

Editor's Preface

Sri Aurobindo has been described by Ken Wilber as “India’s greatest modern philosopher-sage” and also as “the greatest of all Vedantic philosophers”. The aim of this book is to highlight another aspect of Sri Aurobindo, not that of a philosopher but of a mystic, for whom the ultimate Reality — popularly called God or Spirit — is not an abstract or philosophical concept but a concrete experience, “more concrete than anything sensed by ear or eye or touch in the world of Matter”(p. 190). The aim of the book is to present Sri Aurobindo as an Enlightened One whose view of the human being is based not on speculative theory nor on statistical inference but on self-realization. The aim is to present Sri Aurobindo as a Seer whose delineation of the future of the human being and of human society is not an ideative dream of what ought to be, but a spiritual pre-vision of what is already in the process of becoming.

It is significant that Wilber, whom an author has described as “the most comprehensive philosophical thinker of our times”, bases his integral vision on the core model of the spectrum of consciousness, a model which underlies Sri Aurobindo’s map of Reality.

Two features of Sri Aurobindo’s psychological thought which have appealed to me most, and which I have tried to bring out in particular in this book, are its experiential basis and its integral nature.

Sri Aurobindo is among those few mystics who, based on a direct experience of the ultimate Reality, have given a systematic philosophical formulation of the nature of Reality founded on their experience. The mystical experience, states Sri Aurobindo, pertains to “a greater consciousness beyond Mind” (p. 182), and is therefore supra-intellectual. The mystic speaks about the supra-intellectual in philosophical or intellectual terms in order

to communicate to “those who still live in the mental intelligence” (p. 183). Among such philosophies based on mystical experience, Sri Aurobindo’s is perhaps the most comprehensive, permitting a synthesis and reconciliation of diverse insights which appear contrary because of their non-integral nature. In particular, Sri Aurobindo’s integral psychological thought provides a framework for the integration of the conventional psychologies of the West — which study the outer personality — with the spiritual psychologies of the East which deal chiefly with the inner person.

While advocating a strictly scientific method in the pursuit of psychological knowledge, Sri Aurobindo points out the inherent limitations of a methodology based solely on reason and positivism, and argues for a spiritual approach to the study of experience which lies beyond the realm of reason, thus vindicating both science and spirituality.

In Sri Aurobindo’s experience, the human being is one with and inseparable from the Being of the universe. Therefore in his thought, psychology is part of and intermingled with cosmology. The nature and development of the human being find an explanation in the light of the nature and evolution of the universe.

Sections in Part One of this book, consisting of passages from Sri Aurobindo’s writings, follow a sequential development of thought (except for sections 14, 15, 19 and 20), and are, therefore, best read consecutively, unless one is already adequately familiar with Sri Aurobindo’s thought.

The essays in Part Two of this book, originally written as independent articles, are meant to serve chiefly as an aid in understanding Sri Aurobindo’s own writings contained in the anthology. They do not purport to be my expositions of Sri Aurobindo’s thought but rather a faithful presentation of his thought, to a great extent in his own words. My comments are meant only to provide elucidations and to bring out the integral nature of the thought presented. Both the student and

the scholar were kept in view in writing these essays. Therefore their contents pertain to different levels of understanding.

Sri Aurobindo never tried to systematize his psychological thought which is scattered throughout his various and numerous writings on yoga and philosophy. The essays aim at bringing out explicitly the system underlying his thought.

Sri Aurobindo's writings, based on spiritual experience rather than on intellectual theory, can convey not only their thought content but also something of the higher state of consciousness underlying the thought when read in a meditatively receptive way. This is but one reason why I have often chosen to quote Sri Aurobindo instead of paraphrasing him.

The reader, if not already familiar with the fact, will discover that Sri Aurobindo's writings cannot be understood by means of "speed reading". To read Sri Aurobindo with understanding is to engage in a sort of reflective meditation, dwelling on each sentence, sometimes re-reading a sentence.

The passages in the anthology have been drawn from a number of different sources, including Sri Aurobindo's letters on the same subject to different disciples. Therefore, although each passage under a given topic deals with a different aspect of the topic, certain ideas are repeated. Some repetitions will be found also in the essays. Generally, these repetitions serve to drive home salient or seminal ideas in Sri Aurobindo's thought.

A word regarding Sri Aurobindo's terminology. As do many original thinkers and persons who have had a unique experience, Sri Aurobindo, too, employs certain words of his own coinage, e.g. "supermind", "overmind", etc., and uses many common terms with an uncommon connotation, e.g. "transformation", "psychic", etc. Grasping well the meanings of such terms as used by Sri Aurobindo is indispensable to the understanding of his thought.

"Yoga", states Sri Aurobindo, "is nothing but practical psychology." For yoga as a method for the attainment of Self-realization and transformation of consciousness is merely the

application of certain psychological principles. This book, which deals only with the theoretical aspects of Sri Aurobindo's psychological thought, is thus an introduction to the practical psychology underlying his yoga.

I am deeply grateful to Ken Wilber who offered helpful comments and valuable suggestions regarding the manuscript. His support and commendation have been a great encouragement to me in my hope to bring this book to a wide readership among those interested in a greater than conventional psychology.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay my tribute to Wilber for exercising the widest influence in highlighting the integral nature of Sri Aurobindo's thought. Thanks to Wilber's work, now published in twenty languages, almost everyone the world over interested in integral thought today is apt to be familiar with the name of Sri Aurobindo, whereas until a few decades ago, Sri Aurobindo was to a large extent unknown outside of India.

I am grateful also to Professor Arabinda Basu, former Sri Aurobindo Professor of Philosophy at Hindu Banaras University, who has always been willing to give me his time whenever I needed help for clarifying philosophical points pertaining to Sri Aurobindo's psychological thought.

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A. S. Dalal