannot be so easily dismissed as disguised good. Aurobindo remains consistent to his scheme, however. Man at the lowest level of development resists pain and grief by the coarseness of his composition; at a higher level of the future he will no longer experience it since he will rise above it. Man presently experiences pain and grief because of his intermediate position on the evolutionary scale. “It was knowledge of good and evil that brought grief and sin into the world; when that knowledge is surmounted man will rise above grief and sin.” Pain is therefore but a shadow, and not apart of man’s intrinsic essence. Man’s essence is freedom; and freedom is bliss and joy. Therefore evil is not real to the one who realizes his essence.

But another application of evil as disguised good must be consistently handled. On what grounds can one oppose political bondage and repression by a foreign power if bondage and repression are but disguised good? On what grounds can Aurobindo justify active involvement in anti-British movements within India?

Aurobindo finds it necessary to admit both the greater good of British rule in India and the final good of Indian freedom from that rule. Whereas the Bande Mataram editorials in particular vilify the British in strong language, he occasionally admits that the British must be seen as controlled and destined by divinity too. And therefore British rule in India has been

68. Ibid., p. 33.
69. Ibid., p. 34.
for good. He refers to it as a "provision of Nature... brought in for a time in order to cure the previous unnatural condition of insufficient cohesiveness." And he insists that a divine intention lies behind subjection of India:

The subjugation of India is explicable neither in the ability of the men whose names figure as the protagonists nor to the superior genius of the conquering nation... In other words, it was one of those cases in which a particular mission was assigned to a people not otherwise superior to the rest of the world... But "the time has come when India can, should and will, become a great, free, and united nation." "In a subject country society is deprived of its normal tendency towards progress." And it is this principle which provides the basis for Aurobindo’s affirmation of nationalist ideals. "Foreign rule was therefore made to be resisted; and to acquiesce in it is to defeat the very intention with which Nature created it." Therefore good comes out of the subjugation of India by the very resistance to foreign rule which the subjugation inspires. Aurobindo finds an interpretation for both the evil and the good of imperialism within his system: the apparent evil of political oppression and enslavement is really a divinely appointed spur toward freedom and a higher good. And the nationalist movement is justified on these grounds.

70. MB, 4/27/07, SANT, p. 19.
71. BM, 4/12/08, BMIN, p. 68.
72. BM, 4/26/08, SANT, p. 17.
73. BM, 10/1/07, SAPT, p. 137.
74. BM, 4/27/07, SANT, p. 19.
75. See also "The Problem of the Past," contained in Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual, No. 26 (1967), a reprint from an article for the Dharma, and translated from the Bengali by Niranjan. Here Aurobindo uses the notions of satta, rajas, and tamas as psychological principles to explain the success of the British in India. According to this interpretation, the Indian nation was overcome with tamas, whereas the British by nature are full of rajas. Rajas contributed a sense of national feeling to the British, whereas tamas made the Indians lethargic and irresponsible.
Aurobindo's conceptual scheme of the universe attempts to explain the universe by reducing the multiplicity of phenomena to a unity which corresponds to the religious goal—freedom. Freedom as a spiritual reality is at once man's possession because of his intrinsic oneness with the Ultimate. But the manifestation of Spirit (Purushottama) in Matter through the agency of prakriti results in the predicament of man as bound to nature. The universe, however, is forever under the rule of the Spirit, and all things work toward the realization of the priority of Spirit over Matter. Thus bondage is a state of ignorance. Freedom is realization of unity with Purushottama.

In this chapter I have tried not primarily to explicate the cosmology, but to show how the conceptual scheme relates to the religious goal and how nationalism can be a legitimate outgrowth of the cosmology. There are some inherent problems to such a cosmology which I will point out in the final chapter. In the next chapter I will show how Aurobindo's religion calls for a ritualization of life which spiritualizes not only yoga but the nationalist concerns of Boycott, Swadeshi, Passive Resistance, and National Education.
Chapter IV

THE RITUALIZATION OF LIFE:
YOGA AND ACTIVISM

The nationalist movement is shown to be imbued with religious significance by Aurobindo’s synthesis of moksha and swarāj. Such a synthesis unites the goal of existence with the goal of nationalism. A second synthesis, the union of the ātman-Brahman notion and Shākta clarifies the path to freedom and fits the nationalist movement into the traditional Indian religious context. A new synthesis is created by Aurobindo when he constructs a program to implement the ideal of swarāj. The new synthesis unites the traditional ascetic ideal (yoga) with an activist program. The result is a revaluation both of yoga and patriotism and a reconception of the notion of karma-yoga. The synthesis centers in what Aurobindo refers to as the Karmayogin, the ideal patriot who works selflessly without attachment to the implications of his acts. According to Aurobindo’s testimony, the ideal of the Karmayogin came to him most forcefully during his internment in the Alipore Jail as an under-trial prisoner. He interprets the whole jail experience as a schooling by the divine:

He placed the Gita in my hands. I was not only to understand intellectually but to realise what Sri Krishna demanded of Arjuna and what He demands of those who aspire to do His work, to be free from repulsion and desire, to do work for Him without the demand for fruit, to renounce self-will and become a passive and faithful instrument in His hands, to have an equal heart for high and low, friend and opponent, success and failure, yet not to do His work negligently. I realised what the Hindu religion meant.... The Sanatan Dharma is life itself. ...1

The testimony, couched in traditional terminology of Krishna worship, yoga, and the Gitā, assumes the synthesis of moksha and swarāj. But it also assumes a new synthesis of the Gitā-yoga and political activism. Aurobindo’s testimony of the jail experience really amounts to a reaffirmation and intensification of a prior conviction, namely, that nationalism is itself a kind of ritual activity, an acting out of universal truth. The faith or “creed” of nationalism is to permeate and control all actions—political, social, mental and spiritual. The “Eternal Religion” is to be found in the present and necessary activity of swarāj.

The necessity of synthesizing yoga and political activism is apparent from Aurobindo’s reading of the political situation. The situation is one in which a foreign power exercises complete control over the Indian populace in order to exploit the country for economic gain. But to implement the initial goal of economic gain, the British had to expand their rule into other areas of Indian life as well, with the result that India was exploited and impoverished in the whole of her national life. The situation, then, is one of ever-expanding British power and ever-weakening Indian resistance. A realistic Indian response demands the acquisition of a comparable power at comparable levels of British encroachment. In other words, where the British have used economics to overpower Indian economics, a weapon of power must be developed to counteract British economic power. The same must be said for all areas of

2. To make nationalist activity into ritual is not a post-Alipore development. Bande Mataram editorials, the “Bhawani Mandir” pamphlet, and Speeches all indicate that for Aurobindo political activity was spiritual activity. This is apparent particularly in his speech “The Present Situation” at Bombay, January, 1908: “Nationalism is a creed which you shall have to live. . . . If you are going to be a nationalist, if you are going to assent to this religion of nationalism, you must do it in a religious spirit. You must remember that you are instruments of God.” See Sources of Indian Tradition, Wm. Theodore de Bary, General Editor (New York, 1958, 1967), II, 176-177.
British encroachment. Power must be met with power. Any other method is politically unsophisticated, unrealistic, and doomed to failure:

Nobody seriously expects the English in India to forego any of the manifold and material advantages that are bound up with their despotic possession of the country, merely out of a philanthropic tenderness for the feelings, affections or interests of the ruled. Nobody sincerely thinks that we are going to part with an atom of their arbitrary and absolute power, merely because our abject and servile condition awakes in our people anger and a settled bitterness and ill-feeling.\(^3\)

Since both spiritual and political exploitation has occurred, both spiritual and political power are demanded. But since political freedom is integrated with spiritual freedom, the methods of implementation must combine the political with the spiritual, or to remain consistent with Aurobindo's scheme, the methods of resistance must present political realities in the light of ultimate spiritual truth. Such a synthesis at the level of power politics is symbolized for Aurobindo in the figure of the *Karmayogin*.

The normally disparate concerns of *yoga* and activism are united through the revaluation of this traditional figure of the *Karmayogin*. The integration of political and spiritual power by the creation of a new ascetic is apparent in Aurobindo's thought as early as the "Bhawani Mandir" pamphlet of 1905. The pamphlet calls for the creation of a secluded temple devoted to the worship of the Mother Goddess; the temple would harbor a select group of devotees whose devotion might harness the power necessary for the work of nationalism.\(^4\)

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4. The temple plan was never implemented, although some preliminary planning was done. The pamphlet itself caused considerable stir among British officials (see Mukherjee, *Sri Aurobindo and the New Thought*, "Introduction.") Of importance to this study, however, is the idea which Aurobindo advocates: a group of monks are to provide through yogic
Aurobindo’s plan for the temple rests upon his assumption that three things are necessary for the revitalization of India. The first is bhakti directed toward the Mother of Strength. The implementation of bhakti demands a temple built to “the white Bhawani,” the Mother of Strength, the Mother of India. But adoration is worthless without the second necessity: karma, or action, which centers in a new order of monks after the Brahmcharin. These are to be men who renounce all in order to work for the Mother. Why Brahmcharins?

1) Because it is only in proportion as we put from us the preoccupation of bodily desires and interests, the sensual gratifications, lusts, longings, indolences of the material world, that we can return to the ocean of spiritual force within us.

2) Because for the development of Shakti, entire concentration is necessary.... We need a nucleus of men in whom the Shakti is developed to its uttermost extent, in whom it fills every corner of the personality and overflows to fertilize the earth. These, having the fire of Bhawani in their hearts and brains, will go forth and carry the flame to every nook and cranny of our land.

The third necessity for the revitalization of the nation is jnana, knowledge. But knowledge of a peculiar sort—the knowledge of vedānta, the so-aham, divinity within man.

The order of Brahmcharins should not be isolated from society. The rules of the order contain prescriptions for activities such as mass education of illiterate peoples, social and economic rehabilitation at the village level, construction and operation of schools and factories. The vows of the monks prescribe purity in body and mind, including abstinence from sex, strict diet, disciplined program of meditation, and discipline the needed spiritual energy for the rebirth of the nation socially, politically, spiritually.

6. Ibid., p. 93.
the disavowal of personal monetary profits for any work. This union of the traditional ascetic ideal of yoga with activity directed toward alleviation of current needs produced by political, economic, and intellectual impoverishment forms the basic synthesis of traditional religious practices and modern political and social activities. The result is the reconception of yoga as a social and politically relevant discipline.

By the time of the publication of the Karmayogin in 1909-10, Aurobindo is arguing that it is a mistake to assume that yoga is socially irrelevant. The spiritual ideal is not divorced from ordinary life. The yogin is not to be separated and isolated from the affairs of the mundane world. Rather the yogin is to infuse the world with spirituality and power. Thus the yogin is the one who brings together in his own person the affairs of both the spiritual and the mundane world. The disciplines associated with yoga are a means to such an end (to make yoga a means of dissociation from the world is to confuse the means as an end).7 Asceticism, therefore, is

7. This view runs counter to the view of yoga maintained by the Sāṃkhya-Yoga School. Dasgupta in Yoga as Philosophy and Religion (Port Washington, N.Y., 1970) maintains that “Sāṃkhya relied largely on philosophical thinking leading to discrimination as to the difference between prakriti and purusha...” (p. 164) And “Sāṃkhya does not admit the existence of God, and considers that salvation can be obtained only by a steady perseverance in philosophical thinking. ... With Sāṃkhya... avidyā is only the nondistinction of the difference between prakriti and purusha.” (Ibid.) When yoga is attached to Sāṃkhya, however, certain exercises for proper discrimination are incorporated and a subtle change in the notion of avidyā is introduced: “According to Yoga, avidyā... means positive untrue beliefs. ... Both Sāṃkhya and Yoga admit that our bondage to prakriti is due to an illusion or ignorance (avidyā), but Sāṃkhya holds the akhyāti theory which regards nondistinction of the difference as the cause of illusion, whereas the Yoga holds the anyathāk theory which regards positive misapprehension of the one as the other to be the cause of hyati, illusion.” (p. 164). But both, it is clear, advocate release as discrimination and therefore isolation from prakriti as the goal.

Ninian Smart in Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy notes that
conceived to be a means toward a higher goal, not an end in itself:

... the spiritual life finds its most potent expression in the man who lives the ordinary life of men in the strength of the Yoga and under the law of Vedanta. It is by such a union of the inner life and the outer in Śāṅkhyā-Yoga"... the nature of the soul as constituted by consciousness, in a pure and nondiscursive and nonimaginative form, gives the state of *release a somewhat negative aspect. Bliss and sorrow being contingent upon association with the *natural world, the liberated *soul has no further particular experiences: for this reason its disappearance from the scene is scarcely distinguishable from annihilation. This state of *release is described as *isolation (kaivalya) in both *Distinctionism (Śāṅkhyā) and Yoga *viewpoints." (pp. 83-84).

The Śāṅkhyakārikā of Ishvara Krishna, edited and translated by S. S. Suryanaryana Sastri (Madras, 1935) and the Tatata-Kaumudi (Vacaspati Misra's Commentary on the Śāṅkhyakārikā (850 A.D.), translated by Ganganatha Jha (Poona, 1934), suggests quite clearly the same idea—that isolation is the goal of the Śāṅkhyā-Yoga philosophy. In the following kārikāś from Ishvara Krishna’s treatise the translation of Sastri is followed, except where marked by Jha in brackets:

LXIV. “Thus, from the repeated study of the truth there results that wisdom, ‘I do not exist, naught is mine, I am not, which leaves no residue to be known, is pure, being free from ignorance, and is absolute.”

LXV. “Thereby does the pure spirit, resting like a spectator, perceive Primal Nature, which has ceased to be productive, and because of the power of discriminative knowledge, has turned back from the seven forms” (i.e., dispositions).

LXVI. “‘She has been seen by me,’ thinks the one and hence loses all interest; ‘I have been seen,’ thinks the other and ceases to act. Hence, though their connection is still there, there is no motive for further evolution.” (Jha)

LXVII. “Virtue and the rest having ceased to function as the spirit remains invested with the body, because of the force of past impressions... which persist for a while by virtue of the momentum imparted by a prior impulse.”

LXVIII. “When the separation from the body has at length been attained, and by reason of the purpose having been fulfilled, Nature ceases to act,—then he attains eternal and absolute isolation.” (Jha)
that mankind will eventually be lifted up and become mighty and divine. It is a delusion to suppose that Vedanta contains no inspiration to life, no rule of conduct and is purely metaphysical and quietistic. 8

Aurobindo defines yoga as “communion with God for knowledge, for love, or for work.” 9 Such a definition combines the three traditional religious values of jnana, bhakti, and karma. But Aurobindo sees the karma aspect of yoga as the unifying element of the three. The yogin, by practicing the disciplines, achieves realization of the ultimate; and by such an existential realization he incarnates into the world the power of the divine:

The yogin puts himself into direct relation with that which is omniscient and omnipotent within man and without him. He is in tune with the infinite, he becomes a channel for the strength of God to pour itself out upon the world whether through calm benevolence or active beneficence. When a man rises by putting from him the slough of self and lives for others and in the joys and sorrows of others . . . when having thus abandoned whatever he is, does or has, to the Lord of all, the Lover and Helper of mankind, he dwells permanently in Him and becomes incapable of grief, disquiet or false excitement,—that is Yoga. 10

Aurobindo effects the synthesis of the ascetic ideal of yoga and political activism in two ways. The first is merely to declare that yoga and politics are compatible and mutually related. He refers often to Arjuna and the Bhagavad Gītā to

It should be clear, I think, that Aurobindo, in asserting that the view of yoga as a means of dissociation from the world as a confused application of means and ends, is running counter to the traditional view of yoga as a means for attainment of isolation from the world and from nature.

10. Ibid., pp. 21-22.
show that *yoga* provides the basis for action in the world of ordinary life. And he interprets the *Isha Upanishad* to support his view that it is an error to think that spirituality is divorced from this world:

"Abandon all," says the Isha Upanishad "that thou mayest enjoy all, neither covet any man's possession. But verily do thy deeds in this world and wish to live thy hundred years; no other way is given thee than this to escape the bondage of thy acts." It is an error to think that the heights of religion are above the struggles of this world.

The other way in which the synthesis is justified can be seen by noting the functional value of *yoga* for Aurobindo. He maintains that *yoga* is but a means to an end. And in pointing out the function of *yoga* to the end of knowledge, love, or work, he argues for its functional relevance to both personal and social life; and he expands these functional benefits to support the nationalistic cause. The first noteworthy function of *yoga* is its certification of the validity of the Hindu faith. Aurobindo's experience of the validation of the faith was indeed personal and private. But he makes much more of it than a personal certitude. His *yoga* validated the Hindu religion both by reason of its uniquely experimental nature for him and by reason of the messages he received while in yogic trance. In a letter dated September 13, 1946, Aurobindo recalls his earliest experiments with *yoga*:

I began my yoga in 1904 without a Guru, in 1908 I received help from a Maratha yogi and discovered the foundations of my sadhana but from that time till

11. "The most practical teaching of the *Gita* and one for which it is of abiding interest and value to the man of the world with whom life is a series of struggles, is not to give way to any morbid sentimentality when duty demands sternness and the boldness to face terrible things." (From *On Nationalism* articles in the *Banda Mataram*, this one dated September 22, 1907, and titled "National Virtues," p. 11)

the Mother came to India, I received spiritual help from no one else. My sadhana before and afterwards was not founded upon books but upon personal experiences that crowded upon me from within.

But in the jail I had the Gita and the Upanishads with me; practised the yoga of the Gita and meditated with the help of the Upanishads; ... the Vedas which I first began to read long afterwards in Pondicherry rather confirmed what experiences I already had than was any guide to my sadhana.\(^{13}\)

His yoga was, therefore, experimental because it was done without the usual guidance of a guru. Yoga for Aurobindo is a self-authenticating discipline: what he experiences testifies to its validity and to the validity of the texts which speak of it. A. B. Purani, the biographer who publishes under the sanction of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, contends that Aurobindo had many extraordinary experiences with yoga while imprisoned. He quotes Aurobindo to the effect that insight into aesthetics came while in meditation (pictures appeared on the walls and ceiling of the cell: "And behold! the artistic eye in me opened and I knew all about painting, except of course the more material side of the technique.")\(^{14}\) He also mentions Aurobindo's experiences of levitation and hearing the voice of Vivekananda speaking to him:

It is a fact that I was hearing constantly the voice of Vivekananda speaking to me for a fortnight in the jail in my solitary meditation and felt his presence, but this had nothing to do with the alleged circumstances. ... The voice spoke only on a special and limited but very important field of spiritual experience and it ceased as soon as it finished saying all that it had to say on the subject.\(^{15}\)

But the messages he received from appearances and voices which Aurobindo attributed to Vasudeva, Narayana and Krishna settled for him the validity of the Hindu religion. In the famous “Uttarpara Speech” of May 30, 1909, less than a month after release from prison, Aurobindo speaks of two convincing messages he received while practicing yoga in his solitary cell:

What happened to me during that period I am not impelled to say; but only this that day after day, He showed me His wonders and made me realise the utter truth of the Hindu religion. In the communion of Yoga two messages came. The first message said, “I have given you a work and it is to help to uplift this nation. . . .” The second message came and it said, “Something has been shown to you in this year of seclusion, something about which you had your doubts and it is the truth of the Hindu religion. It is this religion that I am raising up before the world, it is this that I have perfected and developed through the Rishis, saints and Avatars, and now it is going forth to do my work among the nations. I am raising up this nation to send forth my word. When you go forth, speak to your nation always this word, that it is for the Sanatan Dharma that they arise, it is for the world and not for themselves that they arise. I am giving them freedom for the service of the world. When it is said that India shall rise, it is for the Sanatan Dharma that shall rise.\(^\text{16}\)

It is important to note that the two “messages” contain no new information. Aurobindo had been speaking and writing for years to the effect that God was behind the movement for national freedom; and he was convinced for a long time that he had a personal role to play in the movement.\(^\text{17}\)

\(^{16}\) *Speeches*, pp. 76-77.

\(^{17}\) In a letter to his wife Mrinalini, dated August 30, 1905, Aurobindo speaks of his three “madnesses”—that “whatever virtue, talent,
Moreover, he had been articulating the rationale for independence in terms of traditional religious terminology for some time prior to the jail experience. Therefore, the messages are not new information; rather they stand as a confirmation, certification, and validation of the truth of his convictions as well as a validation of yoga as a means to attain such conviction.\textsuperscript{18}

Thus the first function of yoga is to certify the truth of the religion which Aurobindo identifies as "Hindu." The second function of yoga which makes it relevant to the sort of political activism advocated by Aurobindo is that it generates the necessary power and energy to carry the nationalist movement to success. He argues that India must look to the yogin for the strength to progress in nation-building. The movements of the past failed, he contends, because they were merely intellectual and not spiritual:

It is the spirituality of India, the sadhana of India, \textit{Tapasya, Jnanam, Shakti}, that must make us free and higher education and knowledge and wealth which God has given me belongs to Him;” that, “by whatever means I must get the direct realization of the Lord;” and that, “whereas others regard the country as an inert object . . . I look upon my country as the Mother.” He then continues to say that he has been given the task to uplift the fallen “race.” “I am not going to fight with the sword or with the gun, but with the power of knowledge. . . . This is not a new feeling with me, it is not of a recent origin, I was born with it, it is in my marrow. God sent me to the earth to accomplish this mission. At the age of fourteen the seed of it had begun to sprout and at eighteen it had been firmly rooted and become unshakeable.” (Purani, \textit{Life}, pp. 99-101.)

\textsuperscript{18} One might accuse Aurobindo of \textit{petitio principii} when he uses \textit{yoga} to validate \textit{yoga} as well as the faith that uses \textit{yoga} as a means to realization. At one level of logic this could be the case, since when Aurobindo uses \textit{yoga} to validate \textit{yoga}, he does not allow for any variable to count against it. Therefore the validation is tacitly circular and it clearly begs the question asked. However, one could see Aurobindo to be merely saying that the \textit{yoga} experience is a self-authenticating experience, and then allow him to extend the statement to imply that the experience always authenticates itself to the man who devotes himself to \textit{yoga}. 
The Ritualization Life of: Yoga and Activism

great. And these great things of the East are ill-
rendered by their inferior English equivalents, disci-
pline, philosophy, strength. Tapasya is more than
discipline; it is the materialization in ourselves by
spiritual means of the divine energy creative, preserv-
ative, and destructive. Jnanam is more than philo-
sophy, it is the inspired and direct knowledge that
comes of what our ancients called dhrishti, spiritual
insight. Shakti is more than strength, it is the
universal energy which moves the stars, made indi-
vidual. It is the yogin that must stand behind the
political leader or manifest within him. . . .

The temple dedicated to Bhawani was intended to provide
a locale for the practice of a yoga which would result in the
resurgence of India. In the pamphlet Aurobindo argues that
a math must be built which will harbor a group of Brahma-
charins and Sannyasins wholly dedicated to the Mother and
wholly intent upon creating the energy needed for the rise of
the nation:

The Brahma within, the one and indivisible ocean of
spiritual force, is that from which all life, material
and mental, is drawn. . . . If it be so, then spiritual,
energy is the source of all other strength. . . . We
need three things answering to three fundamental
laws.

I. Bhakti—the Temple of the Mother.
We cannot get strength unless we adore the
Mother of Strength.

II. Karma—a New Order of Brahmacharins.
Adoration will be dead and ineffective unless it is
transmuted into Karma.

III. Jnana, the Great Message.
Bhakti and Karma cannot be perfect and endur-
ing unless they are based upon Jnana.

Yoga is relevant to the current needs of Indian freedom because it functions to harness and control the necessary vital energy for the success of the movement. A third function of yoga which Aurobindo recognizes as relevant to the nationalist movement is that of providing the correct insight into social and political issues. In an essay for Karmayogin of 1909 Aurobindo again cites the need for a centre in India where the “brain” of India can be developed according to yogic prescriptions. He contends that the foundation of the immense intellectual superstructure of the past was the “all important discipline of the Brahmacharya.”

The notion of Brahmacharya as the foundation of great intellectual achievements rests in turn upon the notion that all men and things are adharas—containers, recipients, of the divine energy. “We are each of us a dynamo into which waves of that energy have been generated and stored, and are being perpetually consumed, used up, and replenished.” Yoga is a process by which a man can increase his adhara. The discipline of yoga clears away obstructions, and increases the capacity for containment, and improves the flow of energy. The point is that the secrets of intelligence rest within man, and that intelligence is capable of growth and expansion through discipline. The training of the Brahmacharya consists in placing all the energy of which any particular individual is capable to receive at the disposal of the brain. Yoga is the discipline of diverting that energy from bodily functions to the brain.

Aurobindo argues time and again that yoga provides the key to insight into the nature of reality. The mind and the body can be isolated, and the mind can work independent of the body, thus increasing its effectiveness and power. One can isolate the mind, watch it work, test its isolated workings,

22. Ibid., p. 12.
relations, faculties, and finally even trace backwards operations of the mind to the source from which all things proceed. In this analysis its first discovery is that the mind can entirely isolate itself from external objects and work in itself and of itself. The next discovery is that the farther it removes itself from the object, the more powerfully, surely, rapidly can the mind work, with a swifter clarity, with a victorious and sovereign detachment. The [next] discovery is that mind is not only independent of external matter, but its master; it can not only react and control external stimuli, but can defy such apparently universal material laws as that of gravitation and ignore, put aside and make nought of what are called laws of nature, and are really only the laws of material nature. This is the decisive discovery of “yoga”, its final contradiction of materialism.

The insight which yoga provides shows that progress and development in the world is essentially a conquest of matter by spirit. This implies many things for Aurobindo and his preoccupation with nationalism. It means that if India is to rise to preeminence in the world, her rise must be a spiritual rise: spirituality is the wave of the future. “The conquest of the emotions and the intellect by the spirit is the work of the future. Yoga is the means...” It supports his view that India’s unique contribution to the world is a spiritual one and that her time of ascendancy is near. It also provides for Aurobindo the basis for finding the key to the interpretation of history in the subjective experience of the individual sadhak. Even as the yogic wisdom has discovered certain laws of spiritual progress for the individual, so the yogi can discover and apply the laws of progress for society and for

24. Ibid., pp. 6-7.
nations. "The law is the same for the mass as for the indi-
vidual." 26 Even as the individual sadhak must go through a
process of purging of passions and through bhoga (enjoyment);
nigraha (control), and sanyama (rejection), so must nations,
and indeed the human race, participate in a process of purga-
tion without which development toward the goal of existence
cannot be achieved:

The process of human evolution has been seen by the
eye of inspired observation to be that of working out
the tiger and the ape. The forces of cruelty, lust,
mischievous destruction, pain-giving, folly, brutality,
ignorance were once rampant in humanity, they had
full enjoyment: then by the growth of religion and
philosophy they began in periods of satiety such as
the beginning of the Christian era in Europe to be
partly replaced, partly put under control. As is the
law of such things, they have always reverted again
with greater or less virulence and sought with more
or less success to re-establish themselves. Finally in
the nineteenth century it seems for a time as if some
of these forces had, for the time at least, exhausted
themselves and the hour of sanyama and gradual dis-
missal for the evolution had really arrived. Such
hopes always recur, and in the end they are likely to
bring about their own fulfillment, but before that
happens another recoil is inevitable. We see plenty
of signs of it in the reeling back into the beast which
is in progress in Europe and America behind the
fair outside of science, progress, civilization and
humanitarianism . . . A similar law holds in politics
and society. The political evolution of the human
race follows certain lines of which the most recent
formula has been given in the watchwords of the
French Revolution, freedom, equality, and brother-

hood. But the forces of the old world, the forces of despotism, the forces of traditional privilege and selfish competition are always struggling to re-seat themselves on the thrones of the earth. 27

Yoga, by its function, is therefore indispensable to the implementation of the nationalist program. It is yoga which can provide the certainty of Indian truth over against European thought, which can generate strength to revive the Indian spirit and greatness, and it is a method of knowing and understanding which can allow nationalists in India to exercise wisdom and discretion. It is for Aurobindo clearly relevant to the political situation of India. The nationalist, through the insight of yoga, can be assured that spiritual liberty is the goal of existence, and that political liberty is a necessary condition, since all things move by the same laws of evolution.

The synthesis of yoga and political activism is not complete, however, until a clear program of political activity takes shape. The yogic side of the synthesis is largely theoretical or subjective—statements about the nature of the mind and body, all of which are validated by Aurobindo’s personal experience. This cannot be a complete synthesis without some clear directives concerning political activities. And in fact the political activities prescribed by Aurobindo seem to take precedence over the yoga theory. 28 But actually Aurobindo maintains

27. Ibid., pp. 71-73.
28. The yogic disciplines do not appear as a major part of Aurobindo’s literary life before 1909. He later insists that few people knew of his practice of yoga, and that it was largely a private and even secret discipline. “My yoga begun in 1904 had always been personal and apart. . . . It was only after my release that for the first time I spoke at Uttarpura publicly about my spiritual experiences.” (September 13, 1946, note contained in Purani, Life, p. 140.) But he also admitted that the articles for Bande Mataram and Karmayogin were done under the inspiration of yogic trance. “All that I wrote in the Bande Mataram and the Karmayogin was from this yogic state. It used to run down to my pen while I sat down to write. I always trusted the inner Guide even when it seemed to be leading me astray. I no longer use the method now.” (Evening Talks, April 13, 1923, in Purani, Life, p. 129.)
that yoga provides the insight for the program itself: “All that I wrote in the Bande Mataram and the Karmayogin was from this yogic state. It used to run down to my pen while I sat down to write.”

The practical directive for attainment of political freedom all fit under the category of Passive Resistance—a doctrine Aurobindo developed in the pages of the Bande Mataram.

Since swarāj is the goal and karmayoga the means, the specific content of the nationalist program will take a shape fashioned by these prior commitments. Yoga conceived as a means to the attainment of a spiritual goal operates on the principle that whatever can achieve the goal is to be regarded as the rule of the discipline. In the political sphere, the principle is the same: “The choice by a subject nation of the means it will use for vindicating its liberty is best determined by the conditions of its servitude.”

Given the conditions of Indian servitude, Aurobindo determined that passive resistance was the only feasible manner of direct resistance to foreign control. The Moderate method of nationalism had been merely verbal—prayer, petition, and protest. The method of passive resistance was active, but activity motivated by a spiritual base. Just as the theology of vedānta maintains that man is in fact free within, so political vedānta teaches man to realize his actual freedom without. The clearest expression of political vedānta Aurobindo saw to be boycott—the “assertion of our independence.”

Boycott as an act of passive resistance was initiated first on August 7, 1905, as a protest against the partitioning of Bengal. The boycott was not initiated by Aurobindo, but he interpreted the decision for boycott as an act of practiced freedom:

The day of a nation’s independence is not the day when the administrative changes are made which complete

29. Ibid.
the outward realisation of its independence, but the day when it realises in its soul that it is free and must be free. August 7th is therefore the day when Indian Nationalism was born, when India discovered to her soul her own freedom, when we set our feet irrevocably on the path to unity, the only path to self-realisation.\textsuperscript{31}

Such passive resistance was advocated by Aurobindo only after a careful consideration of alternatives. War with Britain he ruled out since India was in no position to effectively engage in military resistance. Effective armed resistance on a national scale was impossible without an organized military and without legal or financial means to secure weapons.\textsuperscript{32} Moreover, he considered terrorist work—random assassination and bombing—to be a haphazard and limited method of resistance which in the long run would be difficult to organize and even more difficult to control. A desire to keep within the law, though not a matter of prime importance, did play a part in Auro-

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{BM}, 8/6/07, \textit{SANT}, p. 132. On the seventh of August, 1905, a large public meeting was held in Calcutta Town Hall to discuss the situation of the partitioning of Bengal. The meeting resulted in a declared general boycott of British goods as protest against the proposed partition. The Partition came into effect on October 16, 1905. The day was made a day of mourning in Bengal; "Immense numbers of people in the two divisions of the partitioned province abstained from lighting their kitchen fire, went about barefooted, performed ceremonial baths in rivers or sacred tanks, and tied on one another's wrists the sacred rakhi, a piece of silk or cotton thread, as a symbol of fraternal unity. See M. A. Buch, \textit{The Rise and Growth of Indian Militant Nationalism} (Baroda, 1940), p. 48. Boycott was initially seen as a temporary measure; but its success spurred the Bengalees to continue it as an economic weapon to protect their indigenous industries. Aurobindo clearly interprets the significance of a largely spontaneous demonstration of anger and protest as of spiritual significance and of ultimate significance to Indian history.

\textsuperscript{32} Aurobindo maintained that when he first went from Baroda to Bengal he planned a revolution by armed insurrection. "My idea was an armed revolution in the whole of India." (From a letter reprinted in \textit{Purani}, \textit{Life}, p. 108, and dated December 18, 1938.)
bindo’s consideration of methods of resistance. “A nation which can show a respect for law even in the first throes of revolution, has a better chance of enjoying a stable and successful Government of its own when its chance comes.”33 Nevertheless, legality must never be a first consideration. “To break an unjust law is not only justifiable but, under given circumstances, a duty.”34 And “if alien laws have declared it illegal for [a man] to do his duty ... he must still do his duty, however illegal, in the strength of his manhood.”35

Another consideration was based upon the prior commitment to his re-interpretation of the Upanishadic ideal. Whereas armed resistance of one sort or another would probably be the quickest method by which the outcome could be determined, the mode of resistance for India to adopt must be her mode of resistance. And “the present circumstances in India seem to point to passive resistance as our most natural and suitable weapon.”36 Theories of armed resistance (“aggressive resistance”) and passive resistance operate in quite different ways. Aggressive resistance intends to bring some actual and positive harm to the government; passive resistance intends to marshall abstainance from any activity which might help or support the government. The goal in both cases is the same, but the technique differs greatly. Aggressive resistance tries to destroy a law by destroying the power which makes and supports the law. Passive resistance tries to make a law unworkable by a form of disobedience which ultimately effects its recall.

The passive resister must discipline himself to face assaults from both the government and from his own countrymen. Legislation is not the only weapon of a government. Administrators possess powers to twist legal acts into illegal acts merely

34. *DPR*, p. 53.
by executive ukase. Resistance to such moves must be vigorously practiced as well. And countrymen who oppose the exercise of resistance against the alien government must be resisted alike through social excommunication. Whereas excommunication holds special dangers for national unity, “social boycott is legitimate and indispensable... against persons guilty of treason to the nation.”

The most direct expression of passive resistance is boycott. It is the most direct act of resistance, and it is the most non-aggressive form of resistance. Yet it yields a heavy blow against a government which operates primarily for economic benefits. Where the British were seen to economically impoverish Indians through flooding the markets with goods from England, a refusal to purchase or to condone purchase of such goods could undermine the economic stability of the British government both in England and in India. If the British economy were actually dependent upon the sale of its exported goods, the refusal of Indians to buy such goods could render British industries bankrupt. But for Aurobindo the intention was not just to disrupt the British economy. “By an organized and relentless boycott of British goods, we propose to render the further exploitation of the country impossible.” The effect of boycott upon India itself was the main consideration: boycott was to be the practice of freedom and independence which would mark the end to dependency and exploitation.

But boycott must be not limited to economics. Where there is dissatisfaction with the system of education sponsored by the British, a refusal to send children to government schools is demanded. And where the administration of justice through the courts system is deplored, the refusal to resort to British courts must follow. Finally, where disapproval of governmental administration exists for its “arbitrariness, its meddling

37. Ibid, p. 58.
38. Ibid., pp. 36-37.
and inquisitorial character, its thoroughness of repression, its misuse of the police for repression instead of protection of the people," boycott of all government agencies is demanded.  

The obvious corollary to such a program of resistance is swadeshi—self-help. If Indians refuse to purchase goods from foreign sources, they must supply them for-themselves. If they boycott courts, they must develop arbitration courts to resolve their differences. If they boycott government schools, national schools must be started. And if the protective powers of the government are spurned and ignored, a system of defence must emerge from within the Indian community.

The program of passive resistance is seen by Aurobindo to grow out of prior considerations concerning the religious goal—considerations which highly recommend it. Freedom is the goal of existence; and passive resistance is an expression of freedom. Moreover, there are moral considerations to recommend it; it is non-violent, and it does not teach or inculcate hatred. And it clearly illustrates to the British the immorality of their policies:

The English have long been boycotting us in our own country. They boycotted our industries out of existence, they boycotted our noblest capacities into atrophy by denying us any share in the higher activities of national life, they boycotted us in the management of our affairs, in the defence of our country, in the making of its laws. Now boycott has commenced upon the other side, but it is not an act of retaliation merely; it is much more an unravelling of the English web, a retracing of the steps towards perdition which we were forced or induced to take.

For Aurobindo, passive resistance and its corollary doctrines of boycott, swadeshi, and national education are a part of the

39. Ibid., p. 38.
40. BM, 8/7/07, SANT, p. 136.
ritualization of life resulting from a commitment to the goal of freedom, both political and spiritual. The ultimate concern is spiritual realization of moksha; the necessarily immediate concern is swarāj. The method is synthesis of yoga with realistic political activity. Therefore passive resistance cannot be allowed to develop into dogma. The achievement of self-rule is an immediate goal, and the first duty therefore is the winning of such, "by whatever means, at whatever sacrifice." In fact, as Haridas and Uma Mukherjee argue, Aurobindo was aware that resistance to British rule in the form of a complete disavowal of violence would be ineffective.④¹ They argue that neither Aurobindo’s passive resistance nor Gandhi’s nonviolent nonresistance were the sole determinants of Indian independence. Nor were they intended to be. Aurobindo urged passive resistance. But he maintained also that “peaceful means can succeed only when these imply the ugly alternative of more troublesome and fearful methods, recourse to which the failure of the peaceful attempts must inevitably lead to [sic].”④² Aurobindo argues from the experience of Krishna, who made overtures for peace, but always with strength behind him; it is “the patent truth that all political struggles are essentially a trial of strength, and even diplomacy must have some compelling force behind it to attain its ends...”④³ Just three days before his arrest in the Maniktolla Bomb Case, he states:

The fair hopes of an orderly and peaceful evolution of self-government, which the first energies of the new movement had fostered, are gone forever. Revolution, bare and grim, is preparing his battlefield, mowing down the centres of order which were evolving a new cosmos and building up the materials of a gigantic downfall and a mighty new creation. We

42. BM, 4/24/08, SANT, p. 376.
43. Ibid.
could have wished it otherwise, but God's will be done.  

Obviously, for Aurobindo, the controlling principle in the debate over violent or nonviolent methods of resistance is the effectiveness of the method. Freedom is the immediate goal; whatever wins freedom is a legitimate method. This principle of utility unites political activity with yoga: even as yoga is to be valued and cherished for its function, so passive resistance is to be adopted for its function. And even as yoga is judged by its effectiveness, so passive resistance shall be judged.

The fact that the spiritual goal and the political goal are closely integrated means that freedom has ultimate significance; the fact that yoga and political activity are integrated means that attainment of freedom requires a suspension of normal ethics for the good of a higher ethic. The morality of an act must be judged by its utility to the attainment of the goal. Such a principle requires that the karmayogin have a clear vision of the goal. And, given the spiritual nature of the ultimate goal (and the cosmology of Aurobindo), the yogin is above the ethical because he is "above" or isolated from egoism. He is unattached to the fruits of his acts. Therefore, The Aryan protects the friendly, smites the unfriendly. But he has no attachment. He sees the divine everywhere, in all beings, in all things, in all works, in all results. He has equal disposition towards good and evil, friend and foe, pleasure and pain, virtue and vice, success and failure... He is not afraid of hurting. He does not hate his enemy, he is not unjustly partial to the friendly, for the sake of duty he can slay his own people, and save the opponent's life, giving up his own.  

44. BM, 4/29/08, SANT, p. 383.
The assertion of independence, then, is the free, unattached activity of the karmayogin. It is an activity which combines the ideal of yoga with the political activity necessitated by the present political situation.

In this chapter I have indicated the manner in which Aurobindo constructs a program for the realization of the nationalist ideals. Clearly the program follows from the commitment to the religious goal. The program extends the syntheses into the sphere of direct political activity by uniting the older conception of yoga to the new ideal of political activism to create a revaluation of karmayoga. In the following chapter I will explore the limits of the synthetic religion which Aurobindo has constructed—limits which become apparent both at the level of practical politics and at the level of theological construction.
Chapter V

THE SYNTHETIC RELIGION AND ITS LIMITS

The method of analysis in this study is the functional-definitional method. The previous chapters of this study are an application and expansion of that method. The method has revealed the intrinsic relation between religion and politics in Aurobindo’s thought—a relationship which is structured by the goal of freedom. It has shown that for Aurobindo the nationalist goals are indeed penultimate concerns in terms of the metaphysic itself; but as an immediate condition for the realization of the ultimate concern, national independence is of ultimate significance. The study has then shown Aurobindo’s conceptualization of that scheme of ultimacy which unites the goal of nationalism with the traditional goal of moksha or mukti. Further, the life of the nationalist worker is shown to be sacralized and given ritual significance by the revaluation of his work in terms of the ultimate goal. Since nationalism fits into the scheme of ultimate concern, the nationalist worker shares in the religious valuation of deeds and events through participation in the divine work of liberating mankind.

The penultimate nature of the nationalist goal of swarāj is apparent from many statements by Aurobindo. But it must be remembered that the penultimate goal is raised to the status of ultimacy, since it is a necessary condition for the realization of the ultimate. Nationalism, for Aurobindo, is a temporary elevation of the penultimate to a position of ultimacy:

Swaraj is the direct revelation of God to this people,—not mere political freedom but a freedom vast and entire, freedom of the individual, freedom of the community, freedom of the nation, spiritual freedom, social freedom, political freedom. Spiritual freedom
the ancient Rishis had already declared to us; social freedom was part of the message of Buddha, Chaitanya, Nanak and Kabir and the Saints of Maharashtra; political freedom is the last word of the triune gospel. Without political freedom the soul of man is crippled. Social freedom can only be born where the soul of man is large, free and generous, not enslaved to petty aims and thoughts. . . . Spiritual freedom can never be the lot of many in a land of slaves. A few may follow the path of the Yogan and rise above their surroundings, but the mass of men cannot ever take the first step towards a spiritual salvation. . . . When India was free, thousands of men set their feet in the stairs of heaven, but as the night deepened and the sun of liberty withdrew, the spiritual force inborn in every Indian heart became weaker and weaker until now it burns so faintly that aliens have taken up on themselves the role of spiritual teachers, and the people chosen by God have to sit at the feet of the men from whose ancestry the light was hidden. . . . By our political freedom we shall once more recover our spiritual freedom.¹

The significance of such an elevation of what Aurobindo himself regards as penultimate to the status of an ultimate is obvious; but, I insist, obvious only because the method of analysis has revealed it. Because the method allows the nationalist aspirations to be seen as integrated with the spiritual aspirations, the priority of values for Aurobindo is clarified. Nationalism, therefore, is seen to be intrinsically united with the religious for Aurobindo.

In this chapter, however, I will show that the functional-definitional method reveals not only the inclusive character of Aurobindo’s synthetic religion, but reveals its limits as well. First I will review the numerous syntheses which Aurobindo

¹. BM, 2/23/08, ON, p. 64.
constructs to include and to integrate a variety of normally disparate concepts and concerns. Then I will show the limits of such a synthetic approach by describing both its "outer" limits and its "inner" limits—that is, its failure to satisfactorily synthesize both practical and theoretical elements. The outer limits of the approach are indicated by the Muslim and the British imbroglios; the inner limits are indicated by the failure of the causal model and by the necessity of Aurobindo's opting for an authoritarian epistemology of guruvāda.

*The Synthetic Religion*

I have maintained that one result of the application of the functional-definitional method is a clarification of Aurobindo's urge toward synthesis of normally disparate ideas. The neutral and functional character of the definition provides the context to clarify Aurobindo's synthetic treatment of such normally disparate notions as the ascetic ideal of yoga and revolutionary political activism. Aurobindo's desire to integrate disparate concerns is one of two general orientations in metaphysical system-building. Obviously any metaphysical view must attempt to give some account of possible competitors. One approach or orientation constructs a system which regards all rival views to be quite simply wrong; the other approach is to construct a system which will absorb rival views. The first approach can be termed exclusive; the second termed synthetic or inclusive. Aurobindo's approach is decidedly inclusive: it attempts to include all possible rival views under the umbrella of the goal of freedom. Probably the most creative element in Aurobindo's religio-nationalist thought is to be found in his ability to bring together numerous disparate ideas and reconcile them under the expansive goal of freedom. At the same time where serious problems emerge for Aurobindo in his religio-nationalist thought, they do emerge as a result of the synthetic approach.

I would like to suggest the major syntheses which Auro-
bindo constructs in order to provide a spiritual dimension to the nationalist program. The major synthesis is clearly that of uniting the political goal with the religious goal, swarāj with moksha. It is this synthesis which provides the structure of Aurobindo’s religion and outlines the path to the goal. The uniting concept is “freedom” which results from the union of swarāj (self-rule) and moksha (liberation).

But the actual synthesis of swarāj and moksha depends upon the construction of another synthesis, namely, the ātman-Brahman ideal of the Upanishads and the Shākta notion of devotion to the Mother Goddess. The ātman-Brahman ideal teaches that the essence of man is the ultimate reality of the universe—ātman is Brahman. The Shākta notion of the Mother Goddess identifies the energy of creation and destruction with the prakriti of the Sāṃkhya dualism (purusha and prakriti) and worships Shakti (energy) as a goddess under the names of Kālī, Durgā, Umā, Bhawānī, etc. The union of these two disparate elements (disparate both in the sense that the one is a non-dual philosophy while the other is dualist, and that speculative philosophical approaches such as advaita do not normally align themselves with bhakti in India) is constructed by Aurobindo through use of a developmental monism. The Many of the universe are united in the One of Brahman through the principle of evolutionary development. Thus the concept of Brahman as the ultimate reality synthesizes dualism and nondualism into a monism. “Freedom,” the unifying factor of the first synthesis, then is validated by this new synthesis as an authentic goal of existence by tying it to the vedantic teachings and texts; and the aspirations for political freedom are validated by the subsequent implications of the synthesis: since Shakti is the Mother of all things, she is the power behind India’s resurgence. And since all things are but a manifestation of Brahman, the country too is the “self of selves,” “the God within us,” “the Eternal, Timeless, Absolute.” The political

2. See Chapter III, footnote No. 1.
ideal of independence is thereby firmly joined to the metaphysics of traditional religious thought. *Moksha* remains the ideal; but *moksha* cannot be conceived apart from *swarāj*. Therefore the immediate goal for India is *swarāj*, self-rule or independence.

Aurobindo finds it necessary to construct a conceptual scheme whereby such syntheses are justified. Chapter III of this paper describes that scheme in terms of a cosmology—the reduction of the multiplicity of the universe to a unity corresponding to the religious goal. The process of synthesis continues. Aurobindo is confronted by the traditionally disparate categories such as matter and spirit, freedom and determinism, good and evil, freedom and morality, egoism and altruism. Again his response is the construction of syntheses whereby the disparate concepts are reconciled. Aurobindo does not, as has been pointed out, reconcile the irreconcilable. Rather, he transforms or reinterprets them so that they cease to be what they originally appeared to be, and they become something else. For example, matter is reconciled or synthesized with spirit, but not before matter is purified and spiritualized, and spirit is materialized through a process of evolution. The unity of spirit and matter is effected by evolution. In like manner freedom and determinism are reconciled by a notion of a conditioned human bondage and an implied promise of ultimate freedom. Good and evil are reconciled by admitting that the ethical at times must be suspended in order to bring about a higher ethic; the unifying factor is the notion of *karma-yoga*—to renounce the fruits of an act, thus freeing the agent from attachment and responsibility. Egoism and altruism, disparate elements primarily to people of a Judeo-Christian tradition, are united in Aurobindo’s notion of sacrifice as the enlargement of the self:

The genius of self-sacrifice... is the flowering of mankind’s ethical growth. The first sacrifices are always selfish—... others for one’s own advancement. The first step forward is taken by the instinct of animal
love in the mother who is ready to sacrifice her life for the young. . . . So long as there is identification of self only with one's body and its desires, the state of the Jiva is unprogressive and animal. It is only when the self enlarges to include the mate and the children that advancement becomes possible. . . . But the real development of the god in man does not begin until the family becomes so much dearer than the life of the body that a man is ready to sacrifice himself for it. . . . Beyond the family comes the community and the next step is when . . . self in the body and the self in the family gives way to the identification with the self in the community. . . . The next enlargement is the self in the nation. . . . There is yet a higher fulfillment for which only a few individuals have shown themselves ready, the enlargement of the self to include all humanity. 3

Such syntheses as these fill out the theoretical framework of the original synthesis of political and religious freedom. But the actual program for implementation of the nationalist ideal requires construction of more syntheses. Aurobindo unites the ascetic ideal of yoga with political activism by drawing out of the Bhagavad Gita the notion of the Karmayogin and revaluing such a symbol in terms of nationalist work. This synthesis is treated in Chapter IV and need not be dealt with again at this point, except to recall that the traditional yogin was one who is withdrawn from society, and whose discipline teaches him discrimination between the material prakriti and the spiritual purusha. Such a discipline was to be an exercise directed toward total isolation. Aurobindo's revaluation of the traditional figure in terms of the Karmayogin presents a dedicated worker for national freedom who is so totally dedicated to the Mother Goddess that he remains unattached to personal consequences of his acts.

The ideal figure could devote himself equally to terrorist activities, national education, or meditation. But the karma-yogin’s dedication is given some direction by a further synthesis Aurobindo constructs between violence and nonviolence. The unifying factor is Passive Resistance. As noted in Chapter IV, passive resistance considers both violence and nonviolence as justifiable alternatives for political action; but it tries to unite them into a creative form of coercion which employs the techniques of boycott and swadeshi.

The Limits of the Synthetic Religion

Aurobindo’s synthetic or inclusive system neatly reconciles apparently conflicting ideas and concepts by revaluing and reinterpreting the traditional ideas in terms of the present situation. The result is a system which instills a religious fervor and a religious goal to the nationalist program. But there are limits to the Aurobindonian synthetic approach. And they become apparent as both outer and inner limitations. The outer limits are apparent in Aurobindo’s attempt to synthesize national goals with international goals under the conception of the mission of India. At this point the synthetic approach is unsuccessful both with respect to convincing the Muslims of their role in the religio-nationalist movement and with respect to reconciling British interests with Indian interests. The Muslim failure is essentially a failure in taking seriously another religious system as a religious system. The British failure betrays the basic ethnocentricity of the religio-nationalist scheme as constructed by Aurobindo. The inner limits of the synthetic approach I will deal with later under the rubric of “remainders”—that is, problems which are implied in the pre-Pondicherry scheme and which are left for Aurobindo to resolve in later years.

Aurobindo sees the need to resolve an apparent discrepancy between national and international goals. Aurobindo’s scheme is constructed primarily to justify the nationalist aspirations
for freedom and to provide a spiritual basis for nationalist work. But his drive toward synthesis and inclusivism as over against exclusivism and discontinuity confronts him eventually with the problem of how the nationalist goals relate to the goals and aspirations of other nations. His solution is conceived in terms of the mission of India for the world. According to Aurobindo, India must have independence because the world needs India, and it needs a free India. Therefore all the nations and peoples of the world benefit through the victory of India. "God has set apart India as the eternal fountain-head of holy spirituality..." The mission of India is to "bring the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, in a sense not yet realized by Christian consciousness in Europe or America. It seeks to establish a New Jerusalem in this world..."

It is at this point that the inclusive-synthetic procedure of Aurobindo reaches its outer limits. One might concede that at the theoretical level the union of national and international concerns through the notion of divine mission fits neatly. But at the level of implementation of such a synthesis the construct breaks down. And it breaks down at two levels: at the level of religious conflict with Muslims and at the level of political conflict with the British.

It has been argued by another student of the nationalist movement in India that it was Aurobindo's close identification of nationalist rhetoric with traditionally Hindu terminology which caused the gradual disenchantment of Muslims with the movement. A. M. Buch argues that at the same time as Aurobindo reaped thousands of followers by using the devotional language of Mother worship, he alienated thousands more who were committed to the religious terminology of the Koran. The result was that to the extent that Aurobindo identified the nationalist cause in terms of Vedic, Upanishadic,

4. BM, 2/23/08, ON, p. 64.
5. BM, weekly edition, 6/14/08, BMIN, p. 94.
and Puranic literature, he ruled out a whole segment of the Indian population. Whereas Hindu orthodoxy could respond to Aurobindo's linking of the social and religious past to nationalism, Islamic orthodoxy found little to inspire its allegiance.6

Buch's argument is a compelling one, and it surely can be documented by the literature available from Aurobindo's pen. But the deeper dimensions of the problem are apparent: it is not merely a matter of devotional language which alienates the Muslims; it is the failure of Aurobindo to successfully integrate Muslim religion with his religio-nationalist scheme. And, in fact, the failure of Aurobindo at this point is the result of his commitment to synthesis and inclusivism: he cannot regard his own religion as a potentially divisive factor. His whole attempt at synthesis has been to absorb and include disparate and discontinuous elements and factors into one grand synthesis. But he reaches a limit of inclusivism when he tries to absorb Muslim religion and Muslim values into his system. It is not that the system cannot absorb Muslim religion; it is rather that Muslims cannot remain Muslims if they are absorbed. One does not need to provide a systematic treatment of some doctrinal system of Islam to document such a statement. Rather one need only attend to the conditions of the Muslim-Hindu synthesis constructed by Aurobindo to appreciate Muslim disenchantment.

The failure can be clarified by recalling one more the necessary conditions for a definition of religion in historical study. In the historical study of religion a neutral, objective definition is necessary—mainly to prevent one's study from resulting in a religious proposal. But even in the construction of a theology which intends to account for rival religious positions, a neutral and general definition of religion under which all religious systems can be subsumed in necessary.

Otherwise the theologian never really takes seriously the claims to truth and ultimacy which the other systems hold. And thus he never really treats other systems as religious systems. Rather, the claims of other systems are neutralized and absorbed by the biased definition. Now some theologies of religions are structured with just such a goal in mind, namely, to neutralize and absorb rival views as claims to truth. But Aurobindo’s problem with the Muslims of Bengal is not one of merely accounting for their faith-system or their truth-claims. He must enlist their support in the nationalist struggle. But he cannot ignore the fact that Muslim obstinacy and hesitancy results from religious commitments:

What can we offer to the Mohomedans to induce them to join us?... The sentiment of the Mahomedans is stronger in respect of religion than of nationality. Their eyes are fixed rather on Mecca than on Dehli.7

And his predictable response is to include Muslims by synthesis of Muslim interests with Hindu interests. In other words, by absorbing the Muslims rather than by excluding them:

If we are to create a common sentiment, it can only be by awakening in their hearts the sentiment of common brotherhood with their Hindu fellow country-men. To do this we must first nourish the sentiment ourselves. But if our young men... get more the vision of the Mother... their natural feeling of brotherhood with all the sons of the Mother, will drive them to experience the same feeling with regard to the Mohomedans.8

So Aurobindo reconciles the Muslims to the nationalist movement under the term of the Mother: all Indians are sons of the Mother. But the synthesis cannot succeed because Aurobindo does violence to the Muslim religion. By implication Aurobindo obviates and neutralizes Muslim claims to

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7. BM, 3/19/08, SANT, p. 295.
8. Ibid.
truth and religious particularity. By absorbing them into the movement under the term of the Mother, he is implying that no disagreement as to truth-claims can exist between Muslim and Hindu. The Muslim are effectively neutralized as religious rivals. In fact, they are not even distinguished as rivals: they are not engaged, debated, fought, or excluded. Rather they are reconciled to religio-nationalist point of view; but reconciled on Aurobindo’s terms, not on their own terms or some neutral terms.

The failure of Aurobindo’s synthetic and inclusive method at this point is significant for it points up once more the significance of definitional precision when dealing with religion—whether as historian, theologian or apologist. Aurobindo fails to see that to the Muslim, acceptance of his scheme of reconciliation is actually acceptance of another religious point of view. Aurobindo does not seriously consider the important question of the Muslim, namely, how can one adopt the religio-nationalist ideology without giving up the Islamic faith? Such a question is irrelevant to Aurobindo, and irrelevant for one of only two reasons: either he does not take Islam seriously as a religion (that is, as an ultimate concern) or he sees his religion as the only valid concern and chooses to exclude as invalid all others. Given Aurobindo’s procedure to this point, the former alternative is the likely reason for his failure to make a compelling appeal to the disenchanted Muslims. Aurobindo surely wants to include Muslims; but he wants to include them on the same basis as he includes all other rival or disparate elements—that is, as part of a penultimate concern directed toward the ultimate realization of moksha. And to the Muslims, the teaching of the Koran cannot be made penultimate.

A similar failure takes place on the political level when Aurobindo attempts to unite national interests with international interests. He tacitly admits when developing the conceptual scheme and the necessary spiritual attitude which must be incorporated into the karmayogin’s outlook that “the
national ego may easily mean nothing more than collective selfishness." That is, identification of oneself with the interests of the nation may, in terms of international welfare, be less than the highest good. But there can be no question that for Aurobindo the interests of the Indians and the interests of the British at the present must be sharply distinguished. And as a matter of fact, the interests of the two are so sharply distinguished by Aurobindo that no reconciliation is conceivably possible. No compromise, no settlement with the British could be considered, since swarāj is the necessary goal implied by the conceptual scheme. Swarāj does not mean greater control of the government, or more civil service positions, or a greater measure of self-determination. Swarāj means autonomous self-rule, a necessary corollary to the doctrine of divine-human unity, so far as Aurobindo is concerned. Thus the strongest words are used to distinguish Indian interests from British interests:

[The New Thought] recognizes the ugly fact that in spite of all their conceit of culture and civilization, the British rulers of the country are ordinary mortals, moved by the selfish impulses and motives of common humanity. They are in India not for our good, but essentially and primarily for their own profit. The New Thought refuses to appeal to British generosity for the advancement of political freedom in India. The relations between the countries are such that the loss of the one is the gain of the other.

For Aurobindo it is perfectly clear that whatever advances Britain is to the detriment of India. Moreover, he attempts to justify such an attitude in terms of the scheme by saying:

It is also in accordance with the principle of love and universal brotherhood that we first seek to organise those to whom we are bound by some sort of ties in

10. BM, 4/24/08, SANT, pp. 372-373.
addition to that of mere humanity into one strong people capable of resisting unjust encroachments on their natural rights. . . . Born as we are with a sense of pride, with a sense of dignity and above all with the instinctive desire for seeking our own individual good and the good of those who are intimately connected with us we are false to our nature if we fail to be guided by these first-hand impulses and neglect our immediate duties out of deference to a mere imaginary ideal which we do not feel as a reality. . . . It follows from the rational consideration of the working of human nature that humanity should never give precedence to any cosmopolitan feeling and ideal over those of serving his own nation.\textsuperscript{11}

For Aurobindo charity begins at home, then it works out toward others. And the scheme supports such a view to the extent of arguing that the realization of the ultimate comes through introspection, and since such realization is identified with the highest good of man, egoism (or self-interest) is not contrary to the highest good of all. Thus Aurobindo justifies to his satisfaction the growing gulf between Britain and India. As he argued in another place, the first concerns and interests, by the nature of things, are always personal and therefore "selfish."\textsuperscript{12} But selfishness is a necessary step towards more and more inclusive interests which embrace more and more people. The starting point is with introspection—a form of self-interest and what might ordinarily be considered selfishness.

Such a scheme, however, eventually leads to extremely precarious social and political conditions. Aurobindo admits in the Bande Mataram editorial just three days before his arrest in the Maniktolla Bomb case that:

The fair hopes of an orderly and peaceful evolution

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{BM}, 9/22/07, \textit{ON}, p. 12.

\textsuperscript{12} "The Doctrine of Sacrifice," \textit{TIKY}, pp. 52-55.
of self-government, which the first energies of the new movement had fostered, are gone forever. Revolution, bare and grim, is preparing his battlefield, mowing down the centres of order which were evolving a new cosmos and building up the materials of a gigantic downfall and mighty new creation. We would have wished it otherwise, but God's will be done.¹³

Thus while the conceptual paradox of national goals and the goals of rival nations is successfully resolved by Aurobindo, the practical political problems could not be so clearly resolved. In order to gain the freedom which Aurobindo conceived to be the intrinsic possession of every man and people, in the context of India, it requires a sharp distinction be drawn between the British and the Indians. The drawing of that distinction at the political level means warfare; and warfare risks the possible extinction of the nationalist movement itself. Thus the outer limits of inclusivism for Aurobindo become apparent both with the Muslim and the British imbroglios.

Remainders: The Inner Limits

There are two additional syntheses which Aurobindo constructs in his scheme for a religio-nationalist movement. In a sense these two can be termed "remainders" because Aurobindo does not in the writings prior to Pondicherry ever successfully resolve the apparent conflicts created by the syntheses themselves. And both syntheses create conceptual and salvic problems which one would expect Aurobindo to find necessary to resolve at some point. Since the syntheses raise conceptual problems regarding both the internal consistency of the scheme and the viability of the goal of salvation, I refer to these as indications of the inner limits of Aurobindo's inclusive and synthetic scheme. The problems emerge from Aurobindo's synthesis of a dualist cosmology with a nondual one (the

¹³. RM, 4/29/08, SANT, p. 383.
ancient Sāṃkhya conception with an advaitan conception, with the reconciling concept being Brahman) and his synthesis of scientific reasoning with the evidence of yogic realization (the scientific epistemology with darshana or knowledge by realization).

The two problems are intrinsic to the kind of project Aurobindo assigns himself—namely to build a conceptual scheme which will map a route to complete freedom and which will take in all the rival schemes which might confront it. The requirements of the former consideration—mapping a route to salvation—are complicated by the fact that the scheme must possess both free and deterministic characteristics (note that Aurobindo must synthesize freedom and determinism, a project described in Chapter III). The scheme must combine freedom and determinism because it must on the one hand allow the seeker of freedom to exercise meaningful acts which will help him on his way (that is, the seeker must be recognized by the system as a causal agent who exercises some control over his own destiny); and on the other hand the scheme must not be so open, irregular, or unpredictable that the seeker cannot count on and even predict the recurrence of certain sequences of events or patterns of nature. There must be regularity and order in the scheme of things, but at the same time there must be for the seeker a clear indication that decisions and actions do influence events significantly for him.14 It is the old conflict of freedom and determinism which again rises at this level.

The key problem is one of the relationships between events and things within the universe; and the scheme must somehow account for this relationship. The problem raised, quite simply, is the problem of causation: the determination of the relation between events and things in the universe necessarily has a bearing upon the possibilities of the seeker realizing

salvation. If the relationships between events are considered to be very strong (a strict determinism), then the seeker clearly is subjected to forces beyond his control and his ability to act for realization of salvation is negated. If, on the other hand, the relations are seen to be extremely weak (indeterminism), the seeker is given no structure whereby he can steer his course toward realization.\footnote{15}

Aurobindo’s scheme, as we have seen, unites the universe under the cosmic principle of Brahman at the same time as it affirms the reality of two basic entities, selves (purushas) and nature (prakriti). The two cooperate to produce differentiations in nature progressively toward manifestation of the various elements of matter. The scheme is an evolutionary one which posits a single origin to all things—Brahman.\footnote{16} Aurobindo reveals the path toward freedom by defining the nature of human bondage and showing the relationship of that bondage to the evolutionary development out of Brahman. Bondage, then, is failure to discriminate purusha from prakriti;

15. Potter notes that where the Western empiricist sees two problems concerning causation, the Indian sees only one. After Hume, the tendency in the West has been to conceive of determinism and freedom as two distinct problems: the one problem has to do with the individual seeing himself as free or bound by personal or social constraints. The second has to do with the pattern of nature as a causal process or chain. The one could be termed the problem of “Behaviorism and Voluntarism,” the second the problem of “Determinism and Indeterminism.” The names are my own, but Potter agrees that empiricism normally sees no relation between the two problems, the former having to do with social adjustment and the latter with scientific observation.

The Indian philosopher, on the other hand, sees only one problem. He is concerned to master everything which pertains to himself—and that includes external nature as well as the personal psyche. The whole problem is seen as one, and it cannot be compartmentalized by the Indian who seeks liberation. In Potter’s terms, the liberation sought is both a “freedom-from” and a “freedom-to”—that is, a freedom from constraints imposed by forces of nature and a freedom to control nature and oneself. (See Potter, pp. 93-97)

16. See Chapter III.
and political bondage is but one aspect of the more general condition of human bondage. Since the condition of bondage resulted by cosmic evolution, so must the realization of freedom require some progressive steps. In terms of Karl Potter’s classification of Indian religious systems, Aurobindo’s system is a “progress” philosophy as over against “Leap” philosophies.\footnote{17}

A model of causation is quite necessarily implied, however, when such a conceptual scheme of man’s predicament and salvation is constructed. Though Aurobindo does not clearly state a causal model in his writings before Pondicherry, it is clear that he adopts the satkāryavāda model. In satkāryavāda there is seen to be an identity between the cause and effect in such a way that the effect is pre-existent in the cause.\footnote{18} This model in Indian philosophy is further refined along the lines of Ishvarakrishna’s Sāṃkhya exposition to suggest that the effect is an actual transformation of the cause—pariṇāmavāda. The arguments for the satkāryavāda model are usually to the effect that one never finds things which have not been produced out of something else in the universe, and that any characteristic which is ever produced from something else must have been present “in” that something else prior to its manifestation. The negative form of the argument is the common parlance: you cannot get blood from a turnip. Another argument for satkāryavāda is that for the existence of any thing there must be some pre-existent necessary condition for that thing. The denial runs counter to experience and it suggests that one can get anything from anything or that nothing can produce something—thus affirming complete indeterminacy and randomness. Attention to the conditions of bondage, therefore, as well as attention to the path of freedom require knowledge of the causal model.

\footnote{17} See Potter, Chapter IV.

\footnote{18} See Chapter III, footnote No. 21. This is the only model which would make evolution a viable and consistent theory within the system.
But such a strict model of causation which posits everything manifest in the universe as pre-existent in the primal cause (prakriti, for Aurobindo) is slightly tempered by Aurobindo's conception of purusha as the independent overseer of prakriti. If there were no purusha independent and ruling over prakriti, there could be no salvation, no release, since the human condition would be one of complete and total bondage to the causal process of satkāryavāda. But the purusha, the self, is independent of the causal process and therefore the necessary and sufficient condition for salvation and release. 19 Salvation or realization is not a leap or sudden realization; rather it is a gradual process which reworks the causal process of bondage back to freedom. 20

The issue of progress toward salvation, however, is precisely the issue which is problematic in the conceptual scheme. In spite of the fact that salvation as release is Aurobindo's major and, indeed, ultimate concern, the relation between bondage and release is complicated by the very model of causation which is intended to make conceptual sense of it. Aurobindo successfully obviates the salvic problem inherent to the dualism of purusha and prakriti (namely, an epistemological problem of determining whether the world as manifest out of the primal prakriti is mere appearance or whether it is reality—a problem of all advaitian schemes). Aurobindo modifies the distinction between purusha and prakriti and unifies the universe in the concept of Brahman; thus he can regard the world as real, not illusion. But what he gains through unification of the universe under Brahman (thus skirting the epistemological problem of appearance and reality) he loses by resurrecting the fundamental problem of satkāryavāda: the hard, strict causal relation

19. Aurobindo's emphasis upon the independent and ruling status of the purusha is yet another indication of his dependence upon the satkāryavāda model. See the series of essays contained in The Ideal of the Karmayogin, Man—Slave or Free? and The Brain of India.

20. See the essay "Fate and Free-Will" in Man—Slave or Free? and Chapter III of this paper.
which implies that all causes stand in a necessary relation to their effects. If, indeed, in terms of the model, nothing can come to be which is not already existing, there can be no path to salvation. Bondage cannot be seen to produce freedom unless it can be shown that freedom is contained in bondage.

Thus Aurobindo’s urge to unify through synthesis strikes at the roots of his salvic scheme. His alternatives, it would seem, are either to explore the possibilities of some pluralistic schemes (that is, to reconceptualize the universe and give up the synthetic approach) or to change the method of gaining salvation. And changing the method would either entail removing the goal of freedom from the world of ordinary experience, or make salvation entirely a matter of grace (release coming solely by divine intervention). But either option for the changed method of salvation would isolate the saved one from the mundane world and therefore make the world of space, time and causality irrelevant to salvation.

There are clear indications that Aurobindo opts for the alternative of changing the method of salvation. But he does not opt for grace as the means. Rather, as stated in Chapter III, Aurobindo contends that only prakriti is conditioned and bound to space-time-causality, and that the self is indeed above and free from space-time-causality. But, however, he does not solve the problem, for in opting for such a solution he must draw the conclusion that events in space-time-causality are irrelevant to salvation, and therefore irrelevant to the ultimate goal: And such a conclusion is disastrous to his religio-nationalist scheme and his nationalist aspirations. If salvation is beyond space-time-causality, then the attempt to integrate nationalism with spirituality is a failure.

There is no indication in the pre-Pondicherry writings to indicate that Aurobindo satisfactorily resolves this problem either for himself or for his readers. But the most apparent indication of his personal struggle with the problem is his retirement from political activity after the intense yogic experiences in the Alipore Jail. The “Uttarpara Speech” immediately
after release from the jail, while it says nothing fundamentally new in terms of conceptualization of the religio-nationalist scheme, does indicate a more intense commitment to spirituality and even a denigration of the actual political work:

In this seclusion the earliest realisation, the first lesson came to me. I remembered then that a month or more before my arrest, a call had come to me to put aside all activity, to go into seclusion and to look into myself, so that I might enter into closer communion with Him. I was weak and could not accept the call. My work was very dear to me and in the pride of my heart I thought that unless I was there, it would suffer or even fail and cease; therefore I would not leave it. It seemed to me that He spoke to me again and said, "The bonds you had not strength to break, I have broken for you, because it is not my will nor was it ever my intention that that should continue. I have had another thing for you to do and it is for that I have brought you here, to teach you what you could not learn for yourself and to train you for my work."²¹

One can safely conclude that a new view of the significance of political activity dawned for Aurobindo. Partly it was a realization that he was expendable: Krishna says to him:

If you stood aside or slept, the work would still be done. If you were cast aside tomorrow, here are young men who will take up your work and do it more mightily than you have ever done. You have only got some strength from me to speak a word to this nation which will help to raise it.²²

But Aurobindo had said similar things in the past. For the Bande Mataram he had asserted time and again that:

The leader of our onward march is the Almighty Himself, that element within and without us whom sword

²¹ "Uttarpara Speech," *Speeches*, p. 66.
cannot slay, nor water drown, nor fire burn, nor exile divide from us, nor a prison confine. Lajpat Rai is nothing, Tilak is nothing, Bipin Pal is nothing！These are but instruments in the mighty Hand that is shaping our destinies and if these go, do you think that God cannot find others to do His will？

The explanation that he suddenly discovered his own expendability, and therefore desired retirement from the political arena, is therefore finally untenable. He knew of the principle of expendability prior to the jail experience. But a conceptual problem with the validation of political activity does exist. It might be noted that the writings for the Karmayogin and Dharma increasingly devote themselves to spiritual concerns as over against concrete political concerns, and conceptual problems as over against practical problems. I do not choose to posit the hypothesis that the retirement to Pondicherry results from his discovery of an unresolved issue in the dualist-nondualist synthesis and its subsequent implications for the nationalist program. Nevertheless it must be taken into account that the problem exists as a conceptual problem, and failure to resolve it necessarily obviates the spiritual foundations of the nationalist program for Aurobindo. I would in fact argue that the problem was no sudden discovery, that it is indicated early in the process of construction of syntheses, and that it actually is implied in the basic synthesis of uniting moksha with swarāj. A growing awareness of the failure of the synthesis to adequately justify political activity surely is a probable cause (one of a number) for his retirement to Pondicherry.


24. Of the traced essays published in the Karmayogin only “An Open Letter to My Countrymen” and “The Need in Nationalism” deal specifically with political issues. Other essays concern themselves with yoga and its defence and the concern to fill out a conceptual scheme which will account for political activity as a precondition to salvation.

25. Other than the fact that Aurobindo’s writing concerns itself in
of the inner limits of Aurobindo’s inclusive and synthetic approach, and it is a remaining issue.

The second synthesis which remains for Aurobindo after his retirement is his attempt to bring together scientific reasoning and yogic *darshana*. Chapter III of this paper indicates Aurobindo’s use of scientific evidence to attempt a validation of yogic seers and their conclusions. The thrust of his argument is that scientific evidence not only testifies to the validity of *yoga*, but that *yoga* is able to take the conclusions of science and extend them or perfect them. Particularly in the field of hypnosis and in the theory of evolution Aurobindo sees science and yogic *darshana* to be compatible. With regard to evolution he says, “Whether we take the modern scientific or the

the *Karmayogin* more with spiritual problems than with political problems, I find no direct evidence of a conscious awareness of the specific theoretical “limit” which I mention. In fact, for the *Arya*, a journal issued from Pondicherry, Aurobindo once again addresses political issues. But this time it is to clarify the international implications of his system. (*See The Ideal of Human Unity* [first edition; Madras: Sons of India Ltd., British India Press, 1919].) This is a reprint of the text in the *Arya*, September, 1915, to July, 1918. (*See also War and Self-Determination* [Madras: S. R. Murthy and Co., 1920].) And the international implications do not necessarily touch upon the “inner limits” of the system. Aurobindo’s biographer, A. B. Purani, when addressing himself to the reasons for the retirement, is primarily concerned with pointing out certain immediate factors (an anticipated police raid, the amnesty available in Pondicherry, the Alipore Jail experiences). Purani is particularly concerned that people be disabused of the idea that Aurobindo retired for reasons of fear or futility. Then he quotes Aurobindo: “I came away because I did not want anything to interfere with my Yoga and because I got a distinct Adesh on the matter.” (*Life*, p. 156) The first reason (in the light of the structural “limits” detailed above) is a tacit admission that *yoga* and politics are somehow incompatible. And given the complete isolation from politics, as well as the duration of that isolation, I would maintain that Aurobindo was convinced of a basic incompatibility between spiritual goals and political goals. I aver, however, that such a decision by Aurobindo does not of itself prove that he recognizes the specific theoretical problem which I describe. But the admission (by implication) does tend to destroy the synthetic system.
ancient Hindu standpoint the progress of humanity is a fact.\textsuperscript{26} They both conclude the same thing, according to Aurobindo. And again in an essay titled “Yoga and Hypnotism” he argues that science, in developing and experimenting with hypnosis, has come to conclusions similar to the practitioners of yoga.

It is clear that Aurobindo is wrestling with epistemological conflicts which apparently exist between scientific processes of validation and yogic processes of validation. But he wants to insist that conclusions which emerge from the two different methods of knowing coincide at significant points.

But the synthesis is never a complete synthesis because Aurobindo actually uses scientific evidence only to establish the validity—and superior validity—of the yogic method of knowing. In fact, he disclaims the ultimate validity of science as a way of knowing:

The European scientist experimenting with hypnotism is handling forces which he cannot understand, stumbling on truths of which he cannot give a true account. His feet are faltering on the threshold of Yoga.\textsuperscript{27}

For Aurobindo yoga clearly provides the superior way of knowing. Scientific conclusions must be subordinated to the conclusions of the yogic seers. In this case, therefore, no true synthesis emerges because there is no principle under which the terms of the synthesis can be united. Aurobindo is clearly convinced of the validity of yogic darshana. Yet he grants science some validity as well. The insights of yoga, however, are clearly superior and more trustworthy than those insights gained by the scientific method of observation and experimentation.

Such a failure of synthesis does not constitute any conscious problem for Aurobindo. He handles the scientific epistemology in much the same manner as he handled the Muslim question: he absorbs it. Science has a limited validity,

\textsuperscript{26} “Yoga and Human Evolution,” M-SGF ?, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 17.
but at a level distinctly lower than other methods of knowing. The scientific method is a way to discover truth. But a superior way is yoga. Therefore scientific truth-claims are in fact emptied of any compelling force; they are valid so long as they conform to the conclusions of darshana. In effect, Aurobindo's treatment of the scientific method of knowing empties the method of its truth-claims: they must always be subjected to the tests of yogic darshana. And the important questions of life are answered through yoga and insights gained through yoga. For the Dharma Aurobindo writes that knowledge of the supreme goal of human life is found through the superior knowledge of yoga:

The fundamental basis of this conclusion does not rest upon a mentally constructed new thought, nor does it derive its authority from any ancient manuscript, the proof of any written scripture or the formula of any philosophy. It is based upon a spiritual knowledge more integral; it is based upon the burning experience of the Divine Reality in the soul, life, mind, heart, and body. This knowledge is not a new discovery but old and indeed eternal.28

But whereas there may remain no significant problem for Aurobindo in the conflict between yoga and science, there surely must remain a problem for his readers. Once Aurobindo does away with the kind of certainty which science provides through verification, one might ask what kind of certain knowledge remains. Aurobindo's answer is clear: the certainty of yogic darshana. But such a way of knowing is subjective and not public; and there are limitations to yogic experience which are built into one's karma-formations. Thus the yogic darshana cannot be either public or universal. Only some—the most adept—gain truth. But such objections do not appear to bother Aurobindo significantly: in fact he affirms this point

of view. And in his later ashramic period he assumes the role of the guru who demands complete obedience from his sadhaks specifically on the grounds that he knows more than they know. The reason for such a demand is clearly that of the authority of his darshana: the one who practices yoga "sees" and "realizes" and "knows" things what ordinary men do not. In a letter to a sadhak Aurobindo articulates the rationale of the guruvâda position in this manner:

You have to develop the power and the habit of taking refuge in the protection of the Mother and myself. It is for this reason that the habit of criticising and judging by the outer mind or cherishing its preconceived ideas and formations must disappear. You should repeat always to yourself when it tries to rise, "Sri Aurobindo and the Mother know better than myself—they have the experience and knowledge which I have not—they must surely be acting for the best and in a greater light than that of ordinary human knowledge." If you can fix the idea in yourself so that it will remain even in clouded moments you will be able to face much more easily the suggestions of Asuric Maya.29

The teacher who has "realized" truth is one possessing a more certain knowledge than is available to the one practicing normal modes of knowing. Moreover, the normal modes of knowing are even regarded as Asuric Mâyâ, evil or untrustworthy illusion. Thus Aurobindo opts clearly for an authoritarian epistemology and subordinates the scientific epistemology to a role of a propaganda instrument. Once again no true synthesis takes place. Science is useful to a point; but it cannot as a way of knowing contradict the insights derived from yoga.

29. Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother (Pondicherry, 1953), p. 403. This book is a collection of sayings and letters by Sri Aurobindo Ghośe which indicate his life and activities both political and spiritual.
In this chapter I have indicated the results of the functional-definitional method. The method reveals both the synthetic construct of Aurobindo whereby he integrates the nationalist aspirations of Indians with the spiritual goal of a traditional religious formulation and the limitatious of that synthetic construct. The summary has included not merely a description of what Aurobindo did in terms of the construction of syntheses, but it has indicated the relations of those syntheses and some conceptual problems which emerge because of the syntheses. The “inner” limits of Aurobindo’s system have been revealed and labelled “Remainders” because they leave significant internal problems for the system. The resolution of such problems goes beyond the scope of this paper.
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