

Impact Factor: 6.017

ISSN: 2278-9529

Galaxy

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Peer-Reviewed e-Journal



Vol.13, Issue- 4 October 2024

13 Years of Open Access

Editor-In-Chief: Dr. Vishwanath Bite
Managing Editor: Dr. Madhuri Bite

www.galaxyimrj.com

About Us: <http://www.galaxyimrj.com/about-us/>

Archive: <http://www.galaxyimrj.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.galaxyimrj.com/contact-us/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.galaxyimrj.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.galaxyimrj.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.galaxyimrj.com/faq/>



Vedanta through the Lens of Aurobindo's Integralism

Archana Shukla

Ph. D. Research Scholar,
Himachal Pradesh University Shimla.

Article History: Submitted-13/09/2024, Revised-24/10/2024, Accepted-29/10/2024, Published-31/10/2024.

Abstract:

The traditional Vedanta conducts a thorough investigation into the presence of the Transcendental Being, the Ultimate Reality in this empirical world. The philosophy of Vedanta as propounded in the Upanishads, the *Gita*, and the *Brahma-Sutra* follows a dualistic approach, thus, treating *Prakriti* and *Purusha* as two different entities. Sankara's Advaita challenges this dualistic approach and introduces the non-dualistic Vedanta that advocates the Unity of Brahman and Nature, that is *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. Sri Aurobindo conforms to the non-dualistic approach of Sankara with the exception that he contradicts the latter's speculation of the world as an illusion. The present paper is an attempt to view the Advaita Vedanta through the lens of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Vedanta. The paper also proposes to study Aurobindo's criticism of the conventional Vedanta based on his study of the Vedic literature. The study delves into Sri Aurobindo's synthesis of the paths of knowledge, devotion and work

Keywords: Traditional Vedanta, Illusionist Vedanta, Realistic/Integral Vedanta, Oneness, Synthesis.

Indian philosophical system is studied under six classical schools termed as: *Nyaya-Vaisheshika*; *Sankhya-Yoga*; and *Purva Mimamsa-Vedanta*. Among all these systems of knowledge, Vedanta has, no doubt, captured the attention of the intellectual and spiritual seekers, not only in India but all over the world. The philosophy of Vedanta or *Uttara-Mimamsa* flourished under non-dualistic or Advaitic approach of Sankara (788-820 BC) a noted Indian thinker and spiritual saint:

The heritage from which Sankara synthesizes and systematizes the Advaita Vedanta philosophy is known as the Triple Foundation of Vedanta (*prasthanatraya*), consisting of the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Vedanta*, or *Brahma Sutra*. (Indich 2)

Sankara's philosophy is not just a literary commentary on this trio, rather, he analyses the dualistic theories and concepts defined in these scriptures through the lens of his non-dualistic approach.

Rather than merely offering a commentary then, Sankara uses these traditional texts as the authoritative scriptural basis from which his elaboration of a vision of non-dual, transcendental and purely spiritual reality (Brahman, Atman) follows. (Indich 2)

With an intense study of this school of thought, Sankara developed a deep understanding of the concept of the existence of a transcendental reality, and "the meaning of human life and the nature of the universe" (Indich 2).

Though the Upanishadic statement, "all this is Brahman," claims an identity between the world and the Brahman, yet the meaning conveyed is that this phenomenal world is utterly dependent on the ultimate Reality, Brahman and that it is no ways vice-versa, that is to say, existence of Brahman is completely independent of this phenomenal world. Similarly, when the Advaita defines Brahman as Existence (*Sat*), Consciousness (*Chit*), and Bliss (*Ananda*); it actually propounds that all the creation, the consciousness inherited and the desires or aspirations of the creatures are a reflection of the same Brahman and not the diverse elements or parts of Brahman:

For him Sacchidānanda is pure existence (*sat*), pure consciousness plus pure force (*cit*) and pure bliss (*ānanda*). Both consciousness and force being real, Sacchidānanda is both static and dynamic, being as well as the becoming, transcendent and immanent or both Shiva and Kali. (Dhar 318)

Hence, he establishes the unity of both *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, visualising them as the most revered deities *Shiva* and *Kali*, as "being as well as becoming."

Again, Swami Medhananda in his research article equates Sacchidananda or the Divine Consciousness with Shakti and utters:

According to Aurobindo, the sole reality is Saccidānanda (Being/Consciousness-Force/Bliss), the infinite, impersonal-personal Divine Consciousness which, in its personal and dynamic aspect as Śakti, manifests as everything in the universe. (Medhananda)



Thus, the concept of existence, consciousness, and bliss cannot and should not be used to define or limit Brahman. Sri Aurobindo also posits, "...as the sea is to its waves, so is Brahman to His creation" (Aurobindo, *Kena and Other Upanishads* 402).

In his interpretation of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Swami Prabhupada also throws light on the concept of *Ishvara* and *Prakriti*:

The position of *īśvara*, the Supreme Lord, is that of supreme consciousness. The *jīvas*, or the living entities, being parts and parcels of the Supreme Lord, are also conscious. Both the living entity and material nature are explained as *prakṛti*, the energy of the Supreme Lord, but one of the two, the *jīva*, is conscious. The other *prakṛti* is not conscious. That is the difference. Therefore the *jīva-prakṛti* is called superior because the *jīva* has consciousness which is similar to the Lord's. The Lord is supreme consciousness, however, and one should not claim that the *jīva*, the living entity, is also supremely conscious. (Prabhupada 9)

Here, the writer clearly claims that the *Gita* considers *jīva* the supreme creation but not the one who could attain the supreme consciousness. This view is in a complete contrast with the vision of Sri Aurobindo who had experienced the supramental descent in his own body and who was determined to make this experience a collective one.

Even the *via negativa* statement, *neti neti*, meaning 'not this, not this' (from *Bṛihadaranyaka* Upanishad) does not intend to limit Brahman by indicating what is not Brahman. Rather, the statement specifies that "Since all phenomenal distinctions depend on Brahman, they cannot serve as adequate means to apprehend or define it" (Indich 5). This way the ultimate reality is beyond the thought and description of the human intellect. It is again a confusion how this indescribable and unthinkable Brahman causes the creation and Advaitins answer it by introducing the concept of *maya*. *Maya* is considered a power that hides Brahman and creates the illusion of the existence of this phenomenal world:

Indeed, *Ishvara*'s cosmic illusion certainly seems real enough to those who are subject to it, and rightly so according to the Advaitic perspective, since *maya* defines the limits within which our phenomenal experience is confined. (Indich 5)

Advaitins claim that this phenomenal world is headed by *Ishwar*, an authority with *maya* as a power to run the world. Advaita categorises knowledge as *para* or the higher

knowledge, the knowledge and awareness of the presence of Brahman as the Absolute reality, and *apara* or the lower knowledge, the knowledge of this objective phenomenal world. The higher knowledge is the knowledge of the unity of the individual self (*jiva*) with the Soul/*Atman*, the Ultimate Reality. The concept of diversity between the two is an outcome of *avidya* or ignorance. The higher knowledge or the knowledge of the harmony or oneness of Self with Brahman leads the seeker to liberation or *moksha*, the ultimate aim of this physical existence or life.

The basic difference between the Vedic literature and the Advaita is that the former posits Brahman as the absolute consciousness, transcendental and exclusive of the phenomenal world, and the latter denies any duality or diversity between the two:

So we see how the ultimate reality expounded in the Upanishads, Brahman, is Pure Existence– Consciousness– Bliss, *Sat Chit Ananda*. Existence, consciousness and bliss are not qualities or properties of Brahman. It is not that Brahman exists, but that It is existence itself. Not that Brahman is a conscious entity, rather It is consciousness itself. And not that Brahman is happy, It is bliss itself. (Sarvapriyananda 6)

Sarvapriyananda, thus, posits that Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss are not the different entities related to Brahman, they are Brahman too.

Sri Aurobindo's integral Vedanta has revolutionised the study of Indian Knowledge system. His Vedanta, no doubt, is inspired by the Advaita Vedanta of the great Indian spiritual leader Sankara, but still, his Vedantic view is unique in his rejection of Sankara's Illusionist Advaita, and his own discovery of Realistic Advaita. He believes in the Oneness of Many. A materialist denies the existence of Spirit and conforms to the "Monism of Matter or Force" (Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* 9), completely ignoring anything existent beyond Matter. An ascetic, on the other hand, admits existence of pure Spirit and denies the reality of the materialistic world. However, both the Matter and Spirit are real. In fact, Spirit manifests Itself in Matter in the form of Divine Consciousness or *Sachchidananda*:

Sachchidananda (Existence: Conscious-Force: Bliss) is the obverse; man-as-he-is in his terrestrial habitat is the reverse; and the transfiguration of the latter into the former is the whole aim of all spiritual endeavour. The one divine existence, having taken in terms of its capacity for mutable becoming an involutory descent into the lower hemisphere of phenomenal life, the evolutionary ascent has now to re-achieve



what is lost and return to the life divine. The *one* has become *many*; harmony has broken into a million discords; Truth has disintegrated into deceptive half-truths and falsehoods; immortality has derailed itself into death. (Iyengar, KSS 175)

This deceptive notion of Many is an outcome of the ego caused by Ignorance or *avidya*.

The Divine descends into inconscient Matter becoming Many. Next, it is the turn of the Matter to evolve and ascend to attain the divinity and the Oneness with the Spirit. He advocates evolution, a process mandatory for a spiritual transformation and proclaims:

A divine life upon earth, the ideal we have placed before us, can only come about by a spiritual change of our being and a radical and fundamental change, an evolution or revolution of our nature. (Aurobindo, *Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth* 60)

He further asserts:

The Supermind is in its very essence a truth-consciousness, a consciousness always free from the Ignorance which is the foundation of our present natural or evolutionary existence and from which nature in us is trying to arrive at self-knowledge and a right consciousness and the right use of our existence in the universe. (Aurobindo, *Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth* 61)

Supermind, according to Sri Aurobindo is the highest state of the transformation of human mind. In order to materialise a supramental manifestation, the mind must evolve into Supermind. “Supermind”, in his own words, “is an eternal reality of the divine Being and the Divine Nature” (Aurobindo, *Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth* 62), and:

Supermind is the grade of existence beyond mind, life and Matter and, as mind, life and Matter have manifested upon earth, so too must Supermind in the inevitable course of things manifest in the world of Matter. In fact, a supermind is already here but it is involved, concealed behind this manifest mind, life and Matter... (Aurobindo, *Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth* 63)

Conforming to Vedanta, Sri Aurobindo asserts that the divine is already present in Matter in a veiled state. The seeker needs to evolve through integral yoga to become capable of the manifestation of this divinity, for “only what is involved can evolve” (Aurobindo, *Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth* 63).

Aurobindo considers the Upanishads the true Vedantic scriptures which proclaim the original Vedantic theories. The Vedanta of the Upanishads, claims the Becoming of the Being as real as the Being Itself. In *The Life Divine*, he explores various principles and approaches of Vedanta, and also registers his own deviations from the classical key of Vedantic concepts. In line with the traditional Vedanta, he also analyses the nature of existence and consciousness. In his *magnum opus*, the veteran scholar declares that the human beings have the highest aspiration to attain God, Light, Freedom, and Immortality. They desire to know the Divine, to possess It and attain that highest state of Consciousness where they become One with the Divine. However, the limited ego within, bars the way to that divinity:

Sri Aurobindo's teaching states that this One Being and Consciousness is involved here in Matter. Evolution is the method by which it liberates itself; consciousness appears in what seems to be inconscient, and once having appeared is self-impelled to grow higher and higher and at the same time to enlarge and develop towards a greater and greater perfection. Life is the first step of this release of consciousness; mind is the second; but the evolution does not finish with mind, it awaits a release into something greater, a consciousness which is spiritual and supramental. (Aurobindo, *Integral Yoga* 3)

Aurobindo strongly believes that this supramental consciousness will pave the way for the fulfilment of the human aspiration of God, Light, Freedom, and Immortality. He advocates the process of involution and evolution for making this dream come true.

In *Integral Yoga*, he announces:

The ascent of the human soul to the supreme Spirit is that soul's highest aim and necessary, for that is the supreme reality; but there can be too the descent of the Spirit and its powers into the world and that would justify the existence of the material world also, give a meaning, a divine purpose to the creation and solve the riddle. (44)

The ascent is the process of evolution of Matter to life to mind to Supermind, and the descent is the involution of Supermind to mind to life to the inconscient Matter.

Sri Aurobindo defines these two processes very beautifully in *Integral Yoga*. He explains:

The creation has descended all the degrees of being from the Supermind to Matter and in each degree it has created a world, reign, plane or order proper to that degree. In the creating of the material world there was a plunge of this descending consciousness into an apparent Inconscience, degree by degree, until it recovers its



highest spiritual and supramental summits and manifests their powers here in Matter. (45)

He is determined to lead humanity to attain the long-desired wish to comprehend and attain the Divine through his integral yoga.

... integral yoga accepts and, to a large degree, even follows the paths of other contemplative traditions, especially those of the Eastern Hindu and Vedantic schools and yoga philosophical approaches as the Advaita Vedanta and Samkhya philosophy. Techniques of concentration and meditation, like in the classical raja yoga or jnana yoga, aimed at calming the mind is a basic requisite here too. The purpose is to reach an inner spiritual realization that transcends the ordinary states of consciousness emerging into the ultimate reality, which is the Brahman, the ‘One without a second’ of the Indian Vedic tradition, the non-dual teachings or the Buddhist nirvana. (Masi 517)

The manifestation of divine is realised during the processes of evolution and involution. Sri Aurobindo disagrees with the popular belief that evolution is the aim of the creation. Brahman is not bound to “develop self-conscious individuality in every particle of matter” (Aurobindo, *Kena and Other Upanishads* 414).

The traditional Vedanta summons the seeker to renounce the world and the worldly things considering them *mithya* or an illusion with the Divine as the only reality. Sri Aurobindo differs from the traditional theory in that according to him, the world is as real as Brahman and advocates the need of a complete transformation in the world consciousness to realise the Spirit. He invents the method of integral yoga through a synthesis of knowledge (jnana), devotion (bhakti), and works (karma) to materialise the aspired transformation:

This yoga accepts the value of cosmic existence and holds it to be a reality; its object is to enter into a higher Truth-Consciousness or Divine Supramental Consciousness in which action and creation are the expression not of Ignorance and imperfection, but of the Truth, the Light, the Divine Ananda. (*Integral Yoga* 26-27)

He has designed a whole system of integral yoga for the attainment of the supreme consciousness in this life without renouncing the world.

The traditional Vedanta detects the intellectual reservations of the human mind in understanding the infinite nature, and the immutability of Brahman and seeks after the intuitional and spiritual insight for a deep probe into the existence of the Supreme Reality. It

propounds a dual philosophy addressing *Purusha* and *Prakriti* as two different entities. Sankara's Advaita Vedanta criticises this view, and puts forward the non-dualistic Vedanta addressing the Supreme soul and the individual soul as one. He condemns the traditional Vedantic view as, according to him, interpreted in Vedantic literature, viz., the Upanishads and even the *Bhagavad Gita*. Contrary to Sankara's interpretation of the scriptures, Sri Aurobindo resolves that these scriptures give an all-encompassing view of the phenomenal world and that nowhere the world is rejected as false or an illusion. He believes that the ultimate aim of man is to attain the state of Divine Consciousness and that is possible only when the divinity is already present in matter, mind, and life, though in an unmanifested or veiled state.

The dualistic approach of the traditional Vedanta as well as Shankara's Illusionist Advaita are criticised by him in *The Life Divine*. In the text, at the very outset, he rejects the tendency to divide the universe into the dual power of Soul and Nature or *Purusha* and *Prakriti*:

For both Thought and Life, a choice then becomes imperative. Thought comes to deny the one as an illusion of the imagination or the other as an illusion of the senses; Life comes to fix on the immaterial and flee from itself in a disgust or a self-forgetting ecstasy, or else to deny its own immortality and take its orientation away from God and towards the animal. Purusha and Prakriti, the passively luminous Soul of the Sankhyas and their mechanically active Energy, have nothing in common, not even their opposite modes of inertia; their antinomies can only be resolved by the cessation of the inertly driven Activity into the immutable Repose upon which it has been casting in vain the sterile procession of its images. Shankara's wordless, inactive Self and his Maya of many names and forms are equally disparate and irreconcilable entities; their rigid antagonism can terminate only by the dissolution of the multitudinous illusion into the sole Truth of an eternal Silence. (9)

He views that the realisation of the Truth of existence can shed off the duality as well as illusionist non-duality of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*.

Finally, he envisions the integral spirituality through a realisation of presence of the divine element in every aspect of the physical world:

Integral spirituality, which includes the development of awareness towards the realisation of the divine in all facets of life, is the central idea of Sri Aurobindo's



philosophy. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy welcomes the notion of a divine manifestation in the material world, in contrast to orthodox Vedanta, which often emphasises sacrifice and transcendence of the material world. His conviction in the underlying divinity of all creation and the possibility of spiritual reform in all facets of life is reflected in this worldview. (Rathod 78)

Sri Aurobindo's integral Vedanta develops the idea of a supramental manifestation upon earth through the transformation of the lower consciousness of man to the divine consciousness. Masi observes:

By a more integral practice of karma yoga, the 'yoga of divine works' of the Bhagavad Gita, the principles of bhakti yoga and the spiritual path of devotion, Aurobindo delineated, especially in his 'Synthesis of Yoga', that there is a larger and more encompassing form of spiritual practice aimed at an ascension and also a descension of a higher Consciousness that works on our inner and outer being. Central to this discipline is the act of surrender and self-giving to the Divine. By a constant single-mindedness of our whole being onto the Divine and by transforming our emotional and still limited mental consciousness, a divine Shakti, i.e., the universal Conscious-Force, the 'Chit-Tapas' or 'Chit-Shakti' of the Shakti-Advaita, can transform and transmute our untransformed nature. (517-18)

By synthesizing karma yoga, bhakti yoga, and jnana yoga, Sri Aurobindo explored new vistas of spiritual manifestation through an ascension and a descension of the divine Consciousness, the key to his Vedantic vision.

Works Cited:

Aurobindo, Sri. *Integral Yoga*. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust.

---. *The Life Divine*. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust. 2006.

---. *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust. 2006.

---. *Kena and Other Upanishads*. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust. 2001.

Dhar, Uma. "Integral Yoga - The Unique Vision of Sri Aurobindo". *Online International Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, Volume-09, Issue 3, May-June 2019, pp. 317-25.

Indich, William M. *Consciousness in Advaita Vedanta*. Motilal Banarsidass. 1980.

Macro, Masi. "The Integral Cosmology of Sri Aurobindo: An Introduction from the Perspective of Consciousness Studies." *Integral Review*, September 2023, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 512-51.

Medhananda, "Cutting the Knot of the World Problem: Sri Aurobindo's Experiential and Philosophical Critique of Advaita Vedānta". *Religions*, 2021, 12(9),765, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12090765>

Prabhupada, Swami. *Bhagavad Gita as it is*. The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust. 1972, 1986.

Rathod, Snigdha. Meenakshi, Joshi. "Exploring the Themes in the Works of Sri Aurobindo". *AIRO Journal*, Vol. 2, Issue 1, April 2024, pp. 78-91.

Sarvapriyananda, Swami. "Sat Chit Ananda: The Philosophy of the Upanishads". *Academia*.

https://www.academia.edu/9494836/Sat_Chit_Ananda_The_Philosophy_of_the_Upanishads