

**From Aurobindo to Auroville:  
Marrying the Mystical and the Empirical**

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## ABSTRACT

### **From Aurobindo to Auroville: Marrying the Mystical and the Empirical.**

This thesis examines a proposed narrative between text and practice, in the work of the modern Indian thinker Aurobindo Ghose and Auroville; an experimental township created under his influence. Aurobindo's spiritual philosophy poses non-distinction between transcendent, infinite Spirit and the immanent, finite Matter of terrestrial existence, claiming that the realisation of the one need not entail the dismissal of the other. With a deep focus on Aurobindo's philosophical magnum opus, *The Life Divine*, and a wide-ranging consideration of his vast disciplinary oeuvre, this thesis argues for a commonality of "method" in text, which might find translation and application outside the strictly textual.

This "universal realism" is not only elucidated in the variant foci of his broad textual oeuvre: comprising politics, psychology and poetics, but is also foreshadowed by the key experiences and spiritual realisations in his own life. My thesis attempts to understand the mileage of these ideals and resultant methodology, to argue for their usefulness both for an integral understanding of Aurobindo's diverse corpus, and for an integral re-imagining of individual and communal development.

The thesis highlights the way in which the ideas of Aurobindo and his Parisian spiritual companion, Mirra Alfassa (or the "Mother"), find dialogue with modern, global ideas within Auroville. I argue that we might see their ideas at play; within the creation of new forms of institutional and architectural development; reconceived notions of global spirituality, as well as within the discourse that makes these intentions explicit. This dialogue utilises and redefines the problematic dichotomies highlighted in Aurobindo's work: (nature/divine, individual/society, tradition/innovation, mind/body), to examine "futorologisms": linguistic and cultural forms posed by the community such as "divine anarchy" and "embodied spirituality", that inspire conceptual frameworks beyond a dualistic paradigm.

I consider the mileage of these literary and social texts as contemporary Utopian projects that might be reconceived in light of a wider zeitgeist, beyond themselves and potentially beyond the discipline of Religious Studies.

**Emily Kilburn.**

**From Aurobindo to Auroville: marrying the mystical and the empirical.**

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## **Introduction**

This thesis explores a proposed link between texts and practice, through an examination of the life and ideas of the modern Indian thinker, Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950), and the intentional community of Auroville. Aurobindo was a thinker of much depth and abstraction, yet also a thinker who characterized his spiritual ideas as fundamentally non-distinct from, and ultimately transformative of, experience in the material world. This thesis takes seriously Aurobindo's Integral rhetoric to argue that a continuity might be made explicit between, firstly; the philosophical, poetic and social foci of Aurobindo's texts, secondly; between the differing personality and projects of both Aurobindo and the Mother, and, thirdly; between the texts of these thinkers and the praxis of the Auroville community.

The aim of the thesis is to offer a phenomenological reading of Aurobindo's work, not only through an interpretation of his texts, but also through an examination of his subsequent re-interpretation by an ongoing line of followers and practitioners. The approach is phenomenological in tracing Aurobindo's claim that truth "cannot be shut up inside a single trenchant formula" (Aurobindo, 1997, EoG: 4), but rather might be approached, understood and practically applied through the subjective self understanding of multiple agents, and through the vicissitudes of time and cultural spaces. Not only does this approach not necessitate contradiction, but, in line with Aurobindo's view of truth, retains the dynamism and malleability that all "great" ideas possess. My work addresses how interpretations of Aurobindo's work and explications of its "meaning" have developed, been revised and drawn into negotiation with other key tropes, such as "environmentalism", "world peace", and "inter-faith" discourse. Most particularly I focus upon;

- a) The hitherto unarticulated interplay between Aurobindo's philosophical, yogic and Socio- psychological texts, arguing that the evolutionism of each must be understood in correspondent fashion, ultimately entailing that his philosophy requires a politics.
- b) The partially articulated interplay (Heehs, 2011) between Aurobindo and the Mother's ideas and the differing ways they envisioned and articulated the remit of Integral philosophy.
- c) The implicitly articulated interplay between Aurobindo's ideas and the Auroville community. This, I claim, remains an implicit connection since the Auroville community do refer to the influence of Aurobindo and the Mother - and prior research references this influence -yet it has not been made explicit why this is a community with spiritual foundations, and how Aurobindo's ideas are utilized herein.

This thesis thus aims to be constructive in aligning figures and concerns often studied separately. The articulation of the ongoing and subjective interpretation of Aurobindo's ideas is, I claim, an important dimension to consider if one is to understand not only the historical importance of his ideas, but their continued re-visiting in time. The basis of the unified narrative between such widely differing concerns, is not, I shall argue, through a dogmatic transference of ideas but rather through a dialogue between time-bound individuals and the apparently timeless ideas encountered in texts and social forms. This creative dialogue between temporal individuals and transcendent concerns might become the very means through which Aurobindo's ideas evolve in the texts and societies of today and tomorrow. Herein the key to an idea's grateness becomes inextricably connected to its ability to be re-vivified, re-imagined and re-embodied in each subsequent time.

However, although the creative outlets- of text, institutional/ social forms- provide an intention, or focus for the individual, ultimately - for Aurobindo and in the self- understanding of Auroville - they remain substances and tools utilized in service of a vaster aim: the greater self- realization of the individual beyond time-bound selfhood. Thus, although this thesis appears to be about books, societies and metaphysical ideas, it is ultimately about people and their aspirations. This thesis focuses on the human desire to self- transcend. However, and unlike the ascetic transcendence of (Advaita) Vedanta - through which Aurobindo has found clear influence - the individual discovers his transcendence, and his Divine nature, not through ascetic renunciation but creative praxis. This thesis demonstrates how Aurobindo, and subsequently, the Mother and the Auroville community, employ, not a soteriology of renunciation from the world, the individual self and its products but recognize the poetic, social and material as vehicles to realise this transition.

The vision of the human as a “transitional being”, or a being to be transcended is primary within Aurobindo’s texts. In the various disciplines touched by his vast textual oeuvre, Aurobindo presents both a progressive and an Integral vision of the individual and his products: textual ideas, poetic forms and social manifestations. His philosophy is progressive in positing not only the evolutionary nature of truth, from a subconscious truth of Nature through a semi-conscious truth of rational individuals to a superconscious Divine truth, but also the evolutionary nature of individuals and human society. Thus, Aurobindo considers the current manifestation of humanity as one of transition, rather than culmination. His philosophy is Integral in positing this evolution - of text, nature and society - as a history of synthesis. In other words, the key to their transcendence is not a move away from past forms in pursuit of pure

novelty, but a re-imagining and bringing together of the past and present formulations to create something new.

My approach in this thesis attempts to map onto Aurobindo's view of nature, society, and ideas as vehicles developing through the agency of the individual in time. I examine how the ideas within his own texts, have found re-making in subsequent times and places, through the agency of subsequent interpreters and practitioners, most notably, Mirra Alfassa and the Auroville community. Through a thematic exploration of the key tensions inherent in Aurobindo's key ideas- as exemplified in the ideological/ individual dialogue above- this thesis argues that Aurobindo's abstract, integral philosophy can be interpreted as a pragmatic methodology for realising the ends of a society informed by progressive spirituality. Therefore, I read Aurobindo as a pragmatic thinker whose work entails not simply reading, but action.

The central focus of Aurobindo's texts is a non-distinction between transcendent spiritual truth and immanent material being, and thus his work operates to critique the typical juxtaposition between asceticism and materialism. Echoing this non-separation between truth and being, the mystical ideas formulated in his texts are, he claims, not the result of a purely theoretical mind, but find their genesis in the empirical, as the culmination of his own spiritual experiences. Thus Aurobindo, even through the events of his own biography, enlivens, or gives temporal life to the mystical by positing its realisation through, and dialogical relationship with, the experiential pragmatics of existence.

This series of autobiographical realizations is plotted in *chapter one* of this thesis, wherein I demonstrate a move from considering the "partial truth" contained within

each of Aurobindo's spiritual realisations, to discover their place as progressive building blocks within the wider truth synthesis he proposes. However, the truths expressed by these experiences are not particular to Aurobindo, but also found within a vast history of Indian textual synthesis. Therefore, Aurobindo's own work is also considered a re-making, utilising forms that not only precede and are re-illuminated through his particular experience and synthetic formulation, but might also succeed it, through the re-imagining of his own work in turn.

The influence of predecessors on Aurobindo's philosophical formulation, most particularly from within the multiple strands of *Vedantic* interpretation, is explicated in *chapter two* of this thesis. Herein we see Aurobindo's re-synthesis of the past as an inherently creative poetic activity, which neither purely reproduces prior ideas, nor dismisses history to grasp at novelty, but rather "transcreates": re-imagining these premises according to Aurobindo's particular vantage point in time.

This process is in line with the synthetic capacity of *Supermind* proposed within Aurobindo's work *The Life Divine*, which is the capacity upheld, not only as the ultimate nature of the transcendental Divine, but also a capacity that, he argues, is implicit within and realisable by individuals in time. This higher order capacity is able to simultaneously imagine itself within the shifting bounds of time, without losing its infinite, transcendent status.

The premise of *The Life Divine* is that human beings might realize the *Supermind* capacity, and its greater Self-concept, not purely through ascetic withdrawal from the world, but also through realizing self within the materiality of the world, whose past provides the very creative substance and instrumentation for present selves to

realize and re-formulate their future. Thus, Aurobindo's metaphysics becomes a creative poetics, proposing less a static formulation, and more a transitional imagining, necessitating interpretation and re-formulation beyond itself.

Aurobindo was a mystic and a poet, but also a spiritual reformer, and this thesis claims that his ideas transcend these disciplinary boundaries to become a model for understanding human expression and potential on a much wider level. Thus the thesis takes his ideas beyond pure theory to understand what they might mean practically for individuals and collectives. One community in particular has elevated an interpretation of these ideas to the status of an Everyman project for human unity and world peace. This community is Auroville.

My project takes seriously Auroville's claim to be a community with spiritual foundations, arguing that, even though such foundations might be difficult to uncover, they must be appreciated in order for the township to be understood, not only in its manifestation, but also in its aspirations. This approach does not aim to vindicate Auroville, or judge the validity of its interpretations of either Aurobindo or subsequent practitioners, but is rather an attempt to demonstrate the complexity of maintaining dialogue with transcendent ideals in shifting spaces and times.

Although the academic study of Auroville has been copious, and amenable to viewing through sociological, ecological and economic lenses, study of the community has often occurred with little explicit reference to Aurobindo's ideas, the very ideas that are said to inspire it. Research which has acknowledged Aurobindo, has done so with rather cursory reference to his texts, and has often been undertaken by insiders who speak, if not from a position of faith, at least from a place of deep sympathy. My

project argues that a bridge might be built between the abstract texts of Aurobindo and the lived community of Auroville, demonstrating a complex, multivocal and continuing re-interpretation of key principles in space and time.

The idea of utilizing Aurobindo's philosophy for social transformation finds its discussion within *chapter three* of this thesis. Herein the "Mystic Empiricism" of chapter one – which roots Aurobindo's transcendent ideas within his embodied experience - and the "poetic metaphysics" of chapter two- which roots Aurobindo's philosophy within a creative process of re- making find their practical application in the social corollary of "Divine Anarchy". This concept is both continued by Aurobindo's spiritual consort and founder of Auroville, Mirra Alfassa (the Mother), as well as by present day Aurovilians. Divine anarchy, in a similar way to the above neologisms, subverts the typical distinctions inherent in rational discourse, as it is a category aspiring beyond Mind to Aurobindo's creative capacity of Supermind. As the *Supermind* allows, and even necessitates, multiple lines of creative application, in order to realize its greater Self Being, so the concept of Divine anarchy promotes multifarious lines of individual expression, yet grounds each as signifier to a greater Divine unity, which transcends and encompasses it. The concept of Divine anarchy is re-imagined within chapter three as a kind of "hermeneutic utopianism": which describes Auroville as an interpretive, undetermined project, open to, and attempting to promote individual difference, without losing the deeper teleological aspiration that undergirds it.

Thus, the thesis attempts an exploration into the central theme of "mystic empiricism", as well as its correlative subthemes, to argue for their usefulness in both promoting an integral understanding of Aurobindo's diverse corpus, and their

potential ability to be abstracted, as concepts amenable to re-imagining in the light of individual and communal development through time. Such concepts act to ground Aurobindo's critique of typical binaries and form the trajectory of this thesis. The central juxtapositions explored, and reunified, are that between: the "traditional" and the "innovative"; the "divine order" and the "anarchic de-construction", the "aesthetic poetic" and the "rational metaphysic"; the "time-bound hermeneutic" and the "timeless utopic". These themes are explored and their natural overlap teased apart, both in their origin and textual basis through the work of Aurobindo. Furthermore, and as discussed in the methodological section, these concepts, and their inherent tensions, were utilized as tools to promote discussion and interpretation, as part of my fieldwork in the Auroville community.

*Chapter four* steps outside textual formulation to understand how these ideas find practical application in Auroville. This chapter is an enquiry into the multiple methods Aurovilians have employed in an attempt to realise Spirituality within and through material practice. Here I utilise fieldwork data from my five-month stay in the community in 2013. This period of fieldwork incorporated a mixture of participant observation, one to one unstructured interviews and a focus group, or community discussion series, which I created and conducted.

Participant observation was conducted through residence at a number of sites within the Auroville community. Initially I spent time in "Sadhana Forest", a rural community engaged in permaculture, vegan living and self-sustainability, before moving to Arka, a hostel community created for the elderly in Auroville to promote ongoing mental and physical health and involvement in society. Latterly I stayed within the community "Utility", an early Auroville community, alongside a number of

long term Auroville residents. Living and working alongside residents promoted not only an increasing number of discussions, but also a swift integration into community life. This ensured I was not regarded a conspicuous figure at community council meetings, reading groups, or school and community visits.

A continued presence in the community entailed that the snowball- sampling utilized to select interviewees, swiftly produced a long line of participants. After an interview, I would request the participant recommend another two community members who might respond to an interview request. Although this approach may have limited the variety of participants I had exposure to, it also increased the validity of my findings, since even on first meeting I would tend to find respondents relaxed and open since I arrived recommended by friends.

My method of interviewing aimed at creating an organic rapport between the participant and myself to encourage candid discussion on ultimately very personal topics, such as their beliefs, life choices and aspirations for the community they had joined. Typically, I would arrange to take a participant out for coffee or lunch at a venue of their choice, or arrange a visit to their home. This ensured they were in a space where they felt comfortable. I was wary of imposing my own reading of Aurobindo, the Mother and Auroville, so I would tend to tread carefully with a typical, but by no means rehearsed, pre-amble wherein their background and reasons for joining the community were traced, before questions of faith, politics, community and education were slowly introduced. I would often utilize anonymized excerpts from other interviewees to check participants' responses and feed into a wider discourse beyond the interview.

All participants signed agreements prior to the interviews with the majority agreeing to be taped and for their real names to be used. Where this is not the case, respondents have been marked by a \* in the bibliography. Full CUREC methodological approval, as well as approval from the community “Gatekeepers” was sought prior to undertaking the fieldwork.

The idea of utilising focus- groups as part of my methodology was cemented during my initial visit to the community prior to beginning the thesis (August 2011). This mini visit revealed the community’s penchant for discussion groups, with many members actively engaged in political, academic, spiritual and lifestyle groups. The visit also revealed the nebulous nature of the community’s aspirations, and I was challenged to imagine ways of framing discussions, which might make explicit the implicit spiritual foundations of the community. Each fortnightly discussion group centered upon a particular “tension”, e.g. “religion” and “politics”, “community” and “individual”, which was utilized to promote discourse and debate. Each tension was accompanied by number of quotations from the texts of the Mother, Aurobindo or Auroville, to illustrate points and promote their interpretation. The aim of this structure was to keep the conversation community directed, with myself as researcher stepping in only to facilitate and encourage less forthcoming participants.

From the interviews and community discussion series I held in Auroville, I have attempted to enliven the themes introduced in prior chapters, namely; “mystic empiricism”; “poetic metaphysics”; “divine anarchy”; “spiritual materialism” to understand their operation and meaning within Aurovilian discourse and practice.

These themes transcend the confines of text, interpretation or practical application and thus might be considered qualities for creative interpretation, rather than prescriptions for restricting creativity. This enables a continuity of focus in the face of temporal and modal change, i.e, in the move from interpretation to re-interpretation, and in the move from the study of text to social reality.

Thus, in this thesis the remit of Aurobindo's ideas is re-imagined, as hailing a project beyond the text, as a spirituality that might entail a politics. This necessitates, I argue, a re-writing of the popular conception of Aurobindo's identity. The common story of Aurobindo, as active political figure turned passive spiritual figure is re-imagined less as an identity of disjunct and more as an identity in continuous narrative. Here the political is seen as informing and enlivening the spiritual, rather than the spiritual negating the political.

The chapters of this thesis in turn attempt to move beyond the separation of spiritual passivity and material activity, to operate as an oscillation between text and praxis. The first chapter grounds itself strongly within the experiences recounted by Aurobindo, and examines how these have been formulated to create a unique philosophical text. The second chapter explores how the formulation of this text, *The Life Divine*, in turn provides a model for its own utilisation beyond text. The third chapter begins by looking at the current manifestation of the Auroville, before tracing back the roots of its conception, through the mutual mergence of the socio-political texts of Aurobindo, and the more practical spiritual history of the Mother. The fourth chapter attempts a culmination: a translation of the concepts of text into the social arena to explore how they inform discussion and spiritual practice.

## Chapter One: Mystic Empiricism

### i) Introduction: Mystic Empiricism as the Basis for understanding Aurobindo.

For Aurobindo Ghose the mystical is inextricably grounded in the experiential.

This argument is emphasized in two ways throughout this chapter. Firstly, and most importantly for the ongoing relevance of Aurobindo's project, "mystic empiricism" refers to the practical implications of his integral ideas. In this sense Aurobindo is not unique, but a man of his time and space. Indian philosophy, according to Radhakrishnan, is eminently empirical: '[it] takes its origin in life, and enters back into life after passing through the schools' (Radhakrishnan, 2008: 4). Similarly, Havell differentiates Indian philosophy, from that of the West, as less 'dogma' and more a 'working hypothesis of human conduct, adapted to different stage of development and different conditions of life' (Havell, 1922: 170 in Radhakrishnan, 2008:5). Thus, Aurobindo's work is just one figure in a greater backdrop of pragmatic Indian philosophy.

The inherently practical side of Aurobindo's work, however, arises out of a second and principal definition of "mystic empiricism." This refers to the autobiographical Aurobindo through a self-narrative that posits an identity moulded and realized through mystical experience. In Aurobindo's work *On Himself* there is a couching of ideas and self-identity, neither in the abstract reasoning of the philosopher, nor in the concrete status of the worldly man, but rather in a series of private spiritual

experiences. In this work Aurobindo addresses his ashramites -- those with perhaps better claim to know him than anyone else -- claiming: 'neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all of my life; it has not been on the surface for men to see' (Aurobindo, OH 1972: 378). Thus, he sets to work dismantling the twin façade of Statesman and Intellectual to reveal a spiritual core behind the worldly self-manifestation and intellectual text-manifestation that have come to characterize his thought and following.

Stephen Phillips (1986), in his work *The Philosophy of Brahman*, is the first to coin Aurobindo a "mystic empiricist" in this second sense, by illustrating the primacy of personal spiritual realizations to his life and work:

he builds upon his mystic experiences, offering us descriptions of them, hypotheses that stick rather close to them, and also bold speculations which reach far beyond the experiences themselves in order to place them in a coherent world picture (Phillips, 1986: viii).

Phillips here illustrates not only the primacy of the experiential for Aurobindo, but also his tendency to merge and elevate these personal realisations to a universal series of truths. The twin personality and universality of Aurobindo's work is reiterated by McDermott who points to the divergent camps of followers Aurobindo has amassed

[S]omewhere between the tendency of disciples to create a personality cult and the tendency of philosophers to treat philosophical ideas apart from their personal and cultural moorings, lies the proper relationship between intellectual biography and systematic exposition (McDermott, 1997:288).

As we shall see, the unification of the mystical and empirical throughout these accounted experiences is key to the bringing together of Idealism and Materialism

and Spirit and Matter, which Aurobindo has become renowned for. This chapter develops and illustrates Phillips' characterization to focus upon, and bring together, four spiritual realisations within Aurobindo's life story. I argue that these events are crucial for an integral understanding of his later writing and ideas. We might, I suggest, discover the seeds of Aurobindo's methods and the key charted stages of his proposed psychological, sociological and spiritual development in the very trajectory of these personal experiences. Thus, these realisations might be a useful way of bringing together, not only the diverse phases of Aurobindo's life, but also the multifarious concerns of his textual corpus.

The cohesion of Aurobindo's experience, and resulting textual oeuvre, leads me to argue that each of his works, rather than being examined solely in itself, must be approached systematically, and considered in its place as a part of a greater textual whole. Within this whole we might discern a unity of "method" which, speculatively, echoes his ideas on human physical origin and evolution and its corresponding social, psychological and spiritual facets. This chapter lays the ground, firstly, for a narrowing of focus, through a critical analysis and re-understanding of key texts (*The Life Divine* and *Synthesis of Yoga* in chapter two), and secondly an expansion - a move to considering the cross-fertilisation of these ideas (the Mother and the foundation of the Auroville community in chapter three) before considering the remit of these ideas beyond the text, through examination of the contemporary theoretical and practical "enactment" of these ideas by the Auroville community (chapter four).

## ii) Exception and Synthesis.

Typically, within Aurobindo's key texts we have the posing of two concurrent principles, which work in dialogue and are mutually transformative. For instance, as explicated in Aurobindo's text *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Nature is governed by a principle of exception, or tendency towards creative fragmentation through 'development into (finite) forms' (Aurobindo, SoY 2006: 5), but also a principle of integration, which even when broken apart 'unite(s) once more in a larger and more puissant synthesis' (Aurobindo, SoY 2006: 5)

Within this chapter, I take first the principle of exception, describing Aurobindo according to the particularities of the differing phases and creative outlets of his existence, and then move to a project of synthesis. As he himself remarks of his work:

There is very little argument in my philosophy... What is there is a harmonising of the different parts of a many-sided knowledge so that all unites logically together. But it is not by force of logical argument that it is done, but by a clear vision of the relations and sequences of the knowledge (Aurobindo, OH, 2011:66).

In a similar vein, I argue for clear overlap and harmony between the many facets of his life, and gradually move to the principle of integration as the key to understanding his life and work.

### iii) Brief life sketch.

Thus, taking seriously the adage that “ontology precedes epistemology”, or that our object of study should colour our very approach to the studying of it, this chapter hopes to be a starting point of synthesis for understanding the life and multiple projects of the synthetic mind of Aurobindo Ghose. I begin by offering a brief sketch of his outer life, before attempting to enliven and lend continuity to these events through aligning them with the spiritual, social and psychological ideas accounted in his texts. This will set the scene for an understanding of these ideas beyond the text, and as potentially applicable to contemporary spiritual and community concerns.

To an extent echoing the ideal ashrama of Indian life, Heehs breaks Sri Aurobindo’s life into five key historical periods wherein one of his many personas predominates: “Son”, “Scholar”, “Revolutionary”, “Yogi and Philosopher” and “Guide”. Aurobindo has been classified in many further guises: an extreme political presence in Colonial India, a “Neo-Vedantin “thinker”, a poet and romanticist, and an avid psychologist and sociologist enquiring into the potential of human nature and flourishing. Owing to these multi-faceted circumstances and preoccupations of his life, he is a notoriously difficult figure to categorise.

In my view, although he should indeed be studied as all of the above, if we are to take him at his word then to demarcate his identity simply through the different disciplinary spheres, phases and time periods of his outward life, is to misunderstand a key premise of his thought, as he remarks (to ashramites); ‘neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all of my life; it has not been on the surface for men to see’ (Aurobindo, OH 1972: 378). Yet, to reduce him to the purely spiritual, or inward

aspects of his life, would also be one-sided, for neither did he emphasise solely the metaphysical or transcendent aspects of existence. It seems, as with many of his own conclusions, to understand his identity we are challenged to move beyond an oppositional, piecemeal view of reality and find its point of synthesis. This point of synthesis will be reached through the charting of four key spiritual realisations within Aurobindo's life, after a brief sketch of the outer, material dimensions.

Aurobindo's life (1872- 1950) arguably spanned the most important decades in the formation of modern India, and he himself could be seen to play a vital role in its construction. Peter Heehs, in his work *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, counts him amongst the key political, cultural and spiritual leaders in India at the time. Aurobindo's story however, begins in Europe. In 1879, when Aurobindo was only seven, his father, Dr Krishna Dhun Ghose, eager for him to grow up with strong Western influence, sent him and his brothers to be educated in England. After a childhood with a host family in Manchester, he went on to study Classics at Cambridge and returned to India only in 1893 after his bid - or more likely his father's bid - for him to join the civil service was unsuccessful.

During his time in England, Aurobindo was influenced by a variety of sources, notably the Romantic poets, and their approach to accessing the Divine through the natural world. Romantic themes such as the possibility of sublime experience, accessible through a lone wanderer's contact with the natural world, clearly had an impact on Aurobindo's own variety of immanent transcendence. As Heehs points out, 'concreteness and transcendence are often juxtaposed in Indian culture' (2012:73), yet within Aurobindo's works they come to be situated on a continuum, Nature for Aurobindo, is Spirit. Further, the path he eventually lays towards ideal spirituality, as

shall be explored, does not disengage itself from the temporal realm but might be accessed through Nature.

The protest of these Western writers against the perceived “mechanization” of their own culture was a response to the Industrial revolution and its increasing subjugation of the “natural”, which they felt had a deleterious effect on the emotive and aesthetic life of the British. In many ways this could be seen to foreshadow Aurobindo’s own revolt against both the repression of Spirit (exemplified by freedom of individual expression) in society. The Victorian cultural critic Matthew Arnold in his work *The Study of Poetry* proposed the utilization of poetry as a means of recovering beauty and intuitive truth, a move he regarded a “secular religion” in the face of an overly Materialist culture. Although Aurobindo later cites Auguste Comte for inspiring his proposed “Religion of Humanity”, it is clear that, even from a young age Aurobindo was interested in the idea of metaphysics in non- distinction from the individual and social constellation.

Shelley’s 1818 poem *The Revolt of Islam*, an account of revolutionary Idealism culminating in the creation of a golden city, is said to have been especially influential to the young Aurobindo:

[it] was a great favourite with me even when I was quite young and I used to read it again and again -- of course, without understanding everything. Evidently it appealed to some part of the being. There was no other effect of reading it except this; I had a thought that I would dedicate my life to a similar World-change and take part in it (Aurobindo cited in Purani, 1982: 378).

Here the triumph of individual possibility over collective disillusionment, and the upholding of virtue over social loyalty, might anticipate Aurobindo’s later projects of

individualism and non-dogmatism. Nevertheless, the list of potential Western influences is long, and as Aurobindo moved to Cambridge University to pursue a Classics degree, the exposure to Western modernism becomes too profuse to quantify. Certainly, the influence of Western philosophy, particularly in the cross over between ancient Greek and Indian thought, and more modern existentialism, can be gleaned in his work, although this is always integrated into a historical corpus aligned more strongly with the later influence of Indian thought.

On arrival back in Bengal, Sri Aurobindo allegedly made up for lost time by consuming much Indian historical, philosophical and political literature. He focussed most especially on the study of the *Bhagavad Gita*, *The Upanishads*, and the works of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna (Heehs, 2008:57), and the influence of these ideas comes to be, as we shall explore, vital to the construction of his own philosophy. For each of these thinkers and their respective interpretation of the *Vedic* texts, the political was not only not incompatible with the spiritual, but rather, as I shall explore, a necessary extension of it: a means for the greater realization of Spirit.

In 1909 Aurobindo's political activities landed him in jail after he allegedly planted a bomb in Alipore. This event marks the point in which writers tend to portray Aurobindo as experiencing a complete disjunct in life course, through a move away from the overtly political, to the pursuit of a spiritual life in Pondicherry. However, as we shall see through examination of Aurobindo's spiritual experiences, this occurrence might be re-cast as less a divergence from his prior path than continuum: more an intensification and development of his life, politics and identity than a turning away from it.

#### **iv) Aurobindo and the Religious Politics of the Hindu Renaissance.**

Aurobindo's personal philosophy, as well as that of his textual influences and fellow compatriots, is very difficult to detach from his political activities and ideology. Far from being a wholly unique figure in Indian history, Aurobindo is clearly influenced by the trends and crises of his socio-political context. He was part of a group of individuals that made up the nineteenth century Hindu Renaissance. In this milieu, the distinction between the political and the philosophical, and even the poetic and scientific, was being questioned, reworked and renewed in the lives and pursuits of its key figures. Philosophy was becoming more of an "everyman" project, rather than an exercise confined to a privileged elite, and the ancient mode of philosophy as "escape" or transcendence from an illusory phenomenal existence was becoming reworked to reconcile the apparent gulf between everyday existence and metaphysical pursuits. Kumar Lal (1995) characterises this philosophical period as "meditative" in its attention to the self and "this worldly" pursuits as instrumental for understanding and reaching great philosophical truths.

Aurobindo found the development and outlet for these philosophico-political ideals through his involvement with Bengal's anti-colonial struggle against the British Raj. In Bengal especially, the Nationalist political movement was strongly blended with yoga. Aurobindo clearly found influence from figures like Tagore and B.K. Chatterji whose poetic and political concerns dovetailed with the Vaishnavism and Tantric traditions of the region. For example, Chatterji's 1882 poem *Bande Mataram* captured Aurobindo's imagination through its adoration of Bengal as a goddess. Chatterji was attempting to rouse the sentiments of the Bengali people, through the mythologisation of land and culture that became commonly utilised for Nationalistic

ends, and which, as Banerji explains, '[became a means] to territorialize a nation racially, ethnically or ideologically, [and] has been seen as a rhetorical trope in the formation of fascist subjects in modern times' (Banerji, 2013: 97). As Purani (1964) highlights, a similar trope was echoed in a 1905 letter between Aurobindo and his wife, where he describes India as a 'Mother' whose life- blood is sucked dry by the demons of colonialism.

In response to this perceived demeaning of the Indian nation, through the subjugating control, undermining and infantilisation by the leadership of the British Raj, there became an important re-conceptualisation of what it meant to be Indian. As Aurobindo points out in his work *Bande Mataram*, nations as living, organic entities require a sense of self- possession, since, 'an organism is doomed which, incapable of changing from within, answers only to the pressure of environment' (Aurobindo, BM, 2002: 728-9). Thus India, in Aurobindo's eyes, needed to rediscover its own interiority: its "self-rule", rather than submitting to the external vision and control of the British colonial rulers. Aurobindo argued that a self-ruling India might construct its own identity rather than accepting the status of lesser "Other" to Western dominance. Aurobindo quickly rose through the ranks to become one of the most outspoken Nationalist radicals. He was alleged to be the first to publicly state India's need for *poorna swaraj*, or 'unconditional independence based on the right of a people with its own cultural history to have independent expression and self-determination' (Banerji, 2013:96). Such independence was not purely physical, but involved a National inner self- realization, or the cultural and spiritual idea of a nation to be made great (Basu, 1998:31).

A means of taking back Indian control was through the advocacy of *Swadeshi*: a boycott of all British goods. Such activism brought Aurobindo to the forefront of the Nationalist movement, and in 1906 this profile won him the title of principal at a National College in Calcutta, an institution which aimed to bring a National Indian education to the masses. The move also allowed him to widen the remit of the resistance movement (Heehs, 2008: 97), and to spread his writing amongst a wider audience. The most infamous of these writings was *Bhawani Mandir*, a work initially banned by the British government, wherein Aurobindo made explicit India's role in a global destiny: 'among all the divisions of mankind it is ... India that is ... most essential to the human race' (in Basu, 1998:3).<sup>1</sup>

India's essentiality was, for Aurobindo, one of spiritual superiority, and "political Vedantism" not only found means to define itself in opposition to the West, but also to encompass the ideas of this "other" in its own systems of thought and belief. Universalist concepts like *Sanatana Dharma*, or the eternal religion, were instructive in developing ways to account for Western ideas, while still, it could be argued, maintaining some sense of encompassing cultural superiority. Such ideas were not mere superficial panaceas, but involved a rewriting of India's past, to reclaim its cultural uniqueness and place within the world and become, in Aurobindo's system, 'the guru of Nations' (Aurobindo, BM, 2002: 731), with politics becoming the true vehicle of the teachings of *Vedanta*' (Basu, 1998:30)

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<sup>1</sup> Also in this work, perhaps foreshadowing the later creation of Auroville, was envisaged 'the building of a temple to Mother Bhawani where workers for the liberation of the Motherland where to dedicate themselves totally as Karmayogins, in a spirit of complete renunciation' (Basu, 1998:7-8)

Thus, although Aurobindo certainly used similar language and symbolism to Nationalists like Chatterji, in his case, this ideal eventually went beyond the fulfilment of a Nationalist ideal. Certainly in his later work the mythology of the Goddess served not only as a tool to unite and espouse the National, but eventually developed beyond it to incorporate also the International and the Inter-religious: the *Sanatana Dharma*, or eternal religion<sup>2</sup>. This move, from an upholding of India for herself, to India for the sake of the world (Aurobindo, US 1999), prompted a movement of 'shared traditions transcending religions and opening new forms of collective numinous experience' (Banerji, 2013: 97).

However, this may be tantamount to a broadening of the National, rather than its simple overriding in the face of the global and spiritual development of Aurobindo's thought.

#### **v) Aurobindo and Vivekananda.**

The influence of another great Spiritual Nationalist, Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) on Aurobindo's vision, is particularly poignant. Indeed, Aurobindo regarded Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda's guru, as the 'last and greatest of all avatars' since where others '[experienced] God in a single or a limited aspect, he felt him in his illimitable variety' (Aurobindo, 2002, BM: 800-801). For Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, God could be experienced in a variety of guises, 'at once personal and impersonal', and thus one could practise at once '*Tantra, Advaita, Visistadvaita, Vaishnavism, Saivism, Christianity and Islam*' (Chaudhuri, 2013:170) with no

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<sup>2</sup> Mirra Alfassa (the Mother) could arguably be conceived as the embodiment of this move from "Goddess for the National" to "Goddess for the International" in Aurobindo's thought.

contradiction. Aurobindo's integralism, presented at this early stage as the *Sanatana Dharma*, similarly encompassed multiple paths to "Divine truth."

Vivekananda was responsible for formulating and disseminating these ideas within India and the West, proposing multiple paths to Divine realisation, through *karma*, *bhakti* and *jnana*, and broadening to the possibility of an everyman relationship with the infinite beyond the strictures of text. Vivekananda famously brought this eclecticism to the West in the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, expressing a multitude of paths towards attaining Divine *Samadhi* as allegedly, 'embodied and taught by... [his] guru Sri Ramakrishna' (Hatcher, 1999:56-7). The encompassment of "relative differences" within the broad sweep of Vedanta moved interfaith emphasis away from religious tolerance and the downplaying of difference, towards a celebration of plurality that would not question or undermine the nature of respective traditions' approach to the Divine. As Vivekananda claimed, the very nature of creation is plurality, "Unity is before Creation, diversity is Creation' (Vivekananda CW in Hatcher, 1999:66).

In this sense Vivekananda strongly prefigures the work of Aurobindo, in both his pragmatism, and inclusivist personal spirituality. As exemplified by Hatcher, the approach to salvation might be less a linear "step ladder view of truth" where one moves through a sequence of (partial) 'truth to truth' and more a "stepping stone view of truth" wherein one selects one's own truths (from many apparent possibilities) to construct one's own way across life's shores. The former approach, as exemplified in the work of J.S. Mill, appears to assume that each rung on the ladder of truth is prefigured by a logical sequence of other prior rungs, or necessary truths.

Although Vivekananda and Aurobindo clearly find influence here, their mutual stepping stone analogy allows that,

[there is] absolutely no correct sequence that must be taken to reach the other shore... Who you are, what you are wearing, when and where you cross, how brave you're feeling- in the end all these factors will determine the stones you choose (Hatcher, 1999:60).

Both Aurobindo and Vivekananda demonstrated a similar faithfulness to tradition as a unifying dimension, and its concurrent need for reinterpretation, or reconstruction, in the current time of reading: the fragmentary dimension. For Vivekananda, the *Upanishads* were not necessarily the basis for asceticism, but rather the instrumentation for social transformation and uplift. This is illustrated in the formation of the Ramakrishna mission -- an ashram often compared to the infrastructure and emphasis of the Aurobindo ashram. This fact is rather ironic since, on suggestion that he follow the Ramakrishna mission in disseminating his ideas through a formal religious organization, Aurobindo is said to have highlighted the "error of all churches" in keeping "too much to the forms and Ramakrishna and Vivekananda" in a situation where people needed to "keep themselves open for new outpourings of spirit" (Aurobindo in Heehs, 2008: 234).

This anecdote illustrates a key theme in Aurobindo's work: his parallel stance against the dogma of teaching and the institutionalization of collectives, and his upholding of individuals and their need to express and direct their own existence. More than simply a principle for the organization of collectives, this also illustrates the vital need for Aurobindo's texts to leave space for the individual and his own interpretation and meaning making. Without the individual to constantly enliven and challenge it, meaning lapses in dogma and organizations become empty shells.

Aurobindo and Vivekananda share a common emphasis on cumulative spiritual development and uphold an eclecticism of choice. This cumulative approach conceives each step and each choice as determined, limited, or made possible by one's grounding in the last. This draws Aurobindo and Vivekananda's respective *Sanatana Dharma*, or eternal (transcendent and encompassing) traditions together. However, there is a stark difference between the two. For Vivekananda, as an *Advaita Vedantin*, the token stepping-stones in the journey of life remain accidental precisely because they remain illusory, grounded in the *maya* of the phenomenal existence that shrouds all from true infinite Being. Since all is ultimately, for Vivekananda, 'one in the self which is called *Brahman*' (Sharma, 2011: 166), any partial experience, whatever the tradition, is simply an expression of common blindness, ignorant to Reality.

This viewpoint, as I explore in the second chapter, is grounded in a particular interpretation of the *Upanishads*, for instance, the *Chandogya Upanishad*, which can be read as suggesting that our many experiences of self are ultimately grounded within an infinite subject, 'a ground and sustainer of all experience', which might cast these experiences as a mere flux of 'imperfect realisations' (Radhakrishnan, 2008: 120). The way in which the term "imperfect realisations" is interpreted is crucial to the eventual metaphysics derived. Vivekananda's metaphysics, for instance, would regard such "imperfect realisations" to point at the unreality of human experience, drawing him closer to the ideas of Sankara, and away from the metaphysics of Aurobindo. For example, Ramakrishna said that Narendra (Vivekananda) 'would act in the world only so long as he was not fully aware of his own spiritual identity. Immediately on realizing his true identity, he would give up the body' (Chaudhuri, 2013: 170).

For Aurobindo, on the other hand, the “imperfect realisations” - the stepping-stones - remain “imperfect” only in the sense of their necessary limitation within the bounds of the temporal. Experientially they remain “real” since they are not set in distinction from the absolute Brahman but remain his creative expressions of self. This position, and its unravelling through Aurobindo’s own spiritual experiences, will be explored in the next section.

Nevertheless, although Aurobindo and Vivekananda’s respective ashram communities tell different stories, both share an emphasis and reliance upon the individual as the mechanism for spiritual and social progression. Spirituality became in this epoch a process of self-development and realization, which, both have claimed, could be evidenced by a re-interpretation of the ancient Indian corpus. In Vivekananda’s system this became a rousing call of Self-affirmation to:

uphold the *Upanishads* and believe- I am the Soul ... I am the Omnipotent, I am the Omniscient. So repeat these blessed saving words ... Everything can be done by us we all have the same glorious soul let us believe in it”  
(Vivekananda, 1970: 73).

The identificiation of individual with Divine unveils, in this view, greater capacities for the transmutation of the terrestrial. Similarly, Aurobindo’s re-conceptualisation of the “religious” emphasises the individual and his own self-possession and transcendence:

[through an] opening of the deepest life of the soul to the indwelling Godhead, the eternal omnipresence in true religion is spiritual religion which seeks to live in the spirit, in what is beyond the intellect, beyond the aesthetic and ethical and practical being of man and to inform and govern these members of

our being by the higher light and law of the spirit' (Aurobindo, 1999, IoHU:233).

The interiority of the individual is, as we shall explore, key to the realization of unifying capacities beyond the scope of the terrestrial, and is echoed in Aurobindo's Political Vedantism which proclaims that, an 'India free one and indivisible is the divine realization to which we move' (Aurobindo, 1972, OH: 65). However, this is merely one dimension of Aurobindo's integralism and, in some ways, such statements are a misleading indicator of the complexity of his philosophy, which here seems to promote a simple Advaitism, or reduction to the National or Spiritual, which is uncharacteristic of his later ideas. His vision, whose trajectory we chart below, moves to also incorporate the opposite: the fragmentation necessary for this-worldly creativity.

#### **vi) Synthesising Aurobindo.**

In Aurobindo's life trajectory, I claim, we can see the seed of the tensions inherent in his philosophy, politics and poetics. The binaries he wishes to transcend can be seen to apply as much to the dichotomies of his own existence, as the ideologies his work questions. For example, his struggle between, on the one hand, his English childhood and education and, on the other, his Indian heritage and political occupations -- entailing perhaps a later reclamation of identity -- can be seen as both a major tension in the formation of his identity, and a common theme within his work. Certainly there is a narrative of self-suppression by the "Other", through his separation from Indian culture (both as a child and later under the British Raj), to self-affirmation through posing difference to the "Other" (in his ardent Nationalist projects), to a later "Self-universalization", through the incorporation and ultimate identification with the

“Other” (evinced through his relationship with Mirra Alfassa and his Internationalism). As I shall explore in chapter two, this is re-echoed in Aurobindo’s philosophy which states a movement of Self realization through three key states of knowing: “Knowledge by Separation”, “Knowledge by Relationship” and “Knowledge by Identity”.

The alignment of the political and the spiritual concerns of Aurobindo’s life; which, on the one hand, incorporate both an appeal to the asceticism and surrender inherent in the Indian spiritual texts and, on the other, an avowal of the this-worldly focus of Western pragmatism and the material, scientific worldview, might recapitulate a similar motif. This is most poignantly illustrated through his relationship with Mirra Alfassa (the “Mother”), which shall be explored more closely in chapter three of this thesis. The Mother might, arguably, be seen to represent the very occupation he fought against, and his move to incorporating both herself, and her Western ideals and identity, into his own spiritual worldview.

This provides the foundation for a turn beyond Aurobindo’s outer life and influences to a consideration of the way in which his own spiritual realizations form the basis of his philosophical system<sup>3</sup>.

## **vii) The four realisations**

Here I present a case for aligning the four realisations in Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual development, with his core philosophical system, and his interpretation of the Indian

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<sup>3</sup> However, Aurobindo’s philosophy should not be conflated with that of Vivekananda. I provide a more detailed description and distinction of the two in the discussion of the following chapter.

corpus, most particularly his interpretation of the *Gita*, *Veda* and *Upanishads*. To an extent this lends weight to Sri Aurobindo's claim that his knowledge comes from personal experience rather than intellectual construction, however these experiences are indeed checked and affirmed against the great Indian corpus that precedes them. According to Aurobindo's writings *On Himself*, the creation, or "uncovering" of Aurobindo's "spiritual self", involved four key realisations that have come to define his philosophy, the realisation of: 1) the static Brahmin (in meditation, 1908) 2) the active Brahmin (in jail, four months later 3) the Parabrahman, or "the supreme Reality with the static and dynamic Brahman as its two aspects" (Aurobindo, in Heehs, 2008: 232) and 4) Supermind consciousness.

#### vii.i) The first realisation: The static Brahman.

In 1908 Aurobindo experienced what he terms a realisation of the static *Brahman*, while meditating with a *Bhakta* named Vishnu Bhaskar Lele. This experience is the typical spiritual transcendence of the figurative existence, and a position Aurobindo later critiques and moves on from. After working on *pranayama* and physical postures for over four years, he reports no changes beyond a boost to physical health, until meeting Lele. He reports

The first result was a series of tremendously powerful experiences and radical changes of consciousness...which were quite contrary to my own ideas, for they made me see with a stupendous intensity the world as a cinematographic play of vacant forms in the impersonal universality of the Absolute Brahman (Aurobindo, OH, 2011:239-240)

Here Aurobindo is describing a detachment from the phenomenal play of existence, and a recognition and apparent merging with a witness self beyond all transient form. In this experience of Self as witness he comes to conceive all phenomenal existence as other, as object to this higher subjective self. He goes on to describe how this experience triggers a disassociation from the mental and a new ability to control thought from outside its constant flux. In the same way as one might control the body and the vital impulses through association with the mind, Aurobindo claims that we can achieve control of the mind by:

separat(ing) the two parts of the mind, the active part which is a factory of thoughts and the quiet masterful part which is at once a Witness and a Will, observing them, judging, rejecting, eliminating, accepting, ordering corrections and changes, the Master in the House of Mind, capable of self-empire, *svaṛājya'* (Aurobindo, OH, 2011:243).

By recognising these two concurrent processes at work in Mind, an inherent distance is created: an objectification of mind, which implies a subject, a seer, distinct from its processes. According to Aurobindo, after being instructed to sit in meditation and disregard any thoughts, he apparently achieved a complete detachment from the active mind, for three days. However, this event had impact far beyond these few days, and Aurobindo reports:

From that moment, in principle, the mental being in me became a free Intelligence, a universal Mind, not limited to the narrow circle of personal thought or a labourer in a thought-factory, but a receiver of knowledge from all the hundred realms of being and free too to choose what it willed in this vast sight-empire and thought-empire. (Aurobindo, OH, 2011:244).

This first experience, he labels *mayavada*: a radical reconnection with the *Purusha* consciousness at the heart of Classical *Samkhya*. The *Samkhya darsana*, (or way of seeing), is composed of a radical dualism between a concept of *Purusa*, or principle of

absolute formless consciousness, and a concept of *Prakriti*, or primordial materiality; which moves and is subject to the laws of cause and effect, creation and destruction. This system, though itself secular, has been a key influence on later theistic ideas. In a nutshell, the *Samkhya*, and the systems of asceticism informed by it, relate how through gradual cessation of the outward activity and attachment to materiality, an individual might connect with a static formless, witness self, or *Purusa*. This Self is understood to undergird the transient realm of everyday existence and form the ultimate goal of the *Samkhya darsana* as ‘a self- sufficient state, in which all empirical factors have been disidentified with and experience possesses no further purpose... experience ceases and hence the world ceases too’ (Burley, 2007: xi). Within the theistic corpus of the *Upanishads* this experience is Brahmanised so ‘the dualistic opposition between the “seer” and the “seeable” is typically subordinated to the unifying absolute principle, *Brahman*’ (Burley, 2007:2).

Although these ideals have influenced Aurobindo, it is important that we recognise this first spiritual experience, not as something which his later Integral perspective might stand in contradistinction to, but, in actuality, simply which later encompasses it. As he describes:

to reach Nirvana was the first radical result of my own Yoga. It threw me suddenly into a condition above and without thought, unstained by any mental or vital movement; there was no ego, no real world—only when one looked through the immobile senses, something perceived or bore upon its sheer silence a world of empty forms, materialised shadows without true substance (Aurobindo, OH, 2011: 249).

If Aurobindo’s spiritual explorations had stopped at this moment, there would be very little to distinguish him from the multitude of Indian thinkers who claim an “ascetic denial” of the phenomenal world, a lionisation of transcendence and an overcoming of the material. However, Aurobindo’s own dissatisfaction with the one-

sidedness and, in his view, self-serving position appears to motivate further enquiries. This is not to deny the truth-value of such experience, but merely to question its universality. For Aurobindo, such experiences become the product of a particular phenomenology, which, as we shall later explore, plays its part within the Integral system, but with a status as “necessary scaffolding” to glimpse much greater vistas, rather than a culmination in itself. As Aurobindo points out:

Nirvana in my liberated consciousness turned out to be the beginning of my realisation, a first step towards the complete thing, not the sole true attainment possible or even a culminating finale (Aurobindo, OH, 2011: 250).

Aurobindo’s identity as a political activist and a poet lends itself to the practical, material dimension of life, and, against popular opinion, this side of Aurobindo’s life is not abandoned through his meanderings into the spiritual, but rather made concrete, and afforded its right place. As Aurobindo accounts: ‘I told him (Lele) I wanted to do Yoga in order to get a new inner Yogic consciousness for life and action, not for leaving life’ (Aurobindo, 2011, OH :245). Lele is said to have remarked that Aurobindo’s poetic work would aid his particular sadhana, or spiritual seeking, and in many ways this grounding in the material sphere, and the tradition and guidelines of his forbears, is what informs Aurobindo’s spirituality. In this first realisation, it is the reliance upon the teachings and experience of Lele that allows its happening. Although Aurobindo remarks at later moments in his spiritual path that the religious, or more pertinently, the dogmatic, is a hindrance to the free expression of personal spirituality, it is clear that spiritual explorations require, at least in the early stages, an acceptance, a reliance upon a teacher, and a mediation of one’s own experience through insights gleaned before. For a spirituality to build upon the shoulders of

giants, one must have faith in the perspective of others, before one might for one's self.

vii.ii) The second realisation: The active *Brahman*.

Interestingly, it was in a moment of forced cessation from the active dimension of life that the second of Aurobindo's spiritual realisations: the realisation of the active Brahman, occurred. Aurobindo was incarcerated in Alipore Jail in around 1908-1909 for allegedly planting a bomb in Alipore during an anti-Colonialist outburst. Building upon this prior realization; the disassociation from the illusive identity of his "mental" self, Aurobindo prepares for the realisation of a higher phenomenology. During this period of isolation, he is said to have attained contact with Swami Vivekananda on a spiritual plane beyond the mental, 'he (Vivekananda) was speaking with me for about 15 days, giving me the first insight into the Intuition plane (not the intuitive mind which is mental and not supramental) as the first opening to Supermind' (Aurobindo, OH, 2011:264).

Aurobindo reports this experience in his *Uttarpara speech*, a talk he gave at the "Society for the protection of the Religions" on his release. He foreshadows this speech by invoking his fellow Nationalist and friend, Bepin Chandra Pal, who was also purported to speak of 'his realisation in jail, of God within us all, of the Lord within the nation, and in his subsequent speeches also he spoke of a greater than ordinary force in the movement and a greater than ordinary purpose before it' (Aurobindo, US 1999:1). This, for many reasons, should silence those who regard this moment as one of extrication from the Nationalist political agenda. Aurobindo's speech also recapitulates the Gita story of Arjuna on the battlefield at Kurukshetra, who, in a crisis of faith, turns to Lord Krishna for affirmation of his purpose, or *dharma*, in the

face of destruction. Aurobindo relates, how, at his own time of crisis:

I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me his shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Sri Krishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover (Aurobindo, US 1999: 6)

In other words, in the same way that as a Hindu God may embody himself in a multitude of form to inspire human devotion, so might the multifarious objects of material existence point to a unity of source. Expressed here through an invocation of the many incarnations of *Vishnu*, an underlying foundation, beyond the apparent differences of physical form begins to emerge. For Aurobindo, this casts all form, animate or inanimate, as merely a figuration, a playful expression of a foundational identity.

In some ways, we can see the first of Aurobindo's realisations as a recapitulation of Upanishadic ascetic ideals, and the second realizations as recapitulation of the *Gita*, and its necessary building upon this prior foundation. As he claims in *Essays on the Gita*:

The *Gita* starts from this *Vedantic* synthesis and upon the basis of its essential ideas builds another harmony of the three great means and powers, Love, Knowledge and Works, through which the soul of man can directly approach and cast itself into the Eternal (Aurobindo, 1997, EoG: 9).

In the *Uttarpara Speech* of 1909, Aurobindo claims, he brings together the triple path of the heart, the will and the intellect, or the the devotional (*bhakti*), the intellectual (*jnana*) and the active (*karma*), in an all-encompassing experience: 'I realised in the

mind, I realised in the heart, I realised in the body the truths of the Hindu religion. They became living experiences to me' (Aurobindo, 1999, US: 9). Religion here then becomes a holistic expression through the engagement of the bodily, vital and mental self. Additionally, Aurobindo's experiences echo Arjuna's submission to a course and outcome beyond his finite self and actions. This submission is revealed in the way Aurobindo's realization is recounted, as a realization of the ultimate passivity of the "individual" in the face of a greater active power of divine nature - Aurobindo can only watch as his fate unfolds in his submission to Krishna:

[T]he *Yogin*, as the *Gita* says, even in acting does no actions, for it is not he, but universal Nature directed by the Lord of Nature which is at work... (There is) passivity within, an action without regulation by the universal Will and Wisdom which works, as the *Gita* says, without being involved in, bound by or ignorantly attached to its works (Aurobindo, 1999, SoY: 405).

In other words, the *Gita* puts forward a correction to the traditional ideas of asceticism to propose a submission not to 'the disinterested performance of duties but the following of the divine life, the abandonment of all *dharmas* (*sarvadharmān*) to take refuge in the supreme alone' (Aurobindo, 1997, EoG: 30): not the renunciation of works, but the renunciation of the fruit of works. This is very much what Aurobindo means by submission: a renunciation of the egoic path to open the possibility of a wider Self-actualization.

He relates these experiences to "Hinduism" and its "true" identity as the *Santana Dharma*, or the eternal faith, which might encompass not only all other faiths, but all actions within Nature. In other words, by recognizing the basis of unity underlying all experience, the curtailment of any route toward the Divine, becomes ultimately a curtailment of the infinite identity of the Divine. By casting the net of the divine

beyond the merely orthodox or ascetic, Aurobindo's perspective comes to incorporate not only the way of Knowledge, but also the way of the devotional, ananda, or 'Nature in man liberating itself by right discrimination in power and practice of its own energies, elements and potentialities' (Aurobindo, 1999, SoY: 42-43).

In many ways, this experience might be seen to foreshadow his later enthusiasm for the tantric. Unlike the ascetic flavor that colours all the other Indian darsana, through their focus on the *Purusa* or transcendent objective of existence, Aurobindo points to the Tantric embrace of *Prakriti*, 'the Nature-Soul, the Energy, the Will-in-Power executive in the universe... Instead of drawing back from manifested Nature and its difficulties he confronted them, seized and conquered' (Aurobindo, 1999, SoY: 43).

This comprehensive approach is justified thus:

A narrow religion, a sectarian religion, an exclusive religion can live only for a limited time and a limited purpose. This is the one religion that can triumph over materialism by including and anticipating the discoveries of science and the speculations of philosophy. It is the one religion which impresses on mankind the closeness of God to us and embraces in its compass all the possible means by which man can approach God (Aurobindo, 1999, US: 11).

Aurobindo's opening here to a multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural influence on his work is, arguably key to an understanding of his later works and the way in which his ideas have been utilised both by the mother and later followers in the Auroville project. Of course, as V.P. Varma points out, this universality goes far beyond the Indian tantra and was, in Aurobindo's eyes, 'the basis of the future world religion, towards which the world spirit was moving' (Varma, 1990: 214).

Aurobindo's utilisation of Western scientific discovery is echoed in the evolutionary nature of his later philosophy; such as the hierarchical development of yoga within

the *Synthesis of Yoga*; animal- human physical evolution in *The Life Divine*; socio-political evolution in *The Ideal of Human Unity*; and the socio-psychological development of *The Human Cycle*. The opening of yoga to a potentially everyman, every method pursuit, is something we see in the aims of his *Arya* publication, explored below, in which Aurobindo seeks to uncover the unification behind the apparent opposition between the spiritual and political and the individual and collective destiny. Further, and more speculatively, the grounding of practical collective projects in a spiritual unity, or *Sanatana dharma*, is a key tenet of the foundation of Auroville. The creation of intentional communities to facilitate the kind of spiritual foundation necessary for both individual and collective thriving:

When the *Sanatana Dharma* declines, then the nation declines, and if the *Sanatana Dharma* were capable of perishing, with the *Sanatana Dharma* it would perish (Aurobindo, 1999, US: 12).

Thus, the undergirding of the nation, for Aurobindo, is seen to rest on the Spiritual unity – the *Sanatana Dharma*, rather than any outward machinery.

#### vii.iii) The third realisation: The *Parabrahman*.

On August 15th 1912 Aurobindo wrote for the first time about his experience of the *Parabrahman*, which can be seen as the third of the four key realisations that coloured his life. This third realisation was allegedly achieved on his Birthday (August 15th) whilst in deep meditation. This realisation moves beyond the experience of the universal passive and the universal active self- realisations preceding it, to encounter a transcendent realization, which, to an extent, begins to synthesize in its encompassment of these apparent oppositions. In *Synthesis of Yoga*, this is described

as;

The Self as the All, not only in the unique essence of things, but in the manifold form of things, not only as containing all in a transcendent consciousness, but as becoming all by a constituting consciousness' (Aurobindo, 1999, SoY: 407).

Here one attains a simultaneous awareness of Self as witness and dynamism; both as Being of complete and permanent wholeness and a Becoming of transient creation and dissolution in form. However, the recognition of self within this poise does not immediately obliterate any sense of difference, though it might provide the potential for eventually doing so. By recognizing oneself as *Jiva*, "*Caitya Purusa*" or as a portion of the Divine, one might embrace oneself as part of the totality yet not move to full integrality,

It is quite possible to realize the cosmic consciousness without becoming that; we can see it... feel it, and dwell in it... we preserve the individual consciousness of the Jivatman within the cosmic consciousness of the Universal soul (Aurobindo, 1999, SoY: 411).

As Aurobindo describes his own experience of *Parabrahman*; 'egoism is dead for me in all except the *Annamaya Atma* -- the physical self which awaits one further realisation before it is entirely liberated' (Aurobindo in Heehs, 1999: 232). In other words the physical sheath of the individual person for Aurobindo, acts as an apparent mark of separation, punctuating the whole. This very awareness of separation provides the opportunity for a potential "merging", indeed one cannot imagine a "merging" without a notion of separate entities in which to "do the merging".

In this sense, the realization of the *Parabrahman* might be seen as a "symbolic identification" foregrounding the later true identification; Aurobindo's fourth, crowning, realization. It is symbolic in the sense that the subject has both realized his

dynamic and witness identity in the divine, but still is conscious of a physical separation or individuality, from which he acts, feels and knows this greater entity, if in a protracted, or symbolic, sense. In his work *Essays Divine and Human*, Aurobindo explains,

All things in existence or non-existence are symbols of the Absolute created in self-consciousness (*Chid-Atman*); by Its symbols the Absolute can be known so far as the symbols reveal or hint at it, but even the knowledge of the whole sum of symbols does not amount to real knowledge of the Absolute. You can become *Parabrahman*; you cannot know *Parabrahman*" (Aurobindo, 1997, EDH: 103).

A "realization" or, better, "becoming", of self as *Parabrahman*, points beyond our figurative understanding of the mental and vital, the passive and the active. Instead there is an awareness of merging with a greater relief: non-passive, non-active, and yet potentially both of these, (since anything so defined would reduce to mere symbol) and which grounds all potential figuration:

It is not Being or Non-Being, but something of which Being and Non-Being are primary symbols; not *Atman* or *unAtman* or *Maya*; not Personality or Impersonality; not Quality or Non-Quality; not Consciousness or Non-Consciousness; not Bliss or Non-Bliss; not *Purusha* or *Prakriti*; not god nor man nor animal; not release nor bondage; but something of which all these are primary or derivative, general or particular symbols" (Aurobindo, 1997, EDH: 104).

Arguably, the three stages accounted in Aurobindo's spiritual experiences correspond to the traditional realisation of *jnana* and *vijnana* respectively. These are two differing types of "spiritual knowledge" in the Indian corpus, which might be drawn out of Aurobindo's exegesis of the key texts within this tradition: the *Gita*, the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* and consolidated within his personal experience. *Jnana* corresponds to the 'realisation of the impersonal atman' (Maharaj, 2015: 3), a knowledge arrived at, according to Ramakrishna (1884), via negativa, i.e. through

discernment and elimination, the process of *neti, neti*, or not this, not this. *Vijnana*, on the other hand, ‘ascends into the deeper and more comprehensive insight that God is at once the transcendent Atman and the supreme Lord who both rules and pervades the universe. The *jnani* dismisses the world as unreal, but the *vijnani* realises that God- who in his transcendent aspect is the formless *Brahman*- “has also become the universe” (Maharaj, 2015: 4).

Maharaj aligns Sri Aurobindo’s experiences in Alipore jail with his realisation of the *vijnana*, but I claim that he is mistaken in this classification. If we see the *jnana* and the *vijnana* as merely opposing states of being, it is easy to see how they might mirror the active and the passive realisations in Aurobindo’s development. However, if we conceive the *vijnana* as not merely opposition but an encompassment on a higher level, this might change our perception. During his time in jail Aurobindo is, as Peter Heehs suggests, merely coming into contact with the opposing facet of the passive *Brahman*, i.e the active, the aspect of the *Brahman*, which might take multiple forms in existence. As Aurobindo outlines in his work *Yoga and its Objects* (1912) (an important forerunner to his *Essays on the Gita*), this stage is merely one in which the knower comes to exceed knowledge of the passive, impersonal *atman* and ‘comes to experience “that even the names and forms are *Brahman*” (Aurobindo, 1912, YaiO: 25), i.e. the active form of the *Brahman*. This stage is necessary, but certainly not sufficient, to the “completion” of his spiritual knowledge in *vijnana*. It is only when these two opposing facets of the *Brahman* are brought together, into a further encompassing realization, arguably that of the *Parabrahman*, that *vijnana* is attained.

Another way of conceiving these first three realisations is through Aurobindo’s depiction of the three *Purusa*, which he both outlines in his work and alludes to in his

interpretation of the Indian corpus. As alluded to above, instead of dividing the universal principles of Reality, as the classical *Samkhya*, into two wholly oppositional properties, a *Purusa*, or witness Being, and a *Prakrti*, or material Being, Aurobindo draws the two into complete correspondence as aspects of one Being. The first aspect depicts *Purusa* in its passive pose and the second depicts *Purusa* through its active potential.

Aurobindo illustrates this most beautifully in his essay, *The Three Purusas*. Here he uses an analogy from the Upanishads, which depicts two birds sitting on a tree. One bird is eating a fruit, whilst the other watches, Aurobindo describes how, 'when the eater looks up and perceives the greatness of the watcher and fills himself with it... grief, death, subjection...may cease to touch (him) (Aurobindo, 1998, EPY: 52). This is an illustration of what is termed the *Aksara Purusa*: the recognition of the passive, foundational aspect of the divine that belies all the suffering, destruction and contiguity of the phenomenal existence.

The second realization is that of the *Kshara Purusa*, or the active, formative aspect of the Divine, here depicted as the witnesser observing the bird eating fruit, or '(the) soul in nature and enjoying nature' (Aurobindo, 1998, EPY: 52). As *Akshara* implies the cessation of all activity, so *Kshara* is defined as "all existences", yet for Aurobindo the two realisations are not mutually exclusive. Instead of conceiving these realisations as knowledge of two separate entities, Aurobindo argues that they are merely two facets of the same moment, two alternate perspectives and manifestations of the same process.

However, unlike the *Samkhya*, Aurobindo posits a further unifying realization, a *Purusa*, the “*Purushottama*” which he posits in a position of transcendent encompassment, a position which, in his analogy, is ‘not seated on the tree but occupies and possesses it,’ the ‘soul one with God, with the all’ (Aurobindo, 1998, EPY: 52). The *Purushottama*, I argue, corresponds to this third realization of Aurobindo: the *Parabrahman*, wherein the active and the passive aspects of Self are conceived from a higher more synthetic perspective:

Since *Purusha* is the being which observes and experiences all the movements of Nature, (which is what is meant here by soul) it cannot be anything else than the universal Soul identifying itself with all existences in Nature. (Aurobindo, 2011, OH: 101).

It is important to understand that, for Aurobindo, these differing and seemingly contradictory realisations -- though at each stage moving beyond and questioning each prior stage or stages -- do not at any moment amount to a falsification of earlier realisations, but rather begin to afford each its proper place. Phenomenologically speaking, each becomes a necessary horizon for navigating the way to greater realizations. Every worldview, even elucidated to the highest profundity, remains a necessary construct, a seeing “as if,” which may provide scaffolding to experience realities beyond itself:

A philosophical or religious system is only a statement of that arrangement of existence in universe, which God has revealed to us as our status of being. It is given in order that the mind may have something to stand upon while we act in *Prakriti* (Aurobindo, 1997, EDH: 105).

Echoing the Nietzschean idea of man as a transitional species, “Man is a rope stretched between the beast and the overman”, (Nietzsche in Kaufman, 1974: 310), Aurobindo understands human spiritual evolution to be at the heart of, and the

reason behind, all other threads of human outer development, such as the physical, textual and political evolution that he outlines in various works. On his ladder between “Mind” and “*Supermind*”, Aurobindo has posited several levels of *Overmind* which prepare and mould the individual phenomenology for higher realisations.

In his view, the very scission between the two aspects (active and passive) of the Divine is a central feature of the nature of *Overmind*, which takes various aspects of the Divine and initially conceives them as separate entities, prior to attaining the synthesis, that marks it from the lower level of Mind, which can only understand through construct and distinction:

The *Overmind* does not deny any of the aspects as the Mind does, it admits them all as aspects of the One Truth, but by separating them it originates the quarrel in the more ignorant and more limited and divided Mind (Aurobindo, 2011, OH: 124).

If we turn to Aurobindo’s examination in *The Life Divine* of the three levels of *Overmind* that bridge the gulf between the Mind and the *Supermind*, we can see a certain similarity with his own realisations. For instance, the first stage of *Overmind*, initiating a phenomenology beyond mind is described as a movement of “Inwardness-widening” wherein one moves towards an impersonality and an eventual unification with the ‘inner subtle.’ Here ‘instead of living in our surface mind we break the wall between our external and our now subliminal self’ which allows a realization of self as ‘capable of manifold physical entity’ (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 290). Could we argue that this experience is reminiscent of Aurobindo’s realization of the “static *Brahman*?”

The second level of *Overmind* is described as a movement of Openness wherein there is a simultaneous unification with a silent self that underlies the ‘truth of cosmic existence’ and the recognition of a ‘dynamic descent of knowledge, power and bliss’

(Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 291). In some ways, we could see this as an echo of Aurobindo's experience within the Alipore jail wherein incarnations of *Vishnu* arise in the everyday objects, persons and experiences of the jail, and show their true form as figuration and activation of the Divine.

The third and final stage of Overmind is described as one wherein mind is no longer ignorant of the true reality of nature and all aspects of one's being become activated towards 'pure spiritual dynamis' (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 291), a making real or complete mergence between the two truths Witness and Dynamism, *Akshara* and *Kshara* uncovered. This possible correlation will be examined in further detail in chapter two, which examines *The Life Divine* as a potential template for Aurobindo's multiple spiritual projects.

It is through the realisation of the *parabrahman* -- or the possibility for "identity" of the human and divine planes, beyond their mere spiritual "mergence" - that Aurobindo apparently realised the agenda for the spiritual work that would both lead him to his final realisation (Supermind), and inform his life path for the rest of his days:

synthesis is necessary only where analysis has taken place; one has dissected everything, put in pieces (analysis) so one has to piece together. But Supermind is unitarian, has never divided up, so it does not need to add and piece together the parts and fragments. It has always held the conscious Many together as the conscious One (Aurobindo, 2011, OH: 144).

The initial development of this spiritual work was through the creation of a journal in collaboration with the Mother (Mirra Alfassa) and her then husband, Paul Richards. Aurobindo's relationship with this Bohemian Parisian couple (and latterly with just

the Mother), and its impact on the development and universalization of his own ideas, will be explored in Chapter Three. The journal *Arya* was founded in 1914 its title is a Sanskrit term alluding to a person “who accepted a particular type of self-culture, of inward and outward practice, of ideality, of aspiration’ (Aurobindo, 1998, EPY: 441), i.e. the type of spirituality Aurobindo sought to discover and realize in the physical and social existence. Its ideal was to:

seek for the means and motives by which his external life, his society and its institutions may remould themselves progressively in the truth of the Spirit and develop towards the utmost possible harmony of individual freedom and social unity’ (Aurobindo, 1951, IaP: 49).

The *Arya* was arranged under four subheadings, exploring the different aspects of the proposed spiritual project. They were: “synthetic studies in speculative philosophy; “translations and commentaries of ancient texts;” “studies in comparative religion;” and “practical methods of inner culture and self development.” Aurobindo’s intentions within the *Arya*, form the basis of the key texts he produced throughout his life- and found their first publication in the *Arya* journal. For example, the quest to uncover the fundamental laws underlying existence came to be explored in *The Life Divine*. The ‘application of our ideas to the problems of man’s social and collective life’ (Aurobindo, 1998, EPY: 146) came to be examined in his work *The Ideal of Human Unity*.

[The aim was to] re-explain the *Sanatana Dharma* [or eternal law of being] to the human intellect in all its parts, from a new standpoint, in such a way that it will be seen how all religion arises out of it and is one everywhere (Heehs, 2008:233).

This intention came to find later consolidation in the text, *The Synthesis of Yoga*.

Herein there is, firstly, a synthetisation, or harmonization of the many philosophical

and psychological methods that might be directed towards this aim. Secondly, there is a placing of each methodology into a hierarchical pyramid of development, wherein each endeavour builds on the previous experimentation. This forms a practical exposition of a new method of inner development, based on personal experimentation and coordinating results gained through ancient methods” (Aurobindo in Heehs, 2008: 256).

The Fourth realisation: The *Parapurusha* or *Supermind*.

It is difficult to see how one might go beyond the apparent sublimity of the *parabrahman*, and here the distinction in hierarchy becomes more nuanced. The distinction becomes less one of content and more of kind: *Supermind* is not merely a step higher than Overmind- it is beyond “the line”, it is a different consciousness and power beyond the mental limit. (Aurobindo, 2011, OH: 353). As Aurobindo accounts,

The only difference between *Parabrahman* and *Parapurusha (Supermind)* is that we think of the first as something beyond our universe-existence, expressed here indeed, but still inexpressible, and of the second as something approaching our universe-existence, inexpressible indeed, but still here expressed (Aurobindo, EDH, 1997: 107).

Aurobindo’s realization of the Supermind occurred in 1926 during his life in Pondicherry, and is often referred to as “the descent of Overmind” which prepared for the “advent of *Supermind*”. This is related as an event wherein the prior spiritual realisations, which have, up to this moment, marked a path of steady ascent, are brought to bear on the lower reality of every day, in order to transform all manifest (and unmanifest) existence. As Aurobindo accounts within his epic poem *Savitri*:

In the first task for which our lives were born, to raise the world to God in deathless Light, To bring God down to the world on earth we came, to change the earthly life to the Life Divine (Aurobindo in Heehs, 2012:84).

During this time, Aurobindo went into seclusion, whilst the Mother was purported to “bring down” realizations of the subtle plane into the material and vital, in order to begin the wholesale transformation of the individual and collective existence:

Our *Yoga* is a double movement of ascent and descent; one rises to higher and higher levels of consciousness, but at the same time one brings down their power not only into mind and life, but in the end even into the body. And the highest of these levels, the one at which it aims is the supermind. Only when that can be brought down is a divine transformation possible in the earth consciousness (Aurobindo, 2011, OH: 278).

In other words, there is a dual requirement, as one rises to the transcendence of higher realisations, to “bring down” and to re-imagine these realisations in the forms and instrumentation of the lower sphere. As will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter, to the phenomenology of the emergent *Supermind*, the highest realisations and the lower “existence” cease to be separate properties. Unlike all preceding stages, the knowledge and creative manifestations of Supermind become one and the same, ‘its formations are forms of the reality, not constructions, representations or indicative figures’ (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 286). In other words, there becomes an identification between the ideal and the manifest, the gap between the manifest creation (the universe), and the power and knowledge that ideated and formed its being, becomes wholly sublimated. As Aurobindo outlines in *The Life Divine*, the three properties of mind, life and body in the lower hemisphere of creation find their true identity as *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda*, their equivalent properties in the Divine plane, entailing that,

all that is disharmonious in human nature is being enlightened out of existence, all that makes for harmony being changed into its divine equivalent, purer, greater, nobler, more beautiful and much being added which has been lacking to the human evolution. (Aurobindo, 2011, OH: 332).

As will be outlined in the second chapter, the *Supermind* consciousness encompasses the simultaneous capacities of “comprehension” and “apprehension”. Here “comprehension” refers to or complete vision of the whole of existence in both its manifestation and potential, or “power of infinite consciousness to comprehend, (and) contain in itself” (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 115), which affords its status within the divine realm. Concurrently, “apprehension” refers to the ability to see itself creatively, imagine a finite figuration of self, allowing, or rather comprising, its operation in the world. It is an ability to ‘measure out, that is to say, to form -- for form is delimitation -- Name and Shape out of the vast illimitable truth of infinite existence’ (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 115). To the *Supermind* consciousness there is no opposition between these faculties: *Supermind* is the power of reconciliation between the two spheres. The *Avidya* of the lower realm ‘shuts out the consciousness of each form from the awareness of its own total self, of other embodied consciousness and of universal being’ (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 132).

What this proposes is spirituality non-distinct from life and materiality, but necessarily transformative of it. *The Life Divine* as I argue, should be regarded as a self-generative system, which illustrates the lack of separation between the ultimate creative force and the material of creation:

My present effort is not to stand up on a high and distant *Supermind* level and change the world from there, but to bring something of it down here and to stand on that and act by that, but at the present stage the progressive supramentalisation of the Overmind is the first immediate preoccupation and a second is the lightening of the heavy resistance of the Inconscient and the support it gives to human ignorance which is always the main obstacle in any attempt to change the world or even to change oneself (Aurobindo, 2011, OH: 368).

### viii) Aurobindo and textual evolution.

Not disregarding the Western influence on Aurobindo's life and work, Aurobindo locates his thought within a lineage of self-generative synthesis within Indian history. As alluded to above, Aurobindo critiques and recasts this Indian tradition through the cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary experiences of his own life. He describes his aim as one that brings the "best ideas" of the past into dialogue with contemporary thought and language in order to create "texts", or future constructions of knowledge and experience, for the future. Aurobindo's own realisations both mirror and build upon the spiritual realisations of Indian history. For instance, we can see how the *Samkhyic* and *Upanishadic* ascetic ideas are inherent to his understanding of the passive *Brahman*, and inform his later realization of the active *Brahman*, and its respective mirroring of the pragmatic ideals of the *Bhagavad Gita*. These realisations are not merely intellectual shifts but rather experiences which alter one's whole orientation and interaction with the world, and which in turn create the material for future realisations.

In *Synthesis of Yoga*, Aurobindo argues that "even the whole constitution of our life may be described as a bundle of habits formed by the past evolution in nature and held together by the persistent nature of this secret consciousness" (Aurobindo, 1990 SoY: 648). This statement, echoes Aurobindo's study of both the *Samkhya*, and the pragmatism of William James, (1890 *The Principles of Psychology*), and the bringing together of these perspectives to provide a theory of evolution building upon habit formation. Such a statement lends itself to the dialogue between the transcendent realization and its material basis and instrumentation in Aurobindo's philosophy.

Within his text *The Synthesis of Yoga* Aurobindo takes this further, to outline how yogic approaches are arranged into an evolutionary hierarchy, as technologies or instrumentations of a particular stage, or basis, of being.

Each yogic system, correspondent to a respective stage of being, Aurobindo explains, comprises an evolved aspect that forms its basis, an evolving aspect which provides its instrumentation, and an “ideal” aspect to which it, simultaneously, aspires toward, and is inspired from. This ideal aspect is dual in nature, both antecedent and precedent, or in other words, it is both already implicitly “involved”, i.e. as a potential informing future becoming, and explicitly “evolving”, i.e. becoming “unraveled” explicitly in creation. For example, at the lowest rung of Aurobindo’s hierarchy stands the *hatha yoga*, a physical system, which has its basis in the physical body, its instrumentation in the *asana* and *pranayama*, (the bodily and breath regulation of the practice) and an ideal aspect- the perfection of the physical. This in turn, in a way reminiscent of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, provides the basis for the next system of *yoga*. *Raja Yoga*, which attends to the very governance of this body, through a focus on *citta* or order and self-rule in order to attain the ideal of vital perfection.

Each *yoga* in its process has the character of the instrument it uses. Thus the *hatha yoga* process is psycho- physical, the *Raja yogic* mental and psychic, the way of knowledge is spiritual and cognitive. The way of devotion, spiritual, emotional and aesthetic, the way of works spiritual and dynamic by action. Each is guided in the way of its characteristic power (Aurobindo, 1972, SoY: 610).

The *Gita* in many ways represents the first key synthesis, in bringing together what Aurobindo terms a triple path of *Jnana* (Knowledge), *Karma* (action) and *Bhakti* (devotion), or the intellect, the will and the heart, which ‘in the Integral view of things...are one. Divine Love should normally lead to perfect knowledge of the

beloved by perfect intimacy, thus becoming a Path of Knowledge, and to divine service, thus becoming a path of works' (Aurobindo, 1999, SoY:40). Appealing to the whole person, rather than privileging merely one of his aspects, Aurobindo's view wishes to 'avoid naturally any rigid determination that would injure its universal comprehensiveness' (Aurobindo, EoG, 1987:6).

Aurobindo conceives the place of such syntheses and their potential instrumentation, in the ability of the ability of later thinkers to discern:

the actual living truths it contains, apart from their metaphysical form, to extract from it what would help us or the world at large and to put it on the most natural and vital form and expression... suitable to... the spiritual needs of the our present day humanity (Aurobindo, 1987, EoG:3).

He models his own text on this lineage of progressive unfolding, and re-synthesis, which moves, like the physical evolution, from the gross to the more subtle in form. However, this increasing subtlety of form does not imply an increasing distancing from the material, the active or the intellectual, but rather a re-understanding, or "re-visioning" through each further, encompassing realization. For instance, in his work *The Secret of the Veda*, Aurobindo traces a change in Religious form, from external and ritual focussed to more internal/ subtle. However, he claims that the apparent gulf between these early ritualistic and physical forms and later philosophical writings 'is our own Creation and does not really exist' (Aurobindo, 1998, SoV: 7-8), in other words there is less movement away from these early religious expressions and more a re-casting and re-conception of their meaning.

He illustrates how these early symbolic forms are re-interpreted in a move to more subtle understanding: the God of fire, within the *Vedas*, becomes recast as the God of

labour in later writings; Apollo, the sun, becomes poetic and prophetic inspiration; and Athene, the dawn, 'has lost all memory of her material functions and is the wise, strong and pure Goddess of Knowledge' (Aurobindo, 1998, SoV: 6). Far from representing a primitive understanding becoming increasingly enlightened, this is merely a process of unveiling: a making explicit of truths which had been consecrated, intentionally confined to reception by an elite few through a new synthesis. As Aurobindo relates:

the spiritual and psychological knowledge of the race was concealed...in a veil of concrete and material figures and symbols which protected the sense from the profane and revealed it to the initiated... [Thus] clothed their language in words and images which had equally a spiritual sense for the elect, a concrete sense for the masses of ordinary worshippers (Aurobindo, 1998, SoV: 8).

Aurobindo also found a similar unveiling and re-formulation in the *Upanishads*, wherein *Rishis* 'used the text of the ancient *Mantras* as a prop... for their own intuitions... or else the *Vedic* word was a seed of thought and vision by which they recovered old truths in new forms' (Aurobindo, SoV, 1998:14). However, in Aurobindo's eyes, this archaeological synthesis is rendered most powerfully in the *Tantra*, 'for it seizes upon even the obstacles to spiritual life and compels them to become the means for a richer spiritual conquest and enables us to embrace the whole of life in our divine scope' (Aurobindo, 1987, EoG: 7). Foreshadowing his own spiritual project and its ties to the physical, the creative and the social, the *tantra*, he claimed, brought 'into the foreground along with divine knowledge, divine works and an enriched devotion of divine love... the use of the body and of mental askesis for the opening up of divine life on all its planes' (Aurobindo, 1987, EoG: 6)

For Aurobindo, the integration of paths of yoga find their greatest harmony in the principle of *Shakti*, or “the Will in Power executive in the universe”. *Tantra* conceives the universe as real and attempts ‘to find a method by which human nature can be remoulded into Divine nature’ (Rao, 1997: 112). Aurobindo’s work takes this principle and applies it more universally, conceiving all life as potential method toward the unveiling of Divine and “divinization” of Nature:

Combining this Dynamic *Tantric* principle with the static principle of *Purusha*, or consciousness soul which underlies the philosophies of Sankhya and Vedanta, he arrived at an “integral conception of God and Nature” (Heehs, 2008:280).

Although Aurobindo is, in popular Western scholarship, often aligned with *Advaita Vedanta*, through sharing its apparent monism and union of *Brahman* and *Atman*, he is highly critical of this stage in Indian textual genealogy. For him this time period, exemplified by the work of Sankara (circa 800AD) represents a schism wherein the ‘synthesis preserved by the old Mystics between the external and the internal, the material and the spiritual was displaced’ (Aurobindo, 1998, SoV: 15). In other words, at this moment the spiritual came to be something set at a distance from the phenomenal world through the idea that the Universal Brahman alone was real, and that which possessed merely finite existence came to be not ultimately real. This created a new emphasis on ‘asceticism and renunciation,’ and this became a sharp division between the terrestrial and the supercosmic, rendering ‘obsolete the utility not only of the Vedic ritual but of the Vedic text’ (Aurobindo, 1998, SoV: 15-6). Instead of recognizing the veiled nature of the symbol and ritual of the earlier Vedas these forms were seen to an “encumbrance:” a this-worldly expression, which could be replaced by the language of reason and philosophy.

For Aurobindo, this was not only a disavowal of history, but also heralded a move away from the *Vedic*. With the external form now recast as something seemingly unimportant, there became a move away from orthopraxy through the ‘maintain[ance] that Brahman could not be reached by works’ (Aurobindo, 2013, LoYII: 449). This move away from the “Age of Intuition” comprising symbolic and ritual form, towards the “Age of Reason,” and its advocacy of a pure metaphysics, Aurobindo claims created fertile ground for the later Buddhism, which, although preceded by the *Puranas*, was now destined to arise. In his *Letters on Yoga II* Aurobindo reaffirms his stance against this Idealism, and re-situates himself on the side of the earlier *Vedic-Tantric* lineage, and its this-worldly, active focus:

unless one realises the Supreme on the dynamic as well as the static side, one cannot experience the true origin of things and the equal reality of the active *Brahman* (Aurobindo 2013, LoYII: 448).

#### **ix) Symbol and Language as a prelude to Aurobindo’s metaphysics.**

Aurobindo’s Integral *Vedanta* encompassed apparent prior contradictions of this lineage through the idea that spiritual dissemination had both an overt form and a covert form. The overt form was regarded as the vehicle for the message, with the covert forming the essence of the illumination. He described this as ‘a kind of divine algebra transmitting the eternal formulae of the knowledge to the continuous succession of the initiates’ (Aurobindo, 1998, SoV:11).

Aurobindo originally undertook an in-depth reading of the *Rig Veda* in connection with a study into the origins of *Aryan* speech and, although this work eventually became *The Secret of the Veda*, the apparent linguistic connections within his theory might be worth revisiting. Here he argued, to echo Borges, that he was “creating his

precursors” in that ‘even an old thought or truth which I affirm against an opposing idea, becomes a new thought in the effort of affirmation and rejection, clothes itself with new aspects and new issues’ (Aurobindo, 1997, RIC: 51). There is a sense that in the very act of “recreating” a prior ideal in this system becomes also, itself, a “transcreation,” or new work. Perhaps such accounts might then be regarded less as lineages of “realization” and rather as genealogies of progressive “translation”. As one of my academic informants, Dr Reddy argues, in this system one might come to exceed the present (and its past) by a grounding within it ‘(to) show how this seminal new thought was progressively to be translated into present and future reality’ (Reddy. A, 1997:4).

In many ways, this can be seen to dovetail with Aurobindo’s further work on language. In his work *The Future Poetry*, Aurobindo traces a “psychological evolution of poetry.” In a similar way to Bhartrhari, Aurobindo understands language as having two correspondent aspects ‘the inner intuited sense and the outer material manifestation as spoken words’ (Coward, 1990:100), these elements work concurrently, the former coming to evolve in its very expression through time. The outer formulation is ‘subject to the mutations of time’ (Aurobindo, 1997, EoG: 2), whereas, the inner intuitive element, or “*sphota*” is an ‘indication of infinite meanings beyond the finite intellectual meaning the word carries’ (Aurobindo, 1997, FP: 15), and, like the textual and spiritual evolution, might also come to express more and more wholly the hidden message of its true identity.

The apex of this linguistic evolution is the “*mantra*”, wherein the three components that comprise poetic form are brought into complete synchrony. These aspects are: ‘rhythmic movement,’ ‘highest intensity of verbal form and thought-substance,’ and

the 'highest intensity of the soul's vision of truth,' or rhythm, style and vision. This threefold nature of poetic form as subject, action and object in this account, corresponds, as shall be explored in the following chapter, to the structure of Aurobindo's metaphysics. For instance, the threefold aspects that make up the universe in its higher realm (*sat, chit, ananda*), referring to existence/ truth, consciousness/ force and bliss, respectively, describe each of the terms of subject, activity and object, at their absolute zenith. The lower manifestation (mind, life and body), describe simultaneously, the limited refraction of these capacities within the terrestrial, time and space bound existence (Aurobindo, 1997, FP: 19).

The moment of unification in *mantra* is also, vitally, illustrative of this realization and capacity of *Supermind*, the absolute creative term at the heart of Aurobindo's metaphysics. *Supermind* or *vijnana* - the cumulative realization in Aurobindo's series of spiritual experiences - forms the necessary bridge between the terrestrial and divine. It is understood as a capacity that might realize itself in a comprehensive (or whole seeing) monism as an absolute subject, in an apprehensive (or partial seeing) dualism as the object of its own playful bliss, and in a qualified non-dualism, as a simultaneous poise and process of complete self possession and re-creation. As the three aspects within the creative utterance, becomes one in the mantra, so the three aspects of the universe as subject, action and object become realized as ultimately one, in the universal realism of Aurobindo's integration of each of these theories.

#### **x) Aurobindo and Methodology.**

For Aurobindo methodology was tantamount, and formed the purported aim of his publication *Arya*, in which many of his key poetic, philosophical, sociological and

psychological works were originally disseminated. In a merging of the twin capacities of tradition and innovation, translation and discovery, *Arya* intended, “to feel out for the thought of the future, to help in shaping its foundations, to link it to the best and most vital thought of the past” (Aurobindo, 1951, IaP: 49). This process not only recognized the individual as inextricable from his cultural and historical milieu, but also unified the distinction between historical and innovative thought. In such hermeneutics, foreshadowing Aurobindo’s system of creation, nothing fundamentally “new” is ever brought about: the past is merely reconceived or re-vealed in truer form. At each stage the self-similar structure is revealed in new guise. Aurobindo terms this process a “Method of *Vedanta*,” however similarities can be seen to Western hermeneutics, as shall be expanded upon later in the thesis.

Like Aurobindo’s “Method of *Vedanta*”, Western hermeneutics has recognized the reader’s experience of textual interpretation as both active and inextricable from his own history. The meaning of any text is therefore mediated through a process of reconstructive dialogue with the reader’s wider body of knowledge and personal history, wherein it might find integration. This mediation is imagined vice versa in the explication of ideas by a writer, i.e. as a movement from a wider vantage of history, to a discernment or “emplotment” in the bounds of space and time.

Aurobindo describes the Spiritual text as a providing a “construction,” “figuration” or “scaffolding” to delimit and imagine an infinite reality in a finite manner. In this sense, his communication relies on a process of self- limitation, but limitation informed by, and thus implicating, a whole host of ideas that might transcend any particular explication. The readers of his work (as well as future writers) are therefore required to, at least momentarily, “complete” the limitation of this creation, by recourse to

their own particular paradigms. The universal ideals thus become reconstructed, and gain new, or rather reconceived, meaning by integration into an ever-widening body of knowledge.

Ricoeur regards this process as a “mimesis,” or “copy” of an “original” work, but a copy that, in its very reconstruction becomes a unique creation. Each re-conception and re-understanding thereby progresses and changes (or further unfolds) the inherent knowledge it contains. The ability of a text to be continuously re-enlivened by the stream of individuals, cultures and collectives over history, is vital, Aurobindo argues, for its survival:

Only those scriptures, religions, philosophies that can be thus constantly renewed, relived, their stuff of permanent truth constantly reshaped and developed in the inner thought and spiritual experience of a developing humanity, continue to be of living importance to mankind. The rest remain as monuments of the past (Aurobindo: 1997, EoG: 3).

This dialogical method privileges no one voice: the voice of the present is simultaneously a re-imagining of the voices of the past, and an implication for the voices of the future. The present might thereby be considered as the “active,” the past “subject,” and the future potential “object” of a continuous time and creation.

#### **xi) From text to action.**

Aurobindo is quite clear that an active dialogical methodology may not apply only to an understanding of text, as he points out, ‘My life is modified in the same way by the life influences it has to encounter and confront’ (Aurobindo, 2011, LoYII: 51). Such an agenda could also be seen to inspire both his Spiritual partner, Mirra Alfassa and his spiritual followers in the Ashram and Auroville, to follow and develop.

The Integral aim was to find means of bringing spiritual realisations into identification with everyday reality, so one could reach beyond ascetic belief to inform and transform lives and real-world practises in its light. Aurobindo, notably, was certainly hesitant to align this project with anything that might be associated with “Religion”: ‘Nothing there (in the *Arya*) is written to support or to develop any kind of religious belief or dogma or to confirm or enunciate the credo of any old or new religion (Aurobindo, 2011, OH: 88). However, in later works, Aurobindo seems to reclaim the concept of “Religion” by drawing a distinction between true “Religion” and imitative “Religionism.” “Religionism” he associates with the dogmatism he seeks to transcend, whereas “Religion” dovetails with his own efforts toward a “Spiritualisation of Mankind.” No religion[ism], he famously remarks, has ever achieved this end, ‘For that is needed not cult and creed but a sustained and all comprehensive effort at spiritual self-evolution [*yoga*]’ (Aurobindo, 1998, EPY: 211).

Arguably, the simultaneous boon and shortfall of this approach is that although Aurobindo describes his aim as a “practical method” for developing Supramental awareness, it often ‘requires the reader to provide the link between principle and practise’ (Heehs, 2008: 237). Thus, it does not provide - as evidenced on the ground in both Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram - a complete, one shoe fits all, method towards the “spiritual” life, but rather merely paints in broad strokes the kind of principles differing individuals might follow.

For Aurobindo, although there is ‘a truth one and eternal [which cannot be] shut up in a single trenchant formula’, there are two elements involved in text ‘[one] belonging to the ideas of the period and the country in which it was produced [and another...] applicable in all ages and all countries’ (Aurobindo, 1997, EoG: 4). Similarly, there are

always two parties involved in the dialogical method. On the one hand, there is the text: the essential principles or ideals (the broad strokes), which provide a concrete, unchanging basis throughout time and space. On the other hand, there is the interpreter of the text: the time and space bound individual who, for Aurobindo, is precisely the vehicle for expressing these universals in the flux of temporal life.

This dialogue, in order to function, necessitates at least a sense of incompleteness, in order to leave space for individual readers/actors to interpret, reconstruct, or enliven, the meaning of a text, or idea anew. This is in distinction to reading as prescription, standardization or underwriting by an institution or greater social aggregate. The movement towards a hermeneutical understanding of Aurobindo's spirituality and its potential application beyond text to social action is further explored throughout this thesis. The argument in this chapter is that Aurobindo's philosophy and method might be grounded in his own empirical experiences, his own process of spiritual realization. The phenomenological shifts accounted in Aurobindo's spiritual development have entailed at each stage both a re-translation of personal and philosophical history and a re-casting of future outlook. His Integral perspective allows for the presence of the whole, even at the most earliest of the realizations, and its meaning comes to emerge evermore in each moment of re-seeing.

### **Conclusion: the starting point for an Integral thesis.**

This chapter has sought to align Aurobindo both within a lineage of Indian history and to key figures in Western history, which prepare the ground for a potential dialogue with the emerging global and practical philosophy of contemporary Auroville. I come to look at the possibility of conceiving Aurobindo's philosophy, not

only as an explanation of physical, social and textual origin and evolution, but as a potential model for understanding the Auroville project it has inspired.

It is easy to regard the texts of Sri Aurobindo as discreet bodies of work dealing with very different issues and, in an age of academic specialization, this tends to be how they are studied. However, Aurobindo's philosophical, spiritual, political and psychological texts were originally published alongside one another in the journal *Arya*, and only later differentiated into separate works. Although this may have made his work more accessible, it also might have severed the sense of synthesis inherent in his intellectual and spiritual explorations. My thesis aims to recapture Aurobindo's Integral, synthetic approach to illustrate, firstly, how his diversity of text reveals a common method that transcends each discreet discipline of study (and its necessary historical limitations), and secondly, how this method might be meaningfully re-accessed in contemporary Integralism, using Auroville as a case study.

I outline the particular vision and method of Aurobindo in chapter two through an in-depth reconstruction of his principal philosophical text *The Life Divine*. Herein I demonstrate how his ideas are rooted, not only in the personal spiritual experiences accounted here, but also a "transcreation" of *Vedantic* history.

Aurobindo's yoga aimed to go beyond a preoccupation with transcendent reality, to the detriment of the external physical life; an emphasis on social mechanics, to the detriment of individual spirit; and the espousing of religious or political universals (dogma) at the expense of human creativity. Instead his work attempted to reunite "God and Nature in a liberated and perfected human life" through a kind of "dialogical yoga", wherein each of these aspects (the individual/ humanity, tradition/

innovation, spiritualism/ pragmatism) would find their right expression through ‘the divine consummation of both’ (Aurobindo in Heehs, 2008:238). In his recognition of the individual as a dialogical agent, rather than a purely passive actor of Spirit, Aurobindo finds distinction from the dialectics of Hegel, whom he is commonly thought to appropriate, and comes to sit closer the phenomenology of Heidegger, and the hermeneutical tradition he has inspired:

Instead of Hegel’s historicism, Heidegger had put agency back in the human, and acknowledged Being as setting up the horizon and confronting beings, who find themselves in their “thrownness”, responding with language, the house of Being, through which its horizon discloses and undiscloses itself (Banerji, 2013:1).

Herein the temporal moment of the human being, rather than the grand narrative of history, comes to be definitive in the transformative yoga Aurobindo proposes. Following in the footsteps of a number of scholars (Banerji, 2013; Prince, 2012; Hemsell et al) and contemporary Aurovilians, I recognize the Integralism of Aurobindo as sharing similarities with Western dialogism. This approach recognizes Aurobindo, not merely as a great systematist, but also as a thinker whose synthesis leaves space for the particular context, personalities and technologies of those who interpret and apply his work over time. As Prince traces:

Although... [Aurobindo’s] work bore the marks of the encyclopaedic universalism of the enlightenment, he was also equally influenced by the counter-enlightenment ideas of Nietzsche that strive to deconstruct universalism by arguing from perspectivism’ (Prince, 2012: 8).

It is Aurobindo’s perspectivism that marks his thought, and even his texts, as never wholly “complete.” Following his argument, it would then be impossible to create either text or institution that might be the “final word” on Aurobindo. Neither his

texts, nor his proposed methodology are reducible to a system of pure adherence or standardisation, since,

that would be to limit ourselves and to create our spiritual life out of the being, knowledge and nature of others, of the men of the past instead of building it out of our own being and potentialities (Aurobindo, 1998, EoG: 8).

Instead, each potential interpretation or application of his textual sources might be regarded as merely a momentary re-synthesis: a viewing “as if” at a particular moment of space and time. And the potential fruit of such interpretation and application may have as much to do with these conditions (of space and time) as the text “in itself.”

Like the genealogy of progressive synthesis that his texts attempt to trace, Aurobindo also proposes the possibility of his own re-synthesis. However, the re-synthesis of the future in the context of a global, hyper-connected social world is unlikely to simply interpret the world by recourse to Indian textual history. Instead it might come to view all at its global fingertips, as potential material for interpretation, translation and re-creation, to become the “International Philosophy” that Aurobindo and the Mother proposed:

we have not only to assimilate the influence of the great theistic traditions of India and of the world... but to take full account of the potential though limited revelations of modern knowledge and seeking; and, beyond that, the remote and dateless past (Aurobindo, 1998, EoG: 8).

Thus, the net of potential influence on Integral application might transcend not only time, as the past is excavated and re-imagined for the future, but also space, as an increasing globalization expands the remit of available ideas. This thesis is not the

first to point out the apparent practical and social applicability of Aurobindo's ideas, and indeed as Chaudhuri points out:

The philosophy of integralism is... the foundation of a complete art of Integral living...Integral living would mean creative living in conscious union with the universal creative principle on the basis of fullness of freedom (Chaudhuri, 1954: xiv).

However, this thesis is the first to attempt an explicit demonstration of both the textual basis and attempted application of these ideas, instead of resorting to the convenient postponement inherent in such Utopian statements. The 'conscious union with the universal creative principle', is not, as Chaudhuri here might be misread, merely a state of being, to be realized in some futuristic social constellation, but an active, creative process of realization, already attempted today. Indeed, the highest ideal in this system is characterized as not 'self realization' but 'creative self expression' (Chaudhuri, 1954: xiv). Unlike self-realisation, which may be postponed in the face of one's limited seeing, self-expression, in whatever limitation of form and instrumentation, is possible, plausible and pragmatic in the now.

Whether Auroville might provide the laboratory and methodology for such continued exploration and re-synthesis is what this thesis aims principally to explore.

## **Chapter two: Poetic Metaphysics: *The Life Divine*.**

### **i) Prelude to a textual synthesis.**

As accounted in chapter one of this thesis, the first spiritual realisations that eventually came to culmination in Aurobindo Integral philosophy, embodied a knowledge by juxtaposition, or separation. Herein he initially affirmed the truth of the ascetic to the denial of the material world. Eventually this distinction arrived at recognition. The two terms came to be conceived in relationship and re-synthesised in a deeper realisation, i.e. of the truth of both the ascetic and the material. Thus, that which was perceived as opposition within the bounds of the limited phenomenology became identity when re-grounded in a wider paradigm beyond the limitations of the mind. This synthesis would create, in Aurobindo's view, the ability for imaginings beyond the current status of human consciousness, and the bringing about of a wider knowledge beyond the fragmented view of self and world.

The aim in my first chapter was to emphasise how this radical shift in conception was, for Aurobindo, not solely an intellectual endeavour -- one accessed and penned by a pure cognitive self (and to be read and understood in this manner through his texts), but rather a synthesis empirically realised, embodied and enlivened through his own biography. Arguably his work can be seen to pass on the gauntlet to his readers and followers and, to develop Marx's adage, here we have a call, not merely to interpret the world, but to "re-interpret" it; not solely to change it, but to wholly "re-create" it.

This biography of synthesis applies not only to Aurobindo's interior life, as evidenced in these formative spiritual realisations, but was arguably inherent in his exterior life. As recounted in chapter one, the Western and Eastern influences both found tension and resolution throughout his life course. The relationship between his background in the Oriental, and the Occidental frontage of his early life, and between himself, as a figure of Indian public life, and the Mother, a bohemian Parisian, are most notable. The power of the union between Aurobindo's active/ passive spiritual realisations, and its foreshadowing of this symbolic relationship with the Mother, represents, not merely – and as others have pointed out - the unification of Aurobindo's self, i.e. the bringing together of his abstract worldview, and practical this-worldly intentions (or his Oriental and Occidental self)), but also a unification of individual, society and world.

This movement of synthesis is seen also in Aurobindo's politics. The recognition of internationalism became recast as the undergirding and secret drive behind a defining and ardent nationalism. Thus, in the depths of his nationalism, or the upholding of national self-interest, Aurobindo came to discover the other, to embrace the universal through the particular. Similarly, in the extremes of the active, political self, Aurobindo experienced the wellspring of the passive that grounded all possible active manifestation. Further, the innovations in his texts found their root in a deep respect for the Indian history that foregrounded his Western upbringing. Through these particular examples Aurobindo is arguably pointing to the critique and rewriting of a more universal dualism, that between Nature and Spirit, man and God, or, in other words, the unification of the world in Original Idea and manifestation: in its Being and its Becoming. As Mohanty points out:

[Aurobindo] stands for integration... In him binaries and conflicts are harmonized; the West and the East; English and the Indian language; city and region; merit and social justice; religion and secularism; pacifism and militancy; conservation and development; nationalism and internationalism (Mohanty, 2010: xii).

This chapter, as the starting point for an in-depth exploration of Aurobindo's key philosophical text, explores the juxtaposition and Integral synthesis of ideas conceptually, before coming, in succeeding chapters, to understand their active, social meaning.

## **ii) Introduction: Aurobindo's work as a cumulative poetic metaphysics**

This chapter marks a move from the previous consideration of Aurobindo's key mystical experiences as pre-figuration of his interpretation of the *Vedic* scriptures, to a consideration of his texts as a re-configuration of *Vedic* history. Aurobindo's own mystical experiences thus become pivotal, not only as a prism for understanding the scriptures of the past, but also as a basis for a unique metaphysical synthesis, or "transcreation" of this history.

I follow, and aim to develop Gopinath's work here, to argue that Aurobindo's work utilizes prior metaphysical ideas to provide a grounded creative re-writing of them. In a hermeneutical vein, "transcreation" refers to a process of translation, alternately referred to as "*chaya chaya*" or "translation as a shadow of the original text" which allows at once for a translation to both 'follow the original text' and yet simultaneously, and like a shadow, 'differ from its original object, depending on the intensity and the angle of light falling on it... depending on the nature of light thrown on it by the translator by his interpretation' (Gopinath, 2002:1-2).

Translation, even of apparently philosophical texts, thus becomes a creative dialogue between the text and the particular reader within the unique concerns of his particular space and time. This process culminates, not in a reproduction, but rather in a ‘rebirth of the original work’ (Gopinath, 2002: 3), or as Mukherji (1981) terms it, “translation as new writing.” I argue that the approach to deep understanding as a kind of re-making is exemplified within the work of Aurobindo. This, I argue, characterizes Aurobindo’s work, more as a “poetic” which creatively re-makes and calls for an ongoing creative re-imagining of metaphysical ideas, in line, rather than in distinction, from experience. There is a dialogue in Aurobindo’s work between his metaphysical study, on the one hand, and his concrete experiences on the other, which become the means by which these former ideas find their new place and recasting. As Aurobindo recounts:

My philosophy was formed first by study of the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*... They were the basis of my first practice of *Yoga*; I tried to realise what I read in my spiritual experience and succeeded; in fact, I was never satisfied till experience came and it was on this experience that later on I founded my philosophy. . . This source was exceedingly catholic and many-sided and all sorts of ideas came in which might have belonged to conflicting philosophies but they were here reconciled in a large synthetic whole (Aurobindo, 2005, LD:1109).

Aurobindo’s integral reconstruction, or “transcreation,” of Vedic history is illustrated most clearly within his philosophical treatise *The Life Divine*. Here Aurobindo’s mystical realisations, as we shall explore, map onto the structure of his text, to demonstrate not only the essential unity of an “Individual”, “Universal” and “Transcendent” truth respectively, but also an essential compatibility between apparently contradictory metaphysical accounts through Indian history. Each of these accounts may be considered conflicting moments in Vedantic interpretation, i.e. as

Monism, Dualism and Qualified non- dualism, respectively. However, Aurobindo's system offers each a place within his own interpretation, 'as different aspects of one integral undivided truth' (Chaudhuri, 1954:118). This casts Aurobindo's view as, in his own terms, kind of 'universal realism' (Aurobindo, LD, 2005:432).

Aurobindo's text maps the cumulative realisations of his temporal experiences onto those of Vedic history, with each providing a partial, yet necessary, stepping stone towards the vantage of a greater encompassing truth. Thus, following the "step ladder of truth" exemplified by Aurobindo's personal realisations, "Truth" is not a denial of past truths, but a paradigm for the on-going re-conception and transformation of "truth" in the light of the present. The illumination of this greater truth through the twin lenses of past and present arguably forms the basis of Aurobindo's wider project: the unification of mankind and the Divine, immanent and transcendent, Matter and Spirit. I argue that each part of *The Life Divine*, in its particular oscillation between these terms, can be seen to cumulatively offer an index for the creative process. I argue in this chapter that we might see Aurobindo's description of the creative process, not only in this greater cosmic sense, but also in the particular moments of ordinary, human creative acts.

Thus, in this exposition of *The Life Divine*, with some allusion to Aurobindo's other texts, I aim not only to present this work as a synthetic reconstruction of prior *Vedantic* interpretation, but also to illumine the possibility for its on-going interpretation- and potential application - outside the strictly textual process. The works of Aurobindo have not only been the preserve of a scholarly community, but, as my work explores, have also been read, interpreted and shared by those who do not wish to write books on his ideas, but to begin putting these ideas into practise.

This chapter of my thesis aims to provide a window onto how Aurobindo's texts may provide, not prescriptions, but a possible template for such creative re-working. This would necessarily entail, not only a faithfulness to his ideas, but also the ability to continuously re-read, and re-apply these ideas in dialogue with the needs of the particular time and personalities on which it is brought to bear.

As a possible aid and insight into the potential process of Aurobindo's social re-interpretation, I follow others (Shukla, Atkinson, Coward) in aligning Aurobindo's apparently "philosophical" works rather to a "poetic" approach. In this way, I consider his work as a critique of a "meta-physics" that places reality outside the aesthetic experience of the human. Cosmology, within Aurobindo's system becomes less a concrete metaphysical structure set in distinction from a Divine Creator, and more the creative expression, or continued self-re-imagining of the Divine in the ongoing "text" of time. From this I argue, most particularly, that Aurobindo's work explicates not a "complete metaphysical system" but rather the tracing of a necessarily incomplete and on-going creative process. This places text (including Aurobindo's own) not as a climax but, like the humanity it expresses, as a transitional process: a product in itself, yet also a pre-cursor to continued re-interpretation in line with a reader's temporal experience.

Unlike Hegel, whose concept of Ultimate Spirit remains within the bounds of human reason, the proposed emergent truths of Aurobindo's system are not only considered as beyond the mind's reach, but also as wholly transformative of the current human mentality. They also remain the preserve of the individual in time, so cannot be wholly dictated by a time and a reason outside of this. The call for continued experiential re-interpretation of text forms the basis, I argue, for containing, and yet

going beyond the abstractions of his texts, to find meaning for individual and collective expression in the ever-fleeting now.

This chapter aims at an explication of Aurobindo's philosophy to demonstrate how, not only does the content of *The Life Divine* (through its account of Natural evolution) show the ideal path for human development, but also how Aurobindo's very means of innovatively understanding the truths of the past, lay down a model for a creative process that might succeed him. This process might, as I explore in subsequent chapters, find reproduction in Aurobindo's socio-psychological texts, and, more tentatively, could be utilised as a means for taking these ideas beyond text, i.e in the case of this study, through the intentional community of Auroville.

For Aurobindo the social world and its processes, reflects and is contained within the metaphysical world, so this flight to the absolute macrocosm is not to be considered displacement from our focus on the microcosm, but rather as preparation for it. The examination of Aurobindo's particular spiritual realisations in the preceding chapter, here find themselves recapitulated in his account of history, thus providing a general model, not only for understanding Aurobindo's work, but also for the continuation of a "history of synthesis" that his texts propose.

### **iii) *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga***

This chapter aims to tease out the process alluded to within the previous chapter through a primary focus on Aurobindo's key text *The Life Divine*, with cursory reference to *The Synthesis of Yoga*. These works are commonly understood to represent the two facets continually at play with Aurobindo's oeuvre. The former is

regarded the deep theoretical exposition of his Integral yoga; the latter the more practical guidelines - grounded in a long lineage of yogic history - for realizing these ideals in subjective and cultural life. By considering at once the ideal and the practical dimensions of Aurobindo's work, we might lessen the tendency to consider Aurobindo either as a purely abstract philosopher, aloof to the vicissitudes of his time, or (and equally as spurious) solely through the guises of his life in time, i.e. as a Nationalist or a spiritual guru, which might consign his ideas to an out-dated, outmoded context. As his life appears to critique any opposition between theory and practice or tradition and innovation, so we might approach an understanding of his work through a measured consideration of each dimension of any apparent dichotomy.

This chapter addresses the deeper philosophical underpinnings of the Integral worldview and approach in order to demonstrate the necessity for creative interpretation and application. Aurobindo proposes less a cosmology containing fixity of truth but, and as we shall explore, a fluid processual system encompassing differing truths non-distinct from the vantage of "he who interprets." As in Aurobindo's spiritual realisations, recounted in chapter one of this thesis, which *The Life Divine* may be considered to refract, there are a number of intersecting, cumulative and equally veridical "truths" to be realised and responded to, according to one's position within the process.

*The Synthesis of Yoga*, though containing a difference in emphasis, might be considered to provide greater examples and descriptions of the processes and methods alluded to in *The Life Divine*. Here the strivings of Mankind, and the evolutionary formulations of Nature, are re-envisaged as creative processes of

(Divine) Self-transfiguration. Herein the apparent changes evident in evolutionary substance become recast as a process of Self “unveiling”, or, a ‘working out’ of ‘what...[one] always really was’ (Aurobindo, 1999, SOY: 20). This process reaches its dynamic zenith in mankind, who, with a self consciousness and pliable intellect less restrained by the density of materiality, might consider itself in many roles, as many selves, with a potential beyond his present:

For man is precisely that term and symbol of a higher existence descended into the material world in which it is possible for the lower existence to transfigure itself and put on the Nature of the Higher (Aurobindo, 1999, SOY: 8).

Man has the ability to simultaneously re-member past concepts of self, embody present concepts of self and imagine, or strive for, future figurations of self. Thus, there is within man, as within textual history, a creative dialogue between, as Aurobindo terms it: *the evolved* (the past), *the evolving* (the present) and that *to be evolved* (the future). Man’s evolutionary history, and the future that Aurobindo describes, depends upon the mutual existence of these three elements, and their re-workings in evermore sophisticated syntheses, which in turn call for re-writing, or a re-synthesis of the various new times, spaces and capacities that will succeed them.

#### **iv) The Life Divine: the structure of the text, cosmos and self-realisation**

##### iv.i) Background of *The Life Divine*.

*The Life Divine* may be regarded Aurobindo’s key work of metaphysics in positing a ‘systematic study of the most fundamental structure of reality’ (Cooper, 2000:2). It was initially printed serially in the journal *Arya* from its first issue (August 1914) to

its fifty-fourth (January 1919). As Heehs points out, this rather poignantly coincided with the beginning and ending of World War One (Heehs, 2008: 272). In the *Arya*, Aurobindo, with the Mother's support, began to disseminate his ideas to a wider public through print. The aim of *Arya* was, as exemplified in *The Life Divine*, to 'feel out for the thought of the future, to help in shaping its foundations and to link it to the best and most vital thought of the past' (Aurobindo, 1998, EPY: 103).

The reference to dialogue between past and future is very important to an understanding of Aurobindo's work, both in his arrival at such ideas, and the potential method that might be gleaned from them. Aurobindo's adherence and grounding within the past tradition is elucidated alongside the other side of the dialogue, the 'feel[ing] out for the thought of the future'. In turn, the dichotomy between the internal self and the external reality is here re-worked, with internal self-knowledge allied to the problems and potentials of the external world. As Thakur, argues, Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* describes, 'the problems of establishing the integral divine harmony within, and as a result a changed earth and a nobler and happier humanity' (Thakur, 2004:32).

According to Aurobindo, all the problems of the world, both materially and spiritually, are essentially problems of harmony. This echoes the aim he discerned within the *Isha Upanishad*, i.e. that the 'central idea of the Upanishad ... is a reconciliation and harmony of fundamental oppositions' (Aurobindo, IU, 1951: 20). The central aim of *The Life Divine* is, arguably, to address the apparent disharmony: the points of contradiction and opposition, in order 'to find out the right idea and the right harmony' through affording each of these apparently disharmonious "truths" a place within a greater integrative worldview.

Where Western philosophy typically concerned itself with the exteriority of evolution, Reddy characterises Indian philosophy as one which, ‘from the beginning turned inwards... the interpretation of the universe was, therefore always from the standpoint of consciousness’ (Reddy.V. M., 1989: 2). Aurobindo, however, appears to unify these divergent concentrations: merging the Western ideal of evolution with the Indian ideal of consciousness, in order to:

look at the whole universe from the standpoint of the highest consciousness which he calls satchitananda... the measure of reality of anything is determined by the nature of consciousness that is revealed in it’ (Reddy. V.M., 1989:2).

However, Aurobindo is certainly not unique in this regard, with the idea of Nature as God’s self expression also held in *Vaishnavism* and *Tantricism*. However, within these respective traditions, unlike within Aurobindo’s philosophy, the earthly nature was not considered capable of perfection, since this perfection remained one of supersensible status (Sethna, 1992:64). Aurobindo’s philosophy, on the other hand, creates no such essential distinction between origin and manifestation, God and World.

Nevertheless, although the synthesis of *The Life Divine* clearly finds inspiration from multiple sources, it is most clearly grounded in a *Vedantic* re-interpretation. For example, *The Life Divine* was originally intended as a commentary on the *Isha Upanishad*, however in time, as Aurobindo describes, ‘this work became less an interpretation of the text than a sketch of a new philosophy’ (Heehs, 2008: 266-7). Although *The Life Divine* is a “new philosophy”, there are some key points of influence, or arguably great building blocks from this *Upanishad* that might be flagged

up. This work maps almost absolutely onto the ‘four successive movements of thought’ that comprise Aurobindo’s spiritual biography. As Aurobindo outlines:

the *mantras* of the *Veda* illuminated with a clear and exact light psychological experiences of my own for which I had found no sufficient explanation either in European psychology or in the teachings of *Yoga* or of *Vedanta* (Aurobindo, 1998, SoV: 39).

This comprised, first; a knowledge of ‘the one and stable spirit inhabiting and governing a universe of movement and of the forms of movement (oppositions, tension, multiplicity)’ (Aurobindo, 1951, IU: 20); second, a realisation of ‘the one stable Lord and the multiple movement are identified as one *Brahman* of whom... contains all as well as inhabits all’ (Aurobindo, 1951, IU: 21); third; a state in which, ‘*Vidya* and *Avidya*, Becoming and Non- Becoming are reconciled by their mutual utility to the progressive self realisation’, and, fourthly and cumulatively, a mode wherein; ‘the relations of the Supreme Truth and Immortality, the activities of this Life and the state after death are symbolically indicated’ (Aurobindo, 1951, IU:22). The first three realisations within this listing are the cumulative metaphysical truths which *The Life Divine* integrates in order to find unified footing in the fourth. However, as well as providing a sole mode of truth, according to a particularity of phenomenology, each of these truths may also find its affirmation in the “universal realism” of the fourth truth, wherein,

Every separate object in the universe is... [seen as] itself the whole universe presenting a certain front or outward appearance of its movement, the microcosm is one with the macrocosm... they are continent and contained, world in world, movement in movement (Aurobindo, 1951, IU: 24).

Thus, we have this fourth encompassing, integrating truth, reminiscent of

Aurobindo’s own experience, and illustrated more accessibly within this work as:

[the] perception of essential Unity, of the apparently incompatible oppositions, God and the World, Renunciation and Enjoyment, the One and the Many, Being and its Becoming... The image is of the world either as a garment or as a dwelling place for the informing and governing Spirit (Aurobindo, 1951, IU: 2).

Herein we have in this translation of the *Isha Upanishad*, both the cumulative “truths” that Aurobindo unravels, and the seed of the argument he develops in *The Life Divine*. The argument concerns the nature and identity of the Infinite Subject (truth one) who might simultaneously discover himself in the object of the world (truth two) and create through the tensions of his own active self-oppositions (truth three and four). Thus, the world is in a state of absolute non-difference from the Divine:

[since] creation is not a making of something out of nothing or of one thing out of another, but a self projection of Brahman onto the conditions of space and time (Aurobindo, 1951, IU: 40-1).

In a symbolically poignant way, Aurobindo interprets this alternate projection of Divine self as a container/ medium for Divine self- expression, through allusion to “*Matarisvan*” of the *Rig Veda*. Aurobindo interprets *Matarisvan* here to signify, “he who extends himself in the Mother or the container” whether that be the containing mother element, Ether, or the material called Earth in the veda’ (Aurobindo, IU, 1951:4). Thus his own creative medium is symbolically aligned with the divine feminine principle, which Mirra Alfassa appears to symbolically take up in the ongoing Integral project Aurobindo elucidates.

Within his commentary on the *Isha Upanishad*, as well as in his *Secret of the Veda*, Aurobindo’s basic structure of consciousness finds its basis. Consciousness is described in the *Isha Upanishad* as, ‘not simple or homogenous, it is septuple... it

constitutes itself into seven forms or grades of conscious... activity descending from pure Being to physical being' (Aurobindo, IU, 1951). In *The Secret of the Veda*, Aurobindo elaborates upon this description of the psychological principles alluded to in the *Veda*, by relating them to the seven worlds of the *Puranas*<sup>4</sup>. This essentially aligns phenomenology and manifestation, to provide the basis for his own sevenfold ontology, and as will be further explored, the necessary creative alignment of the upper and lower hemispheres in his cosmology.

This is not the only example of the way Aurobindo's novelty found its basis, not in invention but of alternate interpretation, and through the synthesis of prior

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<sup>4</sup> *Principles of the Veda:*

1. Pure Existence — Sat
2. Pure Consciousness — Chit
3. Pure Bliss — Ananda
4. Knowledge or Truth — Vijnana
5. Mind
6. Life (nervous being)
7. Matter

*World's of the Puranas:*

1. World of the highest truth of being (Satyaloka)
2. World of infinite Will or conscious force (Tapoloka)
3. World of creative delight of existence (Janaloka)
4. World of the Vastness (Maharloka)
5. World of light (Swar)
6. Worlds of various becoming (Bhuvar)
7. The material world (Bhur)

interpretation. Within this chapter I show how Aurobindo's ideas provides a point of similarity to other *Vedantic* thinkers whose philosophical positions are also formed through interpretation of key *Vedic* works. These thinkers are, namely, Madhva, Sankara and Ramanuja.

*The Life Divine* might be seen to recapitulate and contextualize Aurobindo's own mystical experiences in dialogue with these thinkers of the past. *The Life Divine* is broken up into two books, and three parts, the first book containing one part and the latter two parts. The first (Book 1, part 1) echoes Aurobindo's experience of the Divine as *Kshara*: or the active formation of existence, thus recognising the possibility of the Divine in the physicality of the finite. The second (Book 2, part 1) echoes Aurobindo's experience of the Divine as *Akshara*: or the passive foundation of existence, recognising the possibility of individual identity with the infinite. Finally, the third (Book 2 part 2) echoes Aurobindo's experience of the Divine of *Purushottama*, realising an identity of passive infinite and active finite, as the Divine's simultaneous ability to be realised in the guise of each.

Aurobindo's highest realisation of the *Parabrahman* is made concrete in the re-synthesis of each of these positions into a greater whole. *The Life Divine* utilises this trichotomy further to recognise these elements: the static, active and encompassing, respectively, as ultimately representing an essential unity between Man, Nature and God, their existence as "Individual", Universal and Transcendental and their respective phenomenologies, or horizons of knowledge, as "Mind", "Overmind" (or *Maya*) and *Supermind*. Here these three terms are recognised as intimately part of the same ongoing creative process, with each property contained, either explicitly or implicitly, in every stage of this process. *The Life Divine* attempts to unlock the power

in man to recognise his greater Self and satisfaction beyond (and indeed encompassing) both his affirmation of an egoic individual self, and the dissolution of this individuality in his ascetic striving beyond self. This fluid and continuous veiling and disclosure of Self not only operates as an origin story and teleology, but arguably as a methodology and symbol for creativity, both divine and human.

iv.ii) Structure of *The Life Divine*.

*The Life Divine* makes sense of each of these realisations through finding evidence for each in the truths of *Vedantic* interpretation. According to Chaudhuri,

there are three principal modes of interpretation of *Vedanta*: unqualified non-dualism, (*kevala-advaitavada*) qualified non dualism (*visista advaitavada*) and dualism or pluralism (*dvaitavada*) (Chaudhuri, 1954: v).

However, in Aurobindo's view these modes of interpretation are the 'outcome of one sided and exaggerated emphasis on three equally real elements in the nature of ultimate reality' (Chaudhuri, 1954:vi). Below I account how these three truths find place within *The Life Divine*.

The first part of *The Life Divine* (Book one, Part one) utilizes what is termed, a "Knowledge by Separation", to chart existence as a differentiated omnipresence of the Divine. This forms an ontology, or classification of existence into seven hierarchical levels, each comprising its own truth of being. These "levels and "truths" of being" show the manifestation of the Divine through subconscious matter through increasing stages of realisation, to superconscience. Although differing in phenomenology and

ontology, each level in this chord of being is homologous in structure to all others, comprising the self-same threefold form in each level of manifestation. This ontology, though expressing a plurality of form, might thus be considered a “nested” system of manifestation.

This account provides, as Krinsky points out, ‘[an] overview of the field of consciousness and its various forms of manifestation as well as the major issues confronting us in our process of development’ (Krinsky, 2012: 226). I compare and distinguish the differing terrestrial and divine truth- being of Aurobindo, from the dualistic realism of Madhva (1199-1278) who also proposes a ‘pluralistic ontology’ (Gupta, 2012: 233), separating worldly and otherworldly truth. Thus, Book 1 describes the truth of the infinite in the face of a persistent, relative and time bound truth.

However, to a higher phenomenology - as employed in Book 2 part 1 - existence may be conceived as a monism. Here reality is understood as an “identity of Being” comprising the singular infinite truth, existence and bliss (*Sat chit ananda*) of an infinite Subject. Thus, the experience of the terrestrial being finds its limits and transformation in the bounds of the higher truth of this infinite. I relate and distinguish this part from the monism (*advaitism*) of Shankara who conceives a pervasive infinite reality beyond the limited phenomenology of the temporal.

In the ultimate part of *The Life Divine* (Book 2 part 2), the absolute unity of existence in Satchitananda, finds itself qualified by a third “functional” truth, i.e. the finite forms of reality as a “process of infinite being”. This process comprises a threefold movement between a passive Infinite (*superconscience*); an active Infinite process

(*Supermind*) and its play of self-manifestation (the phenomenal reality of body, life and mind). In other words, the greater monism of existence - the infinite *Satchitananda* which bases, informs and pervades all being, in potential and manifestation - might, for the purpose and bliss of its play (*lila*) choose to creatively express itself, to discover itself in the finitude of form and process. I relate the qualified non-dualism of this book, which may discern Brahman in a variety of poises, to the *visistadvaita* of Ramanuja, for whom 'Brahman is identity-in-difference', or *Sirguna Brahman* (Padiyath, 2014:151).

#### iv.iv) Truths within Truths: the three poises of the Divine.

To summarise this process in other words; the divine might wholly separate itself in phenomenal manifestation as subject and object, leading to an apparent distinction between Spirit and Matter; or, within the higher hemisphere, might experience itself wholly as an undifferentiated *Satchitananda*. Lastly it might experience itself pragmatically, creating a practical (though non-essential) differentiation between itself as subject, activity and object of self-enjoyment. However, at all moments, within even the lower hemisphere of body, life and mind, there is a refraction of the former *sat-chit-ananda*: 'a mirror of the universal existence, consciousness, power, delight, but not their full participant or possessor' (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 241). This will be explored further below.

Each of these truths, not unlike the realisations of Aurobindo accounted in chapter one of this thesis, builds upon and re-imagines the truths of the latter stages, in order to provide, what might be termed a nested account of existence. For example, and as alluded to above, each stratum within the account of Being comprises three properties, or *gunas*: the first subjective, the second dynamic and the third substantial or formative. The figuration and potential interplay of these terms is

altered accorded to the differing nature and power of the respective strata. Although these are expressed infinitely as *Sat Chit Ananda*, even at the most subconscious strata in Aurobindo's account of Being there is present the same three essential terms: explicit substance, implicit activity, implicit subject, yet to be unravelled:

Present in every atom of Matter all this is necessarily present in everything which is formed by the aggregation of those atoms; and they are present in the atom because they are present in the Force which builds up and constitutes the atom (Aurobindo, 2005, LD:196).

Thus, matter becomes to be seen as a partial representation of a capacity that wholly transcends but also encompasses it. Throughout the varying series in this "Sevenfold chord of Being," the figuration and potential interplay of these three essential terms is altered according to the differing nature and power of the respective stratum. At the lowest subconscious, the substantial term is dominant but this does not preclude the existence of the implicate, or potential activity and intelligence to be unveiled, and, in turn, to dominate the substantial. As shall be explored, this self-similarity of cosmic structure is also not distinct from the ontology of the human being. Rather this schema is exemplified in the "sheaths of [human] consciousness" which correspond exactly to the wider structure of existence in which he both participates and might progressively realise these latent potentialities. Murali correlates this structure of the self and cosmos, to the Vedic systems where Aurobindo's ideas found their influence:

the ascending graded scale of the Vedic worlds corresponded to a similar mounting scale of... planes or degrees of consciousness in the nature of man, that is, man subjectively contained in himself all the worlds that objectively contained him (Murali, 1997:11).

Further, this nested structure is not merely present in all facets of the universe, but also, I argue in the very structure of Aurobindo's textual exegesis. *The Life Divine* itself

recapitulates the essential structure of both this evolutionary process and the spiritual realisations of Aurobindo by providing first, an affirmation of the material, experienced reality, or the “cosmic/terrestrial” truth (Book 1); second, an affirmation of the ascetic (subjective) truth of the *Supracosmic* (Book 2 part 1) and third, the active relationship between these terms: the creativity in which they find simultaneously their difference and their unity, which is referred to as “supraphysical truth” (Book 2 part 2). This is described by Aurobindo as a:

Becoming with the Divine Being for its origin and its object, a progressive manifestation, a spiritual evolution with the supracosmic for its source and support, the other-worldly for a condition and connecting link and the cosmic and terrestrial for its field, and with human mind and life for its nodus and turning-point of release towards a higher and a highest perfection (Aurobindo, 2005, LD 694).

Herein the three modes or truths of the human self are described collectively as, simultaneously, ultimately beings and objects of the infinite Divine being, and yet also as evolving beings distinct from the Divine. Further, they are described, at once, as beings who constitute the “field” or space of the Divine’s play, and as the unique embodied location wherein the terrestrial might come to realize and embody its infinite and perfect Self beyond the terrestrial.

In the following section I argue that, not only the content, but also the very structure of *The Life Divine* might be considered its own reconstructive synthesis. This synthesis is not merely in the ideas it charts, as shall be explored, but how structurally it elucidates not only differing poises of the Divine creativity, but cumulatively constitutes the necessary modes of the creative process on a terrestrial level. Herein, and to echo Ricoeur’s threefold mimesis (Ricoeur, 2012: 54), there is the move from a primary infinite, creative potential of the Divine Subject, in his

“preconfigured” state in an infinite relief, or all-pervasive Being; to his “configured,” differentiated, or active state; to, finally, a move from this limited, or “emplotted,” self-differentiation to find itself, or to re-align or “reconfigure” itself as, less a distinction, and more an outpouring of the infinite creative Self.

To summarise, this constitutes a move from a Self of infinite subject (which corresponds to the non-qualified Monism of *The Life Divine* Book 2 part 1). It also elides with Ricoeur’s mimesis 1, wherein a subject possesses creative and symbolic potential prior to the manifestation of these properties in act or object. Next there is a move of self-differentiation wherein this relief of infinite Subject draws itself from infinite relief into partial figuration. This move constitutes the inherent dualism between terrestrial and supercosmic experience, whilst they ultimately remain one and the same. On a terrestrial level, this can be homologized with the necessary distinction created between subject and object, or self and world, which is necessary for the former to act upon the latter, or for the creative process to occur. The Divine is here conceived as having an aesthetic desire to “emplot”, or realize Itself alternately in Space and Time, to experience itself, “as if” (this corresponds to the dualism of Book 1 part 1). Thirdly it describes the reconstructive ability of the Self in time to progressively unveil its latent potential through continuous creation, or re-creation in time (Book 2, part 2). Herein the apparent constrictions and containers of space and time become the necessary substance and instrumentation for this creativity to occur. As Aurobindo describes to his followers, in his work *Letters on Yoga*:

The world is a manifestation of the Real and therefore is itself real. The reality is the infinite and eternal Divine, infinite and eternal Being, Consciousness-Force and Bliss. This Divine by his power has created the world or rather manifested it in his own infinite Being. But here in the material world or at its

basis he has hidden himself in what seem to be his opposites, Non-Being, Inconscience and Insentience. (Aurobindo, 2013, LYII: 393).

Thus, the Divine, as the very opposite to worldly manifestation, does not render the world illusory, but, as we shall explore, becomes for Aurobindo the basis and possibility for the recreation, or creative re-making of the Divine Self in time.

**v) *The Life Divine: Book 1, Part 1, Aurobindo's system and Dvaitism: a transcreation of dualism in dialogue with Madhva***

v.i) The reality of the terrestrial: Aurobindo and Madhva.

The first part of the text (Book 1) focuses on Aurobindo's system through the eyes of the terrestrial element in the exposition. This describes reality according to how it is experienced by the conscient beings in time, i.e. to mankind within his vantage point of human mentality. Although Aurobindo understands the universe as an unravelling and re-imagining of unified Spirit in time, for the beings within time, the truths of the universe are manifold.

This book describes the truths of the *individual* within time and through time's instrumentation: mind. Mind, for Aurobindo, operates by means of construction, through a process of forever dividing and distinguishing, and from these limited containers of Divine consciousness we experience and make sense of the world. Although this means of perceiving is to be overcome, as greater truths are realised, it is also of necessary, pragmatic importance to the terrestrial stage, since oneness would 'essentially eliminate the practical capacity to act in the world of dualities and function in this framework' (Krinsky, 2012: 53). In other words, the distinction

between the subject and the world is necessary in order for the subject to act in the world.

The “truths” of this stage of evolution are ideally suited to the transitional nature of the human, who is a being still in a process of Becoming. In seeing terrestrial experience as veridical, Aurobindo’s system is distinct here from *Advaitism*, or non-dualism, and might more fruitfully be compared to the *dvaitism* of Madhva. Madhva (1238- 1317 AD) called his perspective *tattvavada* or realism, and argued for a fundamental difference between the *atman* of the terrestrial individual and the supercosmic *Brahman*. Madhva critiques the gulf created between our experience and reality in *Advaita*, arguing for a direct realism. For Madhva truth is not deferred beyond our empirical experience, but rather reality corresponds to our perception. It is through perceiving that we cognize objects set in differentiation from ourselves in order to build an empirical picture of what we, and others, are through distinction. Thus, a philosophical system is here judged by how far it elides with human experience:

Experience is the immediate datum from which one has to philosophize and philosophy is under a moral obligation to explain the conditions indispensable for its possibility. The worth of a philosophical system is to be judged by the extent to which it is able to explain experience, rather than explain it away (Cook Wilson in Sharma, 1986:12).

Aurobindo’s system is similar in that it does not attempt to “explain away” experience but, rather, accords phenomenal perception necessary truth. For Aurobindo it is through our containment in worldly experience that we come to progressive knowledge of the content of ourselves, as he claims, ‘the knowledge of the contents is contained in the knowledge of the continent’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD:71). Here the

“contents” stand for the self and its paradigm, or way of seeing, with “the continent” referring to the world one inhabits, and the experience it provides. It is this embodied experience that enables us to make sense of the abstract world, with ‘every concept... incomplete for us and to a part of our nature almost unreal until it becomes an experience’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 67). This erects a dualism between the abstract independent truth of the Divine and the dependent truth of mankind which depends upon the former for its being, but yet discovers itself through its manifestation in time. The world for Aurobindo is real but not independent of cosmic consciousness, ‘[the] world lives by That. That does not live by the world’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD:26). The “That” here refers to the supercosmic, or the infinite Divine, that undergirds all terrestrial experience.

Aurobindo illustrates the pervasive independent truth of the Divine as a ladder whose various rungs demonstrate the dependent truth of terrestrial manifestation. Madhva makes a similar distinction between Divine and human truth, dichotomising reality into *svatantra* and *paratantra*, or the dependent real and the independent real. *Svatantra* refers to the independent soul and matter as dependent on the *paratantra*, or God, ‘in the sense that Brahman is the cause and the world is the effect’ (Padiyath, 2014: 156). Thus, for both Aurobindo and Madhva, there is a juxtaposition of a heavenly sacred and earthly profane. Indeed, Aurobindo critiques knowledge of Spirit simply through asceticism, or a renunciation of the material, to rather claim that, ‘the supraphysical can only be really mastered in its fullness... when we keep our feet firmly on the physical’ (Aurobindo, LD, 2006:13-14).

Further, in Aurobindo’s system the experience of the terrestrial individual is vitally important, ‘as through him [is brought out the] development of consciousness

(Aurobindo, LD, 2006: 41). This, for Aurobindo, illustrates the truth of being in time, or our knowledge of what we appear to be in the 'field of becoming (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 67) alongside the truth of Being outside and independent of the vicissitudes of time. Aurobindo compares this persistence of terrestrial truth alongside the recognition of the supercosmic truth to the persistence of life and body alongside the greater truth of mind, to claim, 'as existence of the mind does not deny the life and body so the transcendent does not deny the individual 'centre' [of experience]' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 50).

Often these truths appear to be in conflict, i.e. the truth of divine immortality appears compromised by the terrestrial truth of death; the truth of Divine Bliss thwarted by the pain of the world. However, both Madhva and Aurobindo resist the temptation to simply gloss over, or worse consign terrestrial truth to illusion, and persist in according it vital reality. For each, 'never can the experience of pain and suffering in the world by the souls be dismissed as false experience' (Madhva in Sharma, 1986:8). However, for each this experiential truth remains dependent on the infinite truth of the Independent being. For instance, Aurobindo explains the experience of pain as a 'backwash on the waters of universal delight' (Aurobindo, LD, 2006:97). In other words, the experience of pain becomes an experience that has phenomenal reality, but is ultimately dependent and contained by a greater reality, in this case, that of Bliss, or *Ananda*. It is easy to assume from this example that Aurobindo might arrive at a negation of the terrestrial, in light of the higher truth of the divine: however, this is not the case. Aurobindo's concept of *Ananda* is neither limited by its absolute status (bliss) within the divine, nor its multiplication (experienced as mixed pleasure and pain) within the temporal.

It is the continent, or the phenomenology of our perception, that, for Aurobindo, determines the content of our experience through its particular ability to recognize Self. Pain is for Aurobindo a dis-recognition of Self. Aurobindo gives the analogy of an ocean here, which conceived wholly is one (self) movement, but yet considered through the 'mutable formations' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 103) of its waves appears plural. Pain is for Aurobindo, *jugupsa* or a 'shrinking of limited being from perceived non-self' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 115). Herein the executive force of the Divine, though ultimately non-distinct, is conceived as existentially distinct to the limited phenomenology of the finite being. Behind this frontal aspect of pain persists always 'an *anadamaya* [or blissful self being] behind the *manomaya* [or mental self- being]' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 113). Madhva also accords terrestrial experience qualification by a greater real: 'though *Brahman* and the world are real there is a difference in degrees of reality' (Rao, 1997: 8), with the *Brahman* afforded causal reality.

If all the reals are to be put down as equally dependent, with no Independent Being anywhere in the Universe, all movement of the dependent reals would be rendered impossible — because all of them are 'dependent' and cannot direct one another' (Madhva' Jayatirtha's commentary in Sharma, 1986:16).

Thus, for Madhva, it is the independent real that gives the multivariant dependent "reals" coherence, cause and direction. As Padiyath points out, 'Madhva draws the conclusion of the dependence of everything on God, even though God does not depend on anything' (Padiyath, 2014: 156). However, this is also the point of divergence between the two. Aurobindo and Madhva find their distinction in the status they give to this independent truth of reality.

For Madhva, 'the changeable no less than the unchangeable, the independent no less than the dependent is an ultimate component of Reality as a whole' (Sharma, 1986:

13). However, for Aurobindo the terrestrial truth is not an ultimate component of reality, but merely provisional, with its poise in strict distinction from the Divine. Its status is one of “play,” rather than one of “reality”. Although knowledge of self is gained through our experience of the universe, the apparently distinct Divine does not mark a fundamental divergence from this knowledge, but rather, superconscious and terrestrial truth are considered ‘two different formulations of the same all’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 71).

For Aurobindo the figurative truth of the individual is not distinct from the Divine but, in its wider relief, is revealed as a ‘[Divine] concentration within limits of space and time’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 50). The apparent opposition of the superconscious truth is thus in veiled identity from the terrestrial truth, or ‘hidden in the modes of its own workings’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 96). However, for Madhva, this greater mergence of the individual, world, and divine truth does not occur, with the terrestrial and the supercosmic persisting in a fundamental dualism. Rao argues for this persistence of identity through comparison to Ricoeur, who claims, ‘one cannot give up one’s identity and become the other entirely, nor can one be indifferent to the opening up of the self that takes place in such interactions’ (Rao, 2002: 13). This quote might be true for a self- identity confined to the terrestrial, however, for Aurobindo, identity with the Divine truth does not necessate a negation of the terrestrial reality, i.e. the truth of the individual.

Kumar’s (2009) relation of Madhva’s “soul” to Aurobindo’s “psychic being” demonstrates both the points of crossover as well as the root of their fundamental divergence. According to Kumar, Madhva’s concept of the soul refers to that aspect of the individual which is ‘unborn, eternal, unchanging and is the locus of both good and

evil' (Kumar, 2009:1). This appears similar to the "psychic being", or *Caitya Purusa*, which forms the latter of Aurobindo's "two selves". Whereas the first self of Aurobindo forms our idea of self in the figure of current existence, this latter Self is the greater relief from which the former frontal aspect springs. Similarly, Madhva's soul also provides this greater self-relief, possessing its own free will, perceiving the world not through the bounds of intellect but purely through *sakshi*, or intuition.

However, although Madhva's soul provides the possibility for an individual liberation from worldly bondage in the egoic self (distinct here from worldly denial), for Aurobindo, the manifestation of temporal self is not self-binding. Rather, 'existence is in its activity a Conscious force which presents the working of its force to its consciousness as forms of its own being' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 249). Thus, Aurobindo's soul capacity recognizes reality as conceived through the separative mind, with matter and life a substance and instrumentation for this divided consciousness. However, this psychic element is not only a soul in non-distinction from ego, but also a soul in non-distinction from God. Rather this psychic element forms the bridge between the human ego, which sees itself in distinction, and the Divine, to which it has identity. Thus, where Madhva, in attempting to stay true to worldly perception, ends up creating distinction with little explanation of how such properties relate, Aurobindo's system remains coherent, whilst simultaneously affording the truth of multiple realities.

The psychic being of Aurobindo's *evolving* human is synonymous to the active aspect of his *involved* divine. Aurobindo terms this *Supermind* the *Prajnana*, or the capacity of an Infinite Being to apprehend itself in time, without compromising this infinite

status. Aurobindo illustrates this aesthetically, comparing the act of the Superconscient *Supermind* in the field of time to an act of poetry:

as a poet views the creations of his own consciousness placed before him in it as if they were things other than the creator and his creative force... really no more than the play of self formation (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 175).

In other words, the distinction of the terrestrial from the supercosmic truth is one illustrative of the supreme capacity of *Supermind* to imagine Self alternately “as if”: ‘it can play at being bound without incurring a real bondage’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 44). This realization of different form is not then ultimately illusory, but becomes so (*avidya*) only within the bounds of constructive mind, which conceives this an actual separation rather than just the ‘instrumentation and phenomenon of the play’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 183).

v.ii) Re-imagining the disjunct between superconscient and terrestrial truth.

In this account of existence, the Divine Subject (or “superconscient”) power of the Divine - what Aurobindo terms the *Supermind* - “apprehends” or limits Himself in self- formations of increasing distinction in the process of involution, or creative manifestation in time. He can imagine himself in this variety of forms without separating this form from Himself: ‘its [*Supermind*’s] formations are forms of the reality, not constructions, representations or indicative figures’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 286). In other words, the *Supermind* might limit Himself in the bounds of space without losing footing in his nature as transcendental *Superconscience*: or the essential relief from which all figurations spring. In other words, he might imagine himself alternately as ‘Himself the play, himself the player, [and] himself the

playground' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 111). Aurobindo's Divine can thus imagine and self-manifest himself as both the subject of play, the act of play and the objects of play without any contradiction.

Simultaneously, the process of Superconscient involution explains why mankind, although identical in essence with the Infinite, experiences itself otherwise. Padiyath quite neatly explains this as there being, 'an essential unity and an existential difference between the two' (Padiyath, 2014:12). The realm of the Mind (the current stage of mankind) is characterised by an attuned *apprehensive* capacity. In other words, it is an instrument accomplished in discernment. It attains knowledge through a process of separation, or the apportioning of "rational". This *avidya* or limited seeing, and exclusive concentration on separate manifestation, arises from the encapsulation of mankind in the physical body (*annamaya*) with its limited physical and mental capacities. The Mind's dominant subjective dimension is distinguished, both from the harmonising independent-idea-force of Overmind and the "Real Idea" of *Supermind*, by its constructive, mediative relation to reality. Aurobindo terms this capacity "the original formula", which understands reality not through immediate contact, but through its own re-formulation. The mental perception is, summatively, a partialised conception of self-as distinct from the "rest of the world", but also an enhanced capacity for imagining/pre-conceiving and governing its vital activity and its physical being.

Thus, mankind experiences himself as separate being rather than Infinite Self, perceives in ignorance, rather than Knowledge, experiences inertia rather than Dynamic Power, and pain rather than Bliss. Rather than recognising this experience as the creative realisation of Self, man experiences a gulf between himself and the

world, his present situation and his imaginings and ideals. However, these contradictions within man are described by Aurobindo as 'nature's profoundest method' (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 4), and illustrate the reason inherent to this divisive dualist (or mental) stage of evolutionary development. The tension inherent in the opposition between Nature and God, betrays a deeper drive to unify, to draw nature to more complex formulations, and man to annul the divisions in himself as he moves towards greater realisation and reconciliation with a Self beyond his current phenomenology. Indeed, according to Aurobindo:

The greater the apparent disorder of the materials offered or the apparent disparateness, even to irreconcilable opposition, of the elements that have to be utilised, the stronger is the spur, and it drives towards a more subtle and puissant order than can normally be the result of a less difficult endeavour (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 4-5).

In Aurobindo's eyes this disharmony represents merely one instance of a wholesale problem of harmony that characterises the human condition and its place within Nature's wider schema. In this schema, man represents a vital transitional stage in which Nature no longer evolves in a state of mechanical subconscience (*Prakriti*) but, through the growing self-consciousness of mankind, might progressively begin to understand its further identity (as Spirit/ *Purusa*) within, rather than non-distinct, from this process. In a way reminiscent to Hegel's dialectic, Aurobindo points to the 'upward impulse of man towards the accordance of yet higher opposites' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 5) - a progressive series of unification that draws man to actualise higher manifestations of Self. This is the sense behind evolution for Aurobindo, as a process of re-synthesis, and re-membering of an original self, in being, in dynamism and in phenomenology.

At these higher levels of being/knowing, mankind might recognize himself not merely as an *individual*, beyond and informing the egoic self, but also as a *universal* self. This universal self would be at one with the cosmic status of nature, and ultimately with the transcendent nature of the divine Self: at once foregrounding and involved in all passive, active and formative Being. However, for Aurobindo, this concept of “evolution” becomes arbitrary unless the “father” notion of Vedantic “involution” is accepted. Involution, as the delimitation of the infinite form, consciousness and being, into the finite (or, in other words, the creation of the material world) is the reason for evolution: the progressive drawing out, or the explication of that which is hidden or veiled within the density of matter. It is easy to conceive these two concepts in opposition- and thus separate Spirit from Matter- but that would misrepresent the operation.

Aurobindo thus sees the universe less as a process of creation, and more a process of unveiling, wherein an implicit Being, hidden behind the frontal formation and fragmentation of Becoming, is progressively made explicit in our processes of development. All gradations within Aurobindo’s lower hemisphere (the physical/vital/mental realm that make up the “explicit order”) can thus be understood to have a double identity: the first this “involutionary form”- as the manifest expression of a higher state of Consciousness- the second, an “evolutionary veil”- the interface for a progressive communion with higher states as their veil is lifted. (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 5). Aurobindo himself invokes both scientific discoveries and the *Vedanta*, to suggest that matter itself is a formation or density of energy and the nature of this energy is consciousness: ‘consciousness is the great underlying fact’ (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 22). This consciousness pervades all manifestation, and thus, according to Aurobindo:

We are entitled to see in this general fact the proof of a conscious Force at work in the animal and the insect which is more intelligent, more purposeful, more aware of its intention, its ends, its means, its conditions than the highest mentality yet manifest in any individual form on earth (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 96).

If we can accept that Life evolved out of Matter, Mind evolved out of Life, then it becomes less of a leap to regard Mind itself as similarly a 'form and a veil of higher states' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 5). As Heehs points out, 'life and mind could never have evolved unless they were previously "involved" in matter and impelled to reemerge' (Heehs, 2008:271). This process, although appearing highly abstract, is at the heart of Aurobindo's greater method, which allows a simultaneous creative unity and diversity between self, world and divine:

We are and the world is a movement that continually progresses and increases by the inclusion of all the successions of the past in a present which represents to us as the beginning of the successions of the future' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 84).

This method, as alluded to above, is informed by the processes of Nature and describes how formations of being and seeing emerge through a process of progressive reconstruction, or 'an avenue of progressive self-enlargement [wherein]... new religions arise to replace the old' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 7). This also describes new ways of orienting terrestrial existence to the Divine reality, and in the process realizing this latent Divine reality in the very nature of the terrestrial.

v.iii) Terrestrial homology with the Divine as the basis for Individual Creativity

The realisation of the Divine within and behind the terrestrial, points to a capacity within the individual for self “opening” to vistas beyond the current bounds of manifestation. The inner “silent self” beyond the outer noise of everyday phenomenal existence corresponds to an ascent- an ability to stand above self-manifestation in the potential of greater Self. As Aurobindo explains, this transcendent self is already immanent in our manifestation.

Aurobindo’s universe is one of homology wherein the truths of the paradigm, the supercosmic Divine, appear syntagmatically at every stage within His differing manifestation: the terrestrial world. Thus, there is a similarity of structure within the existential difference of the terrestrial. In other words, the *gunas*, or qualities of the infinite whole are encoded within each finite manifestation. Thus, in the same way as existence is composed of a ladder of consciousness leading from the rung of subconscious substance through the vital and mental formations of the life and mind to the “highest” rungs of *superconscious Supermind* and the *Satchitananda*, so are the “sheaths” or bodies that make up the human individual. The individual is composed not only of *annamaya kosha*, corresponding to his material self, *pranamaya kosha*, corresponding to his vital self, and *manomaya kosha* corresponding to mental self, but also contains within himself (within latent and implicit form) *vijnanamaya kosha* and *anandamaya kosha*, corresponding to the phenomenological capacities of *Supermind* and *Satchitananda* respectively. Thus, since the individual has within himself the nature of the higher hemisphere, he has implicit potential to realise himself beyond the limitations of the lower hemisphere or to, in Aurobindo’s words, progressively lift the “golden lid” on matter. He might do this through, firstly, a cultivation of

inwardness, wherein these deeper modes of self find their recognition as: 'an inner being, a soul, an inner mind, inner life [and] an inner subtle physical entity which is much larger in its potentialities (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 290).

Through this process the self 'ascend[s]... to its own proper divinity (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 161-2), not through change but through greater creative self-realization in the substance of the terrestrial. This leads Aurobindo to characterize life as a process of infinite self-renewal, through the 'dynamic play of a universal Force' (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 193). This limited formulation of life, 'is only a final operation of the [infinite life principle, or] Consciousness-Force' (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 201). Life as the figure of terrestrial experience progressively becomes aware of Self in a greater relief of consciousness force beyond the illusion of 'individualised life' (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 204). The task for mankind is to seek new forms of terrestrial embodiment in order to accommodate this wider phenomenology and to exercise and apply its growing power. As Aurobindo describes this growing realization:

the whole process of differentiation by the Real Idea creative of the universe is a putting forward of principles, forces, forms which contain for the comprehending consciousness all the rest of existence within them and in front the apprehending consciousness with all the rest of existence implicit behind them. Therefore, all is on each as well as each in all (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 137).

Since this greater consciousness remains implicit within the limited figure of the individual there is always the potential for greater re-workings of life and self. For Aurobindo, it is with the individual who occupies the unique status within Nature, of being able to conceive of self beyond his being as a formulation of Nature. Aurobindo points at several signs which indicate the overcoming of human temporality in this first book. For example, the expansion of the linguistic and scientific "houses of our

being”, or ‘concepts of God, Freedom, Immortality... begin to develop, to provide a conceptual framework for that striving and that experience’ (Krinsky, 2012: 50). Further, through technological and scientific innovation, ‘science itself begins to dream of the physical conquest of death... in an insatiable thirst for knowledge’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 14). Thus, there is a movement to align material living with these, often non-material aspirations.

However, as Padiyath illustrates, the growing unification of Matter and Spirit on the human level, should not confuse the continuous universal unification of Matter and Spirit. Matter is never distinct from Spirit, but rather Matter, or Nature, is essentially the ‘body of the Absolute’. This realisation of the individual as part of universal Nature (referred to as the first realisation of Overmind) is the stepping stone and substance for individual realisation of self as, not only as part of Nature, but also as Spirit, also Padiyath surmises, ‘out of Matter we rise to our fulfilment in spirit’ (Padiyath, 2014:161).

Herein, and unlike Madhva, and also unlike many *darshana* of Indian philosophy, in asserting the reality of the individual’s terrestrial experience, Aurobindo does not require it to be understood as separate from the *Supercosmic*. The world becomes the Divine in limited self-conception, and evolution comes to be viewed as its own history of re- synthesis. Initially this conception of the simultaneous union and distinction of Spirit and Nature may appear to resemble the *Samkhyic* dyad between the *Purusha* and the *Prakriti*. *Samkhya* reduces existence, in origin and manifestation, to the existence of two absolute principles, *Purusa*: absolute passive consciousness and Witness, which is ‘never creative nor created’ (Larson, 1969:8), and *Prakriti*: the

‘inherently non-intelligent or non-conscious... stuff of [the] entire manifest and unmanifest world’ (Larson, 1969: 12).

Although Aurobindo utilises the language of the *Samkhyic* dichotomy within his work (and arguably also within his life narrative), ultimately, he sees beyond this dualism, to recognise the oneness of Nature and Spirit. In his work *Essays on the Gita*, and as further echoed in *The Life Divine*, this dualistic view is deconstructed and reworked. In these texts Aurobindo points out that within *Samkhya*, *Prakriti*, or the outward play of Nature, and its products (empirical reality), are not only offered an inferior status, but come to be regarded as ultimately illusory truths (or *maya*) since ‘empirical reality is [considered] purely contingent’ (Burley, 2007: x). The aim of “Knowledge” for *Samkhya* here thus becomes that of the ascetic: ‘realisation of the distinction between *Prakriti* and *Purusa* brings the adherent to the condition of isolation (*Kaivalya*) or release (*moksa*)’ (Larson, 1969:13). Nevertheless, this division, though solidified most particularly through the *Samkhyic* darsana is, for Aurobindo, illustrative of a wider Indian paradigm, (alluded to in chapter one of this thesis), which upholds the ascetic and the mystical to the detriment of the material life.

In Aurobindo’s work, Nature (or *Prakriti*) is reconceived as the progressive enfolding of Spirit (*Purusa*) in time, finding its key synthesis and potential re-writing in the individual. The human must then reverse the process to realise himself not merely in the singular substantial status as “individual” but also as an object and instrumentation of the dynamic universal Nature (*Prakriti*) and the transcendental grounding Consciousness (*Purusa*). In Aurobindo’s words, matter must find itself as ‘the figure and body of spirit’ or come to recognize itself as ‘spirit in its self formative extension’ (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 30) All of these statuses, ultimately, will be

recognised as merely aspects of the self-same Being, imagining himself otherwise. In this way *The Life Divine* represents a truly creative system wherein there is not accounted a single “creation”, i.e. simply the divine maker creating, bringing forth, or shrouding itself in a profane universe, but rather a continued series of creations, or progressive self- imaginings, in which all mankind might both participate and realise and manifest himself, not only in the individual but also the universal and the transcendent: ‘to fulfil God in life is man’s manhood’ (Aurobindo, 2005, LD:41).

Drawing upon this grand synthesis Andrew Sartori suggests that the subjectivity of the individual becomes, in Aurobindo’s system,

a project to be realised as lived reality through the ongoing transformation of objective circumstances into an expression of subjective freedom. The threefold Prakriti (composed in potential of mind, life and body, and the nature of sattva (light) rajas (heat) and tamas (density) realises itself ultimately as Satchitananda (being, existence, bliss) (Sartori, 2013:103).

Each stage within the evolutionary ladder represents a paradigm that is ever in the process of being overcome. This ability to discover a subjectivity beyond ourselves, or to transcend our present being, is at the heart of Aurobindo’s Vedantic method.

Although this phenomenon is examined in much more concrete terms in the yogic examples given in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, it is described philosophically here. As one progresses to ever higher levels of this ladder of consciousness, the separation between Being and Becoming (Spirit and Nature) is sublimated as ‘the one supports the other; the other reveals the nature of the one’ (Krinsky, 2012: 68).

A.K. Banerjee in his 1944 work on Divine Leela conceives this philosophy, or working through self to overcome and realise greater Self, as an invocation and symbol of

divine and human creativity. To echo Aurobindo's alignment with the Divine as a poet, Banerjee describes him as an artist, or 'a true sportsman... [who] becomes a creator of beauty and he imports his own inner joy into the heart of spectators' (Banerjee, 1944:278). To continue this metaphor, the Divine might be conceived as the perfect sportsman, artist or *rasaraja*, who is able to sublimate the gap between his own imaginings and his self manifestation (the objects of his creativity) to become a 'self conscious and self-determining beauty' (Banerjee, 1944:279). Here *maya*, or the view of the world as separate from the divine ultimate reality, becomes *lila*, the play of the Divine. This play is not separate, not illusory, 'not an attribute of the Divine, but a manifestation of the divine in action' (Garfield and Bhushan, 2013: 211).

This would recast human being as ultimately this self-same divine being, yet in a formation which sees itself in distinction from the Divine origin of its manifestation. To reiterate, human consciousness remains determined by its continent, or its available substance and instrumentation. However, the limited continent that appears to confine the individual's freedom, also comes to colour it. Thus, the terrestrial becomes not solely an impediment, and rather the very substance and instrumentation of his free self-expression.

Here Sartori points out how in discovering himself, as a project of Nature's objectivity, mankind might gain insight into the workings of the Divine subjectivity, since the former is only derivative in existence and is, essentially, identical to the latter. As Padiyath affirms, 'though matter and soul are substances, in relation to the Absolute they are attributes' (Padiyath, 2014: 152). It is through the creative re-imagining of matter that soul might be realised. This recasts the apparent individuality of human aspirations, which to a higher phenomenology are revealed to

be time-bound expressions of the universal impulses of Nature. Mankind thus becomes the handmaiden of the Universal Nature, the tool through which it might transcend and re-imagine its current state. Hereby mankind, rather than simply being seen as an end in himself, is revealed as the transitional means of a greater end, or, in other words, the ‘thinking and living laboratory [for nature...] to work out the superman, the god’ (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 6).

To take this comparison further, for Aurobindo the human being might be understood as simultaneously constituting the Sartrean “Being-in-Itself”: or the created object whose essence reflects the outpouring of its Creator, and the “Being-for-Itself”: the subject who must dis-cover his essence through the pragmatics of living. Thus, the human being is at once the *created* “object” of the divine play, and the *creative* “subject” who, in turn, feels compulsion, and joy, in realising his own self (and self potential) in the play of his own outpourings- the expressions and activity that constitute his everyday existence:

Desire is the impulse of the Force of Being individualised in Life to affirm progress in the terms of succession in time and self extension in Space, in the framework of the Finite, its infinite Bliss, the Ananda of Satchitananda (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 208).

In my view, this schema provides an understanding of *involution*, or the creation of temporal existence as a moment of divine creativity. Furthermore, and as I go on to argue below, human evolution, for Aurobindo: the process of created existence seeking its creator – or, in an existential sense, seeking its essence (or the *Being* behind its *Becoming*) – might be seen as recapitulation of this Original act of creativity. However, such an argument would operate only at the level of Mind, wherein we might find differentiation between a subject, (say an artist), his activity

(creating, making) and his object (his artwork). Aurobindo terms such segmented “truth” a *Knowledge by Separation*, or ‘[truth] divided in its knowledge by dwelling in the moment, divided in its conceptions of self being by dwelling in the divisions of space and the relations of circumstance’ (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 524-525). Such truth will eventually find its place as a relative truth, as contact with greater truths is attained: that of *Knowledge by Relationship*, or, and ultimately, *Knowledge by Identity*, wherein the distinction between subject, act and object of creation become wholly non-distinct but rather different poises of Self expression. Each becomes the self-same Divine imagined differently, and non-limited by the infinity of his own self-conception.

**vi) *The Life Divine: Book 2 Part 1- Aurobindo’s system and Advaitism: a transcreation of Monism in dialogue with Sankara.***

vi.i) The 3 poises of the Absolute.

Book 2, part 1, of the text corresponds to what might be termed the Absolute subjective dimension, i.e. the very realization of self as Spirit. Here there is an exposition of reality from the vantage point of an absolute subject who is at once witness and creator of the universe. Aurobindo employs a threefold typology here to describe the schema according to the differing modes of a Superconscient Being. There are three modes of perception within which the Divine absolute “Being” might be viewed and they, cumulatively, amount to the whole of the creative and created world.

The first is the status of *Superconscience*- the complete subjectivity that holds and contains itself - and all its potential mutations of knowledge and form - in a state of pure “comprehension.” We can understand Aurobindo’s concept of comprehension, as a capacity for seeing absolute holism, i.e. resisting even the distinction between Self as perceiver, the act of perception and as object of perception (percept). To this way of seeing, all is Self: ‘knowledge and inner consciousness (are) as one being’ (Aurobindo, 2006:358). In Aurobindo’s analogy, we can understand this state of being as an *ether* encompassing latent creation, providing the necessary relief for the figuration of the multiplicity of form, or as Aurobindo illustrates, ‘determin(ing) the movement of the [universal] sea and its waves’ (Aurobindo, 2006:582).

The “universal sea” alluded to above describes the second state of consciousness: the dimension of the *Supermind*. This capacity describes the process of the Divine subject ‘becoming in form and movement what it already is in substance and status’ (Aurobindo, 2006:348). This creative dimension of the Superconscient has the epistemic capacity of comprehensive apprehension (or what Sri Aurobindo calls the “Real Idea”). The “Real Idea” describes the ability of a creative agency (or active relief) to apprehend, or limit itself in a figuraton, and its simultaneous ability to comprehend itself as both the figure and the relief. This describes how consciousness becomes extrinsic: a universal Self- manifesting/expressing itself by throwing up waves, apprehensions, or limited forms of itself. Simultaneously these waves, or self-apprehensions realise, or re-member themselves as moments of this greater sea. In other words this state describes an active infinite discovering itself in the finite form, and a finite form re-membering itself as infinite, through a ‘Consciousness force full of determination’ (Aurobindo, 2006:357), whose substance is inherent in its energy.

The waves of this universal sea describe the third state of consciousness: the object of Creation or '[the] subliminal and subconscious thrown up on the surface, a wave of the secret urge' (Aurobindo, 2006:581). The waves illustrate the ability of the *Superconscience*, through the active capacity of the *Supermind*, to limit itself in form- and express itself in apparent "otherness". This process can be understood as a kind of "self dispersion": or an extension of Self in multiple finite forms. To the Superconscient this realisation of self in formation is described as a 'sheer bliss of... self- creation, of... self representation' (Aurobindo, 2006:111). However, to the consciousness of the lower hemisphere which, although created through the power of "Real Idea" (in a state of non-separation from its creative source) is itself necessarily veiled from its true nature, the Bliss and union inherent within self might be experienced as pain and separation.

#### vi.ii Aurobindo and Sankara

This portion of Aurobindo's text might most fruitfully be related and distinguished from *Advaitism*. Sankara and Mandara Misra are the founding fathers of *Advaita Vedanta* in around 700AD, with the tradition arising out of their translations of the *Brahma Sutras*, *Bhagavad Gita* and *Upanishads*. However, the tradition traces itself back to the work of Gaudapada (450-500 AD) and his *Agama Sastra*, a commentary on the *Mandukya Upanishad*. For Sankara, the *Vedas*, and most specifically the *Upanishads*, were of 'utmost significance' and of absolute authority' (Nakamura, 1962: 153). The idea that these texts were revelation rather than construction, cemented Sankara's status as a traditionalist. His view was that these texts as metaphysical realities had a nature transcendent of worldly, sensible experience and thus of the rationalism that understood them, entailing that it was through a study of religious

scripture that one might prepare for liberation into the truth. This is the ground for accusations of Sankara's dogmatism, and is one of the reasons why Aurobindo and Sankara, though finding common basis in their faithful exegesis of the *Upanishads*, might arrive at differing metaphysical systems.

Initially the metaphysics of Aurobindo and the *Advaita Vedantins*, exemplified in the work of Sankara, can look similar. For instance, both recognise the ability for *Brahman* to be experienced through his different guises. The first is that allied to the *Purusha* nature or *Brahman* as *Nirguna* (or devoid of qualities) and describes the *Brahman* as 'free from all limiting conditions whatever'. Here the "transcendent", "unmoving", "eternal" and "immutable" *Brahman*. The second is that allied to the *Prakriti* nature, or *Brahman* as *Saguna* (or experienced through qualities), the latter 'qualified by limiting conditions, multiformity of name and form'- here the 'changing manifestations of universe and relativity'. Aurobindo also sees the Divine as the ultimate, independent truth: 'the Absolute is eternally perfect in itself, and does not depend for its perfection in any way on creation of the world' (Chaudhuri, 1954:106). For both Aurobindo and Sankara, the worldly manifestation, though experientially changed through its apparent limiting spatio- temporal conditions, is in a state of non-distinction from the Absolute. The second manifestation describes the ultimate reality as experienced phenomenologically by those within the confines of the world.

It is here that the views of Aurobindo and the *Advaita Vedantins* diverge. For the latter temporal "reality" does not possess actual existence, but rather our experience of it 'depends on fictitious limiting conditions, not its real nature' (Sankara, 1971:79). Sankara illustrates this through the example of "space in a jar", which appears delimited by the apparent boundaries of the jar, but in actuality exists in a state of

non-distinction from the universal space outside the jar. The practical sphere of existence characterised by necessary separation of objects and subject, and as illustrated here by the jar, is illusory for Sankara. Thus, 'as soon... as we grasp the truth that there is only one universal self, there is an end to the whole practical view of the world with its disetine of bondage' (Sankara, 1971: 78). In the language of the true idealist and ascetic tradition, '[it is] only the fact of consciousness that remains constant' (Radhakrishnan, 2008:182). This position even for Integralism, as Aurobindo warns, is surprisingly difficult to surpass.

Sankara interpreted the teaching of the Upanishads as positing a non-difference of *Brahman* and *Atman*, through a realisation of the infinite Self of one's true identity. However, this "non-difference" is constituted by a metaphysics wherein the Absolute has a status as indeterminate, timeless and spaceless reality, and thus reality appears absolutely other than our experience of the world. Since change in the Absolute would contradict its essential nature, this leaves no place for the world, which, in its determinacy, and time and space bound plurality of status, is thus regarded an illusion. Any attribute of self, world or divine would be a superimposition, a means toward establishing its "embodiment" and thus its status in differentiation from other such "bodies". One's life experience is conditioned by the apparent forms of one's being: we find ourselves subsumed in an identity determined by internal sheaths of personality, and external sheaths of embodiment, in the limited world.

This appears to create a gulf between God and the world, and questions how beings subsumed in the latter might realise the former – a charge which might seem to fundamentally go against *Advaitism*. However, as Sankara explains, the alleged "break" between the two remains illusory, 'by that element of plurality which is the

fiction of nescience' (Sankara, 1971: 88). In other words, it is only through the eyes of human nescience that this distinction occurs. This entails that our knowledge and whole experience of the world is faulty, since the world itself, in any way it might empirically be known, in no way exists,

The highest *Brahman* cannot by itself, possess double characteristics, for on account of the contradiction implied therein, it is impossible to admit that one and the same thing could possess certain qualities... and should not possess them (Sankara, 1971: 89-90).

Sankara would argue that although Brahman causes this ignorance, through the creation of *namarupa*, or the substrative cause of "undeveloped name and form," *Brahman* Himself is "ontologically indeterminable," or non-limitable to form. However, as Misra points out, Sankara 'similarly asserts and denies the manifold existence in the identity of Being,' since, if this world of appearance is denied this creates a 'gulf between the transcendent being and immanent experience, and a metaphysical dualism would be the result' (Misra, 1998: 219).

Aurobindo, as accounted in *The Life Divine*, provides a system which, although philosophically monist, does not regard the material world as illusory. In his view, the infinite may be de-constructed and re-imagined in a number of ways. Thus, Aurobindo admitted the simultaneous reality of the Infinite Divinity and the finite world, questioning Sankara's "*vivartavada*," or 'denial of causation and assertion of identity', through "*parinama*," or a consideration of the Absolute as simultaneously 'pure consciousness and self consciousness', both transcendent and immanent. Where Sankara's infinite transcended mutability - since he could not account for the change of attributes without changing the identity of the being that possesses them -

Aurobindo saw the divine as manifesting mutability whilst maintaining infinity. To take an illustration from Sankara:

as the magician is not at any time affected by the magical illusion produced by himself, because it is unreal, so the highest self is not affected by the world illusion (Sankara, 1971: 81).

The world is the illusion, the proverbial snake ‘for which the rope is mistaken in the twilight’ (Sankara, 1971:81). The infinite must be in a state of complete separation from the finite, else he would compromise his infinity. However, and to extend the metaphor, for Aurobindo, although the magician may momentarily “lose himself” within the *ananda*, or bliss, of his magical illusion, the impermanence of this illusion, or the “undeveloped name and form” contained within *maya*, need not contradict the infinite perfection of the Divine.

Thus, where Sankara sees the attainment of *vidya*, or whole seeing, as wholly beyond the emic, i.e. outside the individual and the world, Aurobindo describes the “truths,” or the differing phenomenological positions of individual and universal seeing. The three sections of Aurobindo’s *Life Divine* illustrate how existence might be imagined alternately according to the perception and experience of particular vantage points within the evolutionary trajectory described. These vantage points each provide a differing understanding of the universe, “as if,” i.e. according to the distinct phenomenology that comprise their respective level in the schema. The key levels of this schema are: the realisation of the “individual;” the “universal” and the “transcendent” respectively.

These realities question Sankara's notion of "true nature" and its discrimination of Self from the cumulated sheaths of imposition, both external and internal, to 'lift itself above the vain conceit of being one with this body... [to] become... unchanging, eternal Cognition' (Sankara, 1971: 72). Instead, in Aurobindo's view, the ignorance of individual and world are recast as modes in a cumulative realisation, allied with a key series of realisations that Aurobindo elucidates, not only in his philosophy as the three *Purusha* (described in chapter one of this thesis and explored below), but also in the spiritual development charted in his personal biography. These realisations do not cancel each other out, but are seen rather as cumulative truths, each affording an ever-greater vision. Rather than questioning the truth of a prior realisation, each progressive truth merely assigns the former its place in the context of a wider horizon. Thus, although the process of Self-world differentiation is for Aurobindo a necessary part of self- reimagining, it is merely a temporary one, and certainly not the whole story of his metaphysics.

Though Sankara finds evidence in the *Upanishads* to support his conclusion, i.e. in the *Tattriya Upanishad* where '*Brahman* is reality, consciousness, infinite," there are certain passages which do not appear to support his ideas and rather describe Brahman as *Saguna*, or with the qualities of the world, rather than as the wholly negating *Nirguna*. However, Sankara explains this away as simply symbolic language rather than literal definition. For Sankara, the essential nature of the world is thus ultimately determined by its "substantial" non-separation, rather than its "appearance" of difference. For instance: 'as a mirage does not have its own nature apart from the desert', and a clay pot, though a modification and limitation, shares the same true nature of the original clay, so the mutations of the atman and his world have no nature apart from their grounding in the *Brahman*. Ultimately this would

draw one to the conclusion that 'there is no seer but he, no other knower but he', thus a complete non- distinction between *atman* and *Brahman*.

Sankara regards something as real 'when it does not deviate from something that is known to be its own' (Bartley, 2015: 189). In other words, the "real" can only be that which is 'pre-conceptual [or] pre- descriptive' (Bartley, 2015:192). Thus, the world becomes unreal, since any change in infinity would be seen to challenge its absoluteness, and thereby bring it squarely 'to the level of the finite' (Misra, 1998: 216). For Misra and Aurobindo, however, this would be to judge change materially but, as we know from our experience of the world, change is not so confined. As Misra illustrates:

in the vital world we find wholes coming out of wholes. The Mother gives birth to a son, the son is a whole coming out of another whole (Misra, 1998: 217).

The existence of the son in this example, in no way compromises the identity of the mother, but is rather the expression of her motherhood, and an affirmation of her identity beyond the present. In the same way, Misra maintains, 'Brahman maintains its unity in spite of manifesting into different centres of world of experience' (Misra, 1998: 218). The world thus, far from being illusory, expresses the existence, power and bliss of the infinite through its very diversity and plurality. This is the rationale behind Aurobindo's simultaneous positing of both Being and Becoming as complementary aspects of the Absolute. Aurobindo's "absolute", in a way reminiscent of Hegel's clarification of the "good" from the "bad" infinite, is 'not bound or limited by the phenomena of change' since the 'immutability of the identical does not consist in a monotone of changeless sameness incapable of variation' (Misra, 1998: 207). Thus, to insist on the non-distinction of the *Brahman* is to necessarily deny the

infinity of his power to self-manifest. Aurobindo describes three formations of existence, which though appearing as separate to creative apprehension, exist ultimately in unification. Such unification is untarnished but rather affirmed in this ability to realise itself otherwise. This ability, this non-distinction of the apparently distinct is described as the ‘cosmic paradox [which] is the beginning of all things’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 311). Herein Aurobindo might not be solely indicating the explicit originary paradox, between Spirit and Nature, or God and the mankind it makes manifest. Rather he might also indicate the implicit creative paradox: the paradox between individual subject and worldly object, which finds both its distinction, its merging and its unification in every creative act.

This alignment of the nature of Mind and *Supermind* is reiterated by Chaudhuri, who points out that ‘thought is neither separate from reality nor identical with reality but is an inferior mode of instrumentation of the “self light of reality”’. In other words, the mind is considered a lesser, constructive version of the non-distinction of the *Supermind*. In this view, even metaphysical texts like *The Life Divine* are regarded as limited constructs rather than expressions of reality:

Integralism holds that philosophy is neither identical with ultimate reality nor can it be looked upon as a total or partial falsehood that must be discarded on the attainment of ultimate reality (Chaudhuri, 1954:21-22).

Though Aurobindo recognises the possibility of alternate – and indeed higher - epistemology than that of the separative consciousness of current human experience, this experience is not deemed illusory. In fact, the whole of *The Life Divine* might be considered a treatise for a non-distinction, not solely, as in the case of Sankara, between mankind and the Divine (which might take us to a pure Monism) but

between the separative and the ultimate knowledge: the materiality and the spirituality. As Heehs claims, the central goal outlined in *The Life Divine* is for the human being, as the first self-conscious formation of Nature, “to know, possess and be the divine being in an animal and egoistic consciousness” (Heehs, 2008:271). In other words, the text provides the philosophical foundation for the Individual not to transcend (illusory) time and space to know the divine, but ultimately to realise the Divine in time. Thus, although this view remains monist, it becomes one qualified by the reality of the individual in time.

A crucial passage of his (later) translation of the *Isha Upanishad* serves to illustrate this divergence from the tradition of *Advaita Vedanta*, and foreshadow a key idea and argument of the Integral philosophy unpacked in *The Life Divine*. Herein the active *Brahman* fulfils itself in the world by works but at the same moment, remains transcendent/ unmoving, so one might:

perceive the *Brahman* in the universe and in our self existence. We have to perceive *Brahman* comprehensively as both the Stable and Moving. We must see it in eternal and immutable spirit and in all the changing manifestations of universe and relativity (Aurobindo, 1951, IU: 30).

The realisation of these three capacities of consciousness: *Superconscience*, *Supermind* and terrestrial form, or the “stable *Brahman*,” “the active *Brahman*” and the “changing *Brahman*” (or the universe) outlined above, corresponds to what Aurobindo calls the “triple knowledge of the *Upanishads*.” The triple knowledge can be understood to breakdown the process of involutionary descent into three discrete, yet interconnected stages. The involutionary descent is, in cumulative form, described as a process wherein the Superconscient ‘brings out the intrinsically known from

[himself]... and places it in a self-space as an extended being of self-awareness... as an object of conceptual self- knowledge' (Aurobindo, LD, 2006:566).

If we are to break down this process into its constituent elements, it describes 1) the absolute comprehension and self- being of the Superconscient, 2) the “emplotment” (Ricoeur, 2012) of the Superconscient *Supermind*, who is able to imagine his infinite self-being in the limited container of worldly space and time, and 3) the ability of the *Superconscient* to objectify such a limitation of self-being and thus derive bliss from this creative act. These three moments are, in Aurobindo’s terms, defined as the three dimensions of the Divine Being as *Inclusion*, or ‘he who sees all existences in the Self;’ *Indwelling*, or ‘he who sees the self in all existences’ and *Identity*, or ‘he in whom the self has become all existences’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 566).

Sankara, though allowing the interaction of infinite and finite, Self and world, cannot allow their conflation. Instead there is an eternal distinction between the creator and the formative nature of his creation. In Sankara’s example, the Self is akin to ‘an enjoyer, the dish: [that which he eats] an object of enjoyment. The distinction of the two would be reduced to non-existence if the enjoyer passed over into the object of enjoyment and vice versa’ (Sankara, 1971: 81). However, as we shall explore, for Aurobindo, the enjoyer *does* “pass over into the object of enjoyment”, i.e. as an involution into the terrestrial existence. Also, this terrestrial existence performs the “vice versa” (of Sankara above), by progressive evolution, and unveiling of Selfhood in time, i.e. to realize itself as verily the enjoyer of the worldly enjoyment.

Aurobindo thus provides a non-static God and world, to propose a cumulative, evolutionary history and future of progressive synthesis. Here the knowledge, action

and being of the present represent a culmination and reconstruction of prior ideas, instrumentation and forms. Aurobindo allows for this mutation of identity through the positing of the *Supermind*, or 'the Absolute itself playing Creator' (Misra, 1998:223). This describes an ability of the infinite to simultaneously realise itself in the finite (apprehension) and the infinite (comprehension). This power also creates the potential for the finite Self to progressively step outside its apprehension and recognise also its infinite self, through comprehension. This creates space for a playful infinite (who might lose himself in the play of the finite) and a growing finite (who might realise himself in the realisation of the infinite). The growing finite, though involved in a process of self-transcendence, remains ever immanent, placing each novel development in dialogue with the aims, instrumentation and substance of the past and present in order to construct future imaginings.

Misra relates Aurobindo to the metaphysics of Bradley here, who posits the simultaneous reality of a divine harmonious reality and a reality of human appearances, which finds itself 'transformed and transmuted in the Absolute' (Misra, 1998: 224). However, for Bradley, 'the more an appearance requires to be transformed and transmuted [into the Divine] the less it is said to possess in his system. The concept of *Supermind*, on the other hand, simultaneously allows for the Divine itself above any internal distinction, 'and at the same time conceives it as inclusive of all distinctions' (Misra, 1998: 224-5).

The *Supermind*, as in the case of the sevenfold chord of Being described above, functions also as a construct for mental understanding, rather than positing a definitive "truth", and the Self subverts and contains any bounds of definition that might be placed upon it. However, for all Aurobindo's divergence from Sankara, Misra

regards his metaphysics closest to Integralism. Both Aurobindo and Sankara, unlike Ramanuja and Hegel, 'represent the absolute in its perfect transcendent and essential nature' (Misra, 1998: 213). The *Brahman* finds Himself never compromised but only finds His infinite transcendence affirmed in his ability to assume differing self-guises.

### vi.iii The correspondence of Creator and World.

At the vantage of these higher phenomenologies, the Divine does not create, but rather 'manifests what is in itself', and constitutes a 'creation only in the sense of the Being becoming in form and movement what it already is in substance and status' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 348). This self-imagining is a bringing forth of the unlimited "content" of the Divine into the mould and manifestation of a limited "continent" of the terrestrial. This limited container determines the status of consciousness and its ability to manifest: 'as is the status of consciousness so is the nature of being' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 427-8). In other words, at the level of the superconscient infinite, the Divine may simultaneously recognise himself as the player (the subject), the act of playing, and the delight in the object of play. This in no way compromises the infinity of the Divine since, for Aurobindo: 'it would not be the infinite oneness if it was not capable of an infinite multiplicity... (but) exceeds at the same time all limitation by finite conceptual oneness' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD:350).

Here, as Garfield and Bhushan point out, Aurobindo unifies the philosophical and the aesthetic. The ultimate philosophical principle, the Divine, becomes non-distinct from the aesthetic re-imaginings, the experimentations of Nature, and the expressions of human creativity, non-distinct from Nature and the Divine. Bhushan and Garfield thus argue that 'to understand the nature of art and of the creative act is to have

understood the nature of reality' (Bhushan and Garfield, 2013: 214), since the former - the art and self recreation within nature and humanity - is non-distinct, but an expression of the latter –the ultimate Divine principle.

Thus, the grappling expressions of mankind can be understood on two levels. Firstly, and most explicitly, on an individual level as expressions of one's personal desire for self- transcendence, or the imagining and realisation of oneself otherwise (and, often, as a means of demarcating self through difference to the Other). Herein creativity appears to suggest the actions of an egoic, self-asserting and constructing self and knowledge in the face of an existence so vast that it appears a constant threat to individual annihilation. Aurobindo conceptualises this individualism, not as an illusion, but as a functional operation of a second level: a creativity of Divine Being, who must operate through such separation to express Self in distinction from the world,

a certain ego-centrism is the basis on which we bind together our experiences and relations in the midst of the complex contacts, contradictions, dualities, incoherences of the world in which we live; this ego-centrism is our rock of safety against the cosmic and the infinite, our defence (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 242-243).

Within this part of the text there is a reversal of the creativity of the Supercosmic-Terrestrial dualism outlined in part 1. Here the structure of the supercosmic Infinite was revealed in the manifestation of the terrestrial finite (Book 1 part 1). However, in this second part of the text, the creative realisation of the infinity of *Sat Chit Ananda*, which, for Aurobindo, encompasses all existence (implicate and explicate) in its paradigm, must also be considered to also “contain” all modes of existence syntagmatically. In other words, each of these states has a dominant identity, as

subjective, verbal or objective - transcendent, universal or individual - yet might simultaneously both contain the further dimensions within itself, and the possibility of their expression. For example, the Superconscient as Transcendent subject provides the 'basis of its own temporal possibilities', i.e. as the condition and container for the infinite multiplicity of its Universality, and the apparent finitude of its objective Individuality to find manifestation.

Similarly, the activity of the Universal finds its Transcendent subjectivity in its latent potential to objectify, in a 'divine self manifestation through the individual' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 401). The Individual, as an outpouring and self-figuration of the Transcendent and Universal capacities inherently contains each of them - and the possibility of realising these higher phenomenologies - even while affirming itself in formative separation. In fact, even in this assertion of Individuality, Being simultaneously asserts itself as a 'frontal power of infinity' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 417), with the 'rest of its knowledge in waiting as a force behind it' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 418).

The human form thus constitutes a 'limited practical self oblivion... [which] contains within itself all the consciousness it has forgotten... but it is self-oblivious [and] absorbed in its own movement' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 605). However, this is a phenomenological "oblivion" rather than in any way a diminishment or "fall" of the Divine in "creating" the world, and in fact the Divine remains constant in all outpourings of Self.

What this implies is that the world, the created existence, far from being regarded as an illusory Maya, must, at all levels correspond to, and even contain, its Creator. To an

extent this has been illustrated above through the example of the multiple subtle bodies beyond mankind's explicit self. This entails a Spirituality that at once admits its immanence and its transcendence and, even in temporal dissatisfaction, might find keys to its own aspiration and self-becoming,

the One and the Many, the finite and the infinite, the transcendent and the cosmic, the individual and the universal; each is the other as well as itself and neither can be entirely known without the other and without exceeding their appearance of contrary oppositions (Aurobindo, 2006, LD:401).

In the phenomenal world, the indeterminable capacity of the superconscient (*Supermind*) infinite is transmuted into a world full of determinables; a world of laws. Similarly, the formless, silent vastness of the Superconscient is transmuted into the finite capacity of name and form. However, 'the apparent contradiction does not point to a real opposition; the formless is not a negation of the power of formation, but the condition for the infinite's free formation' (Aurobindo, 2006:352). The silence is not the negation of expression but rather the basis of all expression. Thus, as in the linguistic phenomena of the *sphota*, wherein the infinite meaning of the word exceeds the form of expression, so the Divine Being undergirds and transcends our limited Becoming, whilst at the same moment providing the potential for our greater self-expression.

In this sense human being (or Becoming) is not only a limitation or determination of the Divine, but rather the grounds and possibility of its (or Being's) ongoing re-approximation or re-imagination. In other words, the individual term becomes the nexus of the creative system, the lynchpin securing the Divine's re-imagination of Nature. It is through the individual existence that the bounds of the creative play are set. The bounds are the respective capacities of the containers (the continent), firstly

of individual body, mind, vitality, and secondly the external aggregates of society, religion, historical tradition to which consciousness finds itself defined and conditioned. Mankind's creativity is required to rework and experiment with these containers in order to discover new means of self-expression, and to see self anew, on reflection, in the process. Man's greater self-realization is thus inherent to the creative process, the creative process is the means by which greater self might become conceivable. The individual appears to be limited, but in his very expression he reveals his secret infinity, the deeper consciousness behind the limitation of worldly container,

Name in its deeper sense is not the word by which we describe the object, but the total character, quality, character of the reality which the form of things embodies and which we try to sum up by a designating sound... *Nomen* in this sense, we might say, is *numen*; the secret names of the Gods are their power, quality character of being caught up by the consciousness and made conceivable (Aurobindo, 2006, LD:352).

Thus, the identity of the individual remains ambiguous and caught between, on the one hand, the indetermination of self expression, and, on the other, the determination of law driven existence, is the mediating term between indeterminate Spirit and determinate Nature:

the indeterminability is not in its true sense negative, not an imposition of incapacity on the Infinite, but positive, a freedom within itself from limitation by its own determinations and necessarily a freedom from all external determination by anything not itself, since there is no real possibility of such a not-self coming into existence (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 347).

As suggested, this indeterminability of the Self, and greater implicit potential within the Self becomes a liberation and the grounds for a new re-working between self and nature to find God.

**vii) Book 2 Part 2: Aurobindo's system and Visista-advaitism: a transcreation of qualified non-dualism in dialogue with Ramanuja.**

vii.i) Aurobindo and Visista Advaitism.

Book 2 Part 2, can be seen as the portion of *The Life Divine* which places emphasis on the evolutionary dimension of Aurobindo's philosophy. Here there is an explicit assertion of each aspect of the *Brahman*, as *Nirguna* (without qualities) and *Saguna* (with qualities), and of individual and divine without conflict. This book recognizes the twofold nature of the Divine as at once metaphysically exclusive and inclusive with, on the one hand, unlimited capacity to sustain and on the other, non-limited by an apparent 'incapacity to contain, sustain, create' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 663). The terrestrial becomes important here, not simply for its own sake, but as the arena and conditions for a reworking of the Divine.

This part thus charts the move of Becoming, or evolution of mankind in space and time through three key realisations or self-affirmations. These are the "Individual," the "Universal" and the "Transcendent" respectively. As we have examined above, man is a partial manifestation of an Infinite being containing a limited consciousness. However, this limited consciousness is the starting point for the self-conscious evolution. Against his history in the subconsciousness of Matter, man finds himself conscious of self-being with an intentional consciousness able to direct in thought, emotion and action. This conception of self is separative, recognising a world and beings beyond the sheaths of his bodily awareness. For Aurobindo this egoic self-conception or 'partial consciousness' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 717) is not illusory, but

vital, and one must 'affirm himself in the ignorance' before he might affirm himself in the "Knowledge" (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 719).

Although all is ultimately of the essence of the Divine Infinite Spirit, Aurobindo recognises how this vast potential "content" is coloured by the "continent," i.e. one's particular ability to understand, or to "contain" the available consciousness. The continent describes the 'field of formation', or the arena in which consciousness is contoured according to the capacity.

This process can be seen as a re-creation, or rather, a "re-dis-covery" of the *Superconscient* Being- the absolute "Other"- and the progressive reclamation and reaffirmation of it as Self-Being. As the creator recognises himself in his own creative expression, so might the "expression" of this creativity discover its own creative potency and vision as creator. Here the asceticism and materialism, exemplified by the metaphysics of monism and dualism discussed in the prior parts of the text find, not their dismissal, but rather their correction and relation as moments within a wider process of self- creation/disclosure. The power of the supercosmic becomes not diminished by the temporal lapse of the terrestrial, but rather dependent upon its body/substance to wholly express itself, just as the terrestrial relies for its emergence on the supercosmic. The world, as in Ramanuja's system, is reconceptualised, not in distinction from the abstraction of the supercosmic but in its very manifestation, as the 'form and body of the spirit' (Aurobindo, LD, 2006: 663).

Herein Aurobindo might most fruitfully find relation and distinction from the *visista advaita* of Ramanuja. Both Aurobindo and Ramanuja interpret the *Upanishads* literally to argue that, 'the omnipotent God creates the world out of himself'. For

Ramanuja the bodies of the world, are God in his status of dissolution, comparable to Aurobindo's understanding of the terrestrial as God in his experience of self subjectively in time, and objectively, in space. Both reconceive *Maya* as *Shakti*, or the very power of God to create, rather than a phenomenon in distinction from the Divine.

Thus, in distinction to Sankara, both Aurobindo and Ramanuja conceive the world as having a metaphysical and epistemological reality, implying that the explanation for the world is no longer either wholly outside itself, or outside our empirical experience of reality.

Both affirm the *Ishvara Brahman* (*Saguna Brahman* or *Supermind*) as the ultimate term in the system, since it describes the means by which the *Nirguna Brahman* (the passive, Infinite and *Superconscious* Divine), 'necessarily and eternally emanates attributes' (Griffin, 2001: 278). The Brahman's expressive force, i.e. that might participate and make manifest, is conceived as, 'higher even than the still and immutable Brahman... containing within himself the opposition of the Brahman with qualities and without qualities' (Aurobindo, 1950: 84-85 in Griffin, 2001:279). For instance, in the *Sri Bhasya*, Ramanuja's commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*, he describes the body in Hindu terms, as:

any substance of a conscious being that can entirely be controlled and supported by that being for the latter's own purposes, and whose proper form is purely to be an accessory to that being, is the "body" of that being (Ramanuja in Lipner, 2013:61).

Thus the "body" here is a concept that includes not only materiality, but also the subjectivity of the *atman* selves that make up the world. The world is dependent or

'incapable of being realized apart from the Divine.' God is conceptualized as *chit achit granthi*, or 'a knot of consciousness and matter', allowing that the terms that make up reality, 'God, soul and matter' to all be regarded as real, though with the latter categories wholly dependent on the first- as the very attributes that characterise its identity. There is a 'rejection of the principle that to be real, means to be independent' (Gupta, 2012; 255) thus paving the way for the world to also be granted 'substantial reality' (Lipner, 2013: 64).

Ramanuja explains the possibility of a qualified monism (wherein the existence of the terrestrial world does not diminish the substance of the Divine, but manifests its properties) linguistically. Here Ramanuja distinguishes himself from the linguistic non-dualism of Bhartrhari, who claims the supreme status of an undifferentiated reality, or a signified beyond the differentiation of worldly expression. For Bhartrhari, the signifiers of language and world that form our phenomenological reality, or 'the diversified phenomenal consciousness (the proliferation of names and form) is the emanation from a unitary source. (Bhartrhari in Bartley, 2015: 182). Thus, like Sankara, the phenomenal world remains accidental for Bhartrhari, who recognises an absolute of meaning transcendent of manifestation with ignorance a result of this linguistic proliferation or apparent fragmentation of unity. Ramanuja however recognizes the fluid nature of signifiers in their ability to operate simultaneously as substance or attribute, depending upon the particular context of their expression,

In virtue of its proper form and other incidental properties at different times a different entity is cognized in different ways in accordance with its intrinsic and extrinsic constitution (Bartley, 2015: 41-2).

Ramanuja gives the example of a *danda* or stick, which might operate as a noun, referring to the particular object, or as a qualifier, *dandin*, an adjective to describe the properties of a particular subject (in this case someone carrying a stick). Without such a qualifier, it would be difficult for the nature of the subject to be conceived. This for him is similar to the way in which we might perceive reality, with the human soul and matter both in one sense substantially real, and in another sense qualitatively real as attributes of the Divine. (Gupta, 2012:255).

Ramanuja terms this *svaetabheda* or the idea that Brahman, far from being pure abstraction, has internal difference and this is realized through his outpouring in the world. For Ramanuja the Absolute is non-distinct from the world, with the world functioning as the Body or expression of the Absolute. The world is thus dependent upon Brahman, whose infinitude, includes the finite world, but who exists in self-dependence from it. Thus, the world is not illusory, it is real, yet exists only through its relationship to the immanent and transcendent. The world changed but Brahman remains unchanged, having a non-conditioned existence, its attributes, i.e. the world, not being an integral part of its identity.

For Aurobindo the essential unity of Divine and terrestrial, as substance to quality, provides the possibility of terrestrial expansion of Self. He highlights how the individual as non-distinct, yet expressive of the Divine, might pave the way beyond the individual affirmation through an expansion of the exteriorised mind through “intuition,” “inspiration” and “revelation,” all processes that will transfigure his existence. In other words, the subject’s ‘witnessing and transcending’, and the subject’s ‘object and instrumentation’ become one and the same ‘an intrinsic direct consciousness... envelops... [and] discovers itself in the object’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD:

887-8). Herein the process of involution described above is wholly reversed. In creation, the subject discovered himself in the object, now the object might discover himself in the subject; the internal nature of the *Purusha* discovers himself externally, now the external form discovers himself in the internal; the relief recognised itself in figuration, now the figure recognises himself in the relief. For Ramanuja however, distinction is primary and, strictly against the ideas of Bhartrhari, Ramanuja claims that,

It is not possible for those who advocate the theory that reality is non-differentiated to cite an authoritative source of knowledge for reality thus constituted since all the sources of knowledge have as their objects differentiated entities... Every experience refers to something that is characterized by some differentia (Ramanuja in Bartley, 2015: 31-2).

He gives the example of a search for a specific thing, in his example, a horse, to claim that pure Being is meaningless without a distinct referent. If, as in his example, the seeker uncovers a buffalo, there must be something that keeps him searching for the horse. Thus, our recognition of the horse relies upon our perception of the different properties that distinguish it from the buffalo, rather than the possibility of their shared “being”. Thus, for Ramanuja, differentiation is necessary for knowledge, and thus he ‘refuses to divorce the manifold from the one.... [as knowledge] always involves distinctions’ (Gupta, 2012;255). It appears concepts cannot exist in the vacuum of abstraction but are realized through the particular instances of substantial manifestation.

Through this emphasis on difference and the qualified *Brahman*, Ramanuja goes one step further than Aurobindo to deny the *Nirguna Brahman* outright, in his to claim that, ‘a bare identity is a metaphysical fiction and cannot be known’ (Ramanuja in

Bartley, 2013: 31). With reference to Ramanuja's linguistic analogy, as concepts are realized only through their figuration, so it is only through the qualities of the *Saguna Brahman* that the *Nirguna Brahman* might become actual: 'In abstraction from *Ishvara*, *Nirguna Brahman* is not some higher reality but merely an abstraction' (Griffin, 2001:279). Griffin compares Ramanuja here to Whitehead's idea that 'creativity is eternally embodied in God' (Griffin, 2001: 279) in other words it is difficult to conceive of the ultimate consciousness without the creative manifestation, the very expression of this ultimate consciousness.

For Ramanuja it is impossible to speak of a wholly undifferentiated reality 'since there is a structural isomorphism between knowledge and the known' (Bartley, 2015: 41-2). The undifferentiated, in order to be known through the mind must share something of its qualities. The latter (the known) is thus referring to its extrinsic reality, and the former, the undifferentiated knowledge, referring to its intrinsic reality. Thus, qualified non-dualism though proposing an ontological non-distinction between self and God, does not allow for the essential identity of the two since Ramanuja concludes by 'emphasising the *Saguna* aspect of *Brahman* at the cost of the *Nirguna* aspect' (Chaudhuri, 1954:120).

#### vii.ii) Visista Advaitism and the Creative Process.

Aurobindo, however, points to the existence of a wider phenomenology which might simultaneously allow for the *Nirguna* and the *Saguna Brahman*. Herein the Godhead is not set in distinction from the individual, but rather, human creativity might be evidenced as that ability to self-transcend and potentially realize the divine Self, 'the

flame of the Godhead always alight within us' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 238). The creativity of the individual is re-cast as the transcendent, All-Existent identifying itself with or, rather, self- expanding itself within, the immanent, limited creation in order to both contain and realise itself more wholly. Thus, the distinction made between the two Brahman – *Nirguna* and *Saguna* – becomes reconceptualised as a continuum between two Self-tendencies rather than self and its abstraction. Through the course of the earthly evolution the terrestrial self becomes 'liberated more and more from its mortal limitations, [in order to become] a physical life fit for a divine inhabitant' (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 275).

Thus, the apparent acts of individualism become here recast as means of Self remembering: of expanding to realise greater self-identity, temporally forgotten in the limitations of world manifestation. This perspective is beyond the individual's surface knowledge, beyond the current instrumentation of Mind. For Mind, creativity is fuelled by the *Desire Soul*, demarcated by dualities and limitations, however this is only a frontal experience that has at its basis a *True Soul*, or the *Supermind*, of which the mind is a derivative. The *True Soul* is within the individual and yet transcendent of him: it both self- manifests within the phenomenal existence, and yet is at once basing and governing itself from behind, at one with the delight of self- manifestation. In other words, this is described as,

a pressure of the spirit or self for liberation from the ego, from the surface ignorance, a turning of the mind and life towards some occult Reality (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 889).

Thus, for Aurobindo, it appears even the most ardent expressions of self- difference have their foregrounding and "true" identity in an "occult Reality" of unity and oneness. Indeed, the greater the "individuality" of such expressions, the more they

might come to express the universality of Nature. In Aurobindo's eyes it is the individual who might see possibilities beyond the bounds of the current manifestation, since it is he that enlivens, who possesses a consciousness beyond the constructed container of the social or religious aggregate. It is he who might understand himself beyond the substance, vitality and mentality of the phenomenal existence, since it is he that contains within himself, albeit subliminally, all the knowledge, existence and bliss of the higher hemisphere, or Spirit. Further, it is he that is impelled, albeit subconsciously, to re-cognise and progressively explicate the implicit transcendent within the bounds of the immanence.

Thus, and as explored in chapter three of this thesis, as the systematism of the social aggregate does not, and should not, preclude the expression of the individual, so the understanding of the individual, as object and instrumentation of Nature and Divine, does not preclude his own creativity. Instead there is recasting of this self-expression, which becomes, from the vantage of a wider phenomenology, not merely the unique creativity of the individual, but the outpouring of a greater cosmic creation, which transcends and includes the time-bound self.

Through unification of the infinite self with the finite formations of matter and form, Aurobindo's knowledge is not distinct from the experience of being. This allows for a philosophy less of escape and more of transformation as our realisations in a conceptual sense and our realisations (as a making real in the world) become conterminous. Thus, Aurobindo's metaphysics might allow for an explanation of how things currently are, whilst simultaneously leaving space for human creativity in order to determine how things might become. Since all available knowledge is conditioned and potentiated by our being, and vice versa, we remain in the position of

begging the question whether 'our sense making inevitably reveal[s] more about us... than it does about the things we make sense of?' (Moore, 2012:14).

Within Aurobindo's transcreation of these prior viewpoints, there is a recognition of the individual and his intersubjectivity as a figuration of the whole, and potentially a realisation of '[a] new totality, harmony, self equation of the One Being' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD:1008). Each figure thus refers back to this wider relief through which it finds its true identity. Unlike the egoic self, this *gnostic individual* would not require distinction and separation from other minds, bodies or lives in order to affirm itself, or orientation of his own past, present and future life narrative, i.e. as 'an expression or re-creation of himself' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 1010). Instead he transfers the inherent pain of separation into *ananda*, to base his identity on the bliss of unity. Thus his objective, or external existence is converted into a 'joy in Becoming' non-distinct from his active 'joy in Doing' and his subjective 'joy of Being' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 1012) In other, less poetic terms, this becomes a creativity wherein a formulation of "Real Idea" or the "internalised identity" of *Supermind* is converted into internalised activity, or a 'pouring itself out and filling every act and activity' and thus an internalised self expression, entailing that within 'each finite is felt the infinite' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 1012).

It could be argued that in such a realisation the individual would not merely discover himself as an object of a creative Being, or himself as a creative subject, but further, discover an embodiment of creativity itself. This creativity might be able to discover itself in "retracted form" as the 'necessary freedom of the spirit' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 1014), or, in other words, in the pre-figuration of the Creative Being which recognises an infinite of potential, or implicate creation, prior to his play of figuration.

Similarly, he might be able to discover himself in “self-sufficient active form” or in the very process of his *lila*, or play, which has ‘no aim of being except to be conscious of being, no aim of delight of being other than its delight’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 1015-6). Lastly this creativity finds itself in the “emplotted” form, in its ‘centration and extension of oneness... all objective life will become part of his subjective existence’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 1015).

### **viii) Aurobindo’s Integralism: as imagined in *The Life Divine*.**

Aurobindo’s position is one which utilises each of these three prior interpretations of the *Veda*, as accounted above, to both assert and qualify the truth of each, thus allowing each a place within his system. Each of these prior “truths” are realised as partial. This is what Aurobindo terms the “triple realisation of the *Vedanta*”, which relates to the three poises (individual, universal and transcendent) that the Divine might assume. Firstly, and corresponding to the “truth” of terrestrial individual experience: “All this is in *Brahman*”; secondly, and corresponding to the universal truth of *Supercosmic* experience: “*Brahman* is in all”, and thirdly, corresponding to the transcendent “truth” of “Supermind”: “All this is *Brahman*” (Chaudhuri, 1954). Thus as V.M Reddy neatly surmises:

it is not enough to say that the Divine is imminent within us. He is not just the soul, he is all this- body, life and mind. It is not enough to realise he is in each one of us and we are all within him; we go a step further and say all this is Divine (V.M. Reddy, 1997: 61).

Aurobindo makes this explicit, demonstrating how a shift in the degree of focus might alter the truth perceived, whilst simultaneously not negating the truth contained within its other dimensions. Thus, the three oppositional interpretations of the *Veda*

are reconceived as differing lenses on the same truth reality that might find reconciliation. As Aurobindo summarises:

...emphasising the sole truth of the unitarian consciousness [herein Book 2 Part 1] we observe the play of the divine unity, erroneously rendered by our mentality into the terms of real difference... [so that...] the play itself is [considered] an illusion. Or, emphasising the play of the One in the Many [herein Book 2 Part 2], we declare a qualified unity and regard the individual soul as a soul-form of the Supreme, but... deny altogether the experience of a pure consciousness in an unqualified oneness. Or, again, emphasising the play of difference, we assert that the Supreme and the human soul are eternally different and reject the validity of an experience which exceeds and seems to abolish that difference [herein Book 1 Part 1]. But... we see that there is a truth behind all these affirmations, but at the same time an excess which leads to an ill-founded negation (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 159).

Aurobindo here asserts each of these three truths, yet recognises how each truth is partial, there remains an “excess” that each cannot wholly account for. This has led to the tendency for each of these positions to be wholly negated. Aurobindo however, does not negate any of these positions, but rather points out that each truth remains insufficient, yet necessary to the growing conception of Reality, that he himself contributes to.

Although Aurobindo affirms a dualism in the existential reality of the upper and lower hemispheres of existence, his system also allows an essential monism between the two realms, with the superconscient both transcending and containing the terrestrial. This monism is then qualified through recognition of the particular: the expression or unveiling of the individual Self in time. According to Kazlev, the text of *The Life Divine* corresponds in structure to the three poises of *Supermind*, in its simultaneous ability to realise itself wholly as an infinite non-differentiated being (*advaitism*), as ‘the one self supporting the many’ (*dvaitism*), and as a multiplicity in a unity (*visistadvaitism*). (Kazlev, 2004).

Furthermore, Aurobindo is able to afford each partial reality a place within a larger integration. Unlike Ramanuja, for whom unification of spirit with world through the recognition of the *Saguna Brahman* (or the Divine manifest in substantial qualities), negates the *Nirguna Brahman*, Aurobindo's system, in typical Integral style, is able to admit the reality of each without diminishment or contradiction:

He admits them [*advaitism, dvaitism, visistadvaitism*] as a means and part of the self-manifestation of the Spirit in human life, but considers them as partial (Padiyath, 2014:170).

In this last part of Aurobindo's text the non-contradiction in the realisation of Self in either a perceptual or conceptual form is made explicit. Here the perceptual refers to the apprehensive capacity of the *Supermind*, i.e. its ability to define and self-limit itself, to *involve* itself in the distinction of limited worldly form. This acts to form an existential distinction between the horse and the buffalo, that Ramanuja claimed primary for meaning. However, Aurobindo refers to this perceptual distinction as a "pot form" of a further comprehensive capacity of *Supermind*: its ability to realise itself in conceptual unity. The pot form refers to the ability of the Divine to assume, like clay, various shapes, without compromising its essential substance, or what Aurobindo terms its "earth form." The pot form, although secondary and dependent upon the earth form, is not lesser but absolutely vital to the creative expression of the divine. On the other hand, the personality (or pot form) of the Divine Self has its very foundation and possibility in the existence of the non-determinate impersonality (or the universality of the "earth form"). In other words, the Divine becomes 'both the space and possibility for their manifestation' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 1029). All perceptual form, or embodiment, thus finds its being, and its potential re-creation, re-

figuration and transformation in the wider relief of the conceptual form, or the ideals which might undergird such expression.

As the mind, in homology with the earth form superconscient, relies upon the substance and instrumentation of the body and the life in order to express itself (or to limit and re-imagine itself in this “pot form”), so the *supercosmic* relies upon its force (*Supermind*) and substance (the terrestrial world) in order to re-imagine itself more wholly through the apparent reduction of diversity and form. Each term provides not a challenge to another but rather a complementary moment in a unified creative process.

In *Synthesis of Yoga*, Aurobindo describes how human thought might itself recapitulate the originary creative movement, echoing the Divine involution, or self-limited emplotment within the terrestrial, ‘It is by thought that we dissipate ourselves in the phenomenal’; and echoes the cosmic move back towards the superconscient, via the supraphysical: ‘it is by the gathering back of the thought into itself that we must draw ourselves back into the real’ (Aurobindo, 2006, SOY: 318). This simultaneous recognition of both the implicit and explicit, the potential and the actual within the creative act, might, as in the case of the Superconscient Self, allow man the ability to transcend his temporal figuration and imagine himself otherwise. This is because he is the essence of the Divine, and the Divine finds no self-limitation in him. This is the reasoning behind the vast unity and multiplicity of Aurobindo’s method, since the human may find itself through a variety of self-figurations. Aurobindo’s account of the history of *Yoga* attests to this, since all is, ‘the infinite itself consenting from one plane of its being to reflect itself in a perpetual soul experience’ (Aurobindo, 2006, SOY: 376).

Here we have a recapitulation of the Original creative process which moves from a state of purified or static potential experience of whole Selfhood, (its pre-figured state), to a concentration of self in manifestation (the emplotted, or configured state), lastly we have the unification of these states, their liberation as one and the same, yet not their sublimation, '[as] an infinite Spirit but still a separate person' (Aurobindo, 2006, SOY: 583), who might possess personality or 'conscious[ness] of his manifestation' (Aurobindo, 2006, SOY:584). This account of cosmic creativity necessarily possesses an aspect of Self which is "pre-figured freedom", which Chaudhuri sees characterised in the comparable imagery of a great void, indeterminability, or silence, within most religions: 'the creative principle has also the power of existing simultaneously, or rather non-temporally as an infinite number of unique centres of self expression' (Chaudhuri, 1954: xi). Each of these apprehended, or configured self- limitations possess a 'functional uniqueness' as 'centre[s] of self expression of the cosmic creativity' (Chaudhuri, 1954: xiii).

In the next section, I outline how this divine and human creative movement might be conceptualised, both within and potentially beyond the text. However, firstly, I discuss how the bringing together of the evolving lower [the terrestrial dimension] and involving higher [the supercosmic dimension] might be envisaged in the play of the *Supermind* [the bridging of the supercosmic and terrestrial dimensions] in this last part of the text. Unlike the earlier parts of *The Life Divine* which focus concentration on the involvement (or involution) of Spirit within the terrestrial, this last part traces the evolutionary pathway of this self- limited spirit: from its growing self-conscious awareness in the Individual mind, through its universalising awareness in the Overmind to a final superconscient awareness in the *Gnostic Being*

and *Divine Life*. The relationship between Knowledge and Being- often placed in dichotomous separation to the mental awareness- are necessarily correspondent within Aurobindo's evolutionary cosmology and in each part of *The Life Divine* but come together most explicitly in this most "active" portion of the work which forms their bridge and completion.

At many points, this portion of the book inverts and completes the previous structures, or truths, discussed. For example, the triadic involvement of creation: from the absolute transcendent Self (*Superconscious spirit*), to its creative reduction in the universal (*Supermind*) and the individual form (*Mind*), is recapitulated through the evolving spiritual individual in his terrestrial realisation of an *Individual, Universal and Transcendent Self*, respectively. Herein through the individual's realization of his individuality, he affirms himself in the universe (to, firstly, affirm himself over and against the Other). This provides the grounding for a second affirmation of self in universal world union (i.e. to secondly affirm himself, not against, but for the sake of the Other). Lastly, the individual might affirm himself in the spiritual delight of complete Self-union, (i.e. through realisation of the essential non- separation between self and other).

Although each prior truth is broken down into its distinct process and realisation in the preceding portions of the text, in this concluding portion (Book two, part two) each truth becomes reconciled in a unified field, as differing powers of the 'Divine being... [who is] both conceptually creative and dynamically executive' (Maitra, 1998:62). The implicit potential, the vast relief of the Divine, and also his active creativity, is also the implicit, latent, potential within the individual.

This trajectory maps not only onto the interior life of Aurobindo, through the spiritual realisations which (as I have argued) came to constitute Aurobindo's philosophy, but also (as alluded to in the prelude to this chapter) the exterior events of Aurobindo's life. To summarise: Nationalism, that asserted self against other, that upheld the importance of self-rule, (which becomes the necessary first stage of human unity in his socio-political texts), became in his later life a universal "Internationalism" which advocated an (Indian) self-affirmation for the sake of the world. The third stage advocated a transcendentalism, which saw Self and Other: India and the West, as aspects in a unified process of Self-unravelling to recognise self not only in the individual interest, but also the universal and transcendent capacity that so often eludes it.

#### **ix) Aurobindo's Integralism and the *Synthesis of Yoga*.**

This progressive *Supraphysical* Self-affirmation, is merely an aspect of the self-same Superconscient and terrestrial manifestation of self. Here one might surmise that Aurobindo's recognition of a plurality of truth in his system legitimises a variety of means for approaching the Divine: a diversity of expressions that ultimately become seen as moments within the same process of unravelling. This allows that the Divine might be realised in his various aspects, without finding contradiction:

He interpreted Being, the ultimate ground of the universe as the Supreme Person (*Purushottama*) or the Supreme Being (*Parabrahman*) endowed with infinite creative energy... the unity of the unchanging and immutable perfection (*akshara purusha*) and the ever changing and evolving world spirit (*kshara purusha*) (Chaudhuri, 2013: 172).

Within this section we move to an understanding of what these realisations might mean for Aurobindo's integral *yoga*, wherein it finds a clear expansion beyond its

typically esoteric image. As Aurobindo makes clear from the outset in the *Synthesis of Yoga*, yoga is nothing distinct from the processes of Nature, but merely a formalisation, or “methodisation” of its expressions, variety and constant striving beyond current form. As Aurobindo defines yoga,

we mean by this term a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the secret potentialities latent in the being and — highest condition of victory in that effort — a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent Existence we see partially expressed in man and in the Cosmos (Aurobindo, 2006, SOY: 6).

As suggested, Aurobindo has a teleological view of both physical and spiritual Evolution. He sees the trajectory of the evolutionary process, though indeterminant in its particularity of expression, through the self-conscious individuals who might participate in its process and play, to be, ultimately, determinant. The end point of this process is the essential unity of man and God or, better, the expression of God through man.

The very structure of *The Life Divine*, not only maps three (partial) truths but also legitimizes three key modes of approaching, or finding unity with, the Divine. This leads Aurobindo, in his sister text, *The Synthesis of Yoga* to ally his acceptance of these multiple truths, with the multiple course of action, or multiple courses of yoga.

The path of devotion *Bhakti*, or devotion, requires a dualism, or differentiation of the Divine from the individual self, in order that He be approached in awe. The path of knowledge, *jnana*, associated with the theoretical asceticism, requires a denial of terrestrial self (monism) in order to find Oneself subsumed by the Divine immensity. The path of action *Karma*, requires both a necessary relationship and distinction to be established between the active self and infinite Divine (qualified non-dualism), to

both assert a figuration of self-action and realize the backdrop of this action in the Divine.

As more explicitly articulated within the *Synthesis of Yoga and Essays on the Gita*, these multiple paths to the Divine are legitimized within Aurobindo, less as divergent paths, but rather as necessary and interdependent dimensions of the same yogic process. Aurobindo demonstrates how these three key methods of yoga are brought together as a “triple way”: the ‘three main powers of the mental soul life of the human being’ (Aurobindo, 2006, SOY: 609), i.e. knowledge, works and devotion, respectively. Each is utilized according to its attributes and available instrumentation: cognitive (reason), dynamic (will) and aesthetic (emotion), respectively. Thus, we arrive, for Aurobindo, at the ‘possibility of an Integral yoga’ (Aurobindo, 2006, SOY: 611).

This opens the door, not to a linear process, but rather a paradigmatic series of synthetic shifts, which might alter the whole relationship of individuals (bodily and vitally, as well as mentally) to the world and the Divine, with, ‘each plateau of the hill of Being giv[ing] to our widening experience a higher plane of our consciousness and a richer world for our existence’ (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 272).

The following stage within this Vedic genealogy, after the assertion of the triple way of the Gita, is the formulation of the *Tantra*. *Tantra* utilises both the prior holism of the triple way, and its techniques, to provide an even greater synthesis: not solely to synthesize man’s approaches to the Divine, but to transform mankind’s very “Becoming” into the Divine. This is termed, *sadrashya-mukta*, or ‘liberation into the divine resemblance or the bondage of the human seeming’ (Aurobindo, 2006, SOY:

623). Its aim is 'to raise nature in man into manifest power of spirit... and it is the whole nature it gathers up for the spiritual conversion' (Aurobindo, 2006, SOY: 611).

Aurobindo claims the *Tantra* as fundamentally distinct from the other *darshana*, in conceiving Nature as the 'power of Spirit' rather than illusory *maya*. *Tantra* is the stage which diverges from the distinction between Nature and Spirit, by instead conceiving them as 'two poles of Being whose essential unity is the secret of existence' (Aurobindo, 2006, SOY: 611). As *Brahman* and *Shakti*, so Spirit and Nature. Aurobindo sees this as the highest synthesis in the trajectory of human/ divine union, before he himself takes up the mantle.

Aurobindo appoints himself the "next system builder" within the synthetic *Vedic* lineage. Chaudhuri (1954) calls Aurobindo's view a 'metaphysical synthesis' incorporating three modes, 'supra-cosmic transcendence, cosmic universality and unique individuality or... freedom, creativity and uniqueness' (Chaudhuri, 1954: x) with creativity being its ultimate integrating principle. Aurobindo's synthesis, builds, not only on the *Gita's* synthesis of the triple way, but also the *Tantra's* essential non-distinction between Spirit and Nature. In Aurobindo's system, the divine Self, here expressed as a "consciousness" assuming many manifestations, is found within each poise and process of the creative movement, as he summarises:

Consciousness as force has created the world movement and its problems; consciousness as force has to solve the problems... and carry the world movement to the inevitable fulfillment of its secret sense and evolving truth (Aurobindo, 2006, SOY: 221).

The recognition of the divine as consciousness, which can be realized in various densities of manifestation, arguably creates the potential for a yoga to be imagined

beyond the previous *darshana*. Aurobindo opens up the possibility of a yoga, which not only steps outside the esoteric to incorporate Nature, but a yoga which steps towards affirming the creative individual in time as the lynchpin of the yogic process. Any attempt at a divinised nature and society which is proposed in Aurobindo's further works, becomes wholly reliant upon the particularity of the individual self and his own transformation. This gives central place to the realization of the Superman in Aurobindo's system, who 'depends... on the fundamental poise of its own constituting consciousness' (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 230). Here the apparent distinction between matter and consciousness, the self and the selves of others, realizes an alternate:

founding of human life upon the supramental realisation of conscious unity with the One and with all in our being and in all its members humanity must seek its final good and salvation (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 230).

In the context of his other texts, which point to the possible realization of human unity, and social transformation on a much wider scale, Aurobindo's work entertains the prospect of a much wider yoga, ideally opening itself to a new global audience. Aurobindo's oft quoted aphorism, "all life is yoga" is not purely a clumsy generalisation, but proposes, I argue, that the variety of approaches to the Divine might not be confined to the purely esoteric, but might, as Auroville figures, include also the exoteric products of the creative process. All becomes recast as means of greater Self/ Divine realization, to ultimately recognize, 'I the knower am the consciousness which knows; the knowledge is that consciousness, myself, operating; the known is also myself, a form or movement of the same consciousness' (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 146).

### x) Aurobindo's Integralism and "the triple change".

Aurobindo describes three steps the individual must take in order to both attain *Superconscience* and live a transformed life in accordance with this greater truth. This may be regarded a recapitulation, and re-writing of Aurobindo's own spiritual experiences. The first step corresponds to the ascetic truth, in a stepping away from the terrestrial to find Union with an Infinite subject (*akshara*). The second: the spiritual change, comes to see oneself in union with the Infinite instrumentation - or a recognition of Divine Self as not pure subject, but subject - action or Consciousness - Force. The third, culminatory realisation: the *Supramental*, reconciles any sense of distinction between individual, world and Divine. I briefly summarise each step.

The first step is the move towards the "ascetic truth", and is termed the *psychic change*. It describes a transformation of self-concept from what Aurobindo terms "the pot form" to its underlying "earth form". This describes a move from understanding oneself perceptually, to understanding oneself conceptually: from considering self as a finite object - confined to a limited existence in space and time, to considering self as a subject - transcendent of figuration in the finitude of space and time. This object or "pot form" identity refers to our understanding of self as mind, life and body, which is a temporal, although limited truth, or '[a] surface aggregate... the conglomerate effect of the inner influences and upsurgings that we ordinarily think of as ourselves' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 926). This stage represents a move into the infinite space of potentia, the superconscient relief that appears in distinction from the finite individual self.

The move beyond this self-conception (the self as an individual, or the “pot form” identity) requires a realisation of one’s terrestrial self as the ‘soul instrumentation’ of a greater subjectivity (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 924), i.e. as tool and force form of a greater identity. The first inklings of such a greater identity are, for Aurobindo, in the tendencies of the heart mind and will wherein one might intuit beyond dualistic limitations and develop a feel for greater truths (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 937). By recognising self through the utilisation of a greater purpose than our manifestation might suggest, there is, according to Aurobindo, an opening to a wider, Infinite identity who is beyond the multitude of the “pot forms” and yet shares their essence: it is the “earth form” prior to self limitation in the finite:

The psychic entity is fundamentally the same always: it contains all possibilities of our manifestation but... is not constituted by them (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 924).

The effect of this change, from pot form back to earth form, although profoundly affecting individuals’ conscious vision of the world, allows an, ‘immediate sense of the world and its beings... a direct sight of... all truths... a direct intuition of right action’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 942), which would not affect one’s instrumentation. In other words, the individual would still find himself within the confines of his continent, ‘in act and form it would be circumscribed within the limitations... of an inferior instrumentation’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 943). This describes the motivations of the ascetic (alluded to in chapter one of this thesis), who, in realising the infinity of the Divine, sees the finite material world as an impediment and denigration of the ultimate truth. Thus, we have the tendency of ascetic quietism and denial of the material.

For Aurobindo this tendency is not inevitable if one recognises that the truths of the ascetic and the psychic entity, are not absolute. Further realisations are required if man is to be led back to earth and pragmatic spirituality.

The second realisation, termed the “spiritual change” wherein ‘the sense of self and spirit is ever unveiled and permanent, and [the] instrumentation of self and spirit is not divided’ (Aurobindo, LD, 2006: 943). However, although such unification is made concrete in this realisation it is not completed on the level of manifestation, ‘the disparity between the consciousness that comes in and the force of effectuation that it can mentalise and materialise are constituting there... [a] diminished creation’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 950-1). Here there is the realisation that it is one thing to discover oneself in consciousness and quite another to discover oneself in self-manifestation. As Aurobindo points out, creation, or emplotment within the finite, creates what appears to be a self-immolation. This is comparable to the symbolic state of identity Aurobindo realises wherein conceptually he sees unification between the active and the passive, however this remains symbolic and difficult to practically move beyond,

The Purusha has to become not only the witness but the knower and source, the master of all the thought and action, and this can only be partially done so long as one remains on the mental level or has still to use the ordinary instrumentation of mind, life and body... the change made by it cannot be sufficient to be integral: for that it is essential to get back, beyond mind-being, life-being, body-being, still more deeply inward to the psychic entity inmost and profoundest within us (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 940).

Only at the last stage - the supramental transformation - is this division wholly sublimated. Here our comprehensive seeing (all seeing) is not only in complete possession of our action, but becomes it: ‘actions become vibrations of the higher wisdom’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 976). In other words, energy and action here

recognise themselves as at one with consciousness, as outpourings, overflowings and densities of the same essential substance. This may be called “Knowledge by Identity”, although it could be questioned whether “knowledge” might exist at such a level of consciousness. If identity is found between consciousness, act and manifestation, it might be that “knowledge” itself is sublimated, since the very process of discernment requires a degree of separation to operate. Instead there is ‘an immediacy of sight’ transcending the constructive disjunct between thought, will and creation (Aurobindo, LD, 2006: 980). The “object” of creation here thus becomes a figuration transcending itself, in Aurobindo’s poetic language, invoking the symbolism of the female *Prakriti* who might dance for the adoration of the male *Purusa* (witness):

[the individual] seizes something of the truth and not only her figure; but it outlines her figure... and at the same time catches the significance of the figure and it can embody her with a finer and bolder revealing outline and a larger comprehension (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 980).

Here not only is the manifest form (the self- limited, configured Being) affirmed, but also the wider relief, of her ‘bolder revealing outline’ (the Infinite, pre-figured Self Being). The active significance of the figure in this moment is described, whilst not denying the possibility for her “larger comprehension” beyond the figuration of this moment (the creative Infinite, the Supermind capacity to re-configure finite manifestation with Infinite Being).

This process is made more explicit through McDermott who outlines the key aims of the Integral Yoga. The first aim is the apparently ascetic *Jnanic* or realisation of metaphysical monism, ‘the liberation of the individual soul and the achievement of the perfect union with the Divine’. The second is the *Bhaktic*, ‘enjoyment of the perfect union of the individual and the eternal’. The last is the *Karmic*, wherein, ‘the

fruits of the divine union are expressed and manifested in the works for promoting spirituality in the world (McDermott 1974, 112). This last aim, although promoting an external terrestrial focus, does not negate the prior aims, yet arises from them i.e. it is the knowledge and the love of the Divine, which inspires a translation into an action for the sake of the Divine.

This point, this turn toward the physical, or translation into the material, forms the key emphasis in Aurobindo's work. As the bridging capacity of the *Supermind* creates the possibility for a bringing of *Superconscious Being* into time, it also provides the potential for the ongoing re-imagining of the individual back towards the superconscious. This double unravelling and re-ravelling in Aurobindo's work leads Padiyath to classify him as a "process philosopher". In Padiyath's definition a process philosopher is one who edifies 'creativity [as] the ultimate foundation of the system' (Padiyath, 2014: 8).

Aurobindo, as Padiyath alludes, is comparable to Bergson in affirming the development or Becoming of the individual in time, yet disregarding the notion of mechanical, wholly determinate, evolution. Bergson poses instead a 'monistic vitalism' wherein 'pure time [is] conceived as pure change' (Chaudhuri, 1951:96), through the vital urges of Nature. Both Aurobindo and Bergson, pose an indeterminate becoming, wherein individuals play a role in their own process of self-creation/ self-unveiling. However, Aurobindo's process- philosophy is distinct from Bergson in retaining its teleology. For Aurobindo "freedom" of the self, is not a freedom without the anchors of Self-determination. Aurobindo's individual aims always to return to its greater universal and transcendent Self. In so doing it not only realises greater intensities of self- transformation, but synthesises, or integrates such

realisations, to transmute its lower aspects. Thus this not an untethered “Becoming”, but a flux undergirded by a greater continuous “Being”.

Bergson’s flow, on the other hand, might be considered more a linear development, a ‘continuous swelling of life’, expressing continuity rather than the integration of this continuous emergence for the transformation of the lower aspects (Maitra, 1998:70). However, without an object to be-come: without the Divine involvement in the terrestrial from the outset, such “unveiling” appears to make little sense. As Maitra interrogates, ‘what is creative evolution if it does not know what it is to create, what is self-generative action if it is not guided by purpose?’ (Maitra, 1968:68). Like the post-structuralists considered within the following chapter, Bergson emphasises the difference of evolution, the fluidity of the signifier, in distinction to the simultaneous unity, the all pervasive signified, as that which undergirds and encompasses all expression.

However, both have in common the proposed departure from the mechanic, scientific nature of thought, to uphold “intuition” as a higher mode of emergent knowledge. Intuition is described as an, ‘intellectual sympathy by which we can enter into the love of a thing and thereby coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible’ (Maitra, 1968: 50-51). Apeing the capacities of the *Supermind*, such intuition, though for Aurobindo remaining the preserve of the upper reaches of the mental hemisphere (Overmind), comes to know the individual detail whilst maintaining sense of the general value of the whole. This chimes strongly with Kireet Joshi’s depiction of the poetic way of “knowing”, which he differentiates from other means, thus,

Philosophy is the discovery of truth in intellectual conceptions or perceptions... Religion is a devout pursuit of God... Science is a perception of

the processes of things... Poetry too is a quest of truth, or feature of the truth, which is inspired by inmost possible experience of an object... so as to create self-vision in the profounder depths of the inner being of the poet, which is thrown out in rhythmic movement by the word or image... which has, in its turn, the capacity of disclosing to the hearer the truth of that very experience-imitation... an interpretive and creative revelation of its inmost truth (Joshi, 2016:3).

Here, I argue, Joshi articulates the necessity to consider the creative process referred to in Aurobindo's work as one which finds greater resonance with the poetic rather than the philosophical mode of knowing. Aurobindo elucidates a creative and fluid process wherein one's self stands not in separation from the object of knowledge, but rather *as* the object of knowledge, and might come to more wholly realise this object self through the disclosure of creative expression. Not only is the object of the individual's knowledge non-distinct from the individual, but also realisation of this knowledge would not wholly be through the rational, but, and to echo Aurobindo's biography, through the empirical. One comes to know, and one comes even to realise the truths of the past, only through their enlivening in the present of one's own experience.

As Harvey Brown suggests, within *A Poetic for Sociology*, the knowledge within such a system must not be in separation from the individuals who participate therein, but rather, both must be considered, 'phenomenologically true... [or] resonant with social reality as intended in consciousness of actors themselves', and, 'hermeneutically self-conscious... dialectically self reflective of its own methods and interests' (Harvey Brown, 1989:2). This refers to the recognition of knowledge as constituted, or re-constituted through the eyes of the temporally bound individual, and a knowledge non-static, nor complete, but constantly re-made through his shifting gaze.

Thus I continue in the next section to argue that Aurobindo's ideas imply a yoga: a union of individual and Divine, not solely through the philosophical, religious or scientific (although indeed encompassing each of these partial modes of knowledge), but through the greater dialogical and personal seeing of the "poetic".

#### **xi) The mileage of Aurobindo's *Life Divine*: from metaphysics to poetics?**

Aurobindo's text, *The Life Divine*, I argue, is a model for a "Poetic metaphysics". *The Life Divine* provides a particular creative re-synthesis of past metaphysical ideas, in the light of Aurobindo's own particular experience of an object. This creates a text (*The Life Divine*), which at once stands to encompass and transcend these ideas. Each part of *The Life Divine*, as demonstrated above, re-imagines the works of prior thinkers in order to re-package key ideas in dialogue with Aurobindo's own temporality, i.e. the realisations of his own spiritual experiences, and through the instrumentation of his physicality.

The reason for demonstrating Aurobindo's metaphysical "transcreation", or re-synthesis of textual evolution, is to show not only the text's homology with the very cosmic creation and evolution of Nature that Aurobindo articulates, but also to provide the very representation of what a future "re-synthesis" may look like. The yoga he proposes is not only homologous with the natural and Divine movement, as has been explored in this chapter, but also, and as shall be explored within subsequent chapters of this thesis, is homologous with the process of social and psychological development he proposes.

As we saw, Aurobindo's re-synthesis was not imagined within a vacuum but through a lineage of prior synthesis. Simultaneously his work, as a synthesis of its time, stands

not as the last word but, true to his anti-dogmatic poetics, rather made to be re-made, re-imagined, in the shifts of time.

In this section I move from consideration of Aurobindo through a metaphysical lens, to an understanding of how *The Life Divine* might operate as a poetics, necessitating its own poetic reconstruction. Within this system there are no “pure forms,” but rather different guises and realisations of the all-pervasive Self. It is very much from the phenomenology of the individual in time that these ideas are re-worked, and he does not play a passive role as the receptacle of this knowledge, but an active participant in dialogue with it.

Unlike the “philosopher” who aspires to ‘[an] apprehension of originals... [or] the so-called Platonic forms’ (Rosen, 2014:4), there is an emphasis on a mimesis, or creative transmutation of the prior, according to unique vantage points, throughout Aurobindo’s texts. This submission to the aesthetic intuitive over the rational, I argue, might render Aurobindo a “philosophically inspired poet”, over a philosopher. Shukla (2002) accounts a correspondence between Aurobindo and Dilip Kumar Roy, wherein Aurobindo protests vehemently against a straitjacketing in philosophy,

I never, never, never was a philosopher... I knew precious little about philosophy before I did the Yoga and came to Pondicherry- I was a poet and a politician, not a philosopher (Shukla in Verma and Agarwal, 2002: 111).

As Atkinson reiterates, even within his most overtly philosophical text, Aurobindo expresses deep skepticism at metaphysics, particularly its ‘tendency to battle in the clouds because it deals with words as if they were imperative facts instead of symbols’ (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 69). As the nature of the symbol is one which not only communicates its referent, but participates in and changes it, so Aurobindo’s

texts not only communicate the ideas of the *Vedic* tradition, but participate in its aesthetic process and ultimately come to change it.

The importance of personal immersion and dialogue with the experiential in the substance of the text, and the tradition it comes to represent prompts Coward to relate Aurobindo to Steiner, who states that ‘without a feeling for and immersion in the classical texts, any study and analysis of literature will be so superficial in nature that the deeper moral and spiritual dimensions of the word will be missed. Literature, as a consequence, will lose its power to humanize action’ (Coward, 1989:142). Thus, the very dynamism of the poet requires both a grounding in the past (in the archives of the literary) and, for Aurobindo, also the social historical “text” in order for him to breathe fresh light into their eternal truth. Joshi illustrates this re-imagining of the poet through the image of the climber, pointing out that “*Arya*” - which is, rather poignantly, the name of the journal in which Aurobindo’s works were originally published - ‘is derived from the word *ri*, to climb’. This echoes the ladder, or stepping stone mode of truth discussed earlier, wherein earlier truth formulations are not derided but rather utilised as scaffolding for a higher vision. The image also lends itself to the terrestrial engagement of the worldly and pragmatic quest for truth. In Aurobindo’s view the ‘the vedic poet is [reimagined as...] the one who is in the midst of toil and battle of life... And can there be poetry without life?’ (Joshi, 2016: 5)

Aurobindo glorifies the symbolic age of the *Vedas*, proposing the existence of a dynamic unity between language and the world, the signifier and signified, the terrestrial and divine. According to Sivaramkrishnan, Aurobindo does not reduce the *Vedas* to simply objects of knowledge but rather treats them as dynamic visions and processes which transcend this utterance, ‘[the] *Veda* is a vision and a word which mediates it’. The word, the physical form, is not dismissed as redundant, but

absolutely necessary for any expression to occur, as ‘even intuitively experienced truth needs the scaffolding of expression as evidence’ (Sivaramkrishna, 1997:161). The poetic climber must use the footholds of subsequent substance in order to scale new heights of self-realisation.

For Aurobindo, poetry is a means of moving beyond both the intellectual inter-relation of “parts and aspects” of truth represented by the “philosophical method”, and the God centric truth of the “prophetic” method, ‘mere thought may be enough for philosophy, mere devotion may be enough for religion, mere observation may be enough for science, but poetry is a cry, call, an aspiration that rises in the heat of life movement’ (Joshi, 2016: 5).

Instead Aurobindo proposes a way of knowing in line with the aesthetic to, in echoing Keats, propose that ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty’. Beauty becomes the enlivening and harmonisation of “truth” in its temporal communication, appealing to a mode of knowledge, or better, recognition, beyond the intellectual.<sup>5</sup> We witness this most particularly within Aurobindo’s interpretation of the Vedas as poetically charged, or mantric works.<sup>6</sup>

Further, Aurobindo highlights ‘that the original spirituality of ancient India, which he calls the *Adi Vedanta* was world affirming and inclusive of life and society in all aspects... The universe was affirmed as a manifestation of delight’ (Chaudhuri,

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<sup>5</sup> This is interesting, especially in light of Aurobindo’s own re-claiming of “Nationalism” from the colonial oppressor, and re-imagining in Indian terms (or “swaraj”).

<sup>6</sup> Aurobindo, however, was not the first to consider the Vedas as poetic works. Coward points out the influence of Swami Dayananda, the founder of Brahma Samaj, on Aurobindo, in his view of the veda as a living scripture. “Dayananda has given the clue to the linguistic secret of the Rishis and re-emphasised one central idea of the Vedic religion, the idea of the One Being with the Devas expressing in numerous names and forms the many-sidedness of His unity (Coward, 1989). Dayananda was in turn influenced by Yaksa who created an etymological account of obscure vedic words. Dayananda, like Aurobindo, ‘suggest[ed] that the words of the Veda had a double significance. On the one hand, the Veda can be seen as a book of religious ritual, on the other, as a book of divine knowledge. (Coward, 1989:141).

2013:171). The primary grounding in the delight and reality of existence in the *Vedas* is the key element Aurobindo wished to recapture and draw into the present. The spirit and dynamism of the ancient Vedic texts had, according to Aurobindo, become lost in the later conceptual concretion of the Vedanta, leading to an overemphasis on the ascetic tradition to the detriment of others. In these overly mystic traditions “truth” became univocal and static, and forms came to exist only to elucidate something beyond themselves: something outside the terrestrial dimension. This is the key differentiation of Aurobindo from thinkers like Sankara, who relegated the terrestrial dimension of the vedas, in preoccupation with truth, only in its pure form (*Nirguna*).

The fixing of the referent outside the materiality of form, as we find in Sankara, not only denied the realm of word and symbol its dynamism- reading each as a static signifier to an increasingly transcendental signified- but, and more pertinently, placed meaning and Spirit, further and further away from material expression. As Purani outlines:

The ideal of withdrawing away from life into the Supreme reality seems to have got currency in our country after the 9<sup>th</sup> century and in seen steadily growing up to the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century. But even during the same period we had the Vaishnav religion, the Tantras and Kashmir school of Saivism, all of which accept life as a term of manifestation of the spirit (Purani, 1955:30).

Aurobindo’s work aligns more with the life-affirming spirit of Vedic poetics than the later philosophy of Vedanta. This alignment is key not only to an understanding of Aurobindo’s particular interpretation of the Vedas, but also forms the basis for understanding the potential remit and currency of his ideas through a wider lens. Importantly for this thesis, it highlights the potential for overlap between this most philosophical text, Aurobindo’s more overtly terrestrial texts, such as the socio-

political texts discussed in the following chapter, and the potential for worldly application of his ideas, through analysis of the Auroville community in the final chapter. The argument is that each of these works and the attempt at their application might be considered descendants of one common process highlighted in Aurobindo's interpretation of the Vedas. This at once solidifies Aurobindo's status as a faithful descendant of tradition and unique futuristic innovator.

This process inheres in a theory of language arising from Aurobindo's Vedic interpretation. For Aurobindo language is a capacity for self re-enlivening and self-unveiling in material form. I argue, that this understanding of language can be universalized to become a way of understanding communication and creative expression more generally, and is the theory behind Aurobindo's adage, "all life is yoga". It is through human expression that the implicit *supraphysical* comes to be made manifest in the terrestrial world. It is the process through which the created objects, i.e. human beings, become conscious of themselves as creative subjects, with their comparable ability [to the creative Divine] to discover alternate forms of themselves outside of themselves.

As Gilbert affirms, the Integral philosophy of Aurobindo shows clear parallels with the Vedic Rishis (Gilbert, 1973:130). Both Aurobindo and the Rishis share an emphasis on the mutual development of all levels of the being (Gilbert, 1973:132), not as a preparation for an ascetic denial of the terrestrial, but in order to transform it. Most importantly Aurobindo shares the original goal of these fathers: 'the progressive evolutionary unfoldment [of Spirit in Matter]'. The Vedic symbols, as I explore below, express the multiple aspects of this action and unfolding of Spirit.

***The Life Divine and Language, poetics and Mantra.***

Within Aurobindo's *Life Divine* the chasm between the *supercosmic* and terrestrial knowledge is reconciled through the creative power of the *Supermind*. The two come to be seen as necessary poises within the same self-expression (the former superconscient becoming its subject and the latter terrestrial its object). Gilbert describes this as, 'the Divine Oneness manifesting in multiple form yet maintaining in the midst of the diversity of this dynamism the fundamental unity of Being' (Gilbert, 1973:11)

In a comparable movement, human expression, most explicitly through language, might operate as a mode of creative Self-unveiling. The dual aspects of the human language are corollary to the dual aspects of the divine expression, with human language containing: 'the inner intuited sense and the outer material manifestation as spoken word' (Coward, 1989:141). Further, these opposing dimensions of language find their unity in the expressive moment of the individual. Therefore, there is, in the terrestrial creativity, a recapitulation of the originary cosmic creativity, which poses no essential distinction between consciousness, force and expression within terrestrial space.

Aurobindo has hinted at the ability of language to become a force for communication beyond itself, beyond fixity of meaning. Within his text *The Secret of the Vedas* he points to a deeper significance within mythological scripture, wherein, in the process of expression the "truth" is not only revealed, but also re-animated, relative to the time in which it is spoken. As Coward highlights, the malleability of *Vedic* language allows for expression to 'sometimes refer... to a merely conventional image but at other times los[e] sight of a specific image completely and evok[e] a general intuition'

(Coward, 1989:147). As Aurobindo describes within his *Secret of the Veda* this illustrates the nature of the *Vedic* symbol which operated not only to communicate a single truth, but act to illuminate, at the same moment, other homologous truths. Aurobindo terms this a 'multisignificance of roots' (Aurobindo, 1998, SoV: 49), which allowed for the recognition of a greater relief, within the figuration of each limited expression. An instance of this can be seen in Aurobindo's cosmology, which is derived from the Vedic depiction of 'the Great Vishnu [who] pervaded three worlds in three immense steps' (Aurobindo, 1998, SoV: 346). These three worlds refer to the three planes within Aurobindo's system: the upper transcendent and the lower immanent, bridged by the action of the third, the Supermind, in his pervasive manifesting force. It might also simultaneously correspond, as Purani points out, to the three distinct steps observable in the process of universal evolution from the Inconscient towards the Supreme Superconscient'- matter, life, mind (Purani, 1955:31). Thus, there is, through the explication of symbolic language, not merely the reduction of meaning into the limited form of expression, but also the pointing to potential explication beyond its utterance.

The same can be said for the manifestation of the terrestrial world. The "pot form" of the individual and his processes, comes to be seen not merely as a reduction of the "earth form" of the Divine and his potentialities, but rather a creative means of His further self-expression, '[Language/ creative expression] is the urn... which unfolds by clay the useful empty space infolded, the *akasha* of the word' (Sivaramkrishna, 1997:162). Thus, it is through the material expression of the Divine, and through the further expression of the individual selves, that the Divine might find his progressive extension and realisation in the minds of individuals.

However, according to Aurobindo, the creativity of the earthbound human self is unable to wholly explicate and realise the Divine as long as his mode of understanding remains within the strictures of the Mind's constructive, delineative reasoning, '[the mind] does not see more than one thing at a time without a contradiction or a rejection... [it is] a representation or shadow which is only sought after and not realised fully' (Gilbert, 1973:19). However entertaining the multivocality of the poetic, intuitive knowledge draws us to a knowledge that transcends and encompasses the contradictions of reason. As Aurobindo points out in order to explicate the truth, it must be expressed through a,

large and plastic idea which has some nearness to it, it will have to be a language intuitively metaphysical and revealingly poetic... such as that which is evolved and perfected by the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* (V.M. Reddy, 1991:23).

This conception of the poetic as a mode of expression wherein meaning is non-prescriptive, but evolutionary according to the subject and the time, is akin to the mantric, rendering text less a fixed product, and more an alive and potentially transformative medium. The word "Mantra" not only describes Aurobindo's understanding of the Veda, but also the process Aurobindo hoped to engender in his readers. Etymologically the word's root: "to think" (man) and "to cross over" (tr) (Coward, 1989:145), implies a utilisation of thought for crossing to higher realisations. Aurobindo saw his own poetry and his translations of the Vedas, Upanisads and Gita as efforts at restoring to the word its psychological double sense - a spiritual inner evocation as well as an outer concrete reference (Coward, 1989:147).

This spiritual transmission relies, however, not solely upon the mode of expression utilised, but also the subject who expresses. As Das articulates, expression and

realisation are dependent upon, 'the medium [of he] who receives it, [and] his capacity to render it into a language' (Das, 1997:133). The need to recover this capacity of language is not, as Shukla believes, inherently Indian, however, and importantly for the International scope of Aurobindo's vision, a similar "symbolic dynamism" a recounted within Ancient Greek thought. In reinvoking the historical Indian usage of language, Aurobindo also, signals a rediscovery and recasting of ideas compatible also with the Western corpus. As Aurobindo elucidates in *Essays on Yoga and Philosophy*,

the idea of the one which is eternally becoming many and the many which is eternally becoming one and that one therefore not so much a stable substance or essence as active force, a sort of substantial will-to-become, is the foundation of Heraclitus's philosophy (Aurobindo, EYP, 1998: 224).

Aurobindo highlights a parallel mystical epoch within ancient Greek thought characterised by a conception of Divine immanence, and a permeation of an all-conscious Divine presence within the 'Orphic, Eleusian and Dionysian' mystery sects. This phenomena witnessed similar processes of Rationalism or 'ossif[ication]into scholastic pedantry' (Aurobindo in Varma, 1990:455), which dissolved its intuitive, poetic knowing giving way to a tendency to 'dissect and analyse, [where once] the ancients tried to sense the spirit of the whole' (Varma, 1990:137).

Aurobindo lauds this 'more artistic vision' within the history of each civilisation, rendering it 'closer to nature' with the individuals in each experiencing 'a sense of comprehensive unity with the world around them' (Varma, 1990:138). Within his socio- political texts, as much as his poetic or philosophical works Aurobindo proposes the need to both return to, and recreate, this Vedic and Grecian mode of thinking and relating to the world.

The text where this fossilization of Vedic language into univocal meaning is made most explicit is *The Origins of Aryan Speech*. Here Aurobindo recounts how the generality of sound, referring to a multisignificant *gunas* or qualities, gives way to the increasing abstraction and mentalisation of language, wherein sense has become dominant and sound seen as an almost arbitrary reference. The repeated association of certain sense with certain root sounds led to a certain precision, yet also less fluidity and less life. Through highlighting this process Aurobindo aimed to 'restore words to their past significance'.

I highlight this not only to demonstrate the primacy of linguistic form in Aurobindo's work, but rather to flag up the importance of terrestrial form and material processes for his spirituality. The desacrilising movement beyond the sacred unity of sound and sense within language is, within Aurobindo's work a corollary to the Vedantic movement beyond a unity of terrestrial form and spiritual ideals, and its move beyond the affirmation of the present through the substance of the past.

Aurobindo's work calls for the re-integration of each of these elements, which have been drawn into hierarchical opposition. For example, for him there has been an affirmation of the "spiritual" to the detriment of the material, an affirmation of the inner sense to the detriment of the outer form, an affirmation of the future to the detriment of the past, and an affirmation of the individual to the detriment of the social constellation.

In this sense Aurobindo shared a similar view of language, and its potency for human beings, to Heidegger. Heidegger also provided an etymological exploration of this comparable epoch of Greek thought wherein Being and Becoming, the Spirit and the material world of form, are both non-opposing essential and harmonious aspects of

existence. He saw the distancing of this union to arise from linguistic forgetting, and he saw the potential of the poet to be a re-membering of this union, or to “bring Being to house” (Langan quoting Heidegger, 1959:111): to unite the abstract and the material.

Both Heidegger and Aurobindo also conceive the utilisation of the forms of language as a means of further self-seeing and self-becoming. For Aurobindo, the apparently lesser forms of the terrestrial individual are realised as expressive potentials of further Divine, or the greater Self-disclosure:

[individuals are] at once figures and instruments of the supreme Conscious Being by which It extends and houses Itself in material form and in that form unveils Itself to Its multiple centres of consciousness (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 30).

The individual through their material expression in the terrestrial world, finds itself progressively transmuted to realize within itself (as the object of creation) more wholly the infinite Subject that forms its greater Self- relief:

Mind attains its self-fulfilment when it becomes a pure mirror of the Truth of Being which expresses itself in the symbols of the universe; Life, when it consciously lends its energies to the perfect self-figuration of the Divine in ever-new forms and activities of the universal existence (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 30).

This wholly affirms the meaning of the terrestrial world and its purpose for Aurobindo’s system, whilst at once not denying his greater telos: the transmutation of the terrestrial into the supraphysical.

### xiii) Aurobindo: Poetry and transcreation.

Aurobindo's process of "transcreation" anticipates a way of knowing, beyond the distinction between self as Subject and world as Object, to see individuals as both subject and object of their own processes of self-creation. This process of becoming, echoing Aurobindo's *Synthesis of Yoga*, incorporates not merely a future-focus, which imagines higher conceptual functioning than the mind, but also requires an "embeddedness" in the forms of the past to faithfully re-work them for the present. The argument and goal within the *Synthesis of Yoga* is to realise that one 'cannot attain Spirit at [the] surrender of life' but rather requires the realisation of a term that 'reunite[s] God and Nature':

man is precisely that term and symbol of a higher existence descended into the material world in which it is possible for the lower existence to transfigure itself and put on the Nature of the higher (Aurobindo, 2006, SOY:8).

Thus, the higher existence that forms the telos of each of Aurobindo's texts requires the utilization and eventual transfiguration of the "lower" or the prior forms. Although this move is difficult for the oppositional mindset to negotiate, the *Supermind* capacity that Aurobindo poses, is able to see the partiality of each pole - Spirit and Matter - not in opposition, but in their mutual role and relationship of each with the other. The process of realizing this capacity, conceptually and socially, is, I argue, represented within Aurobindo's more poetic works. These works, as alluded to above, utilize language as a means of representing human beings not only as beings in themselves, but also as manifestations of the unraveling of Divine creative expression within the world.

In his work, *The Interpretation of Scripture*, Aurobindo highlights three qualities of language, collectively termed *Shabdham*, which might find corollary with a conception of the human individual. The first, most explicit dimension is *nama* (or symbol): the physical expression of language, which has typically been the object of linguistic study. For Aurobindo this preoccupation with the materiality of language, like the preoccupation with the individual's exteriority, arises from 'the superstition that the visible world is the chief factor in language' (Aurobindo, ECW, 1972: 240).

However, for him, to stop at letters or external meanings, is to be a 'slave of the symbol' (Aurobindo, 1997, EDH). A symbol does not find completion without the second dimension of the language: *rupa*, the abstract or concrete form of knowledge, which the material symbol refers to. However, and in the same vein of Aurobindo's other works, he does not point to the limitations of the physical by asserting the primacy of the abstract within language or Being. Indeed, Aurobindo critiques a nineteenth century movement which aimed at 'get[ting] to the spirit behind the word' which, in denying materiality, became equally problematic in its generalisations. The dichotomisation of matter and spirit are forms to be utilized in the progressive path, but ultimately moved beyond. This is where the third dimension of language comes in. Aurobindo refers to this as *svarupa* (or the essential figure of truth). This dimension has the ability to recognize the simultaneity of matter and spirit, and is the level in corollary with the universality of the Supermind.

This linguistic triad is alternately expressed in Aurobindo's *Essays Divine and Human*, wherein he highlights three standards, or moments, of "truth" within scripture. The first is the "known", herein the physical text, which represents that which is evolved and complete. The second is the "knower" or "*drashta*" (seer), which is the term

'evolving'. This term contains within itself - in a hidden or implicate capacity - the eternal knowledge, and has a continuous, although hidden, relationship, or rather identity, with the infinite: '*drashta* was a soul in relation to the infinite spirit, I am also a soul in relation to the infinite spirit' (Aurobindo, 1997, EDH: 36). The "knower" might, within his own mental limitations, express the truth of the infinite spirit partially (through the constructs of Mind). The third term of "truth" is that very "knowledge" or 'eternal truth' which can only be viewed in terms of its partiality, i.e. through that represented by the "known", the physical text, and the limited sight of the Knower, the limited sight, and utilize these forms. However this capacity might, at the same moment, access the "whole", or the greater relief beyond each of these limited forms:

I am not limited by the Scriptures; on the contrary I must exceed them in order to be master of their knowledge' (Aurobindo, 1997, EDH: 36).

The first two dimensions of each of these triads, stand for the restrictive materiality and the extensive spirituality/intellectuality, that human beings have realized. The third dimension represents the capacity to be realized, which does not sublimate the prior matter/spirit realizations but utilizes them less in distinction and more creatively. The creative capacity that Aurobindo upholds, and which, arguably, his followers might attempt to realize, finds homology with the superconscient triad at the heart of creation (or involution). Herein, there is recognition of, neither solely the passive superconscient of the ascetic, nor solely the formative dimension of terrestrial manifestation, but a movement to the processual mergence of these oppositions through a creative capacity [*Supermind*] that transcends and encompasses each in its ongoing play:

Yogic knowledge is defined as that wherein one recognises the individual, universal and transcendent Self: 'the making real to ourselves and in ourselves of the Self (transcendent and Universal)... the subsequent impossibility of viewing the modes of being except in the light of the Self and in their true aspect as its flux of becoming under the psychical and physical conditions of our world existence (Aurobindo, 2006, SOY: 304).

Similarly, for Aurobindo, this creative process finds homology with language, as a model for human expression, in recapitulation of the originary creation. In affirmation, Gopinath compares these three levels of truth to those of Bhartrhari's '*Vakyapadiyam*. Herein they become *vaikhari*, the spoken-linguistic level'; *madhyama* or the intermediate common mental level'; and '*pasyanti*, the highest or the deepest level of consciousness' (Kunjunni Raja in Gopinath, 2002:8). For Aurobindo, as for Bhartrhari, although text might be analysed through the first and second level, i.e. linguistically or intellectually, its actual translation requires the intuitive level- herein the *svarupa*, or *pasyanti*, or the capacity of *Supermind*. This intuitive level has the ability to oscillate between whole and part, and the spiritual and the physical, whilst not losing the other. Further, where translation in the mind reduces translation to a construct, this capacity of Supermind, or 'principle of integration', is able to incorporate the lower into a higher vision (Gopinath, 2002:9).

Herein, we see a linguistic representation of Aurobindo's cumulative spiritual realizations, in the move from the the physical manifestation of meaning or *Kshara*; the substanceless meaning, or *Akshara*, and the merging identity of the two in the greater seeing of the *Parabrahman* or Supermind capacity:

*svarupa* [however] is itself only a symbol of the one essential existence which can only be known by its symbols because in its ultimate reality it defies logic and exceeds perception, — God (Aurobindo, 1997, EDH:33).

Herein the *Parabrahman*, or *Svarupa* is conceived as not the “complete”, non-differentiated reality - or *Purushottama* - but the capacity of this *Purushottama* to at once creatively differentiate itself, while finding itself non-differentiated from its own manifestations. It is to this level “beyond” that Aurobindo believes the interpreter should aspire, ‘[the interpreter] must not be one who will rest content in the thought-symbol or in the logical implications’ (Aurobindo, 1997, EDH: 34). Honig (1991) describes this creative level beyond as the “uncontrolled work space” wherein text might ‘exist... in a language without language form’ (Honig in Gopinath, 2002:11). From this relief, or prefigured existence, the interpreter might come again to a re-textualising, or a finding of appropriate name and form, to re-express these truths for today:

the text has to be grasped intuitively at the highest level of *swarupa* before it can be translated into the other two levels of *nama* and *rupa*, or the level of text and meaning (Gopinath, 2002:11).

The growing awareness and ability to experience this greater relief, beyond the limitation of terrestrial language/ manifestation, creates an infinite potential for re-working and reconstruction, in order to not only come to greater understanding of the higher superconscious Self, but also a transmuted understanding of body and mind, or as linguistically represented, *nama* and *rupa*: ‘The new must be presented to him in terms of the old, new wine must be put to some extent in old bottles’ (Aurobindo, UP in Gopinath, 2002:14). Such a method, also moves beyond the tendency to dogmatise, to continue the play, yet not to allow the play to become a meaningless erasure within time, but remain conscient of Being, and meaning beyond this.

This presents Aurobindo’s poet with a dilemma: how might he attain congruence between “expression” and “truth”, in such a way that it both articulates and yet places

no hedges (or merely provisional bounds] on being/ truth and communicates in such a way to inspire further articulation? Aurobindo again relates this power of poetry to the Supermind, or the Divine Maya or *lila* that draws the world into manifestation: 'it is the one consciousness which at specific moments concentrates itself, and says, "This is I" (Atkinson, 1993: 64). As discussed above, creative Consciousness, or *Supermind*, performs this function of self- apprehension whilst at the moment remaining true to its greater comprehensive identity, behind any such frontal aspects it might utilise in its play,

The word for the *Vedic Rishi*... is still a living thing, a thing of power, creative, formative. It is not yet a conventional symbol for an idea, but itself the parent and former of ideas. It carries within it the memory of its roots, is still conscient of its own history (Aurobindo, 1998, SoV: 51).

Within these more linguistic texts, I claim, we might come to understand the creative vision that Aurobindo potentially has, not only for art and poetry, but for human creative development as a whole. Diversity of expression here becomes paramount. For example, in his work, *The Future Poetry*, Aurobindo describes the evolution of the creative form, or poetry, in language that re-echoes his explanation of the *Supermind* within the metaphysics of the emergent universe:

What all artists do... is to take something from life. . . and transfer it by the magic of their imagination and make a world of their own (Aurobindo, 1997, FP:329).

In my view this process - the intuitive seeing and re-constructive capacity of the artist - is what Aurobindo appears to call for in each of his works. Such a capacity would perform a vitalising function, recapitulating the action of the creative consciousness, which, 'while limited by language, draws from it and transcends it' (Atkinson, 1993:67). In a similar way to how the poetry of the future draws from, and

reinterprets the past in order to transcend its structures and express something deeper, so the body, vitality, and mentality must be utilized in order to reach a transcendence of the lower hemisphere of human existence.

The artist, in life as in poetry, must not only retain the sense of the past text, but also “re-animate” its expression: to perform a vitalizing function and ‘give a breath of life to the word’ (Aurobindo, 1997, FP: 269). This instruction reflects, in my view, more the nature of the poet than the philosopher, ‘poetry is a question of the right concentrated silence or seeking somewhere in the mind with right openness of the Word that is trying to express itself’ (Aurobindo, 1997, FP: 391). As the creator realises Self through its ability to self-limit in time: ‘in the *Vedic* context the Word is the creatrix; it is by the Word that *Brahman* creates the universe of forms’ (V.M. Reddy, 1997: 167), so must individuals, as selves in time, express themselves in order to discover Self both within and beyond the strictures of time,

Human speech at its highest merely attempts to recover by revelation and inspiration an absolute expression of Truth which already exists in the Infinite above our mental comprehension’ (Aurobindo FP, in V.M. Reddy, 1997:167).

This highest expression is, for Aurobindo, akin to the *Mantric*. Coward describes the *mantric* as an expression that vibrates in accordance with, what Aurobindo terms, ‘a corresponding originative vibration on the supramental at the very root of things’ (Aurobindo in Coward, 1989: 147). The grappling progression towards *Supermind*, similarly shares this resonance, bridging any distinction between the manifestation of things (*lila*, the world, the apprehended form), and the manifester, (or the player, the comprehensive form) though only a resonance of this truth, [or] a secondary expression [*svarupa*]’ (Coward, 1989:147). This re-expression, of the physical, the vital and the mental through accordance and identity with this greater Supramental relief comes to transmute these forms also:

with each step of our ascension through a graded series of planes and powers of consciousness which leads us through the domains of other mind into the Beyond-mind we encounter a different kind of thought, different in potency as well as in character (Mukherjee, 1997:142).

This fluidity and transformation, not only of intellect but “whole being”, prompts Aurobindo to suggest that, ‘To understand scripture it is not enough to be a scholar, one must be a soul’ (Aurobindo, 1997, EDH: 37). Through the expressions of space and time we do not only discover the object of art, but through this fundamental non-distinction between subject and object, spirit and matter, come to transform the very subject, i.e. ourselves. Aurobindo’s argument is rooted in an *Upanishadic* interpretation of, ‘an ancient knowledge which did not make the distinction between the Divine and the world, that the conflict between Matter and Spirit is a relatively recent development’ (Gilbert, 1973: 3). This necessitates a re- conception of self, not only as the “transcreating” subject of expression, but also the object of transcreation.

Glendinning describes the texts of phenomenology similarly, as ‘works of words whose capacity to work as philosophy is inseparable from their capacity to involve their reader’s capacity to acknowledge the matter for thinking itself for themselves’ (Glendinning, 2007:27). Thus, these texts do not require a purely passive reading for the receipt of new knowledge, but rather entail the acknowledgement of a personal responsibility on the part of the reader, to re-work out, re-understand this message for themselves. Thus, the work is an invitation for further re-thinking and re-action, and re-conception of self,

[it] aims to cultivate and develop your capacity faithfully to retrieve [for] yourself [as from the inside] a radical revis[ion]ed understanding of yourself and your place in the world and with others’ (Glendinning, 2007:27).

In many ways, what Aurobindo, in his texts, and the Mother, in her foundation of Auroville are working towards is not the acquisition of further knowledge or the grasping of something yet unseen, but rather, and as Heidegger describes of his own project - an elucidation of something we already “know” on some level, but cannot explicate and realise wholly. Speaking of Being, Heidegger claims that it is,

precisely because [Being]... is in some ways available to us and yet cannot be brought into concepts... that he wants explicitly to undertake an investigation into the meaning of Being (Glendinning, 2007:64).

In many ways, this can be understood as the status of many of Aurobindo’s texts: they investigate a potential Being not yet wholly realized in terrestrial time and space. Aurobindo’s texts, as themselves time-bound objects are not the final word, but rather lay down the gauntlet to his readers to continue writing a process that his works might only begin elucidating. The process Aurobindo highlights requires constant revisiting and reapplying. In this sense also, we might similarly consider Auroville as a kind of text, to be re-worked, re-understood and re-formulated according to the readers/ and writers who have accepted the invitation. According to this narrative, Aurobindo’s Integral metaphysics might truly allow ‘the unfoldment of Spirit in matter through the conscious participation of man [which] takes into account the total nature of man in all his various parts... [plus] all the aspects of human life’ (Gilbert, 1973:26).

Thus, like phenomenology, Aurobindo’s texts, though seemingly abstract and text based, cannot be seen as quietist, since their work is not merely to transmit the dogma of the status quo, but to welcome always a re-visioning of such ideas.

#### **xiv) Towards application of *The Life Divine*.**

The premise behind this chapter is that *The Life Divine* is the key text providing a template for Aurobindo's thought, politics and future human intentions. Aurobindo's evolutionary schema, is one of progressive revelation, not only on a physical or intellectual level but on a wider aesthetic level. His was not a linear realisation but an Integral transformation - wherein one evolves beyond the stage of Mind by integration with, and an enlivening transmutation of, Life and Body. His text *The Life Divine* has demonstrated the very developmental structure that might be utilised in order to understand how it relates to social reality.

As alluded to throughout this thesis, Aurobindo's system resists the charges levelled at other structurally complete systems, i.e. that of static determinism, or of overriding the individual. Rather, and to the contrary, Aurobindo's is a systematism that relies precisely upon the existence of the non-systematic element. It is a completion that rest upon its incompleteness: or a system which lives and thrives in proportion to its capacity to allow for the indeterminacy of the individual. The realisation of the individual truth is neither superseded by the realisation of the universal truth of Nature's cosmic unfolding nor by the transcendental truth of Godhead seeking its own self-figuration in the immanent.

As the social world comes to reflect the cosmic structure of worldly development, so also in this chapter we have argued that the interpretation, or creative reconstruction, of text is a basis for understanding the unveiling of Aurobindo's spirit in time, which herein becomes creatively reconstructed by the human narrative in time. The argument is that this work might find extension as a theory of manifold creative

expression to have a social and political application, as well as philosophical and poetical one. This would come to regard the category of “language” in a much wider sense, to see all expression in the terrestrial as manifestation of this spirit.

Aurobindo’s method is necessarily non-prescriptive due to very different conventions in the *vedic* “speech” Herein, again, I take speech to refer to the “*Brahman’s Creatrix*”, i.e. the terrestrial expressions of Selves in time. Speech evolves terrestrially, and Aurobindo relates words to the life form of plants and animals, which also contain their seed or fundamental elements, whose ‘roots have immense progeny’ (Aurobindo, 1998, SoV: 51), less communicating ideas and more sense and emotion (the vital and the sensate are the pre-runners to the conceptual, as the body and life are pre-runners to mind), these prior formations had greater potential since it was a general quality or *guna*, rather than a fixed form, thus could have multi-significance.

[T]heir individuality lay rather in shades of expression of the same ideas than in any exclusive right to the expression of a single idea’ (Aurobindo, 1998, SoV:52).

Varma takes this seriously to propose that, although Aurobindo builds largely upon traditions within Indian history, his work provides a ‘metapolitical, metaeconomic, metasocial plan... conceived on an extended terrestrial and cosmic scale’ (Varma, 1999: 430). His is not a guideline for a particular time and space, but a method with application to all, with the ability to be tailored and realised according to the changing light of the temporal. Aurobindo outlines within both *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga* what this highest process of Integral, or “*Purna yoga*” and its form of “*gnostic existence*” might look like.

Aurobindo is clear that this process, this yoga of becoming, culminating in the realised union of Matter and Spirit, Mankind and Divine, is not an artificial alternative to the general trajectory of evolutionary nature, but rather presents itself as a short-cut: a focussed, methodised attempt to realise the inevitable ends of Nature. As such it proceeds from a deep study of nature and its movements in order to recognise an intelligent and conscious method of the veiled Divine, behind Nature's apparently random experimentation.

In reiteration of *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga* reconstructs the trajectory of self-reimagination and transfiguration within yogic history, as the human self attempts to realise, to "become", the Divine in the terrestrial. *The Synthesis of Yoga* emphasises that unless we can truly "realise", or embody, Spirit in our Nature as earthbound, practical selves, we cannot truly know it, 'it is always through something which she has formed in her evolution that Nature surpasses her evolution' (Aurobindo, 2006, SOY: 31). Nature's creativity is thus always a self-creation, a bringing out of self from self. This is the basis for Aurobindo's Integral philosophy: the merging of spiritual realisation with practical earth-bound experience, the merging of innovation with the trajectory formed by tradition and the merging of individual self affirmation with the social and natural aggregations that colour his freedom.

As I shall explore in the following chapter, a similar pattern is evident within Aurobindo's evolutionary history of social form, which charts how the ossification of structural form sounds the death knell to the principle of diversity, 'This vigor of life, said Aurobindo, can only be assured by the freedom and variations found in the diversity of languages' (Coward, 1989:150). However, at the same moment the

greater relief of unity, herein the cohesive social form, wherein the individuals find their place and right relation, must be also affirmed for individuals to flourish.

Such creativity does not exist within a vacuum, but relies upon a deep grounding and reworking of a present and past manifestation. Thus, Aurobindo's method unifies the oppositions of past and future to demonstrate an innovation and striving continuously foregrounded in its own history. In this sense Aurobindo's ideas might be comparable to hermeneutics, an interpretive view of religion, which, in Ricoeur's words, 'tell(s) us about the unconscious that we were and the Sacred that we ought to become'. The resultant methodology is described as a 'renewal of a theory of reminiscence' (Ricoeur, 1983: 147). For Aurobindo, this "theory of reminiscence" is an unveiling and re-expression of an original Selfhood from within the bounds of time. I hope to tease out how Aurobindo's method is both comparable and might utilise the ideas of Western theory in order to provide a truly International method, as a global philosophy for local imaginings, both individually and collectively.

As Dr Gokak points out, '[Aurobindo's] work opens up new horizons that spell new cultures on earth' (in A.B. Purani, 2009:21). I now move in the following chapter to understand how Aurobindo's ideas have found contemporary mergence with key figures, and application within a society that aspires towards human unity and world peace through the realisation, in time, of Aurobindo's *Supermind*.

### Chapter 3- Auroville: Divine Anarchy or Hermeneutic Utopianism?

#### i) Introducing Auroville- an Everyman society, or a “spiritual” movement?

In her meeting with UNESCO in 1966, Mirra Alfassa, Aurobindo’s spiritual partner, outlined the aims of the International community she wished to bring about in South India. She described the community’s intention, as the realization of “a progressive superhumanity”; “to hasten the advent of the supramental reality on earth” and “[to give] concrete form to Sri Aurobindo’s vision” (Minor, 1999:156). Alongside the Indian Government, UNESCO unanimously agreed to fund Auroville in 1966, 1968, 1970 and 1983, since it was believed the values of the project cohered with UNESCO’s general aim to promote International understanding and global peace. Indeed, UNESCO passed a resolution encouraging:

member states and international non-governmental organisations to participate in the development of Auroville as an international cultural township designed to bring together the values of different cultures and civilisations in a harmonious environment with integrated living standards which correspond to man's physical and spiritual needs (UNESCO, 1968).

This resolution illustrates the external perception of the community as one, not of cultish exclusivity but as an apparently intercultural project open to all. The community was later held up as an exemplary model for the kind of development UNESCO wished to see in the world, suggesting the apparent generalizability of the community for peace movements around the world. However, the more overtly “spiritual” dimensions of the community, which the Mother had made so explicit, were alluded to but not expanded on. This glossing over, through the failure to mention ‘the ideals of Aurobindo and the Mother’, or the phenomenology of *Supermind*, which the community purports to be founded upon, served to align the

town, almost to a kind of UNESCO flagship project, with its own goals of 'world understanding and cooperation' (Minor, 1999: 104-5). As the deputy director general of UNESCO, Malcolm Adiseshiah appeals to the community:

We have tried in UNESCO.... we have tried every way, and we have failed. And so now we turn to Auroville.... And so, on behalf of UNESCO.... I hail Auroville, its conception and realisation, as a hope for all of us and particularly for our children, for our youth who are disillusioned with the world that we have built for them and who will find in Auroville as they found at the time of its foundation ceremony, a living symbol, inspiring them to live the life to which they are called (Dr M. S. Adiseshiah (Direct, 1968 Auroville- UNESCO Symposium, March 1968, Pondicherry).

Without wholly disregarding the potential generalization of Auroville, and its more politically marketable elements, it is important that the community is considered in context, as a site which continues to see itself as a contemporary application of Aurobindo's ideas: a site of a collective synthesis of yoga.

This chapter takes the spiritual characterization of the community seriously and aims to reconstruct the ideological basis for its inception. I do this firstly through consideration of the links between Aurobindo's philosophical and spiritual work, and his socio- political texts. Secondly, I consider the unique relationship between the Aurobindo and the Mother. This is considered symbolically and historically in order to discuss the community's intentional and actual status today.

The Mother especially 'emphasised the experiential and practical aspects of integral Yoga and Auroville as a living laboratory of the active elements of that yoga' (Minor, 1999:156), demonstrating a means by which the complex abstractions of Aurobindo's texts might find substantial application.

The Auroville site, founded in 1968 and nesting amongst 200 acres of rural village India, currently houses around 2,487 individuals and volunteers from 49 nations, although two thirds come from India, France and Germany. Aurovilians live together in around 120 small-scale settlements or microcommunities, though the site was envisaged to be a “city” housing 50,000. The community has experimented with alternative economic systems, in the past piloting a “moneyless” trust economy, though this has been continually reworked after its population grew. The community is also experimental architecturally and ecologically, with a fluid, culturally hybrid and, often futuristic, style of dwellings and civic buildings and new forms of low waste, sustainable technology and lifestyles evident.

Auroville is a physical community concerned with ecological, economic and political problems, and is widely studied through these lenses. However, in both its publicity, and in the rhetoric of Aurovilians themselves, the township considers itself a “spiritual” project, the outer substance and instrumentation for an inner development. As recounted by Aurobindo, and echoed in the work of the Mother and Aurovilians, the crisis to be overcome,

[is]not an outer crisis, it is an inner and a psychological crisis primarily... the economic and the other outer difficulties are only the results of the inner crisis. Therefore, the remedy to be applied must also be psychological and this time it must be a conscious application by man (Purani, 1955:225-6).

Located around 10 kilometres from Pondicherry - the site where Aurobindo chose to found his ashram - the township intends to manifest Aurobindo’s vision: nothing less than an eventual manifestation of “Human Unity”, or ‘the manifestation of the Supermind in all layers of reality, spiritual and material’ (Minor, 1999:155). It describes itself as an ongoing “experiment”, necessitating manifestation as a

processual formation open to various self- reworkings over time, rather than the creation of a complete construct. Auroville's task was to realize, firstly in self, secondly in collective manifestation, the bounds of this futuristic intent before bringing it into Being. In the community's interpretation, Aurobindo's ideas entailed,

a philosophy of life designed to affirm the reality of the world from the ultimate standpoint and the meaningfulness of socio-political action from the spiritual standpoint... (Chaudhuri, 2013:171).

Thus, Auroville is neither a community aiming toward ascetic transcendence of the terrestrial existence, nor one undermining the spiritual in the face of practical action. Rather, and as Aurobindo demonstrates in his texts, since 'the evolutionary structure of the world process logically fits in with the concept of creative energy inherent in ultimate reality', the terrestrial might realise the spiritual within itself' (Chaudhuri, 2013:171). In other words, since Nature, for Aurobindo, recapitulates the trajectory of Spirit, in formulating and re-formulating, and thus seeing itself through the eyes of increasingly complex centres of self-being, Nature might eventually come to realise itself as, truly, veiled Spirit.

Auroville's rhetoric of experimentation appears to echo this progressive creative unfolding and realization of the Divine. Auroville's aim to keep the manifestation fluid, and open to revision, was not only informed by a fear of psychological stagnation or social dogmatization, outlined within Aurobindo's texts (most particularly *The Human Cycle* and *The Ideal of Human Unity*, which find discussion in this chapter), but also to stay true to the nature of the very phenomenology the community sought to make manifest, i.e the capacity of the *Supermind*. In a nutshell, the *Supermind* posed a phenomenology of non-differentiation between the apparently

limited formulations of terrestrial Nature, and the apparently unlimited identity of the transcendent Spirit.

As Aurobindo accounts within his *Synthesis of Yoga and Life Divine*, the *Supermind* capacity operates pragmatically and materially through creating and utilizing what Aurobindo terms, 'indirect constructs' or structures. The term "Indirect constructs" refers to the apparently partial, temporal and fluid formations of Nature conceived through mind, yet which, to the phenomenology of *Supermind* are utilized with no distinction from self or Spirit. These indirect constructs also describe the expressions of humanity (as itself a manifestation of Nature) both in the various roles individuals assume, and their expression in the collective and external environment, 'which mentally it [the Self] can live, move and act... enjoy and labour'. Nevertheless, in distinction from the mind, which "loses" itself in these constructs by mistaking these limited guises for the whole self, the *Supermind* capacity remains in a state of "superfusion", or continuous autonomy from the forms it utilizes for temporal expression.

In other words, this describes a way of seeing the whole of life as a play wherein greater Self discovers itself through these creative self endeavours, whilst importantly not mistaking these expressions for the entirety of its potential being. Unlike the current individual, who utilizes the mind, which 'lives in isolated moments of present and tries to retain the past and forecast and impel the future', the "Superman" that Auroville wishes to bring about, would see through the phenomenology of *Supermind*, which experiences non-separation between all moments of Self. Instead each moment and manifestation is held 'as an indivisible movement and sees too each containing the other'. This is called *trikaladrsti* or a

threefold seeing: a seeing of oneself in the passive completeness of absolute subjectivity, in the active difference of temporal objectivity, and, the creative interplay between these poises of self-being (All Aurobindo, 2006, SOY: 792).

In line with Aurobindo's socio-political texts, which find discussion in this chapter, Auroville was founded to overcome a crisis in human evolution: a crisis of limited seeing, which entailed a limited action and manifestation. The community intended to act as a correction to the *individualistic age*, considered to be the current social paradigm, to herald the drawing towards a *subjective age*, through a re-grounding of the collective in "spiritual values". In this relation of spirituality to nature, and society to the life and aims of man, the process can seem less linear, and rather a collective reassertion of something already known rather the attainment of or claim to new knowledge of a phenomenon.

Auroville appears to correspond with Aurobindo's conception of Yoga beyond its common understanding as an individual, ascetic pursuit, and opened its possibility, or even necessity, of becoming a collective, pragmatic and this-worldly pursuit. For example, Aurobindo's concept of the *Sanatana dharma*, or the eternal religion, came to assert, not merely the partial truth within all faiths, but also a faith non-distinct from politics, social, cultural, or economic reconstruction: 'There is to me nothing secular, all human activity is for me a thing to be included in a complete spiritual life' (Aurobindo, 1972, OH: 429). This expansion of the "spiritual" capacity - which is here juxtaposed to the secular - encompasses all expressions of individual and collective being as the backdrop to the conception of Auroville.

The idea of Auroville was originally proposed at a meeting of the Sri Aurobindo society, and was the dreamchild of the then current chairperson, Nada Chatran. The intention was for there to be a second home of the Ashram, a re-imagining of spirituality, less in the small scale, insular community of the monastic, and more in general social terms. This project was to have two key aims: the promotion of world peace, and the unification of humankind. Each of these aims was believed to be the natural ramifications of the realization of Aurobindo's *Supermind*.

The Mother, who was at the time President of the Sri Aurobindo society, initially showed little interest in the project. However, when her close friend, the artist Suddhika Hoota, shared with her a revelation that she (the Mother) might live at the heart of the Auroville community, the Mother was reminded of a dream she had had as a young girl. From this recollection stemmed further visions, firstly of the structure of the *Matrimandir* (literally: *house of the Mother*) - first referred to as the shrine of 'truth - and next a vision of the whole town (June 1965). Although Aurobindo's texts had referenced the idea of a "gnostic community", and spoken at length of the Superman and the *Supermind* capacity, even at this early stage, it is clear how much the community was to be re-interpreted in line with the personalities and values of the figures involved. Perhaps the inevitability of the vision's change and potential corruption was behind the Mother's original reticence. As McDermott points out, the Mother was allegedly:

[very much aware of the problems] besetting the attempt to create a model society based on Sri Aurobindo's vision and discipline—but she is also uncommonly aware of the extraordinarily positive possibilities of such an attempt (McDermott, 1972:6).

By 1966 the Mother had chosen the architect Roger Anger to work with her on the design of the city. Anger himself was not a town planner or engineer, but a designer, and this is to an extent reflected in the aesthetic functionality of much of the architecture in Auroville. Auroville was imagined zonally, with distinct geographical areas reserved for residential housing, cultural activities and a symbolic zone for human unity comprising the Matrimandir.

This was also an attempt to win the backing of global governments, through the idea of building cultural pavilions in this zone, funded ideally by these countries. The idea of the International zone was shaped by an important publication of the Mother entitled “Auroville International University Centre”, which detailed how Pavilions would house students from all over the world, providing means for them to learn about other cultures as the basis for each to contribute to a future Human Unity. This Human Unity would not override the particularity of cultural forms, but had the ability to retain and celebrate their traditions, by grounding social cohesion in a greater unity. The aim was towards:

A synthetic organization of all nations, each one occupying its own place in accordance with its own genius and the role it has to play in the whole, can alone effect a comprehensive and progressive unification, which may have some chance of enduring (Mother, 1952 in 1999:10).

The Mother, in dialogue with Roger Anger, created a community plan according to the laws of the *Vaastu Shastra*, ancient Sanskrit building guidelines, which aim at the integration of the built environment with the natural, and the social with the Divine. In some way this is a surprising choice, since the *Vaastu Shastra* is renowned for making concrete the power relations of caste through the organization and distribution of space, sacralising certain spaces, and necessarily desacrilising certain

others, in the process. Auroville, on the other hand explicitly aims to create an alternative to hierarchic power relationships, through the upholding of individual expression, and purports to be a “non-religious” community. Nevertheless, this architectural choice could also be seen to root Auroville in the history and tradition of India. At this juncture, the Mother could be seen to root her own creative endeavor in the *Vedic* history of synthesis that Aurobindo places his own texts. This possibility, as discussed both within this chapter and the next, has clear implications for an understanding of the Auroville community, not only in the narrative of its past, but also in its potential future.

In 1988 the Foundation act was passed, which meant that Auroville came to be organized into a movement governed by several bodies. The first and most important of these was the creation of a politics of direct democracy with all members of the community becoming automatic members of a “Resident’s Assembly”. Through the Resident’s Assembly, Aurovilians were provided with the opportunity to discuss and vote on key decisions within the community. The second was the Auroville council; a number of elected, in-house representatives who would oversee the general running of the community. Third was the International advisory board; a consultancy made up of International figures - often connected with UNESCO and other international agencies for intercultural understanding and world-peace. These representatives are annually elected by the Indian government to advise on the general direction of the community.

It is important to point out that the development of Auroville has not only been shaped by Aurobindo and the Mother, and the management bodies listed above, but also the interpretations of key figures in the community. As Bindu Mohanty (2008)

points out, many Westerners found the inspiration to join Auroville, not just from exposure to Aurobindo and the Mother but through Satprem, a French disciple (Mohanty, 2008:6). Although my project does not have the scope to investigate all of these subsequent lines of development, it is worth noting how the Auroville project has changed by often highly alternate interpretations and re-workings of the Mother and Aurobindo's ideas.

## **ii) From text to manifestation: the possibility of finding the Divine through the anarchic.**

Through the introduction of Auroville alongside the discussion of the more socio-psychological texts of Aurobindo, in this chapter we might come to an understanding of what the concept of Supermind could mean beyond the rhetoric of text. This chapter forms a bridge between the theory and the practice - making a leap to briefly and very generally describe [above] the present-day manifestation of the Auroville community - before charting its development through the influence and intersection of textual history. Thus, this chapter marks a move to considering the role of Aurobindo's text in promoting and guiding application beyond itself. The Mother clarifies the role of Auroville,

The task of giving a concrete form to Aurobindo's work was entrusted to the mother, the creation of a new world, a new humanity, a new society expressing and embodying the new consciousness is the work she has undertaken. Unity, which did not override the particular, but was the first step towards the accomplishment of this goal. The project of Auroville is the next step, more exterior, which seeks to widen the base of this attempt to establish harmony between soul and body, spirit and nature, heaven and earth, in the collective life of mankind (Alfassa, 1980:210).

Here the Mother at once presents Auroville as arising from, and aligned with Aurobindo's textual work, yet regards it also as the next step, as a potential greater widening and greater synthesis in the temporal, of the ideas alluded to within text. The remit of Auroville here becomes, arguably, a project that goes beyond the synthesis of the unity and the particular - here an allusion to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram - and becomes one that recognizes the subsidiary dualisms entertained by this primary synthesis: soul/ body; spirit/ nature; heaven/ earth, and their potential synthesis in her "new society".

Purani, echoing the sentiment of the Mother and Aurovilians, affirms that, 'the transformation about which Sri Aurobindo writes in his books has to take place in nature' (Purani: 1955:1). Thus here, there is a proposed return from the textual and metaphysical, back to the empirical.

As examined within chapter one of this thesis, Aurobindo's abstract mystical philosophy is conceived as arising from his own empirical experiences. These experiences were placed in dialogue and synthesis with his particular re-construction of Vedantic interpretation in chapter two. Following this oscillation, this chapter moves from the inception of the text to examine its move back to the empirical, through its potential continuity within the social sphere. I do this through a discussion of Aurobindo's social and psychological texts, before coming to consider the mutual influence of Mirra Alfassa, and the pair's shared concept of "Divine anarchy" on the contemporary practical and interpretive implications of Aurobindo's texts, as well as the greater Integral project this has spurred, through the lives of its readers.

As the prior chapters have introduced the hybrid concepts of “Mystic Empiricism” and “Poetic Metaphysics” as themes addressing the tensions Aurobindo’s life and texts have aimed to bridge, this chapter introduces the corollary of “Divine Anarchy”. “Divine anarchy” is an important neologism for understanding a continuity of narrative between Aurobindo; his spiritual consort and founder of Auroville, Mirra Alfassa, and the Auroville community itself. “Divine anarchy”, as I shall explore, can be regarded an external, social process in parallel with the “poetic metaphysics”, examined in the previous chapter (wherein the metaphysics of text is creatively re-constructed in the the present) and the “mystic empiricism” of the first, (wherein the experiential is the basis of the mysticism communicated though text). Thus, I come to argue that the creative dialogue inherent within the self-text re-imagining of Aurobindo’s transcreation, might be fruitfully applied as a method for self-society re-imagining in Auroville.

After clarifying this concept, I pose whether this progressively interpretive dialogue with textual guidelines (*shastra*), social substance and instrumentation and individual subjectivity, might point to a “hermeneutic utopianism”, or, a means of aspiring to the Supraphysical, or the human realization of Supermind, through a recapitulation of its movements, i.e. its mutual ability to assume form, or lines of finite development, without compromising its infinite holism. Thus, Auroville as a a project that purports to encourage multiple strands of individual interpretation and social application as a means for realizing deeper unity, seems to mirror the Supramental movement in the experiments of its social form.

Through consideration of the Mother’s own background and influence, this chapter also moves from grounding Integralism in the exclusive tradition of Indian thought, to

come to recognise a potentially International scope and remit for the Auroville project. This marks a move from the politics of Nationalism to a re-imagining of “global fraternity”, and from the synthesis of an Indian lineage, to an opening to Western thought and relations. For example, Banerji describes Auroville as,

Represent[ing]... an opportunity for a dialogue between premodern Indian forms of spiritual culture with a long cultural history and a new postmodern international form built purely on the foundation of a spiritual anthropology, an integral psychology for achieving the same goals (Banerji, 2013).

Herein, Banerji alludes to the deeper congruence between ancient Indian ideas and contemporary Western ideas. This not only points to the International reach of Aurobindo’s ideas, but sets the foundation for Integralism beyond those who might read and implement its values, rather seeing its remit for a greater cosmic development, beyond any such manifest community. For instance, the ideal of supraphysical truth, or the potential for realizing the divine within the materiality of our existence entails, as V. M. Reddy proposes

we... take conscious and decisive steps towards building a new and global future for all of humanity in the next century. It is the discovery of this cosmic role for man and the consequent transformation of the earth as an instrument and field of the supracosmic that stand out supremely significant in Sri Aurobindo’s vision of the future (V. M. Reddy, 1997: 207).

Herein Reddy not only affirms the practical nature of Aurobindo’s text but the extension of this role as it operates on a cosmic scale, which might be evidenced by the signifiers of the Auroville community.

After outlining the deep Indian influence on Aurobindo in the previous chapter, this chapter takes seriously the Western influence on Auroville, most particularly through

consideration of Mirra Alfassa, its founder. There is a recognition that the community, though founded after Aurobindo's death, and through the strong leadership of Mirra Alfassa, might continue to echo Aurobindo's own vision which, at moments, became quite explicit in proposing the advent of, as we shall discuss: 'a new Earth and heaven, a City of God, a Kingdom of God not only within us but outside, in a collective human life' (Aurobindo, LD, 2006: 879). However, the community requires its own, as Banerji terms it, "dialogic orientalism", or re-imagination of Aurobindo's terms in the context of the futuristic grapplings of the Auroville of today.

### **iii) Aurobindo and Mother's project as "Divine Anarchy"**

I characterise the intention of Aurobindo's social works, and their relationship with the ideology of the Mother and Auroville, through the hybrid concept of "divine anarchy". This concept is evidenced both in the writings of Aurobindo and the Mother and in the rhetoric of present day Aurovilians. The concept represents a fusing of what might initially appear dichotomous terms, with the first, the "Divine", commonly referred to as a transcendent capacity independent of worldly manifestation, and the second, the "anarchic" defined as a politics of the human disavowing the external control of rules or fixity of order. Aurobindo defines anarchy (in the non-spiritual sense) as the position wherein

all government of man by man by the power of compulsion is evil, a violation a suppression or deformation of a natural principle of good which would otherwise grow and prevail for the perfection of the human race (Aurobindo HC in Mohanty, 2013: 163).

This rebellion often takes place through a demeaning of that absolute arbiter of morals: the very Divine principle. Aurobindo, however, persists in upholding the

freedom inherent within the “anarchic” as a means for an emergent Divine governance to be realized, since, ‘[one] has sometimes to disregard the law of man... to obey the dictates of his conscience and the law of God’ (Aurobindo, in Basu, 1998:34). The capacity that Aurobindo proposes: *Supermind*, is outside the reason of man, and closer to the intuitive self-governance within him. The anarchic in the work of Aurobindo (and potentially also in that of the Mother), is likely grounded in a reading of Matthew Arnold’s popular work, *Culture and Anarchy* (first published 1869). Arnold has clearly influenced both Aurobindo’s dissatisfaction with the society of the time and the solution to its malady. Arnold, like Aurobindo<sup>7</sup>, bemoaned the simultaneous mechanization of his culture and its misguided individualism, but was optimistic that the culture might return to its roots as a ‘study of perfection’ (Arnold, 1981:45), and re-imagine the modern polarization between individual and society. Arnold also shared the valorization of the poetic and the “religious” as a means of attaining this aim, considering religion:

The greatest and most important of the efforts by which the human race has manifested its impulse to perfect itself... [Religion] does not only enjoin and sanction the aim, which is the great aim of culture... [namely] setting us to ascertain what perfection is and to make it prevail... [but also] religion comes to a conclusion identical to that which culture... likewise reaches... [i.e.] the kingdom of God is within you (Arnold, 1981:47).

Here, Arnold, with an admittedly poetic ideal of Religion, reconnects the perfection of both man and society with the invocation of the inner self, ‘the kingdom of God’. Thus, the disavowal of the lesser rule adherence clears the way for a realization of a greater truth: the non-distinction of self and Divine. Herein the enjoining of self and social perfection to an internal condition is comparable to that first stage of realization in Aurobindo’s work: an inwardness, or uncovering of Self beyond roles and

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<sup>7</sup> This corresponds most closely to Aurobindo’s problematisation of the dichotomy of freedom and equality within his work *The Ideal of Human Unity*.

appearance, which, in his view, forms the basis for further transformation of self and society. The concept should also be seen as part of Aurobindo's Nationalism, or *swaraj*, which required self- rule of national and individual organisms, before further unification might be attempted. Nationalism must affirm India itself before the world unity might be attempted, as the individual must be affirmed prior to the universal and transcendent.

Nevertheless, the anarchic for Aurobindo does not simply refer to a political stance, and he offers a critique, not only of blind adherence to social mores, but also of vital and rational anarchism, seeing a higher intuitive, "spiritual" potential as a greater guide than submission to one's reason. According to J.N Mohanty (2013) the current *individual age* - which is characterized as a response to the overbearing social rigidity of the *conventional age* - has 'experimented with two conceptions of the individual: the vital and the rational individual' (Mohanty, 2013:156). These two assertions of individuality in the face of external governance have their qualities. For instance, the intellectual anarchism brought about '[an] enlightenment of man's reason and an appeal to... natural human sympathy' (Mohanty, 2013:163), utilizing the unique abilities of individuals to self assert, rather than this being dictated by social form. However, the rational also, for Aurobindo, found its undoing in its overassertion, most particularly its common 'use... as a weapon for competing with others' (Mohanty, 2013:161), rather than drawing them together.

In the end, the intellectual and vital anarchism however finds its limitation in its narrow self-definition; in defining itself through individualism over and against the social form 'anarchism fails to recognize the truth that man cannot develop, even spiritually, in complete isolation' (Mohanty, 2013:163).

The Mother reiterates this concept through the documents that have become Auroville's textual backbone. The first, "*The Charter*", operates as a dialectic which, in each of its four points, presents an interplay of apparent oppositions and the need, within Auroville, to tend to their resolution. For example, the first point instructs Aurovilians to lose sense of personal ownership to allow the owning of a greater reality, and the third, describing Auroville as 'a bridge between past and the future', critiques the distinction between tradition and innovation.

Further in her work, *To be a True Aurovillian*, the Mother critiques the dualism of order and freedom, and instructs Aurovilians to 'obey one single authority, that of the supreme Truth,' thus proposing an external "anarchy" that, at heart, disguises a deeper internal root, the faith of the *bhaktin*. Within each of these guidelines she proposes a re-working of the Mind's oppositions. For instance, the first principle advocates a social life rooted in an understanding of the self at heart; the second a freedom from the overly conventional, yet not a lapse into the whims of ego; the third a non-attachment, yet one which allows the means to come to us; the fourth an organizing of the outer according to the inner: a preparation of self for its own becoming; a submission of self in order to become part of a greater species. (See appendix for each of these documents).

Thus, the Mother proposes a way between the dichotomous distinction of the Mind, and thus creates her own "transvaluation of values", deconstructing the distinction between young and old through 'a youth that never ages', and, ultimately, the terrestrial and the Divine, to propose Auroville as the place where this new way of living is (being) worked out: 'it is a centre of accelerated evolution where man must begin to change his world by means of the power of the inner spirit' (Alfassa, 1978:

221). Each of these texts instructs individuals in realizing a wider relief beyond the typical conventions: an identity behind the figurative tags of the external, social and ethical conventions.

Auroville, in aspiration, might be said to embody these very aspirations, by itself emerging from the apparent merging of the dualism of Eastern/ Western in Aurobindo and the Mother, as well as its attempt to remain open to the individual in the face of the collective destiny. As the Mother is claimed to have said, in her work *On Education*, 'The grouping should be effectuated around a central idea that is as wide and as high as possible, in which all tendencies, even the most contradictory might find their respective places' (Alfassa, 2002:40). Here, contradictions come to be recast as creative possibilities.

In Auroville the term is referred to often, although usually without clarification. Joshi points out that the Auroville governing board created a document entitled *Toward a Divine Anarchy* as a way of planning the kind of future Auroville wished to manifest. Helmut, an architect in Auroville, also developed this concept further to describe the architectural aspirations of the community as a "transconceptual archy", or the realization of a structure above any particular designations – which, in its form, 'is fluid enough to allow for anarchy' (Helmut, 2013).

The particular structure beyond designation that each of these parties refer to is that 'element of truth' which, according to Aurobindo, describes how 'the more the outer law is replaced by an inner law the nearer man will draw to his true perfection' (Aurobindo, 1997, HC: 270). According to J.N. Mohanty this spiritual anarchism, might completely re-define the terms of a community, by an inversion of emphasis: on

spiritual illumination rather than rational enlightenment, 'on the soul in man, rather than a sentiment in the heart, on inner change, rather than on mere outer change' (J.N. Mohanty, 2013: 163). This is what we might expect to see demonstrated within Auroville. However, these values are typically confined to the individual rather than the society, with attempts to socialize the Spiritual often, arguably, leading to dogmatism. According to Mohanty, the realization of divine anarchy would comprise:

An ideal order of social development... realiz[ing] the mutual interdependence- an interdependence which does not annul the autonomy of each- of three terms: the individual, the community and humanity. Each... has its own distinctive mode of self-consciousness' (J.N. Mohanty, 2013: 160).

Thus, the anarchy would allow for a freedom of individual expression, without compromising the cohesion of the community or the greater human aims of the project. It should also be pointed out that the community should accommodate, in line with Aurobindo's texts, the individual, the universal and the transcendent. However, the individual self and the universal self are, to the highest realization, two indispensable modes of the transcendent reality.

This form of Divine Anarchy, though finding social form more readily in Aurobindo's socio-political works, has a basis also within his philosophical poetics. Aligning the human with the natural world, Aurobindo saw the revelation of new potentialities to be often brought about by, 'a state of crude disorder: [it is] the anarchy of our being which covers our confused attempt at a new order' (Aurobindo, 1997, HC: 127).

Echoing the trimurti of Hinduism, not only are "Brahma the creator," and "Vishnu the preserver" vital to the cosmic process and, homologously, the social evolution within it, but so also is "Shiva the destroyer:" the bringer of "chaos". Here anarchy is held up as necessary to the system, most particularly in its role of deconstructing the system

as a means of re-animating, or re-making it. However, to reiterate, such anarchy must also be founded upon the Divine and ‘the agents of democratic and progressive reforms... must possess a unified understanding of material and spiritual transformation’ (Chimni, 2013:147).

#### **iv) From “transcreation” to “Divine Anarchy”- Aurobindo’s Socio-political texts.**

Aurobindo’s sociological ideas, although apparently quite distinct from his spiritual and linguistic aims, might share a unity of method. I have posed that this method might be described as one of “transcreation,” in the sense that, in order to find faithful utilization, his ideas require not just a pure “intellectual understanding,” but rather must find their translation, or re-creation, in a temporal re-synthesis. As Aurobindo’s faithfulness to prior *Vedantic* interpretation (discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis), was shown through his own utilization and re-making of these truths in the light of his own temporality, so we might hypothesise a similar process between the self and the social text, i.e. a faithfulness to, and recapturing, of the “divine truth” of the past, through its remaking in the present. This chapter provides the basis for questioning whether we might re-make and realize the contemporary meaning of Aurobindo’s texts in a similar way.

Firstly, however, I come to examine how these more philosophical ideas come to find similarity with his Sociological ideas, which inches ever closer to understanding the potential fruition of these ideas outside text.

In both *The Life Divine*, and *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Aurobindo’s mystical philosophy arrived at the proposal of a spiritual “society”, or a “gnostic age” wherein the material

might not simply be “spiritualized”, but come to discover its veiled identity as Spirit: ‘the affirmation and positive predication of divine life upon earth not only implies the immanence of the divine but also within the universe’ (V.M. Reddy, 1997:57).

Simultaneously the material world might be harnessed in order to facilitate this realisation, through an ‘alteration of the forms of our life and its institutions so that they too may become a better mould for the inpourings of spirit (Aurobindo, 2006, SOY: 28). Speaking of himself, Aurobindo recounts the purpose of his yoga:

[as] not to only to realize the Divine and to attain to a complete spiritual consciousness, but also to take all life and all world into the scope of this spiritual consciousness and action and to base life on the Spirit and give it a spiritual meaning (Aurobindo in McDermott, 2013: 290).

As Chaudhuri (2013) points out, this integration of Matter and Spirit is not without its problems for Aurobindo’s socio-political projects, and rather calls into question a series of further dichotomies. Chaudhuri highlights three such interrelated binaries that are invoked and drawn into dialogue in Aurobindo’s work,<sup>8</sup> namely: Nationalism and Spirituality; Self and world; and freedom and equality. I will utilize Chaudhuri’s framework to discuss the unification of metaphysics and politics (and its subsidiary representation, within Aurobindo’s work, as the dichotomy between East and West); Self-knowledge and social participation, and individuality and equality), with reference to Aurobindo’s more explicitly social texts.

I argue that, cumulatively, the resolution of these dichotomies illustrates a move from the “transcreation” of Aurobindo’s philosophical texts, to a twin process of “Divine Anarchy” within his socio-political texts, and its parallel transmission and re-consideration by individuals and collectives today. The hybridity of the term “divine

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly McDermott (2013), also utilized these cumulative dichotomies, to chart the very trajectory of Aurobindo’s life course.

anarchy” arguably becomes the framework for merging more substantial homologies, in Aurobindo’s proposal to bring into dialogue, East and the West; the ascetic and the material; and collective tradition and individual innovation.

#### **v) Nationalism and Spirituality: Unifying the tendencies of East and West.**

The first dilemma Chaudhuri highlights is between nationalism and spirituality.

Aurobindo valorized India in terms of her spiritual achievements and, even after his activist days, remained assured that India was the foundation on which any project of International unity might be built. These ideas are most wholly expanded on in his work *The Renaissance in Indian culture*, which will be touched upon in the final chapter, through references to the text from Aurovilians.

Nevertheless, Aurobindo had to confront the fact that, for all her spiritual achievements, in the more practical spheres of social life, India appeared to lag behind other nations. In other words, it appeared that “spirituality”, most particularly the asceticism prompted by the Advaitic disavowal of terrestrial existence, might be to blame for this lack of progress. Aurobindo’s philosophy remedied this by proposing that *advaitism* [Indivisible Unity], *dvaitism* [Nature and Spirit] and *kevala advaitism* [Spirit and Nature as Existence and Energy, Substance and attribute of the one Being] – not to mention the faiths of other nations, might find place within his greater system:

being is the indivisible unity of existence and energy (*Brahman* and *Sakti*)  
 Nature is the nature of Spirit and Spirit is the spirit of Nature... being is pure  
 existence-energy. Awareness of pure existence is the source of peace, serenity  
 and self- poise. Awareness of the energy aspect or creativity of Being prompts

one to act and participate in the evolutionary advance of Nature and in the creative unfoldment of history (Chaudhuri, 2013: 173).

In unifying the practical and the spiritual in the creative moment, Aurobindo clarified that to be “spiritual” need not distance one from the socio-political life, or even resist the upholding of a national identity for the sake of human unity. Rather, this realization of unity necessitated the involvement and affirmation of the national in order for a transmutation of society and individuality to occur.

The bringing together of the abstract and the practical and the supercosmic and the subconscious, through the merging of the Spiritual and the National, becomes a semiotic for a more explicit bringing together of the tendencies of the East and West in Aurobindo’s socio-political texts. Each side of the apparent dichotomy comes to require the traits of the other in order to find its own Self-completion. This is explicated most clearly within the latter half of Book 2 part 2 of *The Life Divine*, wherein Aurobindo describes the spiritual ascent of the terrestrial self, in its journey through successive paradigms of truth- manifestation, on its way to find unity with the Divine.

The first of these is the “occult” stage, and is analogous to the “ascetic denial”: the first of Aurobindo’s spiritual realizations, which, as previously examined, finds similarity with the *Advaitism* of Sankara. Aurobindo sees this tendency as inherently characteristic of the esotericism of the East. Herein man develops means to “go behind” the material front of his existence, to access sheaths of self [*anandamaya*] beyond the figuration of the body, life and mind. This stage finds its greater sophistication in the formalisation of “Religion” wherein one might develop means to ‘sublimate the thought and life and flesh’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 894). This realisation

beyond physicality is positive and veridical, however Aurobindo critiques religion's tendency to dogmatise, to solidify a "signified" beyond the physical and prescribe universal rules for its realisation. This creates restrictive conditions, separating the terrestrial from the occult and thus creating a narrow continent, within which the content - the individual - cannot wholly realise himself.

In order to foster the need of the individual, mankind requires a wider continent, or to realise himself in a wider container of self being, in order to 'give full scope to the inner spirit... to develop its own truth and reality' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 897). The tendency is then to swing to the "philosophical,"<sup>9</sup> as a mental check and critique of the religious and its collectivism. However here too we find an overemphasis on one form of life to the disregarding of others, in this case the cerebral forms of life. Within this schema, even the spiritual finds itself beyond the bounds of reason and is thus cut from the enquiry, its last outcome beoming, for Aurobindo, the "materialist refusal" or the complete 'denial of the supraphysical' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 899-900). In other words, this constitutes a denial of the possibility of attaining a capacity beyond reason, placing the Mind as the culmination, rather than a stage in the process. This consigns man purely to existence within the lower hemisphere of existence, denying his nature as transitional and his potential as supermental. Aurobindo sees this tendency to be characteristic of the exotericism of the West: here we have the mystic man/ philosopher 'clothed in intellectual forms of creed and doctrine' with his 'tendency to divorce philosophy from spirituality' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 913).

Aurobindo presents a dilemma between, on the one hand, hyper-concentrated Western intellectualism, and on the other hyper-extended, Indian religionism. In

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<sup>9</sup> Herein referring to the analytical, dissective schools of Western philosophy.

formulating his spiritual Integralism, he brings these oppositions together to create the last stage in his trajectory, a form utilising the mentality (Western philosophy) and the vitality (Indian religion) of the prior stages but merging and transforming them into a form befitting the psychic Self, '[a] building of life and action that is in conformity with the truth of spirit' (Aurobindo, LD, 2006: 894). This merged form - recreating and utilising the apparent oppositions in approach and in National character - imagines the dichotomy as representing a partiality of truth that might be brought into dialogue to find meaningful re-synthesis.

Interestingly, Aurobindo still describes this ideal "spirituality" using the terminology of "religion" as 'a religion which is itself a congeries of religions and... at the same time provides man with his own... inner experience' (Aurobindo, LD, 2006:906). In other words, this would be a system which at once leaves space for the ideas of the other and, most importantly, space for the individuals involved to interpret their own means of enlivening this continent.

Aurobindo thus sets out some guidelines towards the end of *The Life Divine* for gnostic life, (though these tend to take more solid form in his more socio-political texts). These collective methods correspond to the more general argument of this thesis: the necessity of intellectual and institutional incompleteness if we might allow, or leave space, for the individual to "complete," "enliven," or provide the content to re-imagine the continent of his space and time.

This re-imagination comes about through recognition of an infinite identity (or a Divine relief) both containing and beyond the manifestation of form, allowing for a greater potential diversity within the social aggregate: its 'spontaneous natural

adaption' and 'rich many-sided execution of thing to be collectively known, done, worked out in life' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 1046-7). This might allow the differing individuals (or differing poises of the Divine) to realise their selves, or their "content", (and their necessarily unified content), unfettered by any egoism or impediment of the social continent.

Aurobindo argues that aggregates and institutions beyond the individual have value only according to how far 'they help the being [or the individual] in his partial manifestation (Aurobindo, LD, 2006: 1059). The individual does not exist in a vacuum of pure content, but rather relies upon the continent of space, time and society to provide the symbolic and expressive field of value for his own creativity: the figurations of his Being: '[a] means of discovering or formulating what it seeks to be' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 1060). In other words, the individual's expressions are contextual, informed by a certain history, conditioned by a present constellation of value and capacity, and driven by aspirations beyond the egoic self.

This, I claim, clarifies the first dimension of Aurobindo's "divine anarchy": an upholding of the individual's ability to self-actualise, rather than the society's ability to objectify and control the individual. This necessarily also frees the individual from the strictures of National, religious or philosophical identity - though he may also utilise and celebrate it - since his aim is not to realise self as social object, but Self as divine subject. Herein the social aggregate finds the means of its own transformation.

## vi) Self and World, self- knowledge and social participation

Aurobindo's concept of "Divine anarchy" finds further clarification in the next, interrelated dichotomy: that between "self" and "world:" the apparent opposition between 'mysticism and action, between complete liberation and self-knowledge on the one hand and active physical existence and social participation on the other' (Chaudhuri, 2013:169-170). According to Chaudhuri, Indian philosophy widely recognizes 'two grades of manifestation of the same creative energy (*prakriti, shakti* or *maya*)'. However, a dualism between one's Divine [non-terrestrial] Self and one's terrestrial bound, and thus lesser mind, life and body prevails. Aurobindo, as recounted in chapter two of this thesis, remedies this dichotomy through his bridge concept of the *Supermind*. The Supermind, although able to self limit, or re-imagine itself in the play of the finite, resists absolute dichotomization, and thus resists claims that the terrestrial existence is *maya*, distinct from Divine Self, since: 'the *supermind* alone can descend into the darkness of physical existence without losing its full power of action' (Chaudhuri, 2013: 175).

This state of non- distinction between the creative capacity of the Divine and the manifestation of the terrestrial individual, places a great potential implicate within the self of man. This greater capacity inherent in the material, social and creative man is the basis of many of Aurobindo's texts, and cements his status as a thinker that places the "creative principle" at the very forefront of his system. It is this absolute creative principle (the *Supermind*) that provides the link between the supercosmic and the terrestrial, in its ability to see itself within the sphere of either without loss, but greater joy in alternate realization of Self. However, the principle does not merely operate from the top down, i.e. from the supercosmic to the terrestrial, but also from

the terrestrial to the supercosmic, as man progressively unveils this secret self-capacity. The catch, however, is that in the limited capacity of the mind, we have the propensity to lose ourselves and formulate “truth” in the limited forms of the world. In *The Synthesis of Yoga* this is made particularly explicit:

development into forms is an imperative rule of effective manifestation; yet all truth and practice too strictly formulated becomes old and loses much, if not all, of its virtue; it must be constantly renovated by fresh streams of the spirit revivifying the dead or dying vehicle and changing it, if it is to acquire a new life (Aurobindo, 1999, SOY: 5).

As we saw in Aurobindo’s metaphysical work (problematizing the Mind’s constructs of “philosophy” and the “religion”), each form is rendered partial and potentially dogmatic if clung to too vehemently. Both “philosophy” and “religion” are a stage along the way: a partial vantage point or a progressive rung on a ladder to a greater perspective. Neither is dismissed but each operates as a necessary substance and instrumentation for a “revivification” through a deeper truth.

Aurobindo’s approach to the “sociological”, like his approach to the “religious” does not only utilize the models laid down by the discipline, but also operates as a critique and correction of these forms: prompting a move from the sole emphasis on convention and form, to a twinned emphasis on the “Spirit”, that he claims underlies, and is expressed, through these forms. The social forms represent the progressive expression of Spirit unfolding in time. Aurobindo’s sociology is thus, like his linguistic and philosophical ideas, not prescriptive, but dialogical, comprising a necessary interaction between, firstly an external historical dimension subject to the vicissitudes of time and space, and secondly an inner spiritual dimension transcendent of time: the first is of the nature of the terrestrial, the second of the

*Supercosmic*. Thus, Aurobindo emphasized the need for societies, individuals and even texts to be understood, not only according to their outer manifestations (the first dimension) but, more vitally, also according to their inner, spiritual dimensions (the second dimension). As Aurobindo makes clear

the spiritual idea governs all; the symbolic religious forms which support it are fixed in principle; [whereas] the social forms are lax, free and capable of infinite development (Aurobindo, 1997, HC: 12).

The problem is that these external forms are always in danger of assuming a fixity, and thus arresting their potential for development, which is ideally the further unveiling of Spirit. Devine (2010) relates this approach to that of Nietzsche, who at the end of the nineteenth century heralded a “Return to Religion [without religion]”, a dismissal of ultimate truth, that cleared the way for the multiple “truths” of individuals to be realized (Devine, 2010: 1-2). I would argue that the same is true in the case of Aurobindo’s sociology, in that he might mark a “Return to Sociology, without Sociology”. In other words, his Sociology moves beyond the prescriptions of social form (the first dimension) over individual and cultural subjectivities (the second dimension), in order to reverse the hierarchy and promote individual, and necessarily spiritual, non-prescriptive creativity for the sake of the social.

Aurobindo, however, is not promoting asceticism, and, as the sole emphasis upon the physical might reduce terrestrial forms to a mere mechanism, so an over-emphasis on Spirit leads to a dismissal of our phenomenological, material experience. There is thus a recapitulation of the very dichotomy addressed in Aurobindo’s metaphysics - that between the *ascetic denial* and the *materialist refusal* - and an analogous conclusion reached. Each dimension of this opposition is, to the integral mind, non-

distinct, but merely forms a differing element of the same play. In other words, the subjectivity of the former, is only revealed, and further developed, through its objectification of the latter: its expression in the flux and substance of the temporal. Thus Aurobindo 'demands that a subject, be it a person or field of study, should be studied against its appropriate background, both historical and contemporary, from within and from without' (Chattopadhyaya, 1988:1).

However, according to Aurobindo, the history of social psychology, (as comparable to his account of the history of Yoga and Indian thought) is a history of oscillation between the twin poles of the dichotomy of form and spirit which find only tentative resolution while remaining at the level of Mind. This problematic is most explicitly addressed in his work *The Human Cycle*. Herein, Aurobindo follows Lamprecht in mapping an evolutionary hierarchy of typical social paradigms through which he regards all collectives to pass. These stages are 'respectively, [coined] symbolic, typical and conventional, individualist and subjective' (Aurobindo, 1997, HC: 6). The failings of each stage, and the reasoning behind the move to the next, are testament to an inability to stay in dialogical relationship with the past, and to transcreate incorporating the truths of tradition rather than a pure innovation. As in the work of Sorokin, who imagines a pendulum swinging between certain social extremes, herein we have a series of oscillations, which amount to a series of partial truths until they find synthesis.

For example, in the first stage of this trajectory: the *symbolic* stage, the religious or spiritual permeates the whole of human existence, with the terrestrial itself a signifier of this wider, multivocal truth of the Divine signified. In other words, there is unification of the spirit and the social realm, with 'Religion... a mystic sanction for the

ethical motive and discipline, Dharma, that becomes its chief utility' (Aurobindo, 1997, HC: 11).

Aurobindo, as we saw within his more poetic work, romanticises the Vedic period not only through this symbolic means of relating to the world, but also its way of writing text and constructing social form. To an extent this ancient period can appear similar to the kind of gnostic collective Aurobindo proposes for humanity. For example, human society was, according to this Vedic symbolism, the terrestrial expression of the Cosmic *Purusha*, who might express himself in diversity of life and form, 'Man and the Cosmos are both of them symbols and expressions of the same hidden reality...everything [is] a sacrament (Aurobindo, 1997, HC: 10). In other words, in a symbolic understanding of the world, all becomes sacralised, and stands not only as a mirror of itself, but also as a potential window beyond itself:

The image was to these seers a revelative symbol of the unrevealed and it was used because it could hint luminously to the mind what the precise intellectual word, apt only for logical or practical thought, or to express the physical and the superficial, could not at all hope to make manifest (Aurobindo, 1997, HC: 9-10).

For Aurobindo, 'symbolic spirit permeates not only the actual forms of religious worship but also the social institutions of the time' (Chattopadhyaya, 1988:35). The loss of the symbolic within philosophical history is thus recapitulated in his history of social form. In social history, this loss comes about in the *typal* stage, wherein the sentiment of the symbolic becomes concretised into an otherworldly focus, with the divine principle in man and society neglected in favour of an Ultimate set apart from his worldly manifestation. This system creates great abstract ideals: such as honour, purity and piety, but ultimately remains out of touch with the man on the ground.

The oscillation swings back in the successive *conventional* stage, with the focus shifting to corrective in re-cognition of the outward forms. Here the *dharmic* prescription of social life becomes absolutely sedimented into social types, so outward supports such as birth and *jati* come to be wholly prescriptive and formalized over the unique spirit of the individual.

Thus, Aurobindo lays down the gauntlet to readers to find means to subvert the confinement and reclaim self. The recapture of self is necessarily the work of individuals who, unlike the historical forms they inherit, possess a capability to reassert spirit. This movement, in Aurobindo's eyes, necessarily brings about the next stage of social evolution, the advent of the *Individualistic* age. The *Individualistic* age, describes a condition of revolutionary unrest, wherein the general standards are deemed to no longer work. Thus:

(the) individual flings off the yoke, declares the truth as he sees it and in doing so strikes inevitably at the root of the religion, the society, the politics, momentarily perhaps even the moral order of the community (Aurobindo, 1997, HC:17).

At this point Aurobindo appears to be re-writing Marx, in freeing individuals from the blinding oppression under the weight of institutionalization. This is clearly a positive paradigm shift, wherein scientific, technological, and other breakthroughs - formally suppressed as threats to social order - might suddenly be welcomed, or reassessed, in the termination of the establishment hold. The individualistic age describes the general standard of truth and social order inherent to the modern secular age, wherein the scientific and rational is held up as the basis of life. This may have been sufficient for Marx, however, for Aurobindo this forms a rational anarchy, itself limited by its fixity of truth. This is not a satisfactory endpoint and in fact, by

asserting the scientific to the detriment of other modes of individual and collective knowledge and governance, the scientific stronghold might begin to suffocate individual spirit and experience as much as the conventional age that preceded it. In other words, these truths in turn become sedimented in the arrogance of unquestioning dogma, to become

universal laws by which the individual is almost a by-product and by which he must necessarily be governed [which entails] the suppression of that very individual freedom which made the discovery and the attempt at all possible (Aurobindo, 1997, HC :21).

Thus, in the very moment of apparent completion, social mechanisation overpasses itself and consigns itself to inevitable decay and ultimate death. Even the *individualistic age* appears, in the last, to override the very individual voices that it initially sought to promote. This comes down to the fact that the individuals that make up a social collective are organic properties that require, not only the guidelines proposed by a social form, but also, and most vitally, room to grow and to self actualize:

the individual is not merely a social unit but must fulfil his own individual truth and law as well as his natural or assigned part in the truth and law of collective existences (Aurobindo, 1997, HC: 24).

At this point, Aurobindo separates himself from the dichotomised worldview and, arguably, repositions himself within a style of re-questioning and relativity more at home in the postmodern. Instead of upholding the social to the detriment of the individual, or the individual to the detriment of the cohesion of the social group, Aurobindo proposed a re-imagining of the dichotomy itself. This entails a synthesis between the perceived oppositions that the social form might swing between. As the

“materialist refusal” and the “ascetic denial” find unification in *The Life Divine*, so must the perceived dichotomy of the individual and the society.

This is reminiscent of Sorokin, who proposes an “Integral” society that might comprise each polemic: “sensate” (material) and “ideational” (spiritual), in a state wherein science, philosophy and theology come together. In other words, ‘[t]he distinguishing characteristic of an integral epistemology is that it combines faith, reason, and the senses into a harmonious system’ (Jeffries, 2005:69). In my view, this kind of social constellation is not too distinct from what Aurobindo proposes in the move to the integrative final stage, the *Subjective age* wherein he calls for a

revolutionary reconstruction of religion, philosophy, art and society... It must go from the individual to the universal... [since] he cannot securely discover the truth and law of his own being without discovering some universal law and truth to which he can relate it (Aurobindo, 1997, HC:28).

Aurobindo’s aims are twofold in the *subjective age*. First, is the realization of an inner freedom in the individual, and second, though not conflictingly, the realization that this freedom is of the nature of the Supreme Being, who ‘is one in all, expressed in the individual and in the collectivity and only by admitting and realizing our unity with others can we entirely fulfill our true self being’ (Aurobindo HC: 40-41, in Chimni, 2013:136-7).

In summary, after the *symbolic age* Aurobindo describes a progressive loss of spirit, wherein the inner subtleties of a society come to lose their meaning and governance. In other words, societies might become ‘confined in their own rigidity of outward form, and crystallised into hierarchies, leaving no space for the necessary enlivening spirit’ (Aurobindo, 1997, HC: 13-14). This reveals not simply an overriding of the

necessary individuality of the man in time, but also, and more importantly here, the disregarding of the truth of tradition, which finds itself overwritten as new “truths” come into vogue. Thus, Aurobindo proposes the need to see, in recapitulation of the *symbolic age*, not purely the utility of truth in the momentary, but also its significance, and re-imagining, throughout history:

while we are satisfied when we have found the practical and material causes of a social phenomenon and do not care to look further, they [the symbolic predecessors/ Vedic age] cared little or only subordinately for its material factors and always looked first and foremost for its symbolic, religious or psychological significance (Aurobindo, 2005, HC: 9).

Aurobindo has demonstrated how a history of social form becomes a history of mediation between the inner and the outer, the spiritual and the material, the individual freedom and the social order. Society has, historically speaking, tended to come to emphasise the one, before swinging to the opposite extreme. This entails that social vision becomes ‘locked in one dimension of reality, whereas reality is multidimensional’ (V.M. Reddy, 1997: 208). Thus, although these social types form a hierarchy- of lesser to greater- each also, in correspondence with Aurobindo’s sevenfold chord of Being, might suffer and lose itself if it does not maintain an Integral hierarchy. Rather than simply progress to the new, the social form must revive and renew the realisations of lower stages within its greater progress: ‘the old is to be taken up, it must be transformed and succeeded’ (Aurobindo, 1997, HC: 26).

Reddy relates the trajectory of social evolution in *The Human Cycle* to the charting of individual evolution in *The Life Divine*. In *The Life Divine* the movement of individual evolution was from a bodily constitution; to a vital expression; and, at the zenith of this lower hemisphere, a wider conception and expression of self allowed by a growing mental level. In the same way the social form

[grows from] a common life interest that was the base for the constituents of that body and lastly a conscious mind... capable of governing and helping the central ego to express itself (Reddy. A, 1997:188).

The social thus moves from a first stage of substantial (bodily) capacity to a second stage of vital, active governance. The second, vital or *conventional* stage of the social, according to Reddy, refers to a stringent organization and centralization of common interests. This concretisation into the activity of the unified social body, asserts the equality and order of society to the detriment of the free expression of its individual members.

Necessarily, this untenable arrangement of social reduction eventually collapses and a 'period of free external development ensues' (Reddy. A, 1997: 189). This free external development is reminiscent of the development of mental capacity, which allows for possibilities to be imagined beyond the current bodily frame and internal status of the social. This third individualistic stage represents, the current external frame and internal status of the social. Here the social unit moves to incorporate the individuals, as distinct entities from itself.

In this way, the social unit moves to incorporate not only the immediate needs of its internal components but also a political, economic and religious life. This stage of mass dispersion through a social division into individuals, creates, like the mind the ability to imagine many alternate possibilities, yet also, (as the mind is later problematized), to see these possibilities in superficial distinction, lacking the deeper substance and integration of the capacities of the higher hemisphere.

Each stage, in both the natural body of societies and individuals can thus be seen to provide a 'scaffolding and framework' for the manifestations of higher possibilities in its future self-imagining. However, ideally, unlike the social history he charts, there is always a building on the prior in the fabrication of the future, and,

even in dealing with its new problems it works upon past experience and therefore upon past motives and analogies. Even when it seizes on new ideas, it goes to the past for the form it gives to them. Behind the apparent changes of the most radical revolutions we see this unavoidable principle of continuity surviving in the heart of the new order (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU: 575).

However, the problem is always this lack of integration. It is difficult for societies to both move beyond the realisations of the past, yet integrate their "truth" into the ever-widening emergent "truth." However, and as with his philosophical method, in *arguing* for a loss in the present, Aurobindo does not advocate a pure revival of the past - even of the Vedic symbolic age - but rather "a revolutionary reconstruction" of religion, philosophy, science, art and society (in a) universal way" (Chattopadhyaya, 1988:38). This "re-construction" is an inherent challenge for the conventional society which, in order to bridge the gulf between the social convention and the truth it once expressed, must 'on every claim of authority... turn the eye of a resolute inquisition' (Aurobindo, 1997, HC: 17). Aurobindo is here again reminiscent of Nietzsche who sees the conventions created through language as constricting the potential thought and action of individuals: 'humankind cannot submit to any particular idea of a theocratic or ideological society' (V. M. Reddy, 1997:208).

Aurobindo thus proposes a synthesis of that which seems incompatible: bringing together the demands of the institutional forms and the truths of the particular individuals that make it up, to redefine social progress as: 'the development and wellbeing of all the individuals in the society', (Aurobindo, 1997, HC: 24). Within *The*

*Human Cycle* Aurobindo proposes a social evolution that aligns with his method of human spiritual and linguistic evolution: a deepening subjectivity that might, in its very essentialising, encompass a universalizing epistemology and a unifying sociology. Contemporary man must then, for Aurobindo, overcome the current *individualistic* age in order to embrace the final stage of his socio-psychological becoming: the *subjective* age. The method for bringing about this transformation: by restoring, perhaps on an unprecedented scale, insight and self-knowledge to the race, it must end by revolutionising his social and collective self-expression. As Aurobindo accounts:

[the] first [stage is a] deepening [of] man's inner experience... [second] restoring... insight and self knowledge to the race... [and; third] a revolutionising [of] his social and collective self- expressions (Aurobindo, 1997, HC: 33).

The recognition of self beyond man's apparently limited experience of his individual person and its definition against the "other" of society, is for Aurobindo the key to his eventual conception of a universal law and truth to which he might recognize his self, not only as a subject who seeks to know, but also an object of the universe he seeks to understand, since, 'his substance is drawn from its substance and by the law of its life the law of his life is determined and governed' (Aurobindo, 1997, HC: 28). An individual's nature is not then separate from the world he seeks to transcend, but is the very object he moves from (nature), the very object he moves within (society) and the very object (spirit) he moves toward:

When we realise that the land is only the shell of the body, though a very living shell... and potent in its influence on the nation, when we begin to feel that its real body is the men and women that compose the nation unit... we are on the way to a truly subjective communal consciousness (Aurobindo, 1997, HC: 36).

To this higher consciousness no distinction remains between the individual and his

collective organization, the inner and the outer, the substance and the spirit, 'bridge [in built] between the idea and imagination and the world of facts, between the vision and the force, which makes realisation possible' (Aurobindo, 1997, HC: 41). This is the basis for a sociology not only non-distinct from spirituality, but wholly characterized, coloured and defined by spiritual concerns.

At this moment, the absolute unification of self (as mind, life and body), and society (as the means by which we communally express, and mould, our identities), together with the play of the Supramental, reimagines both the potential of man and society as non-complete entities and, ultimately, as transitional moments in a wider trajectory. The Nationalism of Aurobindo thus comes to advocate not an 'India for the sake of herself', but an 'India for the sake of the world' and the Integral or *purna yoga* of Aurobindo becomes 'the art of bringing forth into our operation, in our life and society, the integral and all-integrating consciousness of *supermind*' (Chaudhuri, 2013:175).

This forms a second dimension of Aurobindo's "Divine Anarchy" as the sublimation of the social to the spiritual: reimagining the social as the shell, or current habitation of the spiritual. However since, as we saw, this is not a denigration of the social, but rather a recognition of its identity with the Spirit: as the necessary vehicle for it to be unveiled in collective human form. Herein there is thus the requirement not only to privilege the individual as the content of society, but also a recognition of the role of the social continent in both shaping its individual members, and allowing them the substance and instrumentation to further shape themselves. The society thus becomes the necessary canvas for individuals to self-limit and discover themselves

anew. The distinction herein ceases between content and continent, individual and society.

**vii) Freedom and Equality: *The Ideal of Human Unity.***

The last of Chaudhuri's points most explicitly concerns the future of all mankind, and questions the possibility of establishing world unity whilst at once maintaining the dignity and individuality of all. As Chaudhuri accounts, for Aurobindo, social history is a history of successive attempts, on the one hand, to unify individuals and, on the other, to afford them freedom. These are often seen as conflicting requirements. For instance, military and religious ideologies attempted to impose order on individuals through proposing unified systems of beliefs. However, for Aurobindo, a diversity of belief and expression is 'ingrained in the human spirit' (Chaudhuri, 2013:177), and to curtail this diversity is to impose limitations on the human spirit. Herein politics and religion become aligned in their twin potential to dogmatise, or to impose as ultimate,

[an] imperfect human image of the absolute truth... [when] each can at best enjoy a relative measure of validity depending on the socio-political and cultural conditions prevailing in a given country (Chaudhuri, 2013: 177).

The problem here, to reiterate Aurobindo's critique of Vedantic interpretation, rests not with the formulation of a system of truth, but with its fixity and universalization. Thus, the political or religious "truth", in his view, requires remaking according to the socio-historical circumstances in which it operates. There can be no one size fits all, and to enforce truth in such a way would be to demean the individuals subjected to it.

*Aurobindo's Ideal of Human Unity* approaches the problem from a historical perspective, illustrating how collectives throughout cultural history have comprised distinct social constellations each echoing a similar cycle of birth (creation); mechanization and destruction, or, in other words; 1) a vibrancy of ideals inspiring change, 2) the solidification and standardization of the ideals in social convention, 3) the destruction of convention to make way for new ideas. From the material of this very deconstruction,

A new idea with another turn of the logical machine revolts against it and breaks up its machinery, but only to substitute in the end another mechanical system, another credo, formula and practice (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU: 577).

This constant cycle of renewal is on one level necessary to the preservation of current society. However, Aurobindo's claim is that we might step outside this reoccurring pattern through the foundation of a more enduring human unity of ideal/spirit and form/convention, and of individual and society. Even religious bodies, seemingly the most spiritualized means possible of unifying people, eventually act to ritualize, mentalize and ultimately homogenise and, in so doing, crush human spirit. Thus, Aurobindo questions how one might find a means beyond the dialectic of the oppositional mind and its oppositional social formations:

The question is whether there is not somewhere a principle of unity in diversity by which this method of action and reaction, creation and destruction, realisation and relapse cannot be, if not altogether avoided, yet mitigated in its action and led to a more serene and harmonious working (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU: 522).

Thus, for Aurobindo there is great potential latent within the human, but since humanity currently operates at this separative level of mind, societies have tended to

experience conflict: the oscillation of an apparent dichotomy rather than its identity. Aurobindo claims that, although humanity seemingly moves towards a unity of mechanic, or outward, form - evidenced by moves to globalization of rights, politics and economics - true unity might only be achieved through the realization of a common spirituality, or “group soul”. Aurobindo is clear that this group soul would not compromise the heterogeneity of individuals but rather be a unity to aid the diversity of their mutual flourishing.

The singular freedom and the unified equality are for Aurobindo not opposing terms and, as he points out, the faculties of body and life are adept at creating “vital unities” which retain each side of the dichotomy, such as those between a family or tribe/clan which grow out of essential needs, such as the need for protection and consistent food. The nation-state however, is deemed to arise from secondary need: ‘a geographical and historical necessity’ (Aurobindo, 1997, IOHU: 554), and thus, impelled by a less vital requirement, comes to rely on a constructive unity compelled by the mental faculties and the exertion of external force and machinery to hold it together. In recapitulation here, not just of his text *The Human Cycle*, but also his philosophical and literary texts, Aurobindo is again problematizing the move away from the *symbolic*, or the multivocal unity of expression and outer form, to a sole emphasis on the limited construct of the Mental.

The move towards World Unity that Aurobindo proposes in this work, and further implies within his philosophy, lacks not only this vital need but even its geographic necessity: at present being compelled only by the more tenuous ‘economic, political’ needs. How might collective cohesion be maintained in such a unity? How might the individual maintain his freedom of self-expression within its systematism? Here the

dichotomous thought Aurobindo seeks to overcome - though represented by the opposition between individual and society, the community and nation, the nation and Internationalism - is in essence between the principles of liberty and equality, and their mutual flourishing. As Aurobindo describes:

When the ego claims liberty, it arrives at competitive individualism. When it asserts equality, it arrives first at strife, then at an attempt to ignore the variations of Nature, and, as the sole way of doing that successfully, it constructs an artificial and machine-made society. A society that pursues liberty as its ideal is unable to achieve equality; a society that aims at equality will be obliged to sacrifice liberty (Aurobindo, 1997, IOHU: 570).

From an “egoic perspective” it would seem that humanity is in a bind: with an apparent and essential incompatibility between the affirmation of the individual and his freedom, or the affirmation of social order and its cohesion. This view has been popularised and accepted through works like Garrett Hardin’s *The Tragedy of the Commons* (1968), which dichotomises society’s choice between freedom and order:

Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons. Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all (Hardin, 1968: 1243-1248).

In other words, for Hardin, individual freedom is equal to social ruin. However, in Aurobindo’s view - and increasingly echoed by those within the Commons Movement - it is possible to move beyond, not only the egoism of individuals but also the egoism of social aggregates, in order to find a basis for unity beyond these oppositions. As within Aurobindo’s metaphysics, the individual and the universal principle do not fundamentally differ, but are revealed as stages within the same process. This is not to say that egoism, and the mental stage of operation is not capable of unities beyond itself, these faculties are in fact great tools for a constructive unification, but they are not adequate tools for realizing an essential unity, i.e. the true identity of Nature and

Spirit. For Aurobindo the solution cannot wholly be brought about by the social or political mechanisms of Mind's egoism, but requires a transition to a higher phenomenology and its correspondent way of being. Following Auguste Comte, this higher phenomenology he terms "The Religion of Humanity." Aurobindo describes the "Religion of Humanity" thus:

The fundamental idea is that mankind is the godhead to be worshipped and served by man and that the respect, the service, the progress of the human being and human life are the chief duty and the chief aim of the human spirit (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU: 565).

Here we have a merging of the typical distinction between mankind and God, not as a desacrilisation of the Divine, but rather in his eyes, as a resacrilisation of the terrestrial. Aurobindo questions the method by which this "Religion of Humanity" could bring about its aim, i.e. the formulation of a world unity. He highlights two tendencies within nature that might be harnessed to determine the form through which this end might come about. The first is 'the increasing closeness of common interests' (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU: 571) or inclusivism, and the second, 'the force of common uniting sentiment' i.e. through federation or union (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU: 572).

Followed to its logical conclusion, the first tendency would bring about 'a centralised World-State' – a mechanized unification around a limited number of common principles. Although appearing externally strong through its simplicity of structure and interests, it would act to emulate the larger aggregates of nations of kingdoms, wherein there becomes a tendency towards centralization (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU: 283). This concentration of capital would firstly deny vitality and cultural life to a majority of the population, and secondly render the social life too organized, lacking

the freedom and spontaneity required for individual and small communities to flourish. This amounts to a sacrifice of the population, for the sake of the social order.

The second tendency, however, would bring about a looser world-union which may be either a close federation or a simple confederacy of the peoples for the common ends of mankind' (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU: 574). This would allow for human difference, becoming a unity of cultural expressions, philosophies, languages, technologies and a state wherein diversity might be regarded less an impediment to human growth and more its byproduct: 'a fruit of increasingly conscious mind' (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU: 291). Aurobindo sees this latter tendency of nature as the principle most in line with the future constellations his spiritual project aims to propagate, as it 'gives sufficient scope for the principle of variation which is necessary for the free play of life and the healthy progress of the race' (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU: 574).

This celebration of individual and cultural history can be seen to foreground many of the postmodern, postcolonial and post-structural ideas of today. Aurobindo recognizes the fluid, indeterminate nature of all grand structures and schemas – even his own – by leaving them open to re-definition and re-construction according to the imagination of the future. As a forest might compromise its resilience in its omission of floral diversity, so for Aurobindo might any suppression of individuality face its 'day of change or destruction under the irresistible impulsion of progressing Nature' (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU: 285).

Such Internationalism would thus not stand in contradistinction to the free determination of nation states, but rather see diversity as strengthening its own

project. Thus, Aurobindo defines his vision against large-scale centralization and homogenization, since this weakens and reduces the potential threads in humanity's development. Rather he promotes a unity through 'free inner variation' and a 'freely varied outer self-expression', which would be the basis for a higher type of human existence. This would be a unity beyond the mappings of the external and the internal worlds of peoples and rather a mutuality based upon

interesting the peoples in each other's art, culture, religion, ideas and...  
breaking down at many points the prejudice, arrogance and exclusiveness of  
the old nationalistic sentiment (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU:551).

Here difference would be recast as an essential ingredient for the mutual appreciation of the Other: with the dichotomy of *égalité* and *liberté*, subsumed in the realization of *fraternité*. As Banerji points out, the dichotomy here becomes a dialogue: the terms of nation and individual, soul and state cease to be cast in static opposition and come to recognise one another as mutual evolving entities, which may serve to mutually enlighten one another. Each term cannot be thought of except in relation to essentially identical but sensibly unique "others" in a world context (Banerji, 2013).

When it strives for brotherhood, it is founding that equal freedom of self-development on a common aim, a common life, a unity of mind and feeling founded upon the recognition of this inner spiritual unity. These three things are in fact the nature of the soul; for freedom, equality, unity, are the eternal attributes of the Spirit (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU: 570).

Thus, this external collective unity appears to come about through an apparent inversion of its aim, i.e through recognition of interior, individual uniqueness. In other words, it is by becoming more wholly oneself, in the recognition of a subjectivity beyond egoism, that one might create, or rather uncover, the conditions

for universal unity. Aurobindo's system requires a growing number of people to realize this truth in order that a critical mass that might create a tipping point in human destiny,

when the mind of man is ready to escape from its mechanical bent, — perhaps when it finds that its mechanical solutions are all temporary and disappointing, — the truth of the Spirit may step in and lead humanity to the path of its highest possible happiness and perfection (Aurobindo, 1997, *IoHU*: 578).

As homology was drawn between the history of socio-psychological form and the evolution of the individual in the prior section, so homology between nations and individuals might be drawn here. Like individuals, nations were, in Aurobindo's view, capable of being either egoistic and self-serving or "soul-driven" and designed to serve higher ends. In the same way as an individual might transcend the ego and the constructive distinctions of its instrumentation (the mind), so too might the nation transcend the divisive reduction of equality and liberty, inherent to its limited conception and mechanization of "self".

The idea of the "nation soul" was originally a Western construct and, in Banerji's eyes both Aurobindo and Vivekananda were undoubtedly familiar with this European idea. Banerji argues that 'the invocation of this category [by the two] can... be seen as a strategic subversion of the Enlightenment discourse by inserting a neo-Vedāntic spiritual content into it' (Banerji, 2013). For Aurobindo the enlightenment represented an earlier formulation of apparent "liberation", through imposing its own dogma on individuals and nations, but its ideals can be re-cast and re-defined according to the time and traditions of a new context. In this sense, Aurobindo's "nation soul" provides a correction and subversion of the attempt to construct unity via "Western mechanical" means and instead a re-construction with its foundation in

“Indian spiritual” means. Thus, the dichotomy is resolved along Indian lines, with ‘our true development through a moralised and even spiritualised humanity united in its inner and not only in its outward life and body’ (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU: 303),

Yet is brotherhood the real key to the triple gospel of the idea of humanity. The union of liberty and equality can only be achieved by the power of human brotherhood and it cannot be founded on anything else. But brotherhood exists only in the soul and by the soul; it can exist by nothing else. For this brotherhood is not a matter either of physical kinship or of vital association or of intellectual agreement. When the soul claims freedom, it is the freedom of its self-development, the self-development of the divine in man in all his being. When it claims equality, what it is claiming is that freedom equally for all and the recognition of the same soul, the same godhead in all human beings. When it strives for brotherhood, it is founding that equal freedom of self-development on a common aim, a common life, a unity of mind and feeling founded upon the recognition of this inner spiritual unity (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU: 570).

This then becomes an external unity based upon the realization of inner, spiritual truth, which, since defined by an identity of inner rather than outward formulation, can simultaneously promote equality and liberty of its members without compromise. The “Religion of Humanity”, or federation for the common aims of mankind, thus becomes the most desirable aspiration, since it allows ‘sufficient scope for the principle of variation which is necessary for the free play of life’ (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU: 574). As Nature is recast as the *lila*, or play of the Divine, so the diversity of outward form inherent to the development of human societies is revisioned, less as a challenge or opposition to the unity and equality of the group soul, but rather as its free expression, which might further realize itself in this diversity of play.

Herein lies Chaudhuri’s resolution to the third dichotomy, which realizes the unity of this subsidiary dichotomy, in a manner non-distinct from the Master dichotomy between Nature and Spirit. The dichotomy is resolved in a move beyond Mind, into

*Supermind*, which might recognize the pragmatic, or “existential” distinction between the two terms (individual or national expression and international order), without compromising the greater essential unity between them. It is only through the individual, through his realization of *Supermind*, that this integration, and the basis for unified human relations may come about: ‘it is the spiritual evolution of the individual which must underlie all human unity if it is to be a unity that facilitates the equal and free development of all’ (Chimni, 2013:137).

The capacity of the *Supermind* may see itself comprehensively as Ultimate superconscient Spirit, and in its self limited form, as the creative apprehensions in Nature’s diversity, thus, ‘the world in which we live is not a dichotomy of Nature and Spirit but rather a Nature-Spirit continuum’ (Chaudhuri, 2013:179). In the same vein:

the total being of man is not a dichotomy of matter and mind nor a dualism of flesh and soul, but a body-mind-soul continuum. His being-in-the-world and his non-temporal of oneness with Being are inseparable aspects of his total reality (Chaudhuri, 2013:179).

Herein spiritual realization does not necessitate withdrawal from the physical, but finds itself within man’s very creative play in the terrestrial domain. As Reddy points out, herein the diversity of mankind might be conceived as ‘the conscious dialogue of Nature with itself’ (V.M. Reddy, 1997: 207). Thus, the apparent distinction of individuals becomes evidence of the ability of spirit to realize greater forms of self, in the process of dispersion and interaction in substance. The recognition of this essential non-distinction between the physical and the spiritual creates the possibility for the transmutation of Nature in the Divine. This is referred to as the

*supramental*<sup>10</sup> realization, or the *Overmind* realization, that clears the way, at least conceptually, for this material transmergence to be made manifest: ‘now that Aurobindo and the Mother have brought down the supramental, the next step is that of transformation’ (V.M. Reddy, 1997:62).

According to Chimni (2013), for Aurobindo, spirituality is the necessary foundation of any potential human unity, and the only way in which such collectivities might ‘decolonise International relations.’ This spiritual interiority would eschew the tendency of the nation and the individual towards “objective egoism” (Chimni, 2013: 131), in the face of the greater “spiritual” truth of a coming subjective age. In other words, Aurobindo placed the internal consciousness, or the spiritual unity, as primary: the basis for all manifestation, and the outer mechanization or material diversity as secondary. In so doing Aurobindo reconstructed, at least symbolically, a form of “Internationalism” in “Indian” terms, building upon the preoccupations of the *East* though utilizing the foci of the West in subsidiary means. The utility of this broadening of Integralism to become increasingly global in form, is affirmed by Chaudhuri, who suggests that

It is only on the strength of a global perspective inspired by Integral Being-awareness that the conflicting national interests can be gracefully subordinated to the collective good of all mankind. The secret of Aurobindo’s yoga lies in man’s conscious cooperation with the creative energy of Being toward the integral transformation of his total being, including the social and global dimension (Chaudhuri, 2013:178).

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<sup>10</sup> Although apparently utilizing the language of “Supermind”, the “supramental” refers in Aurobindo’s works to higher conceptions of the mind – and thus remains within the lower hemisphere of manifestation; a mode wherein conception of identity might be symbolic but not ultimate.

Within each of these works, Aurobindo proposes a “spiritual religion of humanity,” which might communally come to, ‘the growing realization that there is a secret spirit, a divine reality, in which we are all one... and the human beings are the means by which it will progressively realize itself here’ (Aurobindo, HC in Chimni, 2013:143). This spiritual religion, as alluded to, does not treat the individual as a term to transcend the terrestrial, social world, but this becomes a project that incorporates this world, that, ‘emphasizes socio-historical perfection in addition to personal liberation’ (McDermott, 2013:293). Similarly, outer social and political unity becomes, ‘only worth pursuing in so far as it provides a means and a framework for a better, richer, more happy and puissant individual and collective life’ (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU: 281). The individual is the centre for the unveiling of the universal and transcendent self; rather than through submission to the group, the group’s strength relies on the free expression of the individuals it comprises.

However, at the same moment, the individual does not merely detach from the group but continuously utilizes the group’s archive of *shastra*: principles, texts, ideas and guidelines, as a means for its own re-making. This entails that even in the apparent “anarchy” the other poles of the Hindu trinity are maintained: there is a preservation of the past form, even though it might find re-working and new creation in the present,

even in dealing with its new problems it [the individual] works upon past experience and therefore upon past motives and analogies. Even when it seizes on new ideas, it goes to the past for the form it gives to them. Behind the apparent changes of the most radical revolutions we see this unavoidable principle of continuity surviving in the heart of the new order (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU: 575).

*The Ideal of Human Unity* not only recognizes this simultaneity between the “past” and “future”, but also, and in corollary fashion, a simultaneity of “nation” and “individual”; “equality and liberty”; free national expression and world unity. Each of these partial truths, recapitulating Aurobindo’s transcreation of Vedantic metaphysics, finds its greater place and role within Aurobindo’s concept of synthetic Internationalism: ‘Internationalism is the attempt of the human mind and life to grow out of the national idea and form and even in a way to destroy it in the interest of the larger synthesis of mankind (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU, 548). Here the move to the International, at once upholds the partial truths of the “individual”, the “universal” and “transcendent” as non-contradictory moments of the same trajectory.

Although he seeks to establish the social constellation suitable for both an individual perfection and a world unity, this, as with all of his ideals, is not seen in any stable ultimate sense, but rather always in a relative and progressive sense ‘(as) the inevitable aim of nature’ (Aurobindo, 1997, HC: 287). Nature is the term that appears to order and pattern the realization of the future.

This simultaneous avowal of Nature and Spirit is the key way in which Aurobindo’s work might be distinct from the Hegelianism to which he is often compared. Although both thinkers share a common view of history as an unfolding drive towards synthesis, for Hegel this is a synthesis precipitated by rationality and as such possesses a directionality determined by thought. As Banerji describes Hegel’s view, ‘Rationality is immanent in Matter and “evolves” into more conscious forms of itself through time. Human history is marked by this evolution’ (Banerji, 2013).

However, for Aurobindo, Spirit does not merely supervene upon Nature but essentially *is* Nature. Nature is thus both incorporated into Aurobindo's system and identified, even at its most subconscious levels, with the highest term in his system. The multitude of formations that nature might assume in no way compromises the Spirit which continuously ungirds the entire system. Further, for Aurobindo, the rationality of humanity becomes merely a layer in the unfolding of Nature over time, and a progressive revealing/unveiling of the secret Spirit implicit within it. Therefore, in Aurobindo's system, mankind is integrated not only within his future, his inevitable transitional grasping towards Overmind and eventually infinite Supermind, but also within his origins – a nature non-distinct from Spirit – from which he has sprung. Aurobindo's view of mankind should be studied, according to Chattopadhyaya, as a poise of Being at once emerging from the subconscious nature and possessing the superconscious nature within him:

Placed in between the natural base and spiritual destiny, man as a phenomenon should be studied with reference what is behind him and particularly to what lies ahead of him (Chattopadhyaya, 1988:12).

Within Aurobindo's understanding of becoming, there are no completely new forms in the present, or proposed future, but rather a re-construction, or mimesis, of the past. Therefore, Nature is never "overcome," but rather merged and developed into greater complexities of form in the course of Becoming. This is no different for the development of conceptual understanding. Concepts like the "Religion of Humanity," which is proposed as a future aspiration, itself has a history, albeit one limited to an instrumentation of mental formulation: it has remained a product of the *Individualistic age*. For Aurobindo, intellectuality does not get to the centre of man's being (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU: 568), but rather 'addresse[s] itself more to the mind

and emotion of humanity and not to the inner being of man' (A. Reddy, 1997: 203).

Although such ideals stimulated the growth of philanthropy and democracy, the spiritual formation proper to the *subjective age* would rework even the division between institution and individual, and indeed, individual and individual, that such practices imply. In the proposed *subjective age*, no other aggregate, either nation or empire, would be held above the individual. Only those aggregates and institutions that support the further development of the individual and his liberation from social and mental bondage would prosper. Although the term "subjective" suggests a way of knowing in distinction to an object, i.e. the world, Aurobindo is clear that the "Religion of Humanity" would comprise not only a doxology, but also,

a discipline and a way of salvation in accordance with this religion, that is to say, a means by which it can be developed by each man within himself, so that it may be developed in the life of the race (Aurobindo, 1997, IoHU: 577-8).

Aurobindo's "sociology", even at the level of world unity, recognizes social form, but ultimately begins and ends strictly with the individual. The social aggregate operates merely as the substance and instrumentation, or the "laboratory," for human development to be tested through its proposed collective and concrete expression. The social might thus come to represent the altering manifestation of human becoming in time. In this way society can start to look like its own text- a means for individual re-formulation through its own radical re-writing.

This concludes the final dimension of the divine anarchy, which, demands, firstly, an interiority recognizing a deeper Self beyond the limited mental construct of ego. This individuality, echoing the capacity of the *Supermind*, allows for a non-distinction between order and freedom, internal and external, seeing each of these as undergirded by a greater encompassing capacity that may utilize each mode. This

allows for a creative diversity of individual and national expression, without affecting their unity in the International. Further this free expression and mutual appreciation might become a dialogue of enrichment, with the diversity of art, religion and culture forming the basis of a "Religion of Humanity" through a "worship" of the Spirit revealing itself through the subjects of time. This free expression in the group soul might inspire the basis of a World unity in the Spiritual.

**viii) East and West, Passive and Active: the relationship between Aurobindo and the Mother.**

I now come to a further, more contentious, dichotomy unresolvable through sole allusion to text: that between Aurobindo and the Mother. In this section I argue that, symbolically speaking, the dualism between Aurobindo and the Mother might be unified in the project of Auroville. The three terms, respectively, can be considered a symbolic microcosm, recapitulating the three terms of the creative triad, namely: the involutionary process of Being; the evolutionary potential of Becoming; and the substance for this Becoming and Being to find a progressively merged identity. In other words, each might be said to represent, respectively, the subject, activity and object of the divine process: the passive supercosmic freedom; the active supermind's "realisation"; and the integrating supraphysical manifestation. The three "truths" of *The Life Divine* become symbolically embodied thus: He the freedom, She the creativity, Auroville the unique formation. As Sethna and Mohanty clarify:

Through the transcendent mother and by her creativity the whole universe has taken birth... the Mother came a Westerner but with the eternal Indian within her... and joined forces with Sri Aurobindo to complete by her Indianised West his Westernised India... [Aurobindo] saw in her the Shakti that would make his Yoga an organised starting point of a new chapter of earth's history (Sethna, 1992:72-78).

The task of giving a concrete form to Sri Aurobindo's vision was entrusted to the Mother. The creation of a new world, a new humanity, a new society expressing and embodying the new consciousness is the work she has undertaken. The Ashram founded and built by the Mother was the first step towards the accomplishment of this goal. The project of Auroville is the next step, more exterior, which seeks to widen the base of this attempt to establish harmony between soul and body, spirit and nature, heaven and earth, in the collective life of mankind (Mother 1969 in Mohanty, 2004: 4).

The Mother described the aspiration of the community as the realisation of human unity based on the teaching of Aurobindo (Alfassa, 1980:221). This is an allusion to Aurobindo's work *The Ideal of Human Unity*, which appeared serially from 1915-1918 in the journal *Arya*.

K.D. Sethna takes the overwriting of the Mother as purely an echo and re-statement of Aurobindo's original ideals, in his claim that the Mother and Aurobindo share '(the) same yogic process towards an identical goal of spiritual manifestation' (Sethna, 2003: 1). However, each admittedly differs according to their means of expression, which is tempered by their respective backgrounds and personalities. In this vein, the establishment of Auroville (1968) could be seen less as a move of difference from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram - which had at this point been running for over 40 years (foundation, November 1926) - and rather a sign of its development. As Anu, one of my Aurovilian respondents emphasizes, although the ashram came first, in the end what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother wanted,

was to bring these teachings to the world, as a kind of everyman project. The Mother was clear that once contact was made with this consciousness 'the first thing [was] to translate that into a material project, as something like an ideal type, which would then have repercussions in the world (Anu, 2013).

Others, nevertheless, are more critical, pointing towards the cultish status of both the Mother and the kind of collectives she propagated. The use of Aurobindo for critical study and inspiration becomes, in the eyes of some, tainted, or at least misinterpreted in the later 'unquestioning obedience to sweet Mother's interpretations' (Goldman, 2012: 30). Such criticisms are focused less on the content of the teachings and more the approach of followers, which at this point seems to edge towards devotional: a surrender of self to teaching, rather than its active, critical re-interpretation.

For some the disjuncture comes less between the ideologies of Aurobindo and the Mother, and more in the institutionalization of their teaching, formally in the Ashram, and latterly, in Auroville. Satprem, a key influence in early Auroville, and transcriber of the Mother's *Agenda*, contended that in the Ashram the material creations of "Aurobindoism" became more important than the spirit and aims of Aurobindo and the Mother (Lorenzo, 1999: 214). Auroville was proposed as the present Spirit of Aurobindo and the Mother's aims, and the ashram an outdated form which the movement had evolved beyond. Auroville too, many argue, lost its way. According to Lorenzo, Navajata of the ashram saw the charter, not as rules and prescriptions but as 'symbolic only' (Lorenzo, 1999: 209). This entails that the ashram is understandably uneasy with the contradictory nature of its very existence and are troubled by the fact that Aurovilians would use it as a constitution.

Within Auroville itself, an obvious hierarchy of labour has developed, with relatively poor villagers taking on the cleaning and heavy labour jobs, whilst richer Indians and Westerners have the financial acumen to undertake work of their choice. For a community aimed at the abolition of money and the unity of East and West, it can at times look more like a Neo-Colonialist outpost. Additionally, for all its progressive

rhetoric, as Devine found in her study of Auroville youth, the community is not immune to its own dogmatization:

“The old won’t let go, they won’t let the youth make their mistakes... We have gone through this process and the stubborn dogmatic attitudes stay... Even if you have six months training [to join an influential committee], they dogmatize you; if you don’t understand like them, you’re out!” (Respondent in Devine, 2010: 3).

For such reasons, Aurobindo scholars have often sought to distance themselves and their own study from, at times, the institution of the ashram and, more frequently, the figure of the Mother and Auroville. However, this too could amount to purism and an artificial isolation of ideas from praxis – precisely what Aurobindo’s texts work to move beyond. This thesis is testament to the belief that, in order to take Aurobindo seriously, he must not be considered in a vacuum, but examined through the figures and ideas that constitute a big part of his life and vision.

Those ardent followers of Aurobindo, who yet critique the Mother, are faced with a problem of Aurobindo’s own recognition of her as the true worldly representative of his teachings. Aurobindo stressed the complete inseparability of the identity of himself and the Mother to argue ‘if one is not open to the Mother it means that one is not really open to Sri Aurobindo’ (Aurobindo, 1972, OH: 458). The institutional responsibilities, not only for Auroville, but also for the Ashram, came to be overseen by the Mother. This entailed that the merging of the two figures, and their respective ideas and praxis, was gradual but ultimately definitive.

Although the Mother had accompanied Aurobindo since 1920, it was only in 1926 that her presence came to move gradually to the forefront. During this year, Aurobindo began to refer to her as *Mirra Devi* or Mother (to which she came to be

referred to by followers thereafter). This culminated in August of 1926, or the “Day of *Siddhi*”, when complete authority over the Sri Aurobindo Ashram was passed over to the Mother (Minor, 1999:39). The day of *Siddhi* describes the event of Aurobindo’s realization of the *Overmind*, his attaining of a higher state of knowing. This state was not only understood as an epistemic realization but a realization which needed also to be both vitally experienced and subsequently to be “brought down” to find manifestation in the human plane. It was thought that such revelations created the potential for both the worldly recognition and manifestation of higher order expressions within the temporal sphere. This event was the culmination an intense period of spiritual work, demanding Aurobindo’s separation from the movement. From this moment, Aurobindo was seen by followers and ashramites on only three occasions per year, known as *Darshan* days. This gradual isolation from the movement entailed that adherents’ focus came to centre more and more on the Mother (Minor, 1999:37).

The status of the Mother was not, however, one of clear successor to Aurobindo’s teaching, but rather that of the potential medium and expression of these teachings: an active interface between himself and the social world. As the Mother describes (and as they are together purported to say): ‘without him I do not exist, without her I am not made manifest’. Aurobindo states:

The Mother and myself stand for the same Power in two forms – so the perception in the dream was perfectly logical. Ishwara-Shakti, Purusha-Prakriti are only the two sides of the one Divine (Brahman) (Aurobindo, 1972, OH: 457).

In other words, the Mother becomes symbolically cast as an active capacity of Aurobindo, as a self and spirituality non-distinct from his own. This can be

understood conceptually through Aurobindo's own philosophical system. For instance, as described in the realisations recounted in chapter one of this thesis, Aurobindo moves from an experience of the passive Divine, towards a realization of the active, before coming to realize the identity of the two, as witness and actor, and the need for their merging.

However, symbolically speaking the nature of the Mother's insights appear, perhaps necessarily, to stand several steps behind Aurobindo's spiritual realization. She describes a poignant exchange between herself and Aurobindo, wherein she relates to Aurobindo an insight which he at first applauded, before alluding to its possible development, entailing a further shift in perspective (or even paradigm), which questioned her proposed course of action:

[Aurobindo's purported words] It will be a great success but it is an Overmind creation, and it is not success that we want; we want to establish the Supermind on earth. One must know how to renounce immediate success in order to create the new world, the supramental world (Alfassa, 2004:149).

In this dialogue, the Mother forsakes her own insight, and its apparently inevitable success, in order to invite the possibility of a greater "truth" beyond the current pragmatic comprehension. The Mother's apparent surrender to Aurobindo, as she claims, appears in itself transformative. This moment is arguably reflective of that illustrated in the Gita: a surrender of the fruit of action, rather than a renunciation of the active self. Like Arjuna, the Mother places her acts in the lap of a higher insight than herself, in order to bring forth, and re-synthesise, its insights with her active present. As the Mother claims,

Sri Aurobindo and myself are one and the same consciousness, one and the same person. Only, when this force or this presence, which is the same, passes

through your individual consciousness, it puts on a form, an appearance which differs according to your temperament, your aspiration, your need, the particular turn of your being. Your individual consciousness is like a filter, a pointer, if I may say so; it makes a choice and fixes one possibility out of the infinity of divine possibilities' (Alfassa, 2004b: 75).

Here the Mother aligns herself not only with the consciousness of Aurobindo, but also, arguably, with his method. In recapitulation of the concurrent tendencies outlined within his texts, a dialogue is presented between two terms: firstly, an essential infinite, in this case, a "Force" or a "presence", "which is the same", and secondly, an existential finite, or an "individual consciousness", "a form", which necessarily limits and conditions the expressions carried forward. Thus, not only does the Mother appear to argue for her own mergence with the teachings of Aurobindo, but also the possibility, or rather necessity, for followers to in turn actively merge and re-interpret, or re-translate, this teaching.

As Bolle (1971) argues, this alignment of the Mother and Aurobindo's relationship is in many ways a 'recapitulation of the tantric union wherein *Prakrti* could be identified with the Supreme *Shakti* and where *nirvana* and *samsara*, *mukti* and *bukhti* could be homologized in the symbolism' (Bolle, 1971: 88). At this moment, even the most mundane levels of action and existence come also to find sacred status.

According to Stoeber (2013) '[t]antra typically stresses the empowerment of the body in the movement to' deification' (Stoeber, 2013:254), a tendency that is evidenced within the ideas of both Aurobindo and the Mother. Indeed, within Aurobindo's *Synthesis of Yoga*, the tantric was conceived as the highest current synthesis with the progressive syntheses of yogic history:

We observe, first, that there still exists in India a remarkable Yogic system which is in its nature synthetical and starts from a great central principle of

Nature, a great dynamic force of Nature (Aurobindo, SOY, 1990: 42).

This characterisation sets Aurobindo apart from a sole alignment and re-working of the Vedantic tradition, a school that Aurobindo characterizes through its preoccupation with *jnana*, knowledge, consciousness, and the Purusha aspect of the Samkhyaic dualism. The Tantric, on the other hand, draws emphasis to the other aspects of terrestrial existence, i.e. 'Prakriti, the Nature-Soul, the Energy, the Will-in-Power executive in the universe' (Aurobindo, SOY, 1990: 43).

Although Aurobindo is critical of elements of the Tantra, most particularly in the universalization of its partial truth, which, in his eyes, had entailed its obscuration and descent into an "occult mechanism," I argue that its influence provides the other important dimension to his work. For instance, once Aurobindo has established the mutual ability of the Superconscious Divine to persist in the Purusha element, as passive, all pervasive consciousness and, simultaneously, in the Prakriti element, as active, dispersed, self-limited conscious form, he recognizes the ability of the latter through a supraphysical ascent, or evolution, to recognize the essentiality of the former within itself:

in the Tantric method Shakti is all-important, becomes the key to the finding of spirit; in this synthesis spirit, soul is all-important, becomes the secret of the taking up of Shakti (Aurobindo, SOY, 1990: 612).

Stoeber highlights Aurobindo's tendency to emphasize Shaktism in his spirituality, 'through encouraging his devotees to work to become more and more open to supramental Reality and draw it into material consciousness' (Stoeber, 2013:257).

Also, the dual emphasis within Aurobindo's system on not only knowledge but active

and ‘embodied transformation’ (Stoeber, 2013: 258) marks his system in its progressive transcreation, to recapitulate the tantric ideals.

Further, in my view, it is not accidental that Mirra Alfassa is given the name of the Mother, with Mother India in the *tantric* system identified with the divine “female” *Shakti*. Aurobindo himself marks the correlation between the two, when he aligns the Mirra Alfassa with the “universal creatrix,” stating, ‘nothing can be done except through the force of the Mother’ (Aurobindo, 1975 in Stoeber, 2013:273).

This leads me to argue that the merged relationship between Aurobindo and the Mother comes to figuratively re-construct and synthesise the realisations of *Vedantic* knowledge and *Tantric* force, together becoming symbols of the “consciousness-force” or *Supermind* that is the pivotal term in Aurobindo’s metaphysics. In my view, it is also not accidental that the Mother takes up Aurobindo’s mantle at the moment of the alleged descent of the Overmind, since this is precisely the moment wherein the realizations of the higher realm must come to active recognition in the lower realm.

As Minor accounts,

Her [the Divine Mother’s] mission on Earth [Aurobindo] said is to prepare the lower consciousness by transforming it so it will be able to receive the supramental. She is thus, actually always at work in material nature, in the disciples’ souls, minds and bodies and in all of reality (Minor, 1999: 41).

In other words, the Mother becomes cast as the active material principle, the inherent ability for the spiritual heights to now find translation in the terrestrial, through the language of the Mind, Life and Body, in order to uplift and transform these limited capacities into a true Identity with their infinite source (the realization of Supermind). We might find further evidence for the nature of this relationship, and its

apparent merging, in Aurobindo and the Mother's own accounts. For instance, Aurobindo describes the Mother as,

a *Mahashakti* of this triple world of the ignorance [who] stands in an intermediate plane between the supramental light, the truth Life, the truth Creation, which has to be brought down here and this mounting ascending and descending hierarchy of planes of consciousness that like a double ladder lapses into the nescience of Matter and climbs back again thorough the flowering of life and soul and mind into the infinity of the Spirit. Determining all that shall be in this universe in the terrestrial evolution by what she sees and feels and pours from her, she stands there above the Gods and all her powers and personalities are put out in front of her for the action' (Aurobindo, 2011, TM: 30).

Here the Mother is clearly aligned with the active principle of *Supermind* within Aurobindo's philosophical system. She comes to represent an intermediary between the *Purusa* of the Divine Witness and the *Purusa* of the Divine Creation, as a *Purusa* of creative-action outpouring, or, in other words, the mediative capacity between ideal and manifestation, since the 'Divine becomes manifest only through the creative power of *Shakti*' (Stoeber, 2013:276). What is also emphasized in this account is a non-distinction of the *Purusa*, wherein the three apparently opposing formations of *Purusa* become re-understood as three poises, or three aspects of one unified entity. Thus, not only does Aurobindo present himself as non-distinct from the Mother, but she in turn is also depicted as non-distinct from her active creation, again as Stoeber makes explicit,

Aurobindo referred to the Divine Mother as "*The Ishwari Shakti*" insofar as she becomes a mediatrix between the eternal One: Ishvara and the Manifested many of the created universe (Stoeber, 2013:276).

The description of the Mother then becomes a "double ladder," which might both lapse into limited form in creation, and find itself in the all-pervasive superconscious.

Thus, the creative action of the subject, becomes not one of detached action of self on other, but rather an action of self on self. The becoming/transformation of the world in this account arguably comes to look more like a re-imagining, or a re-figuration of self rather than a unique, or substantially different, creation.

Whether Auroville might be afforded the status of the third *Purusa*, or potential vehicle for the eventual realization of the higher in the formations of the lower, is both an important and contentious question, and will be discussed later in this chapter and thesis. Stoeber for one, postulated that the energy of the Mother had in Auroville become “transferred” to the Matrimandir [literally translated as “The house of the Mother”], or the ‘soul of Auroville’ (Stoeber, 2013:277), emplotted in time and space so others might draw from it.

McDermott characterizes the Aurobindo Ashram as, ‘The fullest concrete expression of the historical implications of Aurobindo’s Integral yoga’, and Auroville, ‘the most ambitious’ expression of this yoga (McDermott, 2013: 293). Thus, a continuity is placed between the two, yet, and as is commonly posed through intellectual eyes, through elevation of Aurobindo’s status and the merging of the Mother into his narrative, rather than a consideration of the two as active dialogical agents in a unified process.

The Matrimandir is an interesting structure, symbolically, for a project that considers itself the manifestation of Aurobindo’s textual ideals. Clearly its existence at the heart of the community, and the point from which the important zones of Auroville emanate from, would appear to cement the Mother’s status at the centre of the community she wished to create. However, Aurovilians have tended to discuss this

structure in more general, figurative terms. Gille Guigon, an Aurovilian who explores the metaphorical level of Auroville in his work, *'Architecture and Symbol'* (June 2014), sees it important, however to make the distinction between the universal and the particular emanation of the Mother. As he points out:

Matrimandir is dedicated to the Universal Mother, a Presence or Being that has been experienced and worshiped, under different names, in most cultures of the world since time immemorial. The ancient Egyptians named her "Isis", the Incas "Pachamama", the Japanese "Kwannon", the Hindus "Aditi", the Catholics identify her with "Virgin Mary" ...Matrimandir isn't dedicated to any particular emanation or incarnation of the Mother (Guigan, 2014: 9).

Thus, the building might come to represent the emanation and realisation of the Divine in the material terrestrial, rather than necessarily operating as a devotional building to the Mother per se. Similarly, Sonja, a member of the Auroville Council describes the structure through the apparent merging of another dichotomy, between male and female, through this structure:

the symbol of the female cosmic energy force... all set to be more integral - and the Shakti in India is the manifesting force in the world and... in many platforms and hierarchy there are women at the helm... statistically little everywhere else (Sonja: 2013).

However, according to Dr. Karan Singh, former President of Auroville's International Advisory Board, the building also operates as a symbolic representation of Aurobindo's metaphysics, with, for instance:

"[the] walk up the [spiral] ramp [between second level and Chamber level] symbolis[ing] the ascent of human consciousness in an upward spiral, culminating in the Supramental vision, and the double helix can be seen to stand for the two channels - Ida and Pingala that enclose the fiery Kundalini Shakti, the spiritual power that pervades the universe and is located in potential form at the base of the human spine" (Guigon, 2012).

Herein Dr Karan Singh not only highlights a homology between the architectural and Aurobindo's philosophy, but also a homology between the architecture as the continent of the individual, and the individual body and power as content. It also brings together each of these positions, appearing to suggest a symbolic construction of the supraphysical, through a utilization of the terrestrial Becoming, represented by the Mother, and structurally recapitulating the philosophy of Being through building towards, or transcreating its "truths" in the substance of the terrestrial. This appears a clear parallel to the way in which Aurobindo describes the Mother,

There is one divine force that acts in the world and in the individual and is also beyond the individual and the universe. The Mother stands for all these, but she is working here in the body to bring down something not yet expressed in the material world so as to transform life here- it is so that you should regard her as the divine Shakti working for that purpose (Aurobindo, 2011, TM: 35).

However, the Mother was certainly not a blank slate or simple repository for Aurobindo's ideas, but rather had her own history and beliefs that impacted not only her interpretation of Integral teachings, but contributed to their very formation. As Aurobindo himself pointed out, and as shall be explored later in this chapter, his yoga was not a sole endeavour, but a joint creation between himself and the Mother. Rather than considering this purely as a statement of convenience, I argue for the existence of some, rather telling, crossovers between the background and ideologies of the two that might support this statement. I first move to an account of the Mother's history that might support this statement.

### **ix) The Mother and Sri Aurobindo - whose Sanatana Dharma is it anyway?**

Mirra Alfassa was born in 1878 in Paris. Her parents were of Sephardic Jewish origin, though neither practiced. Alfassa, however, was purportedly intrigued by religious and spiritual questions from a very early age. After studying at the Ecole des Beaux Arts she married fellow painter Henri Morisset and gave birth to a son, Andre Morisset, in 1898, before joining a group called the “Mouvement Cosmique”, which taught ‘a modernised Kabbalah’ (Heehs, 2011:224) in Tlemcen, Algeria. This came to have a decisive influence on the Mother’s subsequent spiritual development and her eventual appreciation of Aurobindo’s ideas. As S.L. Julich claims, aims, the Mother ‘remained rooted in her original Western Occult training, and can best be understood if this training... is seen, not as of merely passing interest, but as integral to her development (Julich, 2013: 80).

The Mouvement Cosmique was founded by Max Theon prior to his settling in Algeria; however further bibliographic knowledge of Theon is a little sketchy. He is purported to have been born Louis-Maximilian Bimstein on 5 August 1847 (Nahar, 1989: 50), and to have been of Polish, Russian or Ukrainian heritage (although there are also reports that he was Austrian), with a Hasidic or Kabbalic background. In his earlier days, he was the primary instructor for a group in England called the Hermetic Brotherhood (Heehs, 2011) that practised rituals of sacred sexuality. When the group was disbanded, Theon and his wife Una left for Algeria where they collaborated to form a body of their key teachings.

Una Theon had written extensively to compile teachings for a perennial philosophy, which she termed the “Universal Philosophy of Humanity”. The truth synthesis

inherent in this work utilized the findings of the Theons' travels and research, and found itself particularly influenced by the *I Ching* and the *Vedantic* teachings. According to the Mother, Theon is said to have known some Sanskrit and had a thorough knowledge of the *Rig-Veda* (Heehs, 2011: 252).

These ideas that were syncretized to formulate a system known as the 'cosmic tradition which Theon claimed... (predated) the *Cabala* and the *Vedas*' (Alfassa, 1978: 219). This emphasis on tradition has led Nahar to relate the group to Aurobindo's own aim, as cited in the *Secret of the Veda*, to go back to the 'wisdom of a prehistoric humanity' (Aurobindo, 1998, SoV: 191). Indeed, according to Nahar, the Mother claims that the two shared the same knowledge:

The other tradition, which Theon said was the origin of *Cabala* — he said both the *Cabala* and the *Vedas* originated from it — also held the same concept of divine life and a divine world as Sri Aurobindo: that the summit of evolution would be the divinization of everything objectified, along with an unbroken progression from that moment on... So personally, I am convinced that there was, in fact, a Tradition prior to these two traditions, and which contained a knowledge very close to an integral knowledge. For a fact, there is a similitude in the experiences. When I came here and expressed to Sri Aurobindo certain things I knew from an occult standpoint, he always told me that they were in conformity with the *Vedic* tradition. As for certain occult practices, he told me that they were fully *Tantric*. At that time, I knew nothing, absolutely nothing of the *Veda* or the *Tantra* (the Mother in Nahar, 1989:65-67).

Thus, it appears that the Mother was led to Aurobindo's teaching through an engagement with ideas appropriated from perhaps a comparable tradition, although undeniably re-worked. Aurobindo, although rooted in the Indian tradition, himself shared similar Universalist views, with a comparable wish to synthesize and translate the wisdom of old into the language of today. As I will demonstrate below, there are many other points of convergence between the work of Max Theon and Aurobindo's

tradition, not only, as one might expect, in the ideas of the Mother and Auroville, but also within the texts of Aurobindo himself.

The *Mouvement Cosmique* upheld principles reminiscent of the Indian *Vedantic* tradition, such as the idea of the two in the one, the divine masculine and feminine principle. For example, a key axiom of the tradition is ‘the pathetic union of the active and the passive, the divine masculine and feminine principle’ (Heehs, 2011:226). This has similarities to Aurobindo’s typical invocation, and subsequent integration, of the Samkhyaic dualism between *Purusha* and *Prakriti* (the universal witness and the universal activity). However, the group also shared with Aurobindo less typically Indian ideas, such as the ‘prioritisation of the individual in evolutionary accounts’ (Heehs, 2011:226). This casts the *Mouvement Cosmique* less as a group purely appropriating Indian ideas, but, and comparable to the approach of Aurobindo, a group integrating these ideas with those from Western science (most notably the concept of Evolution). According to Heehs, the early Kabbalah and the Zohar upheld that ‘man is the perfecting agent of the cosmos’ (Heehs, 2011: 232). This idea not only recapitulates Aurobindo’s ideas of man as the conscient agent within Nature, but also the reasoning behind the Auroville project: to realize the universal and transcendent self within the form and life of the terrestrial individual.

In its account of creation, the *Mouvement Cosmique* does not ascribe the terrestrial to the status of a “Created” entity of a Divine principle, but rather describes the division of the divine entity: a losing of Divine Self into the terrestrial. The aim of Nature is said to be to overcome this division through man’s evolutionary ascension. Its main goal is the ‘restitution of man to his full right and power.’ In reminiscence of Aurobindo’s *Life Divine*, evolution becomes a process of recovering Self, man re-

discovering God in the terrestrial. The Mouvement does not claim this philosophy as its own but rather as an originary and universal human philosophy, described as,

[the] original tradition of humanity, the pure source, from which all religions, all philosophies have borrowed the light that they reflect- after altering it more or less, the better to adapt it to their interests or conceptions (Heehs, 2011:227).

Even this characterization of the belief system echoes Aurobindo. Aurobindo claims his approach to be the *Sanatana Dharma*, or the Eternal Religion, which might encompass all faith. To point out such similarities is not necessarily to see the influence of all of these ideas on Aurobindo. For instance, Aurobindo spoke of his intention for the *Sanatana Dharma* on leaving Uttarpara jail in 1908, before he had even come into contact with the Mother or could have been influenced (even indirectly) by her.

However, there are other points of correlation that certainly do suggest influence. For example, the fact that the symbol of the *Mouvement Cosmique*, which Theon claimed was the Seal of Solomon (a legendary occult symbol) (Alfassa, 1979: 454), became the symbol of Sri Aurobindo's movement (Heehs, 2011:236). This is particularly telling of the potential synthesis of these traditions through the figure of the Mother. However, this does not appear to be a case of the Mother simply overwriting Aurobindo. Rather Heehs has highlighted passages within *The Life Divine* wherein Aurobindo speaks of a hexagram enclosing a square with a lotus floating on water inside, in a way not illustrating the idea of the divine Duality or the traditions *Samkhya* or *Tantra*, but, at least in Heehs' eyes, the *Philosophie Cosmique* (Heehs, 2011:237).

However, what is most curious for Heehs, is that Aurobindo's ideas are in fact perhaps more akin to the tradition of *Lurianic Kabbalah*, from which the Cosmique philosophy emerged, rather than the Mouvement's modern re-writing. The tradition's conception of *tsimtsum*, or the necessary limitation created by the Divine being in order to manifest his creation, appears to tie in with Aurobindo's account of the involution of the Divine as the creative self-figuration of world. For instance, in the *Kabbalic* account before God can emanate, imitation must be introduced into God's nature, this is termed, *tsimtsum* (Heehs, 2011:231).

What is curious about the Lurianic account is that the Divine and his creation are not only ultimately non-distinct from one another, but also self-similar in their formation. However, though the Divine is not fettered by limitation whilst his lower manifestation, or creation, is diminished by the limitations of space and time: 'In early Kabbalah imagined man's soul is said to be threefold, comprising *nefesh*, the animal soul, *ru'ah*, the spirit, and *neshamah*, the innermost soul' (Heehs, 2011:232).

Similarly, Aurobindo conceived the lower creation of the Divine as a limited refraction of the higher. Herein the infinite pours himself into the temporal container of finite creation, confining himself in the process to the physical, or *nefesh*, (coterminous with Aurobindo's material being), knowledge, or *ru'ah*, (coterminous with Aurobindo's concept of "mind"), and origin, or *neshamaah*, (coterminous with Aurobindo's psychic being), in worldly nature. Like Aurobindo's evolutionary account, which allows the temporal re-imagining and re-creation of finite form and its eventual realization of itself in the Divine, the *Movement Cosmique* claims the goal of existence as gaining contact and ultimately becoming one with the Divine Origin.

The philosophy of the *Mouvement Cosmique* and its antecedents has not solely influenced Aurobindo and the Mother's Integral movement. Prior to working alongside the Mother, Theon is said to have collaborated with Theosophical Society leader and founder Helena Blavatsky during his days in the "Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor" (Minor, 1999:38). This has led to claims that the idea of the seven planes of existence present both in Aurobindo's work and the Theosophical society originated with Theon. The influence of Theon on Blavatsky's Theosophical tradition is further poignant if we are to compare Blavatsky's own later projects to those of the Mother,

[Blavatsky] tried to connect occult thinking inspired by Hinduism and Buddhism, and an application of the Darwinian theory of evolution to the psychological sphere... Without denouncing the evolutionary links between humans and the great apes, she suggested that humans could continue to evolve toward a higher cosmic level, in order to achieve brotherhood, unity, love and beauty (Metzner and Lesmeister in Thomsen, 2013).

I would venture similarly that certain terminology, which has become common parlance in both the Ashram and Auroville, has originated with Theon before being used by the Mother in substitution for comparable concepts within Aurobindo's corpus. The most notable is the term the "psychic being". This illustrates the difficulty in assigning definite origin to Mother or Aurobindo's concepts. Some have theorised that Aurobindo's concept of the "psychic being" is a tantric influence, emerging as his studies broadened. However, at the end of 1905 the Mother decided that in the coming year she would unite herself with her soul or "psychic being," long before meeting Aurobindo, or even becoming at least directly, influenced by him.

Banerji and Kazlev highlight how Aurobindo's terminology comes to change through his relationship with the Mother, entailing that we might see similar philosophies

overlap through mergings of concepts and worldviews, making the Mother and Aurobindo increasingly difficult to detach from one another:

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's yogic partnership was thus also a profound integral union of different cultures, practices, and realities that shared a common aim, the transformation of the Earth through the establishment of a new Divine species, the supramental race (Kazlev, 2004: 2).

Even within Auroville, key symbolism suggests the mark of “the Theons” on the Mother’s bringing forth of Aurobindo’s ideas. For instance, as Guigon highlights, ‘both the Mother’s symbol and the matrimandir represent a lotus in full bloom’ (Guigon, 2014:16). The 12 petals contained within this lotus are a remnant of Alfassa’s contact with the Theons, since Madame Una Theon is to have remarked of Alfassa, ‘You are that [the Mother] because you have this [12 “petals” over your head]. Only that can have this!’ (Guigon, 2014: 22). These twelve petals became the twelve virtues of the Mother and the 12 meditation rooms and the 12 gardens of the matrimandir, bringing forward this symbolism into the experience of Auroville: ‘the Mother kept on stressing to her architect the same points: “everything is symbolical”’ (Guigon, 2014:22). This has led Heehs to argue how this influence, not disregarding the greater Vedantic influence on the Aurobindo and the Mother’s movement, might ‘draw attention to what might be called the “multinational” side of the transmission of esoteric knowledge (Heehs, 2011: 245).

Thus, the International flavour of Aurobindo and the Mother’s project is illustrated here, and following this, the conceptualization of the Mother as a “pure” descendant” of Aurobindo’s teachings is resisted here. To present her as a “vessel” for the transmission of these ideas would not, I argue, stand to verify her relationship with Aurobindo’s ideas, but rather to demean her place within the greater narrative of

interpretive synthesis he proposed. Thus, rather than pointing to an appropriation or corruption of Aurobindo's Vedantic synthesis through the Mother's reworking, I claim that she might provide a very clear example of the the re-synthesis or transcreation of tradition that Aurobindo proposed. In dialogue with her own Western background and Spiritual influences, she comes to stand for a re-synthesis of Aurobindo's works in a way that might, arguably, come to incorporate both the traditions of East and West, as well as lay down, or indeed begin to bring forth, the possibility for an Integralism that moves beyond text.

The "anarchic" here becomes conceptualized, not only literally, as a "working out" of the texts in a way beyond convention, but also figuratively, through the representation of the Mother as the Shakti, the enlivening force of all creation, who provides the foundation for experimentation and re-imagination of Spirit through the Material.

#### **x) Auroville: Divine Anarchy as Hermeneutic Utopianism.**

This chapter has moved from the textual basis for "divine anarchy" to interpretation of the Mother's place within it, both through her relationship with Aurobindo and the influence of her own particular background on the resulting re- synthesis of Aurobindo's teachings. However, before coming to an understanding of how these ideas might find practical translation in the social world - most explicitly examined in the final chapter of this thesis - there is a final, interrelated tension to be explored. I have termed this tension "hermeneutic utopianism," to problematize the relationship between individuals' interpretation and the text itself. There are particular problems associated with the interpretation of the religious/ spiritual text. The problem

inherent to Aurobindo's texts is that, although the message is transmitted through the intellectual language of mind, and its knowledge through construct and separation, the nature of the message it contains – and the implications of that message – purport to be higher than mind, namely, a “knowledge by identity”, or *Supermind*. Whether the vision laid down for Auroville by the Mother, i.e. the supraphysical realization, or the human realization and manifestation of this Supermind capacity, constitutes an utopia, will also come to consideration here.

As we saw in chapter two of this thesis, Aurobindo was aware that his texts might be interpreted at a variety of levels. The metaphysics he described contained a series of partial truths which could each be grasped discreetly by the mind, however, in his view, these “truths” required the operation of a phenomenology higher than Mind in order to be wholly understood. The argument within chapter two was that the progressive understanding might be realized “poetically” as an interpretive re-making of the text in line with the sensate, the reader's own temporality. One could argue that the Mother in the founding of Auroville provides a model for a interpretation and translation of these ideas beyond text. Yet she may also – as indicated in the discussions between Aurobindo and the Mother as well as the rhetoric of experimentation in the Auroville community – provide an interpretation “on the way,” rather than the complete realization of the Supraphysical. According to Aurobindo's own typology, Auroville might be regarded a creation of “Overmind,” which, conceptually recognizes the unity of Spirit and Matter, but is working on “realising” this identity experientially. The gulf becomes bridged, as we shall explore in this section, not solely through the action of the anarchic, but firstly through the conception of an alternative hermeneutic means beyond mind.

The hermeneutic refers to the available processes for interpretively realizing and making manifest this vision, within the experimental flux of interpretation and re-interpretation of individuals upheld in Auroville's ongoing experiment. The Mind, although it is to be moved beyond, at least in the way Aurobindo describes its capacity, might find great utility here. By encouraging the mind's ability to imagine circumstances, practices and even the self as otherwise, Auroville might capitalize on a force that allows for a diversity of individual expression, reminiscent of the *Individual age* in Aurobindo's *Human Cycle*, but must also find a way of unifying this individualism in order to move toward the *Subjective age*.

Both the Mother and Aurobindo come to propose the creation of community as a necessary means to effect the individual inner change to which they aspire, with this external social form, in turn, becoming transmuted in line with individual realisations. To signpost several instances in *The Life Divine* wherein Aurobindo points to the utility of the social form as a means for individual transformation:

The inner change can begin to take shape in a collective form only if the gnostic individual finds others who have the same kind of inner life as himself and can form with them a group with its own autonomous existence or else a separate community or order of beings with its own inner law of life (Aurobindo, LD, 2005:1097).

At a certain stage, it might be necessary to follow the age-long device of the separate community, but with a double purpose, first to provide a secure atmosphere, a place apart, in which the consciousness of the individual might concentrate on its evolution in surroundings where all was turned and centered towards the one endeavor and, next, when things were ready, to formulate and develop the new life in those surroundings and in this prepared spiritual atmosphere (Aurobindo, LD, 2005: 1099).

Thus, Aurobindo encourages the shaping of the social continent as a means of elevating its individual content, by providing the conditions for human self-transcendence. Aurobindo is clear within such passages that his ideas have a remit

beyond the text, beyond the asceticism of passive reading, to realisation of this vision - namely the bringing about of the *Superman* - in dialogue with the fluidity of terrestrial existence.

The receptivity of mankind to a higher knowledge, and a transmutation of man's social and physical processes beyond his current manifestation, is reminiscent of Nietzsche, through whom Aurobindo and the Mother have certainly found influence. Nietzsche similarly proposed mankind's status as a transitional being, conceiving the *Overman* as the natural next level of transhuman aspiration, 'I teach you the Overman. Man is something that will be overcome. All beings so far have created something beyond themselves' (Nietzsche in Kaufmann, 1974: 3). This creation beyond self also re-echoes Aurobindo's dialogical self, which considers human evolution as a drawing out from oneself, an unveiling. For each this is a process wherein, in order to develop,

[individuals] do not so much require new truths; rather it becomes necessary to remember and relearn some ancient ones. One will then discover it as for the first time, for there is only the "first" time that is repeated again and again (Pearson, 1997: 8).

Essentially this "eternal return of the same" is evident not only in Nietzsche, but also in Aurobindo, since the reaches of his universal realism, allow for Self to be realized in multiple, non-contradictory guises. However, for Aurobindo, existentially there is a difference between Superconscious Self and terrestrial self, with the former, though playfully participating within the difference of the terrestrial, never wholly losing itself, or changing, within the process. The dialogical anarchy of which the Mother and Aurobindo refer is not a creativity of endless Creative Becoming, as in the empty deconstruction, or erasure, of the postmodern thinkers. Instead, for both of these thinkers, there remains always an essential Being, a unity, or essential signified, not

wholly outside the terrestrial field of signification - since its infinity encompasses and comprises it - but existentially distinct from it. This capacity is imagined as, alternately, a passivity that creates the conditions for action, or a silence behind the noise of existence. Nietzsche's system does not contain such a hemisphere of Being and, in this sense, the Overman he posits does not signify a complete self-transcendence since, 'not only does man eternally return, but so does Overman' (Nietzsche in Pearson 1997:15): there is nothing to "Be", nothing remains exempt from the great cauldron of Becoming. As Aurobindo critiques Nietzsche:

[Nietzsche] founded his whole philosophical thought on this conception of existence as a vast will- to- become and of the world as a play of Force, Divine power was to him the creative word, the beginning of all things and that to which life aspires. But he affirms Becoming only and excludes Being from his view of things... (Aurobindo in Hemsell, 2011:66).

By only emphasizing one side of the equation; in this case the Anarchy, or the endless self re-formulation, Nietzsche overrides the pervasive Divinity, which undergirds and provides teleology, in Aurobindo's system. In a similar way to Bergson, it is difficult for the process to have meaning without an essential reason beyond the difference. In Aurobindo and Mothers' eyes, this Divinity remains ever intact, non-affected by the many roles it plays. For Aurobindo, like Heidegger, who claims knowledge of Being arises 'through the presence of Beings in time... We know the Being of these objects because we are continuous with their material embodiments in form' (Hemsell, 2011: 71), Aurobindo sees, in the very profundity of change, the Becoming in time, as signifier to the vast pervasiveness of Being,

every possibility implies a truth of Being behind it, a reality in the Existent; for without that supporting truth there could not be any possibles... [beings] must create or rather bring out of a non-manifest latency their own significant forms, expressive powers, native processes; their own being would develop their becoming, *svarupa*, *svabhava* (Aurobindo, 1997, LD: 313).

Thus, Aurobindo points to a utilization of the terrestrial, the necessary signifiers within the chaos of Becoming as a means to 'build bridges to the unseen, and to help us restore to Time the mystery of the presence of Being' (Hemsell, 2011: 72). A truth of Self-Being, essentially one with the individual, yet existentially separate through the veil of distinction that the temporal casts over his vision. Herein there is constant Being in the Becoming, and order behind the chaos. Aurobindo does not discount meaning within this process, since its existential difference is merely the *Superconscious* Self in play. As he points out at the beginning of *Synthesis of Yoga*, each of these tendencies - of unity and difference, Being and Becoming - are unified, non-contradictory, but merely poises of the self-same Being.

However, Aurobindo and Mother share with Nietzsche the premise that man is the essential "bridge" between the current existence and a transcendent self immanent within his Being, 'man is a bridge not a goal' (Nietzsche in Pearson, 1997: 15). As Aurobindo points out the individual stands for the point where Nature becomes self-conscious of Her own Becoming. This is re-echoed both within the work of Nietzsche and the phenomenology he inspired. According to Glendinning, in his account of Heidegger, this is a unique self-concept in that,

within the domain of everything that is, we (the questioners) are unique in that we are in our Being... (we are) fundamentally indissociable from having already some understanding of Being (Glendinning, 2007:73).

Thus, Heidegger implies that we are not simply subjects who learn and question "objects" but rather, as inextricable from the very being we study, remain also an

object of our own study.<sup>11</sup> We come to a deeper discussion of these crossovers between the traditions below.

Nietzsche and Aurobindo share the view that this transcendent self cannot be realized outside of history, as in the partial truth of the ascetic striving beyond temporal self, but must be brought into the flux of time. Nietzsche's means for applying this was in bidding individuals to remain, 'strangers to [them]selves', by consideration of the current self-manifestation 'as tools (techniques) for the further cultivation and enhancement of the human animal... [with this transcendent, aspirational self beyond them] but this outside is immanent in their becoming' (Pearson, 1997:16). A similar ideal is witnessed not only in the rhetoric of poetic transcreation or divine anarchy, within the works of Aurobindo and the Mother, but also, as we shall examine in the following chapter, in the rhetoric of Auroville.

This future focused creativity of Aurobindo, the Mother, and potentially Auroville, is an attempt to go beyond Mind, and its distinction between this Being and Becoming, neither to land in the pure "Divinity" and holism of the ascetic, nor the pure "Anarchy" and difference of these ardent materialists. Instead they transmute the very opposition to appreciate the simultaneity of these poises within the *Supermind*. The Mother suggests that the "new consciousness" she proposes arises through her own empirical experience, and these spiritual realisations come to further recapitulate the move beyond the opposition that Aurobindo's works account. In the Mother's accounts this "new consciousness" goes beyond the constructs of Mind, and in so

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<sup>11</sup> Through this conception of ourselves as object as well as pure subject, Heidegger call into question Descartes, cogito ergo sum, by recognising that our involvement in Being precedes our thinking, and objectification of, that very Being.

doing, as we shall explore, implies not only an epistemic alteration, but, in the Mother's view, a transmutation of Self. This new consciousness is described as one which:

includes the world of relative and finite form and change which no longer appears to be characterized by the opposites of suffering and joy, good and evil, for there are no longer any opposites... It is one with the world of name and form, energy and experience, in which it continues to be a related active participant, but with a new ability to act without a sense of separateness and to act as an effective channel of the one Consciousness that seems to be continuous with all the forms of existence (Hemsell, 2011: 63).

The Mother here proposes through her own experiences a potential capacity akin to the *Supermind*, which remains terrestrially active, even in its infinite Knowledge, and continuous, even in its separate terrestrial formulation. In line with Aurobindo's evolutionary account of humanity, the Mother recognizes that the Mind represents a great boon to man's ability to imagine himself otherwise, to entertain easily possibilities beyond the present and, by its constructive, fluid nature, to find easy re-formulation. This is very unlike the vital impulses and the bodily form which, in her view, are much more difficult to transmute (Mother, 1968 in 1999:18). However, this very boon is also the mind's shortfall: its ability to shift, to recognize itself as other, has also entailed its superficiality: mankind tends to live on the surface:

The mind is the surface of existence; they [human beings] work on the surface and they try to find the Truth that is behind by studying more and more deeply. Whereas the true method is to enter into direct contact with the inner truth, and impelled by that, guided by that, to make an outer construction that is not a seeking for the Truth, but a creation of the Truth, that is to say, the Truth-force realizes itself outwardly through the human instrument (Alfassa, 1966 in 1999:19).

In other words, the nature of the mental allows humans the ability to hold Truth, understanding or realization at a distance, as an object distinct from self, rather than, recognizing an essential identity with this truth, which might directly transform

them. Auroville, in the Mother's conception, aims to remedy the distancing of man from his knowledge, and although not unlike the ashram in aspiring toward a collective manifestation, aims to become more "exterior" and outward looking. In the Mother's words, the aim was 'to widen the base of this attempt to establish harmony between soul and body, spirit and nature, heaven and earth, in the collective life of mankind' (Mother, 1969, in 1999:15).

The Mother's works speak of a human transformation, beyond that of the mental. This exteriorization makes explicit the non-distinction between spirituality and material life, recognizing an embedding of spiritual life in the creative efforts of the physical and vital self, beyond the abstraction of the mental. This entails coming back to an understanding of individuals, not solely as beings beyond the intellectual, but creatures inextricable from cultural, historical and bodily containment.

In my view, we might relate this way of seeing to the ideas contained within phenomenology which, as alluded to, see themselves as 'works of words whose capacity to work as philosophy is inseparable from their capacity to involve their reader's capacity to acknowledge the matter for thinking itself for themselves' (Glendinning, 2007:27). These texts do not require a purely passive reading and acceptance of the receipt of new knowledge, but rather the acknowledgement of a responsibility on their own part, to re-engage with, and re-understand this message for themselves. Thus, the very text becomes an invitation for further re-thinking and re-action on the part of the reader:

[It] demands the involvement of [a] reader's capacity to bring their own understanding to bear with respect to the conception of ourselves they are reading about (Glendinning, 2007:27).

Arguably the Mother and Aurobindo's works might be seen to operate similarly, through inviting the reader to not only recognize an infinite Self interiority, but also to go beyond this to recognize an infinite Self exteriority, inextricable from the body, the practical and the social in which one finds oneself. Moreover, this re-orientation of the self not only questions individuals' relationship with the text, but also the community, which becomes both the canvas for these interpretations to be collectively brought to bear, and for these social expressions to become, in turn, reinterpreted.

To an extent – and as I examine more closely in the following chapter - the Mother, in questioning the limits of mind, addresses the need to re-engage more wholly: bodily and vitally, in the interpretation of text, and application of self. This might be seen to recapitulate Aurobindo's dialogical methodology by requiring followers to proceed in their evolution by an apparent "going backward", by a reconnection and deepening of the bodily and vital self, and a remaking, or reconstruction of these properties in the present manifestation of self. The constant call to emplotment, or practical and social manifestation of self in the present space and time, entails that "spirituality" or "Truth" is not consigned to a purely mental exercise, but one indiscernible from everyday life: 'it is in and by physical life that the highest spirit must manifest' (Mother, 1968, 1999: 13).

The recognition of self both as not only the subject but also the object of one's understanding and application within the world can be seen to underlie many of Aurobindo's texts. Arguably each lay down the gauntlet to readers to continue writing a process that he himself has started. In this sense also, we might similarly consider Auroville as a kind of text, to be re-worked, re-understood and re-formulated according to the readers and writers who have accepted the invitation.

### **xi) Hermeneutic Utopianism**

As clarified above, although the Mother is calling for diverse interpretation and experimentation within Auroville, and though this might utilize the mental, it ultimately attempts to go beyond the typical identification of interpretation with the mind. This playful approach recognizes the inherent limitation of all conceptual constructs, and instead a submission to the experimental: 'it will be an experiment, it is for making experiments' (Alfassa, 1967 in 1999:22). This appears to entail hermeneutics beyond mind, and yet one still entertaining mind's diversity, within the "cultural synthesis" of Auroville. Although this might inspire action today, it also, arguably, comes to postpone the interpretation, according to the Mother,

Is it possible to find a spot where the embryo or seed of the future supramental word could be created? The plan had come in all its details; but it is a plan, which, in its spirit and consciousness does not conform at all to what is possible on earth at the moment (Alfassa, 1969 in 1999:8).

Here the Mother is pointing to the current hermeneutical limitation of individuals to wholly understand and thus apply the message transmitted through Aurobindo's texts. The text then, although necessary, is not enough, but requires a reader to adequately interpret its message in order to access the phenomenology it promises and thus to wholly conceive what the project entails. To echo Ricoeur's adage, 'phenomenology cannot constitute itself without a hermeneutical presupposition' (Ricoeur, 2008:24).

The Mother thus avoids the trap of perceiving the plan or text as synonymous with its application. Instead the Mother echoes Lefebvre who critiques the tendency amongst

Western theorists to “fetishise the mental”, through the propagation of a dominant ideology to be imposed onto the “blank canvas” of society. Instead the “experimental” rhetoric of the Mother and Aurobindo comes to see the mental, represented in the text, or the plan, as something to be interpreted, or “worked out” in dialogue with the social, the historical, and the self. Both see ‘codes [plans and texts for action] less as determinant, but more arising in interaction between subjects and their space and surroundings’ (Lefebvre, 1991:18). Leord appears to describe Auroville similarly:

Auroville as an institution is asked to resolve the issues of modern social science from a practical approach... attempting speech which generates harmony, not war, power without inequality, exchange without poverty, all the major concerns of the modern world embedded therein (Leord, 2011:29).

Thus, the resolution comes not in the imposition of the text as blueprint, but rather in its dialogue with the temporal conditions. This idea is developed more wholly within Aurobindo’s work *The Synthesis of Yoga*, a key work on the development of yoga. This text implies the existence of no set method of interpretation, but rather, and in a similar way to *The Life Divine*, presents a collection of apparently opposing instrumentation to be utilised by man according to his particular social and personal constellation. For example, *Shastra*, or the tried and tested means of tradition (here represented by the texts and plans for the community), is important, yet must be tempered in line with the individuals who read them:

[the supramental life] has its own great lines [tradition] but these must be made real, must be the workings of an active Power felt in the individual’s consciousness (Aurobindo, 1990, SOY: 204).

In other words, the guidelines of text must always find their dialogue with time (*kala*), since they [the textual guidelines] are ‘[never] more than a partial expression

of the eternal knowledge' (Aurobindo, 1990, SOY: 57). This entails that we may, and indeed should, 'use, but never bind' ourselves to the authority of history, with history remaining necessarily incomplete, or else caged in dogma. Aurobindo describes time as the 'medium and condition' (Aurobindo, SOY: 68) of yogic endeavour, the Divine must express himself through the time-bound medium (man), and according to the conditions of his ever-changing being,

mankind has moved forward on the current of eternal time and the same problem has to be approached from a different starting point (Aurobindo, 1990, SOY: 61).

Thus, the same text might find wholly different interpretation, in a way that does not compromise the validity of any interpretation, but rather points to each as partial, and ever open to new synthesis. In a similar dichotomous tension, Aurobindo highlights the need to seek out gurus who provide the guidelines of a particular lineage or cultural context in which the seeker might anchor his seekings. The guru, for Aurobindo, provides the individual's link to a particular group, since he does not realise himself purely alone, 'the Divine manifests himself always in the double form of the separate and the collective being, *vyasti samasti...*' (Aurobindo, 1990, SOY: 193).

However full submission to the guru and the collective truth he represents would be tantamount to a denial of the individual truth, and thus, the individual must also rely upon *utsaha* or personal effort in order to find personal union with the Divine. This oscillation between the knowledge of the past: the texts and theories (represented by the *shastra*), and the collective (represented by the *guru*) on the one hand, and the present: with the practicality and circumstances (represented by the *kala*) and the unique individual personality and energy (represented here by the *utsaha*), is the dialogical means Aurobindo proposes to find synthesis in the future.

Therefore interpretation, in accordance with time, rather than simple transposition of Shastra; and in accordance with the scope of individual efforts, rather than simple reiteration of the guru, illustrates a yoga that is synthetic in approach as well as in outcome. Thus, the approach of Auroville, as a material project for the unification of the various juxtapositions of esoteric and exoteric, idea and form, past and present, society and individual, echoes strongly Aurobindo's approach. Aurobindo calls for a breaking up of the format of our past and present to create a new centre of vision and... activities in ourselves (Aurobindo, 1990, SOY: 107). In this breadth "all life is yoga" and man has 'no method and every method' (Aurobindo, 1990, SOY: 61), to apply to this aim.

For both Aurobindo and the Mother, although individuals operate at the level of mind with its endless dispersion and possibility, and are thus drawn to text, in its articulation of such possibilities, this is not enough. Individuals cannot sever themselves from their ontology, but are obliged to live in a world of actuality. Thus, in order to find "true" meaning, principles must be brought down into the greater fray: in dialogue with the ongoing text of the everyday. As we discovered, Aurobindo's spiritual realisations could not find completion in the "asceticism" of the transcendent subject, but required a realization in the terrestrial world. Similarly, for Bakhtin, "theoreticism", finds its completion, or 'finalizes what it in fact requires for its meaningful existence to be open, living, unfinalisable' (Renfrew, 2015:36), in dialogue within the empirical and all it presents,

Each word (each sign) of the text exceeds its boundaries. Any understanding is correlation of a given text with other texts... in a new context, in a contemporary context and in a future one... stages in the dialogic movement of understanding: the point of departure, the given text, movement backward,

past contexts; movement forward, anticipation (and the beginning) of a future context (Bakhtin, 1986: 161).

This re-imagining of the textual and the social truths of history in dialogue with the present, allows for the “truths” of texts (*shastra*) and of collectives (through the *guru*) to remain alive, unfixed and able to be re-imagined alternately according to the particular time, or the particular individual that interprets. This methodology recapitulates the opposing tendencies highlighted within many of Aurobindo's texts, and also the oppositions that make up the key themes of the thesis, namely that between a dynamism or flux of history, expression and outward form; and a uniformity of spirit, truth and interiority, with the latter finding their continuity and further expression through the shifts of the former. A similar dynamic has also been examined within Western philosophical hermeneutics wherein, as Ricoeur points out, interpretation must:

seek in the text itself, on the one hand, the internal dynamic that governs the structuring of the work and, on the other hand, the power that the work possesses to project itself outside itself and to give birth to a world that would truly be the “thing” referred to by the text (Ricoeur, 2008: 17).

As the text for Ricoeur contains always a potential “world” implicit within its form, to be uncovered and “give[n] birth to” by the reader, so we might see Aurobindo's text as containing the promise of a phenomenology outside the intellectuality of the limited textual form, but yet to be progressively interpreted through the text.

## **xii) Auroville as an utopia?**

Aurobindo's texts, at first glance, appear to propose a utopian society of “divine anarchy”, with the Mother seeming to follow and attempting to make this manifest

through the substance and aspiration of the Auroville community. We may find lots of passages within each of their works, which back up this premise. As Banerji surmises,

In terms of the social form, Sri Aurobindo's ideal, expressed in *The Human Cycle*, was one of a plural habitus evolving in spiritual freedom to the point where no external authority was needed, a condition of "spiritual anarchy" (Banerji, 2013).

Further, Auroville contains many of the features of utopia. Clarence Smith points to the charismatic authority of the Mother, as a key component in Auroville's potential utopian status (Clarence-Smith, 2015:40). Also, the tensions evident within the rhetoric of Aurovilian appear to cohere with Van de Weyer description of Utopian communities as a re-synthesis of dualistic binaries. As outlined,

Utopian ideas transcend... division. The power of the community over the lives of individuals derives from the personal commitment of those individuals, and is sustained by their mutual trust. Correspondingly that same trust allows the community to vest authority for different aspects of its life in individual, without need of bureaucratic control (Van de Weyer, 1988: 7).

In a similar way, for Aurobindo, recognition and collaboration with the other, the merging of the apparent divisions of human existence, was a vitally important aspect of the *subjective age*: the crowning stage of humanity that Auroville aims toward. This appears to cement the utopia of Auroville not only in the aspirations of social actors but also in its literary genre. As Aurobindo outlines,

For it is necessary, if the subjective age of humanity is to produce its best fruits, that the nations should become conscious not only of their own but of each other's souls and learn to respect, to help and to profit, not only economically and intellectually but subjectively and spiritually, by each other (Aurobindo, HC: 40).

However, I argue that the kind of "utopianism" Aurobindo, the Mother and Auroville represent escapes simple classification, since, although it utilizes the idea of an ideal

society, it neither offers a model for this completion, nor sees the manifestation of society as its overall aim. Auroville's necessity is not itself - the transformation of a small patch of rural Tamil Nadu - but rather the 'spiritual reconstruction of humanity' (Mitra, 1950:11). The community thus becomes more an instrumentation than an end in itself. The community is utilized as a container for the realization of the Superconscient being Aurobindo proposed: Auroville is a *crysalis* for the *Superman*, rather than the Super-society. As Minor points out,

attainment of supramental consciousness would be striving toward that would further their evolution and prepare the social, political and biological environment (the "earth consciousness") itself to rise to higher consciousness (Minor, 1999: 28).

However, it might be argued that this characteristic coheres with utopian striving *per se*, since the manifestation of the ideal society cannot so easily be extricated from the manifestation of the ideal beings that would populate such a society. As Carey claims, for instance, 'the aim of all utopias to a greater or lesser extent, is to eliminate real people' (Carey, 1999: xii), suggesting that a degree of self-overcoming or transcendence might be present within all such aspirational communities. McCord, in turn, highlights how Utopian communities tend to seek, in theory, 'to better the conditions of all humans not just their immediate members' (McCord, 1990: 21). This cosmic reach is certainly true of Auroville, which sees its remit to exceed far beyond its individual members in order to contribute to the evolutionary efforts of humanity as a whole.

However, when approached according to a phenomenology beyond the distinctions of mind, in line with the phenomenological transformation proposed within Aurobindo's texts, the society/individual dichotomy becomes arbitrary. The

implications of the Supraphysical realisation, the manifestation of the Supermind, entail no distinction between the perfect social manifestation and the perfect individual since, as made explicit in Aurobindo's description of the "gnostic being", and in recapitulation of the *mantric* expression, one's action is not only in non-separation from the Divine, 'but part of itself and expressions of its being'. Thus the creative outpourings of the human self become, to this view, the inherent joy in the self-manifestation of the Divine, 'whatever it delights in, it makes part of itself'. This entails that through the interiority of the gnostic individual's own temporal self-creation (or cosmic Self re-creations), he transforms not only himself, but also his social aggregate and, potentially, his world (All Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 1061).

In other words, the vision of Aurobindo implies not only a transformed individual, but necessitates also a 'transformed earth and collective nature', since these entities are recast not in distinction to the individual, but as further dimensions of himself in dispersion. Thus, no opposition exists between individual and society, or individual and world, with these entities finding common Self existence, as '[the] self building of the spiritual forces... [and] self expressed in a native harmony of ideas and action' (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 1068).

According to Aurobindo, the phenomenology of the "modern mind" conceives society's subjectivity as merely 'the material organisation of civilisation,' and whose activity is the instrumentation of science, rationality and education, or 'organised ideation and limitation' (Aurobindo, 2006:1091). Such a society only latterly recognises the individual as its "object" through its aim to "create" 'perfected social being[s].' Alternatively, the phenomenology Aurobindo proposes - the Gnostic collective - appears to reverse this dynamic. Herein the individual is conceived as the

“subject”, the determinant facet of the collective, and the present instrumentation of society becomes *his* action, and its objects are the birth of new ideas from the gnostic wellspring. However, even such a formulation remains an illustrative construct and Aurobindo is clear that, in actuality, all juxtaposition between subject, activity and object might diminish, and the separation between individual and collective finds its fusion, as ‘the self of the gnostic being is one with the self of all’ (Aurobindo, 2006, LD: 1102).

However, to reiterate the dialogue between the social truth and the individual, outlined above, the individual might find his potential moulded, restricted and coloured by the social continent which, thus, brings us full circle, back to the apparent necessity of the social form.

For Aurobindo, therefore, the spiritual, or the realisation of the Divine, is not purely a matter of Self-consciousness, but is always determined by the nature of the collective continent in which such a self realises himself: ‘the Divine manifests himself always in the double form of the separate and the collective being, *vyasti samasti*’ (Aurobindo, 1990, SOY: 192-3).

Following this argument, and turning it back in on Aurobindo, to look at the context in which he was writing, it might be posed that he he himself was informed by his social continent and the particular utopian ideas of his time. Thomsen (2015) highlights a shift in the popular understanding of the status of the human being, through the sudden technological advances of the 1900s. Although Aurobindo and his Romantic Idealist influences, rather ironically, focussed on the negative impact of this shift, i.e. by viewing it as a mechanization of the human spirit, which had to be re-

captured from its grasp, this technological advance might also be seen, in Thomsen's view, to create the perfect context for systems of human transcendence, not unlike Aurobindo's own, to come into vogue. As Thomsen points out, they opened the possibility for conceptions of 'the idea of posthuman and transhuman beings to be on the research agenda' (Thomsen, 2015). In other words, the very *Individualistic age* that Aurobindo's texts aim to overcome, provides the impetus for emergent conceptions of self beyond current manifestation.

Even the very decisions behind the creation of Auroville and the Ashram are rooted in a particular social context, and in turn might feed into this greater discourse. As Banerji explicates:

Auroville [and the Ashram are] not isolated social forms, founded for the development of an exclusive spiritual path, but also an embodied aspect of the nationalist (and larger post-Enlightenment) discourse. This is the discourse of community, in its own way a challenge to or a part of the contention against modernity (Banerji, 2013).

Banerji relates the highly differing projects of the ashram and Auroville, each claiming identity as a material and social emanation of Aurobindo's teaching, to representations of highly differing social mindsets. The ashram becomes for Banerji a representation of modernity, coloured by its ideal of homogeneity, with Auroville representing a move to the postmodern: a celebration of diversity within the micro-community.

Banerji herein entertains a clear link between the social paradigm, the literary text and the action of collectives. However, perhaps the greatest problematic for utopian theories, as within this thesis, is how to bridge the divide between ideal and reality,

text and action. As Ricoeur points out, the problematic of Utopia as a literary genre has struggled to move from the abstract to the actual. All utopias are at risk of leaping into the fantastic and in doing so, become guilty of the charge of quietism,

...the eclipse of praxis, the denial of the logic of action which inevitably ties undesirable evils to preferred means and which forces us to choose between equally desirable but incompatible goals. To this eclipse of praxis may be referred the flight into writing and the affinity of the utopian mode for a specific literary genre, to the extent that writing becomes a substitute for acting (Ricoeur, 2008: 313-4).

As we shall discover in the following chapter, Auroville in turn is not immune to this problematic, and shares the same temptation to grasp at the words of founders, and retreat to text as a “pure form” of the vision. This becomes especially seductive in the open-ended nature of Auroville which, though initiated through ideas that appear solid on paper, encounters great challenge in translating these ideas into clear courses of action, which entails, perhaps inevitably, a battle of hermeneutics.

More modern notions of utopia, however, find means of accommodating the interpretive ideals that Aurobindo and the Mother’s social projects demands, i.e. the social anarchy that conceives its members as individuals-in-progress. The idea of utopias as experimental projects of Becoming appears to be gaining traction, with Levitas in her text *The concept of Utopia* (2011), speaking of utopia, not only in the Marxist sense, as a tool of compensation for the apparent ills of existence, but also in the sense of “anticipation”, i.e. as “the Not-Yet” (Levitas, 2011:100-101). Herein the utopian becomes a means of bringing forth a state of being yet to be wholly realized (in thought or existence) thus, rather than offering itself as a blueprint for manifestation, it becomes a text open to ongoing interpretation. This is line with H.G. Wells, depiction of the modern utopia,

the modern utopia must not be static but kinetic, must shape not as permanent state but as a hopeful stage leading to a long ascent of stages. Nowadays we do not resist and overcome the great stream of things but rather float upon it, we build now not citadels but ships of state (H.G. Wells in Dahrendorf, 1968: 107).

The utopianism of both H.G. Wells and Levitas proposes not an “end”, but rather the beginning of a dialogue between text, individuals and particular social constellations. In my view, this is the kind of process Aurobindo, in his texts, and the Mother, in her foundation of Auroville point towards, i.e. not the acquisition of further knowledge or the grasping of something yet unseen, but rather - in line with Heidegger - an elucidation of something we might intuit, but cannot yet bring to full explication. As Aurobindo clarifies,

the spiritual process of evolution is then...not a creation, but a self creation, not a making of what never was, but a bringing out of what was implicit in the Being (Aurobindo, 1998, EPY: 322).

This echoes Levitas' claim that utopianism is misunderstood as a goal, with the totalitarian visions it generates, opposing its true nature. As she points out, ‘the score is not the work’ (Levitas, 2013: 215), instead, she argues, echoing the Mother and Aurobindo, the Utopian, should be understood ‘as a method that is both hermeneutic and constitutive’ (Levitas, 2013: 217): a method defined by its open-minded dialogism.

Levitas points to Coleman's use of Ricoeur to argue that a social and practical dialogism beyond the text, be considered the very heart of utopianism. Coleman demonstrates how this dialogism extends to architectural form, as a medium ideally responsive to the aims of its occupants: ‘[b]uildings and spaces are utopian in so far

as they are open to changing intentions of people who use them' (in Levitas, 2013:214). Such spaces, though coming to structure the existence of members, are not predetermined, but conceived in temporal dialogue with these members. Their status thus becomes one comparable to the "broad brush strokes" Aurobindo paints for his reader, which lay down basic principles, yet require continuous re-imagining in each shift of temporal, spatial and cultural circumstances.

A similar pragmatic dialogue has been echoed in Auroville, as I explore in the following chapter, through an emphasis on the aesthetics of materiality such as bodily practice and architectural form as dialogical means for allowing greater self-realisation. This is re-iterated in the work of Adam and Groves who claim a move away from the typical methods of "architecture" which have tended to

produce blueprints from the standpoints of present futures, seeking to make plans into reality. The relationship of architecture to the world is one of command. Artisans, in contrast, have embodied skills which require a sensitivity and response to the material at hand (Levitas, 2013: 214).

### **xiii) Conclusion: Transcreation as divine anarchy and hermeneutic utopia.**

This chapter's key aim was to provide a bridge between the physical community of Auroville, and the abstract philosophical texts of Aurobindo. The concept of "divine anarchy" was introduced as a means of providing continuity between Aurobindo, the Mother and the Auroville community. "Divine anarchy" finds parallel to the tensions of "Mystical empiricism" and "Poetic metaphysics" explored in the preceding chapters, as a hybrid concept providing a conceptual merging of the dichotomising tendencies of the Mind. The examination of divine anarchy touched on several

subsidiary dichotomies examined and brought to synthesis in Aurobindo's more socio-psychological texts.

The first synthesis was a merging of the occult, spiritual East with the philosophical, material West within the *Life Divine*, which arrived at a merging in the "psychic," international building of life and action in conformity with the Spirit. The second synthesis was between the Self of transcendent mysticism and the world of terrestrial action, articulated within *The Human Cycle*, which arrived at a merging in the re-conceptualisation of the world as an unveiling of Self, with the transformation of society a means for the realization, or actualization of this deeper Self which must, in this process, integrate the new into its own history. The third synthesis was between the problem of the order and equality associated with social unity, and the freedom and liberty of individual expression, examined within *The Ideal of Human Unity*. This came to merging in the concept of the "group soul" or "Religion of Humanity" which, in Aurobindo's eyes, came to found the world unity he proposed, not through outer means, but rather through a deep interiority that would recognize the outward distinction as merely differing expressions of Self-Superconscious being.

Mirra Alfassa's biographical history both found distinction and similarity with the views of Aurobindo. Her arrival at the concept of the "Universal Philosophy of Humanity" appears to have primed her for entertaining the Vedantic concept of *Santana Dharma*. In the same way as Aurobindo's embedding in Western philosophy, not to mention French sociology, might have piqued his interest in Alfassa, the open-minded Parisian artist. Here Aurobindo's views find their development, and one might argue, their expansion beyond both Vedantic history and, most importantly, beyond the text.

The Mother and Aurobindo came to be conceptualized as themselves presenting a symbolic dualism apparent in their descriptions of one another and the roles they have taken. Each was compared to the Being and Becoming in Aurobindo's work, in invocation of the Samkhyic dualism, as *Purusa* and *Prakriti*, and the *Tantric* imagining of God and Consort: *Shiva* and *Shakti*. In posing whether Auroville might symbolically be cast as the synthetic term, both in the symbolism of this character dualism and the wider cosmic dualism it represents, i.e. that between Spirit and Matter, we arrive at a very distinct form of utopianism.

Rather than such grand visions of the social bypassing individual expression, the very telos of the social - as substance for terrestrial Becoming to realize transcendent Being - is predicated on the free interpretation and expression of individuals who embody and re-embodiment this vision in time and in aspiration. As Levitas puts it, '[w]e must live in this world as citizens of another' (Levitas, 2013: 220).

## **Chapter Four: From Aurobindo and Auroville, the Textual and the Actual.**

### **i) The unification of Spirit and Matter, East and West.**

Aurobindo's ideal is a re-imagining and temporal re-enlivening of *Vedic* knowledge. As described by *The Synthesis of Yoga*, this re-imagining is the culmination of a greater lineage of progressive yogic synthesis, in which man comes to more wholly "yoke" his terrestrial Nature to the superconscient Spirit until, ultimately, it finds identity. The implications of Aurobindo's own synthesis are, echoing the Tantric synthesis that precedes him, a spirituality communicated through the textual and the intellectual yet intended to be realised and lived within the material and experiential. Aurobindo's aim was to discover a higher "consciousness-force" beyond the constructs of the intellectual which would, in turn, entail a re-connection and re-evaluation of the status of the material and vital spheres of existence.

As Raghuramaharaju points out, Aurobindo emphasised a non-distinction between the spheres of terrestrial and superconscient existence, demonstrating the 'desirability of a continuity between matter and spirit, and as a corollary science and metaphysics' (Aurobindo in Raghuramaharaju, 2007: 93). Raghuramaharaju's rhetoric points to the incorporation of these apparently opposing disciplines into a trans-disciplinary whole, evinced through Aurobindo's bringing of evolutionary theory into a holistic spiritual framework. However, it also, as signified in Aurobindo's characterization of these binaries, subverts the colonial hierarchy of Western materialism's 'science and machinery' over Indian spirituality, with the West, though having much to offer the East, becoming, in Aurobindo's eyes,

crushed under its mechanical burden... [and requires] a spiritual change... for the accomplishment of its ideals. The East has the secret of the spiritual change, but it has too long turned its eyes away from the earth (Aurobindo, 1998, EPY: 510).

Thus, not only do the “ideal” Spirit and the “material” terrestrial, and their earthly champions, the East and the West, find need for unification, but also become the key, in this view, to human unification. The impasse of human development, and its proposed move to a greater paradigm, requires not only a re-imagining of the very bounds of materiality and spirituality, but, simultaneously, the disjunct between Eastern and Western. The secret to entering the next stage, the *Subjective age*, is through a grasping of the “whole” of this reality, presently confined within the enclaves of cultural perspectives, and might be resolved when the cultures

meet from two opposite sides and merge in each other and found in the life of a unified humanity a common world culture: All previous or existing forms, systems, variations will fuse in this new amalgam (Aurobindo, 1998, RIC: 72).

Importantly, Aurobindo does not here pose a move wholly beyond, or negation of, cultural history, but rather the celebration and re-imagining of history in the face of greater unification. In recapitulation of Aurobindo’s spiritual realizations, his metaphysics and his social thought, there is recognition of the partial truths these prior cultural formations represent, in order to draw them, progressively, to new synthesis. As always there is the aspiration to see the one through the eyes of the other; the Spirit through Matter; the universal through the individual; the West through the eyes of the East. The apparent merging contained within Auroville - with its status as an International community, yet on Indian soil - cements the community’s status, not just as a project bringing together materiality and ideality, but a hierarchical synthesis grounded firmly in the Eastern side of this dichotomy: it

is the undergirding, encompassing “spiritual” which provides the basis for the re-imagining of these categories.

## **ii) From general to particular: Auroville as case study for a modern day**

### **Integralism**

Until this point we have looked at Auroville through a general lens as potentially the kind of project the Mother and Aurobindo’s texts might have proposed. This chapter aims to switch focus to the particular voices within Auroville, in order to provide a snapshot into the community at a particular moment in time. As indicated in the introduction to this thesis, I completed participant-observation in the Auroville community from August to December 2013. During this time, I lived in several of the micro-communities that make up the site, attended community meetings, lectures and reading groups, and held a weekly semi-structured focus group, or discussion series, alongside conducting unstructured interviews with individuals and groups.

Taking seriously Aurobindo’s claim that life experiences are primary and one’s explanation of these experiences, through the labels, texts and philosophies of tradition, are secondary, I will in this chapter begin by recounting some life details of several of the many Aurovilians I spoke to, before proceeding to understand their explanations.

Shraddhavan was drawn to Auroville by hearing a talk on the texts of Sri Aurobindo in a friend’s house in London in 1969. She describes how

as the speaker spoke, I heard things that interested me, each like a room in my head- doors opened and the rooms fitted together, I saw a clear way forward in Sri Aurobindo (Shraddhavan, 2013).

As the daughter of a liberal pastor in the North of England, she had an upbringing exposed to anti-communist ideas, which she later rebelled against at university in Bristol, identifying as an anarchist, and organising the first National Anarchy conference since 1895. In many ways she might be considered the prime candidate to be drawn to the ideal of “divine anarchy” that Auroville wished to embody. It seems people arrive at Auroville not through a journey of pure idealism, but rather pragmatically, primed by their life experiences.

Jean Yves is a French teacher at “Last School”, a progressive arts high school within Auroville. Prior to coming to Auroville in 1972 he was a business consultant in his native France. After studying Politics at University, Jean came across Sri Aurobindo’s text *The Ideal of Human Unity*, and felt inspired by the comprehensiveness of his vision, and felt motivated and ‘very much ready to integrate everything’ (Yves, 2013) in his own life. Although Jean works in education, he is critical of the upholding of the intellect as the centre of life, commenting that should be regarded a “phase”, and not something ultimate.

Cathy, who works for “Eco Femme”, a charity providing culturally sensitive menstrual products to local village women, saw Auroville as ‘a place of becoming’ (Cathy, 2013). She contrasts this to Australia, her former home, where such becoming ‘has been curtailed to one decade of your life’, i.e. one’s youth. She describes how confining she felt the expectations of the West, how children and a good job somehow didn’t feel enough, and how she yearned for growing space: ‘context allows or places limits on

our experience' and she felt as an introvert her qualities were not valued, 'the West pathologises difference especially sensitivity and enthusiasm' (Cathy, 2013).

She saw these personal difficulties to point at a more general spiritual vacuum in the West, spirituality here being understood as a capacity for our own individual becoming, or self-actualisation, our growing beyond the *ashrama* of the householder, to realise deeper sides of self.

Clare, a long-term resident from Canada who has participated since the 70s without formally belong to Auroville, (describing herself as a "paperless Aurovilian"), notes her long standing interest in the possibility of 'future International cities'. She credits her arrival here to curiosity, 'I wanted to see if it could work'. Similarly, Reg, an architect from the Netherlands:

hoped to find some alternative cities, activity groups to do something meaningful for social development, where you don't sell yourself for money or to the clients (Reg, 2013).

Sonja was drawn to a new kind of society after witnessing the "soullessness" of bombed and rebuilt Rotterdam, and being involved in the hippy movement in Holland. She describes how the Satkina statue in Rotterdam, depicting a man without a heart, came to represent the mood in the city of the time. She realized that 'everything of value is vulnerable', with the bombs not only robbing the city of its physical structures, but also its cultural meaning, 'everything had to be rebuilt' (Sonja, 2013). The books of Aurobindo appeared to possess the deeper reality she sought, and when first followed her boyfriend to India in 1979, she had a strong feeling of "this is what I've been looking for." This was, she mentions, before realising the

reality of living on a barren plateau, but she describes how she felt “maintained” by such experiences as ‘meditating in Sri Aurobindo’s room’ wherein she felt ‘really touched, the way I saw the world shifted’. Such depth of spiritual experience kept her in Auroville, despite the struggle of existence in the early days, ‘gravity was double here.’

Reg also describes how he was ‘in search of... self, I felt instinctively I needed different mirrors, reflectors to see myself better” (Reg, 2013). Most particularly for him, he was interested in the role of the architect for society, and our discussion centered upon the ethical implications of architecture and its non-distinction from living. This openness and malleable view of identity is characteristic of the Auroville atmosphere where bankers might come to learn permaculture, and lawyers build bamboo houses.

Antim, a caretaker at the Savitri Bhavan hostel, struck out on his spiritual path by initially volunteering in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1996. This move was unprecedented in his Jain community and caused his family - who had intentions for him to become a Jain monk - some concern. He explains how he was ‘not interested in escape,’ so unfit for the ascetic life, but rather wanted to pursue ‘delight and power and beauty.’ He quotes Aurobindo’s *Savitri* to explain his decision to live a non-ascetic spirituality, “escape brings not the victory and the crown”. Echoing Aurobindo’s philosophy, he described how renunciation, although utilisable as a tool for transition ‘cannot be a permanent resting place.’ Instead Antim highlights how the diversity of personality, approach, and spirituality in Auroville acts as its boon, since Aurobindo, in his eyes, is less a figure to emulate or worship and more an example of the kind of spiritual self-reliance that Auroville hopes to cultivate

[I have] chosen this as my field of *Tapasya*... My only focus is, “what am I supposed to do?” In detail, I am trying to carry out the surrender I am not trying to become like Sri Aurobindo, I have to experience what I have to experience... the basic principle of manifestation is diversity, each soul represents one aspect of the universe’ (Antim, 2013).

This sentiment was echoed by many Aurovilians in their reasons for joining Auroville. Most individuals were not led here through a study of the texts of Aurobindo and Mother, but rather through some identification with the values that the community, and its figureheads, represent. Aurovilians might be generally stereotyped as possessing an interest in different “religious” and “spiritual” approaches, a restless curiosity for another type of living, and an enthusiasm for community. Auroville presents itself as just one such means of realising, expressing and developing these interests.

I aim to bring the views, enlivened by such individuals, into dialogue with the thematic “tensions” in preceding chapters, in order to utilize the vast diversity of field data to understand how the tensions of the text might play out in the aspirations and practice of Auroville. In summary, these themes are:

- “Mystic empiricism:” This theme, introduced in chapter one of the thesis, problematizes the disjuncture between the empirical, or immanent, this-worldly experience, and the typically esoteric and transcendent nature of the mystical aspiration. How might we understand the status of Auroville as a “spiritual project” which might move beyond either sole concentration on the textual or the interiority

of the ascetic? Here I question the role of the experiential and exterior experiments for Aurovilians' understanding of both Aurobindo's mysticism and their own.

- “Poetic metaphysics:” This theme, introduced in chapter two, problematizes the disjuncture between the metaphysical tradition of the founders and the creative innovation of Auroville. How might Aurovilians stay true to applying the philosophy of the texts whilst not lapsing into the “religious” or the “dogmatic”? Here I examine the role of the text in Auroville, in both the problems and possibility its authority might entail, i.e. whether it might allow space for the creative experimentation of present Aurovilians.
  
- “Divine anarchy:” This theme, introduced in chapter three, problematizes the apparent disjuncture between the individual “anarchy” proposed by Aurobindo and the Mother and their aspiration for a collective “supraphysical” transformation. How might Aurovilians manage, promote and celebrate individual and international difference of expression within the community whilst at the same moment staying unified to the Divine vision that they wish to unfold? Here I examine the question of spiritual order within Auroville and whether a liberty of individual practise might be retained.
  
- “Hermeneutic utopianism:” This theme, also discussed in chapter three, problematizes the disjunct between the identity of seeing and being of Supermind (that Aurobindo and the Mother have proposed will transform mind, life and body as well as the individual-society constellation), and the separative capacity of mind which is the current means for Aurovilians to interpret this vision. How might Aurovilians come to implement this “truth-vision” without the Mother (who was

regarded to have attained supramental awareness), and with the multiple interpretations of this vision and how it might be realised? Here I question the futuristic utopianism of Auroville and how this might inspire or even disable interpretation and action in the present.

- “Spiritual materialism”: This theme, which is introduced in the very conception of this thesis, problematizes arguably the chief disjunct within Aurobindo’s work and the Auroville community, i.e. that between the Spiritual and the Material dimensions of reality. How might either the natural world, or even substantial man-made systems be utilised as a means of attaining supernatural insight, or self-transcendence? Here I examine a variety of material practise to question how Aurovilians seek to transcend the intellectual through the utilisation of the physical.

Evidently, the oppositions entertained by each of these tensions have clear overlap with one another, and I must clarify from the outset that these themes operate as constructs rather than truth concepts. The aim is to artificially attempt to pull apart a unity of life in Auroville, so it might be investigated, before attempting to understand its relationship with the textual narrative it seeks to both continue and “realize”.

The chapter ends by considering whether, as alluded to by certain Aurovilians, the Auroville project might be considered a continuity of Aurobindo’s Integralism, as the proposed next stage in his *Synthesis of Yoga*, i.e. a stepping forth into a practical and International yoga. This invokes the final tension evidenced within Auroville, that between East and West. The proposal of an “Indian Method” that might both encompass and transcend the separative nature of Western science, will be discussed

as a means of re-merging the knowledge and approach of each culture into a global synthesis. Nevertheless, this remains, at least in the rhetoric of Aurovilians and their allusion to Aurobindo's text, *The Renaissance in India*, a globalism grounded in Indian history, and providing a unique role for India's future.

### **iii) Auroville as Mystic Empiricism?**

Auroville is a community purporting to be spiritual, but with an external rather than internal focus. This step beyond interiority and strict textual adherence questions the nature of "spirituality" when taken outside its traditional juxtaposition with the physical and the material. What is spirituality when re-invited back into human psychology, social aggregation, and further, into the apparently secular domains of economics and ecology? How might such worldly pursuits be vehicles for the realisation of higher spiritual truths? Aurovilians, for all their diversity of opinion, were largely in agreement with the idea that Auroville was a "spiritual experiment" and sympathetic to it being studied as such. They often used the terminology of the Mother and Aurobindo to describe what they saw Auroville to be, and sought understanding of this meaning through their own experience. Anu, a long term Aurovilian working at the cultural centre, *Bharat Nivas*, expresses the need for Aurobindo and the Mother's teaching to go beyond traditional religious communities and to become an everyman project:

Though the ashram came first, it was clear that Mother and Sri Aurobindo wanted to build a city because it had to translate into life... the Mother said the work that we are doing is to establish the contact with this consciousness and when that is done the first thing is to translate that into a material project- as something like an ideal type, which would then have repercussions in the world, because of the type of experiment it is... so that's where this whole thing happens... its very grounded, because its practical... (Anu, 2013).

This translative approach involves less talk of the textual and more the aspiration to an experience of a consciousness that could translate and transform the material.

The idea of Auroville as an experiment in consciousness takes the ideas of the Mother and Aurobindo from the clutches of abstraction and demands their progressive, and perhaps necessarily faltering, realization in form. It also emphasizes the indeterminacy of this eventual form, allowing space for a “translation” rather than the application of an ideological blueprint on the “blank canvas” of a geographical, social and intellectual space.

Perhaps this might allow the ideas of Aurobindo and Mother to go beyond intellectual, theoretical or ascetic readership, and become open to a rich diversity of interpretation. Such a reading can, however, be in contention with an academic perspective claiming a more narrow remit to Aurobindo’s work. Professor Murali, a lecturer in English at nearby Pondicherry University, argues that the only veritable means of studying Aurobindo is, rather, through scholarly means:

[one must] gather together the context of the Aurobindonian text as not read by ordinary devotees, or on the other hand, self styled scholars who are blinded... “reading” calls for verification against other texts (Murali, 2013).

Herein Murali claims Aurobindo for an elite, i.e. as an intellectual writer, to be read by other such intellectuals. The volume of philosophical and theological texts on Aurobindo, not to mention the distillation of his teaching into the traditional ascetic model of the *ashram*, are perhaps testament to such an interpretation. This intellectual reading of Aurobindo is a clear challenge to the remit of this thesis, which seeks understanding of the inverse, i.e. an everyman understanding of Aurobindo

through his reception and application in discursive and practical terms. As alluded to in the first few chapters of this thesis, Aurobindo is regarded as a thinker whose vision is not primarily inspired by textual study, but rather responsive to personal experiences.

The “textual” side of Aurobindo’s vision operates to reconstruct these experiences, through the integration of “the relations and sequences” of personal spiritual experiences “so that all unite[d] logically together”. Following Arabinda Basu’s description of Aurobindo as, ‘a philosopher in the Indian sense of *darsana*’ (Basu, 2011), Aurobindo is considered less as a thinker referring to “truth” mediated through textual constructs, but rather a “truth” through personal “seeing”, an immediate experience of truth. This is not to discount the influence of other writers and thinkers on Aurobindo, but rather to suggest his engagement with other thinkers was secondary to the experiential dimension of his work. The strongly empirical side to Aurobindo’s ideas was largely reiterated by Aurovilians. As Alan, a long term Aurovilian and editor of monthly magazine *Auroville Today* argues, Aurobindo’s texts, for all their intellectual sophistication, are to be understood as ‘the product of experience put in mental form’ (Alan: 2013). Similarly, Aster Patel, a senior Aurovilian and academic, claims,

Scholars and he himself have related his thought both to that of the past, and to that of his contemporaries, however such resonances should be seen as a secondary concern- of what he writes, he has experienced directly (Aster Patel: 2013).

Herein the texts involved in transmitting the direct experiences of Aurobindo, his contemporaries and his forbears, although contextualizing or providing a vehicle for *darsana* or an immediate experience of truth, are yet to be considered as a re-

construction, even a diminishment to mental expression, and must not be confused with the experiential “truth” they attempt to represent.

Alan finds justification for Auroville in the empirical since it is by way of experience (and the making sense of such experience), that Auroville might progress. The text, for Alan, necessarily offers guidelines rather than prescriptions, and cannot be understood in abstraction from the living praxis in which they might be realized.

Sharaddhavan, founder of *Savitri Bhavan*, an intellectual hub within Auroville for the study of Aurobindo and the Mother’s texts, appears to chart a middle course. She emphasizes the importance of a deep study of Aurobindo and Mother’s texts prior to embracing the “living of ideals,” as the basis for utilizing Aurobindo’s work. Most particularly she emphasizes the study of *Savitri*, Aurobindo’s epic poem, to inspire development within the community,

If we believe that *Savitri* is the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo’s vision and Auroville is created as a ground for living the ideals that have been presented to us by Sri Aurobindo, then its important for us to be studying the supreme revelation of his vision- and to do that we must study everything else- the Mother, English literature, the *Veda*- all... The task that’s been given to Auroville, to realise an embodiment of Human Unity- Sri Aurobindo’s teachings are the way that can happen, so that’s now our mission statement at *Savitri Bhavan*: “through spiritual education, based on the visions and teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother” (Shraddhavan, 2013),

However the text here is valued less for its intellectual merits, and more for what it offers as an educative spiritual document: a product of “revelation”. The interpretation of such revelation can be aided by deeper contextualization through wider textual study, but its ultimate purpose is one that both utilizes and moves beyond the textual, to offer its reader the realization of greater human possibilities.

The longevity of the Auroville community (1968- present) is testament to its ability to remain responsive to the vicissitudes of temporal experience, synchronizing itself with ideas and movements beyond Aurobindo and the Mother's particular notion of "spiritual", to become vehicles for spiritual realisation in the present.<sup>12</sup> This has led numerous practical movements to find vogue and alignment with Auroville's broad aims. For instance, during my visit, Dr Karan Singh, chairman of the Auroville governing board, spoke of the community's important role as an international mediatory Inter-faith project, whilst others point to its role as a city of alternative technology, Integral health or environmental sustainability. Such shifts are not only testament to the great breadth and interpretive capacity of Auroville's aims, but have proven highly contentious within Auroville, with a clear Indian/ Western divide emerging in perceptions of the community's aims. As Anu argues:

I would raise that there's been a lot of ideologies coming, some of which are real, but they're also fashionable... (Auroville has) become "sustainable city", which is very different from the charter... [which stated the township's purpose as a site for] "material and spiritual researches": obviously sustainability has a place but it is not the whole thing (Anu, 2013).

It is not the presence of such ideologies, but rather the reduction of Auroville into such ideologies, that Anu sees as a problem. Sanjeev, director of the Educational institute in Auroville agrees, pointing out that a similar dogmatism can be found in this unquestioning allegiance to "sustainability" as might be alleged of the evangelist, and his unyielding singularity of reading. As he claims, 'Modern Idealism and

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<sup>12</sup> Indeed, interestingly, Anu claimed the community operated on a 5-7 year curve, wherein change was precipitated by increasing unrest, and talk of stagnation, heralding in a new phase which might again find some sustainability, before the cycle was again repeated.

environmental sustainability can become fundamentalist... [they] should not be the be all and end all' (Sanjeev, 2013).

Ananda Reddy, a local academic with long-term connection with both Auroville and the ashram (though, perhaps tellingly, declining to join neither), goes further still to suggest that the very fundamentals of Auroville are being questioned, with the community feeling the 'challenges of a new generation who criticize the vision- not only [to] develop it for today, but criticize its main tenets' (A. Reddy: 2013). Reddy highlights how the most explicit threat to the proposed ideals of the community has come to those aspects that perhaps chime less with the concerns of a postmodern world: '[the new generation want to] 'forget the devotional aspect' (A. Reddy: 2013). Reddy points out how, although the path of knowledge and the path of devotion come easily into tension with one another, through a perception that the 'the former is progressive, the latter rather static', the two must, in order for the community to remain Integral, be retained together.

Each of these points, flagged up primarily by Indian respondents, points to the problematic inherent in allowing the "mystical" to arise through the empirical. The community's emphasis on the material task has perhaps entailed that the more subtle "mystical" or devotional aspects, which have tended to find more appeal amongst Indian adherents, are more easily sidelined. Rather than seeing this division as merely a caricature of the East/ West opposition Aurobindo highlighted, there might be more practical explanations.

The cultural division on this issue might be explained through a number of factors. Firstly, most of the "impositions" alluded to appear to come from the West. For

instance, one might point to the fact that the version of environmentalism found in Auroville is largely a Western transposition, rather than a home-grown synthetic model in line with the methods, architecture or even the geography of the surrounding communities. Indeed, where environmental movements in Auroville have engaged with local ideas, needs and practices they have tended to fare far better.

For example, the founders of Sadhana Forest, a micro-community on the outskirts of Auroville, were clear that their model would not impose on the locality and its traditions, but rather work alongside it, catering to their current needs, in this case proposing water conservation techniques to grow crops, enhancing existing cooking methods through the use of Rocket stoves (which look similar to traditional stoves yet are 60-80% more efficient), and engaging the wider indigenous community, including children, in its decision making. This community have also trained foresters from the India National forest department. Similarly, "Eco Femme", a social enterprise aiming to provide washable cloth sanitary pads to local women, have engaged these women in the planning and design of the pads, which mimic traditional sanitary methods, but with a higher absorbency and quicker wash and dry time.

Secondly, the disparity of intent might be due to growing inequalities within the community divided most starkly on the basis of ethnicity. Reg, an architect from the Netherlands, recounts how Auroville has changed, citing how on arrival the distinctions between Easterners and Westerners were more blurred, 'life was more simple solidarity more important... we didn't have these differences of money, resources and lifestyles' (Reg, 2013). Contemporary Auroville however tells a different story, with financial and cultural differences leading to a disjunct of concern, with some proposing zero waste living, whilst others struggle to find basic food and

shelter. As Reg cautions, such cultural imbalance needs to be corrected, 'if a certain lifestyle from the Western paradigm is imported here... and takes too much root and has its consequences on everything we are going off track' (Reg, 2013).

According to Ananda Reddy, the ashram and Auroville are going through a testing time of transition as a new generation emerges. The Auroville confronted by those early settlers, that of 'a barren plateau,' was admittedly more physically stark, yet still contained within it the potential and promise: the great tabula rasa to be transformed. However, the original Aurovilians, who benefitted from the Mother's energy and vision, are now aging, and Auroville appears to have become more complex and contested: the baton has been passed forward, yet Auroville is apparently left questioning its direction.

#### **iv) Auroville as "Divine Anarchy?"**

According to Reddy, the fact that many in today's Auroville, 'haven't read the text [and] don't understand the vision,' is behind the fact that the community has, 'become wrapped up in subsidiary matters- ecology, village planning etc... [when it was] meant to be a spiritual vision' (Reddy: 2013). For Reddy, this is not the natural development of the supraphysical process, the dispersion of individual tracks characteristic of Mother and Aurobindo's "divine anarchy," but rather an indicator that things have been blown off course. Aurovilians broadly agree that this creates a need to re-envisage practice, and also re-interpret the texts beyond the influence of the Mother, however they are divided on how this process should take place.

Some call for hierarchy to be reinstated. Sanjeev proposes that Auroville 'should be guided by a natural spiritual hierarchy' (Sanjeev, 2013), whilst Reddy suggests that Auroville 'requires those who know the text to lead it' (Reddy: 2013). Such views seem somewhat reminiscent of Plato's "Philosopher-Kings", who might have privileged access to the hallowed realm of textual "truth." However, such a scheme might run into similar (if not further) logistic dilemmas as Plato with the potential danger of, at worst, a relegation of "the true Aurobindo" and the "true Auroville" to the Platonic realm of forms immortalized in the text, and at best drawing back of Aurobindo into the ascetic preserve of academic superiority.

Sanjeev believes this "natural leadership" might emerge through the assumption 'that people imbued by a spiritual ideal would be open to a higher direction' (Sanjeev: 2013), however it is difficult to ascertain what might constitute the "spiritual ideal" required to fit the post. Certainly, within Aurobindo's texts we see "tendencies" yet certainly not measurable "prescriptions" for ascertaining one's level of realization. With the philosopher kings, one might at least rely on the guidance of logic and reason, but for a spirituality that places its very understanding and mobilization on the interpretation of the individual, this becomes increasingly tricky. As Jean Yves, a teacher at a progressive arts school in Auroville, points out 'Sri Aurobindo's thought is anything but exclusive,' and to instate a hierarchy would in practice be to instate a particular interpretation, thus threatening to universalize that which, in the eyes of many, was seen to be most particular. In this view, there might then be a lapse towards the dogmatic, the formulaic, which Aurovilians tended to see, following Aurobindo's ideas, as the death knell of the social group.

Jean Yves thus contests the ideas of spiritual hierarchy within Auroville, arguing

against a linear approach, claiming that '(spiritual) development is not in a vertical line'. He also encourages a view of the community beyond the appearances of its physical manifestation, arguing that, although Auroville provides substance and space for external expression, it is, at least primarily, 'not here to achieve something external.' Rather the city provides a laboratory for something beyond itself,

[it is] all about what we become; (we are) deepening understanding of what it is to be an Aurovilian, although we sometimes lose in the practical, we do not lose on the inner experiment- what it means to each one of us for a new consciousness (Jean Yves: 2013).

In congruence with the idea of Auroville as a kind of training ground for "higher becoming", Jean Yves describes how the interpretation of Aurobindo's text requires, 'one... to deconstruct his exclusive philosophy in order to integrate the other' (Jean Yves: 2013). This would arguably - rather than lamenting the messy, contested understanding of what Auroville should become - almost come to necessitate contestation, if one is to move beyond personal exclusivity to embrace "communal faith." As Jean explains, 'having [a] relationship with an exclusive Godhead is fine, but the Divine is so much more' (Jean Yves: 2013). In order for Auroville to go beyond the exclusive to embrace the possibility of divinity beyond form, any attempt to standardize might dogmatise and reduce divinity to a "Godhead" and thus curtail the possibility of future becoming.

Jean quotes Vivekananda's adage: "we know that all the ways are true" (Jean Yves: 2013), to illustrate how the free, indeterminate nature of spiritual interpretation, escapes dogmatism, allowing that 'some ways might still be invented' (Jean Yves: 2013). The form and instrumentation of the city, in Jean Yves' eyes, might become a key platform for promoting the free expression of "Divine Anarchy." The creation of a

city is the best way of achieving these multifarious ends since

The thing about a city is there are heterogeneous elements [and] no dogma, no guru, no authority, almost no state- everything that [apparently] keeps a society together is not there- but [we] have not collapsed (Yves:2013).

However, through expanding the notion of truth to encompass “all the ways,” Auroville might be in danger of creating such vague criteria for manifestation that it risks lapsing into a purely emotivist project. Although Aurobindo proposed the discovery of knowledge beyond the intellectual, there is less evidence to suggest that he was emphasizing a complete disavowal of tradition and wholly self- governed spirituality, which might be more characteristic of the Western New Age (particularly as examined in the work of Heelas).

Considering the importance of tradition in Aurobindo’s works perhaps lends more support to Reddy’s proposal for “spiritual authority” since this, he argues, would be instated, not on the creation of a minority ideology: a sole reading of the text, but rather negotiated in more communal terms. Such hermeneutics would not reduce interpretation to a pure relativity but rather privilege authorities based upon the degree to which they are steeped in the tradition they intend to continue. Reddy proposes the addition of a ‘spiritual advisory group’ within the bounds of the current governance structure: the Auroville Foundation.

The Auroville Foundation is a conglomerate of multiple stakeholders, comprising an International Advisory Board, Auroville Council and Resident’s assembly, which together make up the co-governance of Auroville. Although the International advisory board comprises members instated to ensure Auroville keeps on track with its aims,

such as UN members, cultural figures and academics, even, it must be pointed out, Dr Karan Singh and Dr Aster Patel<sup>13</sup> who each completed Doctorates on Aurobindo's thought. However, it does appear that that which is understood to undergird and inform all manifestation within Auroville, i.e. spirituality, lacks an explicit mouthpiece within the community. It does seem telling that there is no explicit representation overseeing the spiritual development of Auroville. The employing of a spiritual advisory group would, Reddy ventures, 'stop the sole emphasis on action and discussion,' (Reddy, 2013) but also in this collaboration of mutual shareholders, reduce spiritual dictatorship, in an attempt to provide spiritual guidance.

It is notoriously difficult to begin to bridge the gap between belief and praxis within Auroville, with the individual anarchy proposed by alternate outward projects, appearing, at least in the minds of some, to lose the sense of the Divine. On the other hand, as Jean Yves concedes, one can keep returning to the refuge of textual and its "truth" as a spiritual anchor, and to avoid the tricky business of bringing such ideals into practice. The solidity of the ideals within the pages of text, or the rhetoric of discussion, seems to evaporate when transferred to its attempted realization in the practical.

However, according to Yves, Auroville necessitates application, 'To refer to philosophy is fine, but... to have an ideal is [or has become] almost an excuse not to practise it "Human Unity" is vague enough' (Jean Yves: 2013). Herein, as Yves indicates, the problem is not solely the difficulty of application per se, but the application of ideals that are so vague. Indeed, it is difficult to understand what

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<sup>13</sup> Though this was not the case at the time of fieldwork, with Aster Patel then a key member of the in-house Auroville Council.

particular action the concept of “human unity” might necessitate. Perhaps, and as I turn to later in this chapter, more “boundaried concepts,” i.e. ideals that prompt a clearer course of action, may find more fruitful utilization for bridging this gap between text and action, individual and society and, more tentatively, man and Superman.

#### **v) Auroville as an “Hermeneutic Utopia?”**

The problem however does not begin with differences of application, but interpretation. In discussion with Aurovilians, the problems of handling the texts and the charisma of their authors, whilst allowing, or rather acknowledging, the space of their own and other’s interpretation, quickly became clear. Townsfolk seemed to welcome the security gained from authorising highly subjective viewpoints with summative quips from the texts of Aurobindo and the Mother, and yet bemoaned others’ need to do so. The Mother’s *Charter of Auroville* and *The Dream* were the most referenced sources and became a means of holding onto the charismatic founder and her vision in her absence. As Reg pointed out:

always there’s a tendency to stick with the master’s or the founder’s voice, to the understanding one has oneself then freeze it in [so] its not moving anymore, its not evolving... [but] the master, he evolved all the time (Reg, 2013).

Here Reg acknowledges the disjunct between Aurobindo and the Aurovilians, pointing out that discipleship, at least in this instance, is diversion. This refers to the tricky task of adhering to a vision that necessitates its own evolution, its own transformation, through the interpretation and application of its current

embodiment. Krishnan, who runs the *Arka* hostel for senior Aurovilians, affirms this stance, in his view that the texts of Aurobindo and the Mother act as ‘a practical guidebook, but for a creature we have not yet become’ (Krishnan: 2013). The emphasis upon Becoming appears to necessitate the need for provisional interpretation and provisional practicality rather than a definitive ideology and prescriptive law-making.

Interpretation after a founder’s death appears an even greater challenge to the community. In many interviews it became clear that the passing of the Mother in 1973 represented a difficult and definitive time, which created serious divisions within Auroville. Without her charismatic authority, the method and means of the project became suddenly open for communal debate and Aurovilians were challenged not simply to “carry out” an external vision, but come to self- authorize, i.e. to begin envisioning what Auroville might mean for themselves. This necessarily presupposes an adaptation or change of textual meaning according to the particularities of the readers, as its enlivening subjects. Such a requirement would entail a need to remain open, to deconstruct, critique and reconstruct, at precisely the moment when the tendency for unquestioning devotion is perhaps most pronounced. The compatibility of the very notion of the “devotional” with the concurrent call for “no religion” within the township is in itself a contested issue, which will be addressed shortly.

After the Mother’s death, a period that of “hermeneutic dystopia” appeared to emerge, with a division widening between the interpretation of two factions: one “revolutionary”, the other “neutral.” Several of my respondents related stories of book burning by the “revolutionaries” in the Auroville libraries and secondary schools. This radical faction of Auroville sought to reassert the authority of tradition,

or rather one particular interpretation of that tradition, by burning any book not written by Aurobindo, thus doing away with all that deviated from the fundamental texts. The premise behind this action was the fundamentalist idea that ‘the supramental only requires Aurobindo’s books’ (Shraddhavan, 2013). The aim here was to draw ‘everything... back to the status quo’, to reassert a solidity of truth and, as we might assume, a prescribed set of actions. As Shraddhavan accounts, this was antithetical to the “neutral’s” interpretation of Aurobindo, which affirmed the place of ‘everyone’s opinion... in truth- consciousness’ (Shraddhavan: 2013). Herein Shraddhavan refers to the expansive nature of Aurobindo’s Supermind which finds no negation in its multiple strands of truth development.

However most acknowledge that this phenomenology has not yet been realized, and whilst adhering to its rhetoric, the operation of the mind necessitates the seeing of distinction, and this Otherness as a threat to one’s own truth stance. This radicalism is symptomatic of a move from a kind of “boundaried freedom:” a freedom always against the greater backdrop of the Mother, as a kind of unified relief of (at least an assumed) greater undergirding consciousness; to an unboundaried chaos, wherein the figures of freedom find themselves only in distinction. In other words, this might be considered a move from the “divine anarchy”- the creativity that realized the universal authority of the Divine term (here represented in the worldly presence of the Mother) - to the fluidity of all-out anarchy. As Shraddhavan accounts,

in the beginning [Auroville] was creative, always moving, reinventing itself... when the Founder, the mother passed away, there was no reference points, the people who were mandated to look after our affairs... they gave us a hard time... because they wanted to run Auroville like a corporation (Shraddhavan, 2013).

The chaos and clamouring post Mother's death came to a head in a way that officially came to change the meaning of the community, when the Indian government came to intervene. The initial proposal to create Auroville (1960) had been led by the Sri Aurobindo society who were exempt from certain legislature due to their status as a religious organization. However, by the time of The Auroville (Emergency Provisions) Act of 1980, Auroville had distanced itself from the Sri Aurobindo Society, and came to represent and be legally accepted as a "secular" organization. To cite the legal report,

there is no room for doubt that neither the Society nor Auroville constitute a religious denomination and the teachings of Sri Aurobindo only represented his philosophy and not a religion. [S.P. Mittal vs Union of Indian and Others, 8/11/1982: point 2.3793 D-E].<sup>14</sup>

As Minor points out, the court, at least at this time, did not 'make a distinction between religious and spiritual institutions'. This ruling was the reason behind the instating of the Auroville Foundation which aimed to divide the governance of Auroville to the hands of several vested bodies; the Resident's Assembly, the elected Auroville council and the International Advisory board.

Other self-appointed leaders emerged, most notably Satprem, who had had a very close relationship with the Mother, but his imposing standards of interpretation remained controversial in a society which sought to exemplify the individual and his own truth.

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<sup>14</sup> For further discussion on the contested status of Auroville, see Robert Minor's work: 'Auroville: the Spiritual, the Secular'

Nevertheless, for some, this spiritual “free for all” has precipitated an individuation and separation that went too far, leading the communality of Auroville to suffer, and the community to become a little lopsided: ‘we were so spread out... the individual part has been developed so strongly and taken root that the sharing on a social level... is not developed’ (Reg, 2013).

For Grace, who has just completed the newcomer process, the aim is to get back to those early days, as she points out, ‘too many comforts mean that people are not unified. Catastrophe and need (in the past) brought out clear vision and community in people’ (Grace, 2013). Similarly, Prof. Murali sees Auroville to be ‘floundering after the Mother and Satprem. Before there was structural and ideological unity- we need someone [new] to take over’ (Murali: 2013).

However, it seems for others that, not only the troublesome, but also the “true” Auroville, might come to emerge after the Mother’s passing. For Antim, this was a natural fragmentation, wherein individuals retreated to regroup and re-examine their personal spirituality in the light of her absence. Antim regards such ‘divisions [to] come as makeshift’: a temporary and yet necessary process of distinction, which has a purpose in the wider process. As he recounts,

once Mother was here she could do it, but once her energy withdrew we were to go back to division to do our individual work... but after that is done again we have to unite...we become one to separate, we separate to become one (Antim, 2013).

Antim regards individualism necessary to the eventual integration Auroville seeks to promote. In order to understand the nature of the niche one might fill in this wider vision one must first establish who they are, ‘[people] need to find their own roles...

[their] different destiny... everything has its own destiny, every atom' (Antim:2013). Thus, this process of self-development becomes non-distinct from social development, with the vitality of the social aggregate becoming wholly dependent upon the individual's self actualisation. This effects an oscillation between separation, internalisation, individuation on the one hand, and unification, externalisation, re-communalisation, on the other. It allows, at once, for the life of the personal intellect - since the 'mind connects us to Aurobindo's teaching'- and the practical social action, as 'only by acting will you increase your means,' resulting in their progressive unification: 'every time a renewed synthesis and the divide becomes less and less until we (claps hands)' (Antim, 2013). In other words, Antim regards individualisation and communalization, and in a subsidiary sense, the textual and the practical, to represent, not dichotomous modes of being, but rather necessary modes within a unified process of spiritual synthesis. In a utopian sense this individualization cannot help but necessitate a transformation, or transmutation of the collective.

Mary sees the individual and social transformation aspiration to represent as a post-religious utopia. As she describes the Mother's text, *The Dream*, this aspiration for Auroville is rooted more in potentially secular, human values, such as harmony and brotherhood rather than the overtly "religious",

It's a dream... its not any religion whatsoever, the last paragraph [on] harmony [and] brotherhood: one sees society without religion and politics as one where all are equal, able to follow whatever work they were able to do for the service of the community. Children were free to study in a post ideal, unfettered way... that's what it would like if it was such a place (Mary, 2013).

Such terms of "brotherhood," "human unity", contained in the works of the Mother and Aurobindo, seem to appear, for several Aurovilians, very straightforward rather

than concepts at the mercy of hermeneutics. As Clare, surmises, 'the charter is clear, you can't corrupt it' (Clare: 2013). She is backed up by Ananda Reddy who, when asked about guidelines and plans for the community, pointed to the charter as 'an eminently practical piece' (Ananda, 2013). There was some division between those who saw the document as charting a clear course of action, and those who saw the ideals contained within it as words with concepts open to vast interpretation, yet offering little in the manner of pragmatic guidance. Rod, however, emphasises a different function of these concepts as promoting ideals, which would not and necessarily could not, be realized within the community. Here he relates the Mother's dream to the Platonic

[which envisioned an] ideal of society and defin[ed] the ideals even though... [it was] recognised they couldn't be realised in the society. A funny thing that Plato says in *The Republic* is that this [the ideals becoming manifest] wouldn't happen because the common man wouldn't allow such people [philosophers] to rule because that would mean they would not have the range of all their desires...

So when the mother says at the end [of *The Dream*] that this has not existed, and it can't exist today because humanity is not ready for it, she is doing exactly what they did -- she is stating the ideal (and it's almost identical to the ones that have already been stated), but if we then take that document and try to make institutions that reflect those ideals in that document then I think we will be moving in the direction of religion... I think one can follow those ideals and try to realise them without making a religion, but that is very tricky and so if you start to protect the document as the ideal to be realised, and then you start to try to create institutions that subscribe to that document and evaluate their relevance in a way that's dependent on that document, then I think you're verging on a kind of institutionalisation of an idea that could be taken religiously by some people (Rod: 2013)

Rod thus refers to an alternative way of reading the Mother's works, as less a pragmatic document, and more as resources for "*Eutopia*", in the etymological sense of this term as a "non- place", at least for current individuals within Auroville. The attempt to "realize" the ideals contained within either Aurobindo or the Mother's texts would, in this view, act to reduce them to bounded mental constructs and thus

to the dogma of religion. However, this view questions what the role of the text might be, if our inability to truly interpret and apply it is assured from the outset? Here the text appears to become less instruction, and certainly not a blueprint for a city to be created today, but more, potentially, something transformative of individuals' mode of thought, which might eventually lead to some change on the physical.

Though some agreed with Rod's non-literal reading, the tendency was to suggest that the openness of the text might not negate its ability to initiate a physical response through its promotion of a multitude of expression, since, as Mary argues, 'the ideals are... a very open kind of statement and nobody would want to take it as a fossilised structural statement; that would be going in the wrong direction' (Mary: 2013). In other words, for Mary, the Mother's ideals are broad enough to, in practice, encompass a myriad of potential forms of expression, in correspondence with current circumstances. To negate the practical value of the text, would thus, for her, constitute a "fossilization" of these ideals.

However, for Daphne, there was a postponing of interpretation, through an emphasis upon the cultivation of interiority, the individualistic, personal spirituality. For her this was a necessary preliminary, which would act as its own guidance to the kind of manifestation Auroville wished to bring about. As she explains,

the spiritual aspiration is the unique force of each individual; all the work is to live an individual aspiration, many come from different spiritual origins, they have very different approaches, energetic, intellectual that all these people aspire to live inside ... to give the tru[th] that... [they are]... [They] don't learn from ritual institutions [but] out of spiritual: you feel inside a strong aspiration [to] become more and more a mirror of an inner ideal- [because] it's a new kind of civilisation form, we don't have to do the same thing as before, we have inner force... to conceive the new world from inside (Daphne: 2013).

This inward connection with one's "psychic being", or inward self beyond manifestation was a necessary step for many Aurovilians, a means of self-transcendence, or greater self-realization prior to acting. This, in line with Aurobindo's first stage of Overmind as a process of "inwardness-widening" would not, as in Advaitism, eradicate the individual self, in the face of an all encompassing greater Self, but rather clarify the role of this partial self for the unraveling of a greater Self-Becoming. As Rod affirms,

If Auroville is predicated on evolution beyond human nature, which it is, and this [Auroville] is meant to be the laboratory of that evolution beyond human nature, and if the way to that is as Aurobindo states: through renunciation of attachment to everything, the transcendence of all dharmas, the rejection means that we immerse ourselves in an energetic process, that is not influenced in any way by conventional methods or standards. If there were a concentrated effort to do that then we would be creating a model of something that would be able to go beyond the religious... So, the first step would be the transcendence of all dharmas and this would be a spiritual proposition... (Rod: 2013).

Here Rod points to the importance of a renunciation, a rejection of the old ways, in order to internally break with conventionality in all its forms, before this new mode of living might be realized. This transcendence of all prescriptive dharma, through the internalisation and reconnection with an individuality, or "psychic being", appears both prior to practical application, and yet "worked through" its current forms. However, this emphasis on the internal, and relegation of "institutions and systems" to the secondary, seems in contradiction with the description of Auroville as an experiment. Surely if the "first step" were the "transcendence of all dharmas" this would render Auroville, at the second stage, as experimentally defunct: there would be no need for the experiment of Auroville if spiritual evolution, the attainment of the Supermind, could be achieved purely through internal means.

This is a contentious and rather unclear issue for the whole Auroville community and others have proposed movements in the opposite direction, towards a reconnection with the bodily and the vital as a means to evolve beyond the mental stage. As Gaurav, a film-maker and Aurobindo researcher, points out, the proposal for internal spiritual attainment prior to external practice, particularly as highlighted by Rod, would seem to oppose the empirical nature of Aurobindo's own spiritual biography. As he explains,

[for] Aurobindo himself spirituality came later... while he went to jail and these intense spiritual experiences happened as part of his political life... you cannot say that the political Aurobindo and this one were different people (Gaurav:2013).

In the same way as one cannot create distinctions between the two aspects of Aurobindo's life - the outward political and the inward spiritual - so it might be difficult to draw a distinction between the spiritual ends and the physical, vital and mental means given to realise these higher realities. In other words, Aurobindo chose precisely those fields, i.e. politics and religion, which the Mother instructs Aurovilians to go beyond, as both a kind of channel for the kind of individual transmutation proposed, and the substance and instrumentation for a process of world transformation. It is difficult to imagine him circumventing the political and the religious forms, which informed his life and spiritual development. However, Rod attempts to explain this by suggesting that Aurobindo utilised the political purely for the sake of the spiritual:

He chose to be in politics to create this energy field for higher evolution- so Auroville is predicated on the possibility of undertaking that project to the exclusion of the others...Spiritual evolution entails a rejecting of the political level, horizontal dynamics... (Rod, 2013).

Here Rod appears to suggest that Aurobindo utilizes the lesser instrumentation of the political, or the changing of external conditions, as a precursor to a non-political spiritual self and society. The “advent of the Superamental,” which Aurobindo was said to realize and bring forth, entails for Rod that Aurovilians need not engage with the political, but rather access higher means of manifestation and realization than simply affecting the external conditions. Thus, in a statement that might be considered a complete inversion of pragmatism Rod argues,

the Mother said that human beings have always tried to achieve a higher state of things by changing structures externally. But you have to first achieve the higher consciousness and then change the structures so the approach has been backwards according to that statement. We don't create an ecological society and then have human beings who respect nature; you first have human beings that respect nature and then you create an ecological society. So that is the top down dynamic which has been recommended for Auroville, but the human tendency has been the opposite- to first create structures that will lead to the ideal, its obviously not working in Auroville (Rod: 2013).

Thus, the *Eutopia* of Auroville appears complete. Since the social transformation to which Auroville aspires is wholly predicated upon the realization of a being that is not yet, this view would imply a complete disabling of Aurovilians. Rather than becoming a society that welcomes the diverse strands of individual and cultural expression for mutual transformation, the introduction of a “top down approach” would appear to both crystallise the past and distanciate the present, leaving current individuals in a hermeneutic no man's land. For example, through the creation of cultural pavilions and the preservation of the history of consciousness, Auroville might operate as an archive to individuals that *were*, and - through its lofty aims and futuristic architecture - might operate as an aspiration to individuals that might *become*. However there appears a gaping lacuna between these oppositions: what then, is the role of Auroville for the beings of the present? To deny the externality and

necessary partiality of religion and politics would appear to place hedges on the potential expression and outlet of individual Becoming, and, one might argue, act to either confine Aurovilians to an asceticism, or, in so distancing the “truth” from the present individuals, resign them to a pure materialism.

Rod here, in appearing to uphold only one side of the dichotomy, I argue, slips into a dangerous misrepresentation of Aurobindo for the Auroville community. For instance, he privileges Aurobindo’s mysticism without acknowledging its grounding within the empirical; Aurobindo’s metaphysics, without the possibility for its poetic re-working; the capacity of the Divine, without its possibility for unveiling in the play of the anarchic; and the Utopian, without its means to be re-created through the interpretation of followers. This appears antithetical, as other Aurovilians have pointed out, to both the process of Aurobindo’s own biography, his re-working of tradition within text and his description of the simultaneity of the *Supermind* capacity. It even stands in opposition to Aurobindo’s description of the connection with one’s inner being. The inner being is, rather, an ascetic quality, which exists, according to Aurobindo, in ‘direct contact with the world, and must proceed to knowledge by identity’ (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 551). This statement must be regarded less a simple shift of knowledge, but rather, when followed to its logical conclusion, as a complete reorientation of being, and thus of outward, as well as inward knowledge.

This chimes with the understanding of other Aurovilians, who saw Auroville as the space for praxis: as the bridge between the apparent oppositions which might eventually find their mergence. Daphne appears to allude to this in describing how Auroville,

provides the place for practice- I couldn't do what I'm doing in any other place... everywhere else I'm expected to earn my living and it takes too much energy... [there's] not enough focus and [they] don't have a centre like the *Matrimandir*. [*The Matrimandir's* energy is] so heavy; its there all the time, so I'm glad that a physical place has been created... its very important (Daphne, 2013).

Thus, although Aurovilians were quick to point out that, as individuals they have not yet 'evolved that far' (Daphne, 2013), i.e. far enough to wholly realize Aurobindo's teachings in the material since, '[his] teaching is for a superhumanity and what we have in Auroville is the infra-humanity,' they did see Auroville as an intermediary step within this process. And the process itself is not arbitrary.

#### **vi) From "hermeneutic utopia" to "hermeneutic architecture?"**

Architecture is one such means for the realization of alternate interpretation of a dream in Auroville. The creation of structures and a community within Auroville, for beings who are "on the way," as alluded in the previous chapter, entails that architectural structures attempt not just to be physical containers for the individuals within Auroville, but might, in their very structuring, effect the content of the individuals contained. This creates a potential dialogue between the built environment and the individuals who both might create and find their existence contained within it. According to Reg, the dialectic between tradition and temporality, represented here through, on the one hand, a textual instruction in the form of maps and guidelines, and on the other, an individual experimentation, constituted not only by the imagination and personalities of individuals, but also social logistics and building materials, became a key challenge architecturally. In his eyes, the transposition of mental models on social space had proven dissatisfactory, 'somehow

to bring [this vision] down into practise, it never really worked- except [in the case of] the *Matrimandir*' (Reg: 2013).

According to Reg, Roger Anger, the chief planner of Auroville, particularly struggled with this fact. He had drawn up intricate plans for the city's development, but apparently became so disheartened when confronted by 'a bunch of hippes', 'no money' and Indian counterparts who 'each... wanted to be boss' that '[he kept] running away'. His frustration with the working materials (and workers) to hand, led him to believe he could not 'bring things forward in any meaningful manner' (Reg: 2013). This need to relinquish control of the text, and its representation of the "ideal" in order to allow for its, often messy, realization in dialogue with the personalities and products of the time.

It is easy for the text in such instances to take on the status of the utopian, the arché, representing the divine vision to be made manifest, however it must also allow for the hermeneutic, the techné, allowing this vision to be a work in progress, to worked out terrestrially. As Jaya, planner at the Centre for Human Unity has described the nature of these guiding texts,

Nothing is binding in the [Auroville] charter- [each point] cannot be a norm, only an inspiration, [for] all the rest we have to invent what it means, re-present what it means... humanity is confronted, given the possibility to change, we want to change, but we resist change (Jaya, 2013).

Similarly, for Reg, the architectural plan was to be regarded less a prescription, and more a "mass model" with a methodology and interpretation continually open to question. As Reg recounts, 'I asked the questions, "Where are we now?" "How much money [do we have]?" "What can we do now?"' (Reg, 2013). This entailed an approach

which remained pragmatic, not wholly confined to the constructs of the intellect, but re-vised through its manifestation in the physical. This in-dwelling in the physical fundamentally changes the way in which planning and buiding might occur:

we believe we can plan how to build the world and ourselves- we can plan how to build this table, but the vision part is not the mental capacity, the old visions are over (Reg: 2013).

Reg here alludes to an alternative means of planning inherent to the very nature of Auroville, as a city planning to change, not merely the external world of its members but also, and more importantly, the internal world, '[Auroville is] a laboratory attempting consciously to change... the human species because the human species is also evolving' (Reg: 2013). At the same time as attempting to tap the inherent truths and capabilities of mankind as a whole, Auroville is also aspiring to become an international community of individuals living their own truths. Reg acknowledges the challenge of this re-visioning, but also highlights that if the project and process were to be scaled down, 'then the diversity... [would] suffer and the meaning of the experiment is a world experiment where all the nations are here...' (Reg: 2013).

Reg recognizes the need within Aurovilian architecture to build human union through those sides of life, less commonly associated with the architectural; such as the 'centrality of emotion and the sacredness of space' (Reg, 2013). This re-engagement with the intimate cultural life of a people also requires rooting in a historical dimension. Reg points to the deep sense of tradition evident within the societies of indigenous people, a dimension which appears to have been lost, or otherwise derided current European nations, but yet finds its potential re-discovery on Indian soil.

we haven't got such a native population to engage with. But India has this potential. The role of Auroville's International zone, might be to recast this archaeology in Integral terms, the rediscovery of "the soul of the nations" ... through soul facilities and not the mind (Reg, 2013).

Reg's view is reminiscent of Aurobindo's stance within *The Human Cycle*, wherein the "group soul" finds itself rooted in the historical, and expressed through a re-integration of the diverse, and often conflicting, lessons of this history. The recognition of the "group soul," the underlying emotional and spiritual unity of the collective, is key to the integration of individual and cultural forms in freedom of self-expression.

For Jean Yves, a challenge inherent to this upholding all self-expression, is the concurrent need to challenge the bounds of architectural development, which he believes remain, 'constrained by Western schooling,' with its 'tendency to control from the centre' (Jean Yves: 2013). Yves points out that we know from Aurobindo's texts where such a condensed social structure might lead, i.e. a state centralised not only geographically and architecturally, but also politically and culturally with its power and energy, distanced, rather than dispersed amongst the people. Auroville, in order to meet its aspiration, 'has to be done in another way' (Jean Yves: 2013). This other way, although finding guidance from texts, remains necessarily indeterminate, and, rather than taking refuge within prescriptive methodology and its simple transposition upon life, rather requires a complete submission to the task: a giving of oneself to embody and thereby create a vision beyond self: '[we are] a kind of clay, worked upon, you have to give yourself to that, [really] we have no clue, there is something else that is doing it' (Yves: 2013).

Moulding hermeneutics to the proposed and intended anarchy within Auroville; the

submission to that beyond self, and even that beyond text, explains the lack of rules within Auroville. The emphasis upon individual freedom aims to give that which is developing within Auroville - both individually and collectively - room to be made manifest. What is to be brought about is not simply something mediated by individuals but rather something which necessitates individuals' direct participation. Individuals thus become, not mere tools to bring a vision into reality, but rather the very substance that is shaped through re-visioning and re-creating what Auroville might become. Thus, the development of Auroville - though experienced and practiced outwardly - is rather understood as the outer "machinery," the necessary training wheels for realizing an inner development. The great rhetoric of the Auroville community in, for example, its drive for Human Unity or realization of the Supermind are thus, for Yves, less states to be reached, and more aspirations to inspire and direct Self-becoming beyond self:

the aim is not to become superman in Auroville- we're not going to do it- it is the cradle of Superman. It is not our business, we are not going to "do it". We are in unknown territory. If we could become human beings unified around an aspiration, a psychic transformation has to take place, because the call, the aspiration is to become more sincere, not change myself to superman, but not having a gap between the ideal we refer to and the way we are (Jean Yves, 2013).

This leads to a further definition of the Utopian within Auroville, as the outer manifestation of the process of self-becoming. For Yves, the goal is, through the personal lived experience of "creating" society and self, to begin bridging the gap between the constructive intellect and its distinction between ideal and praxis, matter and spirit. Thus, the paradigm of the mental - which Aurobindo refers to as "knowledge by separation," due to its basis within distinction - is challenged through the aspiring sense of a merging, deeper relationship, an integrity between ideals and

action, which is the basis for realizing Aurobindo's Supermind, or "*Knowledge by Identity*". It is easy to be skeptical about a project that aims at that beyond the actual, however perhaps, as Antim suggests, one cannot criticize the manifestation of the future through the paradigms of the past,

all that you see is contradictory with what it has to be... but you don't have to see through these mental eye, but even the beauty behind these contradictions (Antim, 2013).

The problem, and simultaneous potential, is arguably inherent to the nature of the texts themselves. Aurobindo's work, beyond being terse and difficult to read, contains a vision that cannot simply be transposed into the present, but demands transformation in the present: it aims to go beyond itself. In other words, it necessitates an individual interpretation rather than putting forward one line of action and argumentation.

### **vii) Auroville: "Religionism" or "Poetic Metaphysics?"**

Jean Yves' comments on the aspiration of Auroville, suggest that the community, in hoping to reduce the gap between self and other, ideal and manifestation, might be moving into a post- religious space. This section, drawing most particularly on a focus group I held in Auroville in 2013, is an enquiry into the nature of "spiritual" life within Auroville, questioning whether it might be considered to be co-eval with the process of "transcreation" evidenced in Aurobindo's texts. First however, it might be useful to outline Aurobindo's distinction between "religion" and "religionism" to show how his definition of "religion" fits within the paradigm of his transcreation, or reconstructive synthesis.

Aurobindo makes clear throughout his works that “religionism” is the product of a separative paradigm, wherein self-consciousness finds identification with the common habits of the mind, life and body, viewing the worldly self as distinct from the Divine beyond. Although this turning to the Divine apparently “beyond self” is the first stage outlined in Aurobindo’s own spiritual process, it is also a juncture,

as yet without [experiential] knowledge and led by the dogmatic tenets and rules of some sect or creed which claims to have found the way out of the bonds of the earth-consciousness into some beatific Beyond. The religious life may be the first approach to the spiritual, but very often it is only a turning about in a round of rites, ceremonies and practices or set ideas and forms without any issue (Aurobindo, 2012, LOY I: 419).

Thus, he notes how this experience, especially within the ascetic traditions, can feel less a transition and more a culmination of religious knowledge. This “religionism,” through its juxtaposition of Spirit and Matter, God and Man, aims at an escape from “earth-consciousness,” or an “ascetic refusal.” This is in stark contrast to Aurobindo’s definition of “religion” which

proceeds directly by a change of consciousness, a change from the ordinary consciousness, ignorant and separated from its true self and from God, to a greater consciousness in which one finds one's true being and comes first into direct and living contact and then into union with the Divine. For the spiritual seeker, this change of consciousness is the one thing he seeks and nothing else matters (Aurobindo, 2012, LOY I: 419).

In Aurobindo’s definition, the distinction between “religionism” and “religion,” appears less a difference in the “Knowledge” of these states, and more a difference in the degree of fusion each brings about. Most particularly this pertains to the relationship between individuals, as “knowers,” and the Divine, as the “object of their knowledge.” Thus, for Aurobindo, “religionism” was not set in opposition to

“religion”, but rather conceived as an earlier step in the process, a necessary scaffolding, to be deconstructed, once the horizon of “religion” was attained. In other words, for Aurobindo, the immediate knowledge of religion is not simply a rejection of mediated religionism, but rather, since it is through this mediated knowledge by separation that one might eventually come to attain the higher states of knowledge by relationship and identity, so it is by the aids of the lesser, “religionist” grasping that one might realise true religious capacity.

In my view, this classification is a recapitulation of Aurobindo’s own personal realisations wherein, as we have found, he accounts four experiences, of a divine “beyond” a divine “immanent” before the increasing mergence of these divinities. It is also homologous to the poetic approach to the metaphysical found in Aurobindo’s *The Life Divine*, wherein the metaphysics of Vedantic interpretation: *advaitism*, *dvaitism*, *kevela advaitism*, respectively, are neither simply adopted, nor wholly dismissed but cumulatively re-worked in a unique re-synthesis with the materiality of the present. Unsurprisingly he presents a similar method for his followers – an interiority which might appear to transcend the material self, only to return and take up the terrestrial self in an Integral transformation. Thus, I question whether the tensions inherent in Auroville, might re-echo those found within Aurobindo’s works, as en-textualised for the continuation of the “tradition”.

Auroville, though lived and experienced outwardly, is adamant that its project is spiritual, not solely aiming at a “Beyond”, but instead utilising the external to better reveal and understand the internal veiled Self. It does not perceive the material as a static or illusory state to be overcome, but rather as a manifestation of a spiritual becoming. This aspiration involves a necessary shift in perception.

However, the Mother very clearly stated to UNESCO that there is to be “No Religion!” within Auroville, and this has been left open to a multitude of interpretation in practise. Within a discussion group I held in Auroville on this very problem, Aurovilians were quick to denounce the religious, yet at the same moment point out the many ways in which its influence is seen in Auroville. For example, as Daphne points out, until very recently the documents of the Auroville entry service contained terminology like “devotion” and “faith” and “commitment to the ideals of the charter”. Rod expands, explaining how for the last twenty or thirty years Auroville Entry Documents required prospective Aurovilians to sign a “faith agreement” which said: “I affirm my devotion to the charter and the ideals of Auroville” (Rod, 2013). The signing up to sets of “rules” appears to suggest at least some solidity in their interpretation, and it was questioned whether this might constitute a dogma.

However, according to Martin, a long term Aurovillian from Germany, the commitment to “no religion” (read here, no “religionism”), need not necessitate a termination of acts of devotion and faith, or problematize a commitment to a set of ideals. In his view, each of these might be compatible with the living of a “non-religious” life, and rather, in calling for “no religion,” the Mother merely admonishes the mediated relationship to the Divine. As Martin expands,

we live for the Divine, we experience the Divine, and there she made the distinction, she said religion is a spiritual experience brought down in a mental level and formulated in a dogma. [But] she wanted to experience the Divine immediately without any dogmatic fixing (and this is what normally, people outside when they grow up in a religion [mean]...) Mother said, ‘the true Aurovilians are those who want to be divine’... [which] means that the spiritual attitude... is dominant, it should actually define Aurovilianship: ‘we want the Divine, we want to experience and manifest the Divine’, that is Mother’s own words (Martin: 2013).

Martin thus conceives the Mother's guidance less a disavowal of religious ideology per se, and more a call to transcend the fixity of form, or dogma, commonly associated with religion, in order to retain a growing relationship, and even merging, with the Divine. Such perspectives appear to correspond to Aurobindo's ideal of spirituality as an unmediated form of religious knowing. However, it appears very difficult, if not impossible to conceive of what this unmediated form of the divine might look like outside of its formulations on a mental level. Frances, an Irishman and long-term resident of neighbouring village Villapuram, echoed this concern, agreeing with Martin's definition of the spiritual, yet also questioning what the meaning of the "spiritual" might be when stripped of the forms of its transmission,

a lot of communities... Pythagorean communities, mimetic...they all had this thing... they delete the religion but then it is the truth of the religion so you're back to semantics... it's a semantic question, so once we've solved the semantic question, at a more general level, what was the Mother trying to describe? (Frances: 2013).

Frances refers to the problematic of attempting to retain an untouchable "truth" beyond the inevitable - and, in this argument, necessary - vicissitudes and fallacies of form. By alluding to a truth that remains ever "beyond" the manifest, Aurovilians do not simply succeed in dismissing the "dogmatic" aspects of religion, but rather find themselves (since the "truth" signified, might never find temporal expression and critique), with a fixed "form" of truth. Further, this view would appear to lead to a redundancy of the text. Auroville, as it self-proclaims, is itself inspired - if not wholly founded - upon ideas submitted and understood through textual form, and thus cannot claim pure unmediated spirituality (or "truth") as its bedrock.

It appears difficult, if not nigh on impossible, to communicate - or arguably even realise ideals - without some submission of these ideals to the formative. One might argue that the very existence of the Auroville township is testament to such a need to utilise materiality as context for an emergent spirituality. Frances points to the ostensibly religious nature of the community, through the centrality of structures such as the Matrimandir, which 'assume [that] the apparatus of Auroville has a religious context' (Francis, 2013). If the "materiality of religion" had to be forgone in the pursuit of spirituality, why would such symbolic structures be invested with such time, energy and sacrality? Martin, however, maintains the spirituality of the Matrimandir through its symbolic status as,

the living symbol of Auroville's aspiration for the Divine... the glass ball [at the centre of the meditation room] ...receives the ray from the Sun: the sun stands for the divine truth of the *Supermind* and the ball stands for receptivity so [it is] a spiritual symbol... (Martin: 2013).

As alluded to in the previous chapter, many others within Auroville explained that the Matrimandir was not to be confused with a "religious" structure, since it was a meditation, or "concentration" hall. The practise of meditation is thus claimed a "secular" everyman activity, abstracted from its context within historical religious traditions. However, the matrimandir - at the same time as communicating an aspiration for the people it hopes to become - also socially "entextualises", or cements an identity for Auroville in its particular space and time. Such a process is similarly communicated through the creation of an International zone within Auroville for the celebration of the religions of the world,

Mother wanted Auroville to be a city of religions, an area where temples and churches of all religions of the world past and present are represented... and run by people who identify with that (Martin: 2013).

It is interesting that, along with her disavowal of dogma and “religion,” the Mother chose to memorialise religious tradition within the township. However, Rod explains this choice through alluding to the nature of “religion” as “culture.” Thus religion’s preservation within Auroville, becomes almost an archive to spiritual truth; ‘Truth with a capital T is what religions have pursued and the implication is the way that religions have pursued truth has been relevant to the evolution of consciousness...’ (Rod: 2013).

Herein, we appear to see a similarly evolutionary approach to “religion”, wherein the prior forms are not dismissed but utilized as a means of directing the forms of the present and future. As Rod quotes the Mother: “we want the truth (whatever it is) and religions should be studied as part of the development of human consciousness, but there should be no religions as such” (Rod: 2013). Both Rod and Martin are quick to dissociate this study of religion or, “study in the history of consciousness from the *practise* of religion”, in order to preserve an understanding of spirituality as, again:

“beyond man’s consciousness beyond speech, oh thou supreme consciousness, sole reality divine truth that includes everything... go beyond all the mental formulations” (Mother’s last mantra quoted by Martin:2013).

This call to study the history of religions as a series of “mental formulations,” to be utilized in order to “go beyond all mental formulations,” is reminiscent of the very “scaffolding to religion” of which Aurobindo spoke. Aurovilians do see their study as a search for truth beyond the intellectual, through the study of these formulations. Further, the study of history allows an access point, a point of orientation from which one might understand both the present and the available means of going forward in

future. By understanding how others have dealt with the questions of the metaphysical truth of existence one might plausibly ground and inform one's own search. Such truth then becomes something utilised and moved beyond, rather than grasped and dogmatised.

However, the danger is that by denigrating the material of "religious" study to "culture" or "history" that Aurovilians might create an irreligious, outdated "form." How then might the "truth signified" within each of these religions be retained, for use in the present? On the other hand, if the "truth" which these religious forms signify does remain intact in Auroville, there might be, as Frances suggests, a contradiction in the Mother's message, 'if there is some mandate not to get involved in religion and politics isn't there some paradox here? (Frances: 2013). Here again, there might be the problem of semantics, since it is likely that by instructing Aurovilians to steer away from "religion," the Mother was rather referring to "religionism," and Rod is quick to align the methodology of Auroville with that of Aurobindo,

if you open Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita*, he [Aurobindo] is very clear that the truth which is the eternal truth is the truth of God and the *Bhagavad Gita* is just one of the many outstanding pursuits of that particular truth... And he speaks about doctrine and how it is important to bring out the actual doctrine of the *Gita* as opposed to lots of interpretations of this or that aspect of the *Gita*, so he is making a very strong case for the eternal divine truth as conveyed by the *Gita* which can be accessed through interpretation. It can also be perverted by interpretation, so perhaps it was something like that that the Mother had in mind when she started undertaking an understanding of the truth through a study of religions as opposed to practising some sectarian version of religion which is usually what happens... So that presents a very large scope for... contemplation and study (Rod: 2013).

Rod here relates Aurobindo's openness to prior interpretation, and his synthesis of multiple doctrinal pursuits of "truth", to the Mother's own study of religions, and

model for Auroville. This aligns Auroville less with a sectarian vision of “truth,” but rather with an experimental approach to the multiple truth signifiers presented to them through a variety of religious traditions. However, although Rod does suggest that these interpretations may be paths to truth, he also appears to take Aurobindo’s particular version of “truth” outside of interpretation. This appears to suggest that Aurobindo, rather than unifying tradition from within tradition (and thus providing merely his own interpretation, or re-synthesis, of this tradition), somehow offers a “truth” beyond interpretation. With such a remark, Rod slips into advocating the very religious dogmatism he ridicules - the fixed, unchanging form of truth, the ‘conform[ity] to the pure core teachings’- that he associates with the outdated ‘religious consciousness.’

Both Martin and Rod, appear to swing between tradition and a something “beyond” tradition, suggesting that the very synthesis inherent in Aurobindo’s work entails a status transcendent of history and interpretation. This has clear implications for the reception of this message: is it *smṛti*: a human recollection and interpretation, and thus open to further interpretation? Or do the texts of Aurobindo come here to be *shruti*: revelation of the Divine, the final frontier, to be accepted rather than interrogated and re-interpreted? As Martin suggests in his description of the Mother (below), she too is synthesizing textual ideas, as the products of historical interpretation, yet she herself appears not defined by the limitations of a specific historical context,

one day she had a vision, she was standing on a balcony and then she saw a big mosaic and each facet of the mosaic was one religion past and present and future... She said people are always “narrow, narrow, narrow:” they want to take one of these facets to the exclusion of others, but the true thing is to take all together... because the divine expresses himself in infinite approaches to

man also... We need to take all the approaches and integrate in a direct experience of the divine, which is not defined by any mental rule beyond mind. Mind has rules and definitions, but when we go beyond the mind we are contacting the truth itself and... then religion is dissolving in the usual sense. We have to experience the Divine service of truth- she means God the Divine (Martin: 2013).

However, to claim a deep understanding beyond the “narrow, narrow, narrow” through the bringing together of historical moments is tantamount to a transcendence of temporality and thus of interpretation (which itself suggests temporality’s necessary limits on truth) is highly contentious. This aspect of Aurovilian rhetorics is reminiscent of the theosophical beginnings of the Mother, to quote Helena Blavatsky’s *The Key to Theosophy*: “Theosophy, on earth, is like the white ray of the spectrum, and every religion only one of the seven prismatic colours’ (Blavatsky, 2016: 39). Auroville, like the theosophical claim, places itself beyond interpretation by attempting to contain all manner of “finite expression” within its claim to infinite transcendent truth.

Yet, in a move appearing to transcend this opposition, Rod suggests that the concept of religion in Auroville might constitute both of these aspects: the experiential moment and the narrative form, the “signified truth” and its necessarily vehicle, and the “signifier” through which it is communicated, and understood by others. In other words,

[Religion is] both the going beyond and the formulation of the doctrine about going beyond... both of those are aspects of religion, one of those is the experiential faith act, and the other the intellectual doctrinal aspect and that its necessary to recognise both of those realities and evaluate the extent that one accurately reflects the other... What is the difference between existential faith and knowledge in the form of doctrine which attempts to define that existential experience? (Rod: 2013).

The validity of this doctrinal aspect, as a construct, rather than a truth, depends, in Rod's eyes, on how far one's own experience is actually conveyed, both through the doctrines of others (the preceding tradition), and in one's own entextualisation of the experience. This appears to echo Aurobindo's own mystic empiricism, wherein the personal spiritual experience was primary, yet its transmission might rely upon its ability to be re-contextualised in history and understood in this light. It could be suggested that, rather than being understood as set in opposition, the two terms (the doctrinal and the faith act) might be conceived as interdependent dimensions. Here the cutting of the one (in this case the doctrinal), would act to diminish the other (the un-formulated, or pre-formulated truth). This recapitulates Aurobindo's Integral ideal, which advocates not simply a going beyond and the experiencing (eventually) of an unfettered, immediate truth, but also a "bringing down" and transformation of the lower aspects, through the *realisation* of these ideals. To override any kind of translation of that experience onto the levels of the mental, vital or physical level would act to break the dialogue between the spiritual and the material, the unravelling of the one through its realisation in the substance of the other.

Thus, Rod advocates a need to recognize the "timeless": the experience which he regards to go beyond time, and the doctrinal: which formulates itself within time. It appears that, in order to attain any sense of "truth" the individual must entertain the apparently extraneous, in order to stay true to what Martin also suggests; 'there is a step above the creation, but in the creation it is the consciousness' (Martin, 2013). This statement suggests that, however veiled, the consciousness remains in every creation, which contributes to the very unravelling of these ideas throughout time. Transmission of truth would appear to require time, materiality and formulation through text- whether literary, social or spatial- for its expression. As Frances points

out, other communities throughout history have addressed a similar problematic. He gives the example of the Theosophical mantra:

“there is no religion higher than truth.” [Here] they are not denying religion, they are simply saying that truth is an overlay onto any form of religion, and funnily enough... in the Theosophical Society Headquarters in Madras... there is a temple vihara, a mosque... gurdwara and there is actually an incumbent on the spot, so you can go around and have various ceremonies, so that’s the theosophical approach to it (Frances, 2013).

The tension between the finite, material expression of “truth” and the potential infinite, non-material experience of truth, re-visits a further problematic within Auroville, that tension between a religion of individual interiority, which in the diminishing of the physical would preserve its transcendent ineffability, and a religion of social exteriority, which in its materiality, appears to lose sense of the religious. Herein we have the very dichotomy: that between the “ascetic denial” and the “materialist refusal”, that Aurobindo’s vision endeavoured to overcome.

According to Sonja, the essential goal highlighted by the Auroville council’s 2011 report, was ‘finding living ways to manifest the ideal of Auroville’ (Sonja, 2013). This re-emphasis on praxis is echoed by other Aurovilians who, as we shall now move to explore, have endeavoured to find practical ways beyond the dichotomy of matter and spirit. Through their praxis they rather come to critique the very distinction between self as intellectual, spiritual subject, and world as sensible, material object. This might have great bearing on how Auroville’s spiritual direction might proceed.

### viii) Auroville as Spiritual Materialism: towards “An Indian Method”.

In the discourse of Auroville, there appeared a clear distinction, between a rhetoric of collective, material transformation on the one hand, and individual, spiritual retreatism on the other.

The apparent separation of Spirit and Matter and text and society is an issue of clear debate within Auroville, which, as alluded to, is often responded to either with a rhetoric of integration, or a clear asceticism: privileging the textual and spiritual, over the more apparently mundane, messy or secondary society and matter. Whether Aurovilians regard Aurobindo and the Mother to be proposing a purely “spiritual” vision, or a material vision, colours the kind of acts and aspirations Auroville might encourage. For example, the former “spiritual vision” would entail that the development or transformation of the lower, i.e. the material and social realms, functions merely as a refraction of the spiritual development of the individual. On the other hand, the latter, more “material vision”, entails that the creative, practical and communal set up of Auroville could play a strong hand in moulding the individual transformation.

Quoting Aurobindo, Reg, a retired architect and long-standing resident of Auroville, describes how, “God by his ecstasy threw himself into the darkness to rediscover himself out of darkness”; this entails that ‘he [God] himself goes through the whole process of matter becoming self aware’ (Reg, 2013). In other words, Reg demonstrates how God is non-distinct from his creation, the material is thus non-distinct from the spiritual, and thus individuals, as created, material manifestations of the Divine, might also discover their non-distinction from God, from Spirit.

However, grasping this intellectually, he cautions, is very different from living this “truth” pragmatically. Reg is hinting at the idea that Auroville is bound by a limited paradigm: individually that of “Mind,” collectively that of the *Individualistic age*. Each of these paradigms create a dissociation, a distinction, between individual and society as it does between Spirit and Matter, wherein the bringing together of all appears to threaten the annihilation of individuality. However, he remains positive that shifts are being made in the direction of integration,

[the] subjective age [is] coming, has started- the whole illusion of objectivity has to go... I see all these little islands trying to physically work on that, not as singles but to live together and to work together and have another effect... [when] 2% really go forward then has an effect... people who are unified in themselves to such an extent they of course find each other and automatically then align each other to some actions... without violence and missionary zeal (Reg, 2013).

Here Reg is alluding to the potential for a “tipping point” within Auroville. He sees this as illustrative of a tendency towards integrating self and other, but with the promise of finding complete non-differentiated synthesis. Echoing Aurobindo’s projection for human social development within his work *The Human Cycle*, Reg illustrates how the change is a shift not only in self other orientation but, in calling for a move beyond individual objectivity, a fundamental shift in orientation to the wordly self. Herein, in a move from the privileging of the intellectual objectivity of body and society, individual interiority becomes both non-distinct from bodily and social self, and thus non-distinct from the apparently exterior transformation of each. In affirmation of this unification of interior and exterior, self and society, Shradhdhan regards both positions (the material and the spiritual vision outlined above), to be, ultimately, true. As she explains:

[Aurobindo's] project was definitely not the liberation of a few souls, his project is the transformation of everything, the Divine life in a Material body, on Earth, but the solution that he saw for bringing that about depends on individual change- it is the individual that leads the evolutionary process... It's come to the point where we have conscious individuals who can choose to participate, and there's a paragraph in *The Human Cycle* where he says if this isn't the solution, then there is no solution... (but) eventually this needs to grow into all society that's receptive, and the effects will radiate from there (Shraddhavan, 2013).

One might be mistaken for assuming that this implies a two- phase process wherein one connects with the inner, the individual self, or "psychic being", and then the outer transforms. However, for Shraddhavan, such a linear, polyphasic construction points more to the limitations of the Mind's comprehension than to a contradiction in the spirituality. In her view, this is rooted not only in the illusion of an individuality composed of a composite material and spiritual self, but also the illusion that our individuality confines us to existing as separate selves. Once this is challenged, we begin to understand that our individual and collective being are not diametrically opposed states, but in ongoing dialogue:

Even if we are doing something privately at home it is going to have an effect on the whole... (but) we do this in a sort of withdrawn state [we] have to focus and shut out all kinds of external things, (however) that can only be a temporary state- and we have to test it against reality, and reality is the rest of the world, no? (Shraddhavan, 2013).

Thus, there is a concentration and dilution of focus of consciousness, in the necessary withdrawal and testing involved in experimentation, yet each of these moments, though distinct in its movement and purpose, is in no way separate from the other. Similarly, individuals and society, 'the whole world... and the whole circumstances are the product of the current general level of consciousness', in its various movements of concentration in form and dilution in process. Thus, this consciousness

determines the kind of “outward,” “social” or “material” form that might collectively find manifestation:

if you want obvious physical changes in communal life or in anything else, than you first have to change your consciousness and that has to happen in enough people for it to be able to express itself in the society, and of course, that is what Auroville is created for (Shraddhavan: 2013).

In this view, the most interior movement becomes the most exterior and the most individual action has the most bearing on the collective, since each of these realizations move toward the same outcome. The desired outcome: the realization of *Supermind*, would regard each, individual and collective, interior and exterior, less as distinctions and more as simply differing plays of self consciousness.

#### **ix) Spiritual Materialism I: the body as a mode for transformation.**

Aster Patel, a long-standing member and spokesperson of the Auroville community, as well as an academic who completed her Doctorate on Sri Aurobindo in dialogue with the French thinker Henri Bergson, develops this viewpoint. I both refer to her (2006) publication, and our interview, wherein we discussed the key ideas it raised, namely the attainment and manifestation of humanity beyond the level of the Mind. Aster describes the task Auroville faces in awe-inspiring terms, as she quotes Aurobindo, ‘a veritable transformation and a transformation of the mind and life and very body is indeed the change to which our evolution is secretly moving’ (Aurobindo in Patel, 2006:7). This “Supramental manifestation’ implicates not only our mental development, but also pre-empts a huge change in our actions and very substance. However, this transformation is not predicated on the attainment of something

distinct from self but rather a deeper comprehension and apprehension, a widening and deepening horizon of consciousness.

In a similar way to Shraddhavan, with her description of the non-distinction of individual and society, active concentration and passive reflection through allusion to the unity of consciousness, Aster describes the differing “densities” to which consciousness might realize itself, with clear allusion to Aurobindo’s sevenfold chord of being, through the traverses that might be made in order to reach supramental realization:

The many dimensions of the Real are like a stairway... one “field” leading onto the other. There isn’t a “break.” There is a piercing through, different orders of “densities” ...but inexplicable continuity (Patel, 2006:9-10).

As Aster makes clear, such development is processual and each level encompassed therein only made distinct through its objectification in perception. Aurobindo describes these “orders of densities” as moving from gross to subtle through two hemispheres. At the most substantial and finite, Aurobindo poses the triad of body, life, mind, and as their infinite counterparts - to which this former manifestation might be regarded a mere refraction - the triad of Sat Chit and Ananda. It is easy to perceive these densities as strictly linear, leading to the perception that the mind is more “real” than the body, but according to Aster this perception must be resisted, and an integral rather than linear development pursued.

Following Aurobindo, and re-echoing the intention of Auroville, Aster considers the next stage of “Becoming” in the evolutionary progression of man to be an “Overmental existence”. She is excited by the apparent evidence of the beginning of a

new cycle “beyond” the level of the mind, but is clear that this would not be through ‘an increase of its own activity - but by a silencing of it and by a grounding of the stuff of itself into the material base of one’s being’ (Patel, 2006:18).

Thus, the levels beyond mind are not reached purely through the maximisation of the mental capacities but, and seemingly counterintuitively, through a reconnection with the foundational phase of man’s evolutionary development, i.e. the bodily materiality and its physicality. Aster finds affirmation of this approach through Aurobindo’s description of the *Supermind*. This capacity is described as, at once, the aspiration of humankind; the mediate “consciousness-force” that bridges the lower to the higher hemisphere, and the creative capacity which “involves” itself, moving from a status of infinite Being in the higher hemisphere, to a status of finite Becoming in the lower hemisphere:

that nodal step of the stairway of creation which makes it possible for the Spirit to manifest itself in a world of Matter without losing an essential link with it or denying itself the possibility of ever re-discovering its plenitude, an even greater one in the very folds of matter... must make it possible...for man to move... along this “stairway of creation”, in a movement upward and downward. Till a point of... “conjunction” is realised between the two movements coalesce into one and reveal Matter to be the substance of the Spirit (Patel, 2006:15).

Aster thus believes that mankind must mimic the action of the *Supermind* in its simultaneous capacity of apprehension, or seeing as separate (seeing outside itself) and comprehension, or seeing as one (seeing all as part of itself). In this sense, human evolution recapitulates this original creation. There is further justification of this position from Aurobindo in *The Life Divine*, wherein he speaks directly about modes of knowing beyond the mental, wherein

It is possible for the mind — and it would be natural for it, if it could be persuaded to liberate itself from its consent to the domination of matter, to take direct cognisance of the objects of sense without the aid of the sense-organs. (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 69).

In this allusion to the Tantric, and its emphasis on the importance and joy of matter, Aurobindo goes on to claim that man's re-connection with the material aspect of existence acts to diminish a sense of separation between man's identity as a subject viewing world as distinct from self, and an object non-distinct from the world he seeks to understand. As Aster points out, 'our emphasis on the body is going to take us to a more holistic mode of culture... [since] the body is a one piece by virtue of its organic structure' (Aster, 2013).

In other words, the body can be regarded as a natural whole, or an "Integral representamen", at once containing in its sheath, not only the history of the human being as a physical entity, but also the later developments of the vital and mental self. By this re-integration with his whole being, man might, according to Aster, shift his perspective from the abstractions of the mental, to re-grounding in the material and physical, in sensation and feeling. This re-integration, though on the surface a regression, is, to this view, not a change of substance, but purely a change of mode. In other words, these aspects of being (body, life, mind), do not, for Aurobindo, possess a simple hierarchical status that might be overcome as new "heights" are reached, but rather - and as described in chapter two of this thesis - also function as particular concentrations, or refractions of consciousness, i.e. as the concentrated passive and the increasingly diluted active and constructive (or as body, life and mind, respectively). Matter and Spirit here cease to be considered as wholly different properties, and become rather differing densities, or as Aurobindo asserts, (and Patel echoes), '[the] substance of the spirit' (Aster, 2013).

This re-grounding in the body is said to act as a kind of re-construction of the modalities of the human organism, in its vital and mental capacities, in order to recast and transmute them in the process. As Aster reports, though it took her ten years, the re-integration with her body had significant impact on her mentality, with the mind 'function(ing) in a more holistic manner, it doesn't construct or deconstruct... it perceives and acts... perception and action is like one string' (Aster, 2013). This state of non-differentiation between perception and action recapitulates Aurobindo's recasting of the conventional distinction between Spirit and Matter, passive Consciousness and active Force, creating an interaction between self, action and world in a state of non-distinction or immediacy, rather than the typical mediated constructions found in Aurobindo's description of mental interactions. This also creates a possibility for the self, as perceiver, to become non-distinct from its object of knowledge: in studying the world then, we study ourselves.

This repossession of bodily self is described as a process of "Centering", a means of grasping a totality in which problems arise 'from that fabric in which they are deeply interwoven' (Patel, 2006:66). In other words, in addition to the apprehension, or limiting focus of the mental (a capacity well honed within the human), there is simultaneously an attempt towards a comprehension, an understanding - or rather, inhabiting - of self in relief, as non-distinct from the whole of existence. Aster considers this view the harbinger to 'a new methodology beyond the reductionist,' which might constitute a re-imagining of a quintessential "Indian methodology," providing an alternative approach to the reductionism of Western science (Aster: 2013).

Unlike the objective aspiration of Western science, which necessitates a detachment of the observer from a bounded, finite, object of study, this approach entails a radical subjectivity: a study of the development of consciousness in which the perceiver himself is part of the object of study. Echoing Aurobindo, Aster points out that 'our way of knowing must be appropriate to that which is known' (Aurobindo in Patel, 2006: 66), claiming the scientific methodology redundant, 'when you arrive at a whole, how is reductionist metaphysics going to go any further?' (Aster, 2013).

Aster, however, is also clear not to set her approach in opposition to the scientific, pointing out that developments in science, the "new physics", have prompted a similar change in the way we consider reality. Nevertheless, the implications of this paradigm shift for our understanding of the world - and the human sciences - outside the strictly scientific domain, have not, she feels, been adequately considered, and should encompass not simply the scientific, but apply 'to all human problems, whether psychological, social, cultural, political, economic and with reference to both the individual and collective dimensions' (Patel, 2006:69). The question raised now, she argues, is not how to progress, but rather, how to re-integrate?

The "new model" for individuals and collectives, like the new science, is a "something" 'that remoulds, that re-creates the new out of its own being' (Patel, 2006:64). In other words, Patel re-echoes Aurobindo's examination of 'old problems to see where past solutions have proved ineffective or, at best, inadequate, and how fresh departures can be made' (Patel, 2006:65). This method, as an antithesis to a linear view of development, advocates a "looking backward" in order to "look forward", a looking to the body to exceed the mind.

One of the ways the integration of an implicate aspiration, i.e. the non-distinction of man and God, through explicate practice, has been attempted in Auroville, echoing the ideas of physicist and Eastern philosophy enthusiast David Bohm, is through utilizing a new language to reflect the proposed shift in paradigm. This would be a new vocabulary through which to label and describe the world in order to communicate not just through the finite constructs, but through neo-logisms which might express a merging between that which the mind views in distinction. This potential role of the linguistic will be examined in the following section.

#### **x) Spiritual Materialism II- the poetic as a mode of transformation.**

The development of society, according to Shraddhavan, should be in 'a spiritual way. In order to become that spiritualised society [aspired to], enough of us need to find out who we really are' (Shraddhavan, 2013). However, the texts of Aurobindo might aid this by themselves foreshadowing the kind of spiritual experimentation called for in Auroville. This is most particularly within Aurobindo's epic poem, *Savitri*, which she claims aided the development of her own consciousness:

going into the text is so much more profound and rich and complex... our brains have got developed... consciousness has changed' thus they are a useful contribution to our self development (Shraddhavan, 2013).

*Savitri* retells a story from the *Mahabharata*, which, like all Aurobindo's invocations of the Vedas, operates not as a simple historical account, but to reveal hidden truths that might be useful to people today. Aurobindo entitles *Savitri*, "a legend and a symbol": 'a legend about something that has taken place in the history of man and a symbol of what is going on and of what is going to be' (Bhattacharjee, 1988). This

work, considered by many Aurovilians to be the definitive text of Aurobindo, can thus be seen not only to foreshadow a potential direction for Auroville, but also, at the same moment, to recapitulate the spiritual experiences that shaped Aurobindo's own biography.

For example, the cumulative realisations of the characters in this work, such "the discovery of the All- negating Absolute" (Book 7, Canto 6), and the "correction" of this "truth" through "the discovery of the Cosmic Spirit and the Cosmic Consciousness" (Book 7, Canto 7), re-echo Aurobindo's personal spiritual pathway. Thus, the text 'describes [Aurobindo's] own spiritual odyssey and the saga of The Mother's spiritual adventure', as well as operating as an allegorical account 'for the evolution of a new step in consciousness beyond the mind' (Bhattacharjee, 1988). For example, it also contains passages that describe the synthesis of the inner and outer self:

They looked upon each other, knew themselves,  
 The secret deity and its human part,  
 The calm immortal and the struggling soul.  
 Then with a magic transformation's speed  
 They rushed into each other and grew one  
 (Aurobindo, 1997, SAV, Book 7, Canto 5: 527).

As well as documenting a key spiritual realisation in Book 7, the work also, as Sharaddhavan points out, poignantly shows the way in which this is tested again and again throughout the rest of the work, for example, 'in book 8, 9, 10, 11' (Shraddhavan, 2013). To her this provides an exemplified blueprint for Auroville, as a laboratory for human becoming through 'yoga in practise': 'all these palliatives that

we are working on [within] our field of growth, test its reality' (Shraddhavan, 2013). This also reinforces the importance of no rules, to free up the expression, to enable the experimentation that might realize the physical manifestation of the spiritual.

Rod also sees *Savitri* to operate beyond that of a poetic foreshadowing of the Auroville project, to rather become the very substance and instrumentation for the supraphysical vision to be both "revealed" in its form, and contained within the process of reading it. Rod saw the work as a form of Mantra which, as discussed in prior chapters, might operate to unify thought, rhythm and form in a similar way as the Supermind capacity that Auroville aspires to, unites the subject, action and object as merely different poises of self-imagining.

According to Rod, the mantric here would take the hearer beyond the intellect, to witness 'the Overmind inspiration coming through [the poetic medium]' (Hemsell, 2008: 11).<sup>15</sup> In a way re-iterating the bodily practice of Aster, Rod is charting a move away from the intellectual grasping of the poetic, to come to understand the deeper meaning of the text that falls through the separative sieve of the mental. As Rod explains, 'the eye doesn't get it... the ear gets it and its rhythm' (Hemsell, 2008:12). Herein rhythm, the very act of enunciating the text, rather than a conceptual signified alluded to through the signifiers of the word objects, becomes the central mode of communication. This rhythm is *quantative metre*, which emphasizes 'the weight of the voice' as the determinant factor for 'the meaning of the phrase' (Hemsell, 2008:18). Thus, the meaning of the text becomes irreducible beyond its spoken metrics, and the text, although containing the potential to be enunciated and understood, remains

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<sup>15</sup> Although these ideas were originally aired in an interview I had with Rod Hemsell, he was unhappy for me to record it, so here I refer to his text on this topic so as not to misrepresent by misremembering.

incomplete without the voice of the reader. The reader himself becomes responsible for enlivening the text with his own voice.

This means of approaching and appreciating the text does not simply imply a means of understanding the text anew but, according to Rod, necessitates change within the very being of he who utters the words: 'the vibrational structure of the disciple is informed and altered by the sound' (Hemsell, 2008: 27). Thus, in the very action of reading these texts, one might become changed on an interior physical level, a change which will necessarily alter one's exterior social action.

Following the trajectory of *Savitri* (where there was a spiritual realization, before its numerous testings), and the proposed mantric capacity of the text's metric (wherein one's individual interior Self might be affected in the process of reading), spiritual realization was seen to trump physical manifestation for Aurovilians. However, Aurovilians were generally clear to problematize untested asceticism, claiming a state of non-distinction between spirituality and materiality, and emphasising that Auroville should not be regarded as a "two phase project", between each of these categories. However when faced with the question of spiritual becoming they each tended to prioritise work on the individual self rather than the community and the inner, rather than the outer self, generally proposing a 'need to construct psychic inner being before transformation can happen' (Reddy, 2013). This was described as a process of internalization wherein one might remove 'the veils of super-imposed personality' (Aster, 2013), and attain an, 'inner assimilation of contraries' (Patel, 2006:73) prior to outward organization and manifestation.

Therefore, in recapitulation of Aurobindo's own trajectory of spiritual realizations, the primary step for many Aurovilians remains a realization of the one, inner reality, by a negation of the other, our outer being. This movement is behind claims that Auroville might be a site in which the ego could be 'researched out' through 'aiding people to discover this inner-being... their deeper self' (Clare, 2013). Aurovilians are clear that this identity exists beyond the mind, and is what connects the later task of the community to a spirituality, as Reg clarifies, 'the inner being [is] conscious beyond the mind... [only it] can do the job, nobody else... most people see the mind as the highest and the ruler... the mind is not the king [but] the minister' (Reg, 2013). The role of mind becomes diminished into merely an administrator for this higher self-identity,

what kicked me was totally beyond mind... otherwise I would not have been so strong to stay... something higher, intuitive coming through- because in our society, in the European, artists know it a little bit, and poets, all those who are not only in the technicalities and the physical of things and in the healing sectors, even in physics... even great science, this is not mental but they had the ability to translate it through the mental (Reg, 2013).

Thus, the two-phase movement might be understood as truly one: the interiorisation that creates a connection with the inner being, with a subliminal self, and at the same moment operates as a true exteriorization: a universalization, or identification of self with the world. As Aster echoes, without such a disjuncture from the worldly, to re-understand self, 'no real creativity is possible' (Patel, 2006:73) – the task of Auroville as a subject, an instrumentation and an object would radically change at this moment.

Aurovilians are unified in their belief that such a movement has not collectively occurred within Auroville, and as Reg points out, individuals are functioning within different paradigms, some focussing wholly on the self, others taking a communal

path, to 'understand the whole story and not just their own' (Reg, 2013). This disjuncture of development explains in many ways the hesitancy of the community to impose rules on its members, retaining an understanding of spirituality as,

an expression of a process that's happening uniquely in many different individuals, so you have to give the individuals the freedom, if you start imposing the mental organisation... they feel like they're being pushed into things that are contrary to the inner direction (Shraddhavan, 2013).

At the same time as promoting inner freedom, there is a strong empiricist discourse within Auroville that calls for 'the experimental discovery of truth' (Yves, 2013). This reasserts the simultaneous importance of the outer, physical space of the community, as providing the resources and impetus to build a future. As Yves relates to traditions beyond Auroville, 'as we can see in Judaism we require territory, for reunification' (Yves: 2013). Simultaneously, Jean Yves argues, we require each other, "the fulfilment of our individuality is in the group" (Aurobindo cited by Yves, 2013). Further, a constant in the conversation and publications of Aster Patel, is the idea that Aurobindo, for all his scholarship, is truly a master of experience,

the question is the reach of experience, the meaning of experience and the depth and the framework that has been given... it all depends on the wideness of that framework... If matter can "re-position" itself as spirit, it can, as the creative Supermind, begin a new creation, re-creation, of itself (Aster, 2013).

Aster here reiterates Aurobindo's idea that the content, or outward experience of life, might be defined by our continent, or our own capacity for understanding: 'it all depends on the wideness of that framework' (Aster, 2013). Thus, it appears there is much self work to be done before true understanding of the Auroville project, and how it might manifest, can be realized. However, this, at least for some Aurovilians,

need not necessitate a complete interiority, or withdrawal from the physical or collective sides of life, since these might be utilized as means for this self- realization.

**xi) Spiritual Materialism III: Symbolism as a tool for socio-spiritual development?**

Murali utilizes Aurobindo's work *The Web of Yoga* to compare the identity of individuals to the Divine. For the *Superconscious* divine, the objects of the worldly finite are set in non-differentiation from the infinite, as indications of both its ability to lose itself in time, and symbols which point to its potential to manifest itself more completely. This models onto the individual's expression, which communicates not only the limitations of an outer instrumental self, but also the possibilities of an inner (and largely unrealized) indexical self. Thus, individuals at once operate as a legend - or testament to a physical, vital and mental past - and a symbol - predicating a latent reality yet to be expressed through human life and being.

Professor Murali problematizes this gulf between the two aspects of individual self, which, like the Superconscious and His worldly expression, might easily come to be seen as an unbridgeable opposition. Murali suggests that the poetic might operate as an intermediary between these implicate and explicate "selves". Herein he expands the concept of yoga to encompass art, as 'the creative interchange between the visible and the invisible, the apparent and the actual' (Murali, 2013). He points to how this artistic process operates similarly to the intermediary of the *Supermind* creatrix, as a kind of bridging device, with the ability to traverse the apparent oppositions of the higher and lower hemisphere, i.e the aspirational and the manifest.

This is because, for Murali (recapitulating Aurobindo's *Secret of the Veda*), the poetic myth of the *Vedas* (like the *Supermind*) has a double identity, at once communicating a timebound truth in its manifest identity, and enshrouding in its symbolism a deeper and timeless truth that might be uncovered for utilization today. Thus, the poetry of the *Vedic* tradition might at once tell a story and communicate a temporal truth, but also '[act to] clothe in image and symbol the mystic significance of life' (Murali, 1997:101). Thus, for him, engaging with poetry might be at least an initial method for the realization of greater self-consciousness, since, according to Murali,

[the] poetic vision can be a prelude to spiritual transformation since poetic knowledge itself is bound up with the spiritual evolution of the consciousness. To know reality cannot be separated from becoming what reality is (Murali, 1997:58).

In other words, and as alluded to in Aurobindo's description of *Knowledge by Identity*, within the very process of self-knowledge that poetry might facilitate, lies a deeper relation of self and reality. It presupposes a transformed relation to the world, not only epistemically, but also ontologically. Murali proposes that the very process of poetry might become a microcosm for the kind of transformation that individuals aspire to, and the process, or method, through which they might achieve this becoming. This is because poetry contains each of the aspects of human being within itself as, at once, a manifestation in three different planes: material, vital and mental. As Murali points out, 'all art starts from the sensuous and sensible; ... the vital gives it substance and impetus and determines the form... [the] "seeing" mental capacity (Murali, 1997:68). Within the poetic form, according to Aurobindo (and echoed here by Murali), each of these aspects become reconfigured in order to communicate,

[a] progressive expression of the involuted truth, and the creative act, representing the inner rhythm of the unfolding universe was to function as a

vital aid in this godward thrust' (Murali, 1997:134).

With this metonymy between inner and outer, self and world, the poet might begin to interfuse the subjective and the objective spheres of existence which, at the highest level, become *mantra* for Aurobindo. This is a state beyond the instrumentation of the mind, wherein the instrumentation becomes non-distinct from the manifestation: 'revelation and inspiration operate in an act of twin spontaneity, the vibration of Pure Existence, *sabdabrahman*' (Murali, 1997:115). In other words, re-engagement with the substantial, the objects of physical existence, provides the possibility for realizing a greater active and subjective self.

This creative utilisation of matter for the pursuit of greater self and spiritual realization appears promoted by at least the rhetoric of Auroville, if not the practise. For example, on the wall of the new headquarters of the Research and Education centre within Auroville, is emblazoned the adage:

Art is the refusal to fool oneself, to be flattered, or accept mere effect. Art is the constant and endless search for truth in matter' (SAIIER, New Headquarters, 8/11/13).

I read this as indicative of the experimental ideal in Auroville, which cannot hide behind pure theory, the solidity of text, or individual interiority, but must come to see itself in the very faltering process of community building. Thus, the aesthetic, the poetic and the artistic, becomes a model for the community's development, or more precisely, the creation of the "new beings" that the Auroville community aspires to make manifest.

The Mother describes the aim of Auroville as one of symbolic struggle, which is signified by the problems human individuals and collectives face generally. However, she is clear that an “Indian” means is required to move forward this struggle. For her, echoing Aurobindo, it is on Indian soil and through the vision of an Indian thinker that the answers to a current stagnancy in human development might be discovered.

As the Mother describes:

...the clear vision, the same thing which in the history of the universe made the earth the symbolic representation of the universe so as to concentrate the work on one point, [so] the same phenomenon is taking place. India is the representation of all human difficulties on earth, and it is in India that the... cure will be found. And then, that is why- THAT IS WHY I was made to start Auroville (Alfassa, 1981:41).

Auroville, as a project conceived and created from ground zero, thus comes to be seen as a site-specific concentration: a microcosm of both the world’s difficulties and the world’s solutions. This citation could also be interpreted to suggest that the Auroville comes to function for the individual in the same way as the earth came to function for the universe, i.e. as a symbolic concentration, a figuration to be practically utilised for the realization of a greater individual.

The academic and Auroville enthusiast, Debashish Banerji, echoes this interpretation in affording Auroville the status of a “habitus of extra-normality”. This describes the community as one that intentionally attempts to push through the confines of the current paradigm, in order to create a community for a people “we are not yet”. This has backing from Aurobindo’s idea that ‘there is no inevitable necessity in our existing limitations’ (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 69). This entails that although we have become accustomed to a particular mode of relating to the world (which in turn

reinforces our perceived sense of self identity) this does not preclude us from entertaining other means of relating to the world, and other dimensions of self. Aurobindo's adage: 'the knowledge of the contents is contained in the knowledge of the continent' (Aurobindo, 2005, LD: 72), establishes that as our understanding of the world, and our relationship to it, develops, so our understanding of ourselves expands. Auroville might thus be considered one such continent, container, receptacle for such experimentation; to expand self-consciousness as we expand habitus.

Banerji argues that the community must engage in an "immanence of technologies of transcendence [as] the basis for the revision of [its] habitus" (Banerji, 2006). This would include not only the more esoteric methods of yoga and mantra but might also encompass a future-focussed social reform, alternative forms of enterprise and different academic and cultural boundaries, which might, as Rich, another respondent in the online forum, argues, create institutions that simultaneously transcend and remain socially embedded, without lapsing into either the flights of the fantastical, or the rigidity of dogma. In other words, Auroville might be conceived as a "practical yoga."

Evidence for this conception of Auroville is contained in the nature of its structures, which at once serve to mediate between the two poles of immanence and transcendence: providing a present utility, and the seed of inspiration for future realization. As Revi points out, although there are many places built according to the tenets of the sacred geometry in *Vaastu Shaastra*, Auroville takes this to another level. Firstly, the township as a whole is built as a galactic symbol, which, as Revi argues, concretises Aurobindo's philosophy as a 'material celebration of the emergence of the

supramental from the subconscious'. Secondly, and at the same time, it communicates, the four aspects of the mother; her crown and lines of force' (Revi, 2007: 8-9). This architectural integration of the two thinkers, Aurobindo and the Mother, along with the two facilities they represent (passive and active, spiritual and material focused, respectively), and the nationalities they represent (East and West, respectively), is the basis for a re-imagining that might utilize and go beyond the architectural to influence the institutional matrix of the community.

The role of the symbolic in Auroville was emphasised most particularly by Jaya and Shivaya who work at the Unity Pavilion project in Auroville. The Unity Pavilion has a unified vision, encompassing three key aims: firstly; the securing of a Pavilion group space for the International Zone of Auroville, secondly; working with students and young people, i.e. organising group exchanges, establishing higher learning in Auroville and, thirdly; working for Unity.

Conceived in 1996, the pavilion was directly inspired by the visit of the Dalai Lama to Auroville. Both Jaya and Shivaya emphasised the importance of the visit for the community, in helping to re-direct their own vision. They relate how at this point Auroville, overwhelmed by the vast scope of Mother's yogic vision, was

hopelessly lost and pioneering [and] then he [the Dalai Lama] came with beautiful simplicity... [and we] realised it's about humanity, profound love and care... he emphasised the everyday life, common sense and the importance of friendliness' (Shivaya, 2013).

Jaya and Shivaya appeared to suggest a tension between, at once, this need to draw back to the immanent, simple, wordly action, represented by the Dalai Lama's visit, and a need to remain expansive, inclusive and open to truth beyond the manifest, so

as to invite the possibility of transcendence. For example, the two listed as a chief aim, ‘working for human unity,’ which, although high in aspiration, places key importance on action in the present. On the other hand, the two stress the need for an expansive approach to progress,

when things are wide and inclusive... it is of Sri Aurobindo’s consciousness- we don’t put boxes on [reality]... [because] Auroville has a great energy that you often can’t see (Jaya, 2013).

Jaya and Shivaya believe we might find a means to simultaneously allow for both sides of this tension, i.e. for both the inclusivity to realize a transcendent Auroville, and the pragmatics to operate within the Auroville currently manifest. They proposed a meeting of each side of the polarity in the symbolic. According to Jaya: ‘[the] symbol represents [a] reality behind it’ and in itself, has a ‘force, something will be happening’ (Jaya, 2013). The symbolic thus, whilst at once recognizing the everyday objects of communal living, also recasts them, seeing behind them an implicate force and reality yet to be made explicit. This renders these objects, ‘not artefacts, but occult’, holding ‘something deep and profound’. Thus, the objects are considered not passive and inert, but rather active, alive with the ability to be utilized for greater realization: ‘the symbol holds; energy [as] working tools’ (Jaya, 2013). The objects of creation, arguably in a similar way to texts, come to be seen not only as products of the temporal, but also as processes, moments within a greater narrative, to which they might contribute, and continue.

A key symbol that the two emphasised at the time of our discussion was George Nakashima’s “Peace table for Asia”. The American woodworker, Nakashima, created six tables, or altars, which he wished to be placed in each continent of the world, to be

sat and meditated around as a symbol for the aspiration of world peace. He had gifted one to Auroville. After witnessing the two present a case to the International Advisory council for funding to house this table, I asked them to expand on its importance in our interview.

Shivaya explained how the table had great significance for Auroville: 'the table you can see its just wood, but someone has conceived this - directing energy and aspiration creates a subtle field' (Shivaya, 2013). Shivaya believed that the intent behind the creation, which here goes beyond the explicit functionality of the object, becomes a latent energy concretised in it. As a powerful object, it required a meaningful placement, and since 2014 - as a result of this proposal to the Advisory board - there has been a purpose built Peace hall to house the table.

Furthermore, echoing the ideals of pragmatism, Shivaya explains how it is through the utilization of manifest physical objects and material practice that individuals might come to better management of the more subtle dimensions of life. As purveyors of International spiritual unity, Jaya and Shivaya spoke of their interest in the process of interfaith, but related how the mind driven, and thus heavily dichotomized world of ideas, might act to divide rather than unify individuals. However, this unity might more organically 'come out of "Being"', for example, Shivaya portrayed the environmentalism of Auroville as the 'first face of interfaith'. Thus, ecological concerns became recast as a symbolic means for an "applied faith" with a unified purpose that was 'easier to grasp' than the inter-faith and inter-being of human unity, since, 'we are all in this boat of having to save the world'. Unlike the practicality of the environmental project, Shivaya believed that the interbeing and interfaith might emerge from these less conceptual endeavours, '[unity] happens in love, we give it

form in words but it is actually formless'. Thus physical projects are required, and might operate as, 'symbolic objects and processes to bring out its [Being's] latent energy' (Shivaya, 2013).

This approach could be seen to chime with Aster's call for a new creativity and a new form of leadership, which might at once bring together the technology of the community into dialogue with a growing 'awareness that there exists a transcendence - a transcendence that has an action on all that is imminent and is not something eternally aloof from what is imminent' (Aster, 2013). The challenge of Auroville is to both act and 'be open enough to get the transcendent act' (Aster, 2013). She sees the lack of linear planning in Auroville as indicative of the fact that, like the multivalence of the symbol, the institutions and processes might both make manifest the imagined form and yet transcend it,

the systems we create exceed our conscious limits- and by the energy inherent in them are obliging us to change in qualitative terms our human existence (Patel, 2006: 41).

Thus, for Aster, as for Jaya and Shivaya, the spiritual evolution sought within Auroville is one both realised and revealed through the creative process, through the intermediary acts and articulations of human beings in space and time: 'The steps of the journey find expression through the written word, through form and colour and texture, and the tracing of lines' (Patel, 2006: iii). Thus, through the reduction to physical and social practice, Aurovilians might come to find an expansion of self through self, and social expression.

## **xii) Spiritual Materialism IV: Language as a tool for transformation.**

Ananda Reddy's father, Madhusadan Reddy, arguably outlines a similar role for language as for physical symbols in the community, in his study of Aurobindo's *Future Poetry*. In the same way as philosophical and social ideas and the symbolic and practical institutions they might inspire, go through processes of endless destruction and re-formulation, so also, for Aurobindo, might language. Language, has both an instrumental capacity: 'language represents under verbal consciousness of a people- their cultural and multilateral experience and realisations' (V.M. Reddy, 1989:169), and an indexical capacity: 'it is the power of a nation's resurgence that can transmute the life and minds of its peoples and its language once again young and fertile and make it move into a new cycle of activity' (V.M. Reddy, 1989:168). In this sense, society itself could be regarded as a kind of language, with its substantive elements, reflecting the degree of free expression of its enlivening spirit.

This idea is taken up by Banerji who poses that Auroville, as a case study or "material for experimentation in potential and dialogical habitus," must utilise the linguistic in order to go beyond the formations of the past and self- definitions of its citizens through the categories of Nationhood and Religion, and find social identity, cohesion and continuity. The re-appropriation of terms, like "darshan", and Western terms like "praxis," which do not draw strict demarcation between the physical and the idealistic, might be seen as useful to those who wish to go beyond dualistic existence. Such concepts claim that we must proceed by way of physical-material and socio-political experimentation, in order to change our current paradigm and fundamentally develop the way we see, in order to create the conditions for a society that aims at a "transitional humanity".

In an online discussion with Aurovilians (2008), Banerji invoked Heidegger's concept of "thrownness," Bourdieu's "habitus" and Althusser's "interpellation" to explain the kind of language Aurovilians might come to employ in order to move beyond the distinctions inherent to mind's "knowledge by separation". Such concepts, he argued, might help bridge not only the thought/action divide, and the individual/society but also the tradition/innovation dichotomy, that Auroville faces. Each of these concepts act to recognise the interrelation of the apparent oppositions faced in a community that wishes to provide conditions for a world of the future, through utilizing the ideas of the past. This invokes Aurobindo's evolutionary ideal of progression by way of integration, or an invocation of the past, in dialogue with the present, through the skills, opportunities, technologies and personalities it contains, to create the future.

Rod, who also contributed to this online forum, termed this "a hermeneutics of cultural hybridity," which would utilize language as a means to transcend, not only the separation between the materiality and ideality alluded to above, but also the outdated demarcations of East and West, colonial and colonised. Although Rod is sympathetic to Western critical theory as a tool for the understanding the hybridity in Aurobindo's works and the Auroville project, he highlights its limitations, most clearly through Western theory's inability to allow for a supra-rational basis for human unity. Although Rod - who has himself published several works comparing Heidegger and Aurobindo - regards a study of phenomenology and hermeneutics as a good starting point for an understanding of Aurobindo's method and theory, he is clear that it most not be mistaken for the same level. All argue for a merging of the tools of phenomenological theory with the language of India, and the greater, "supra-rational" scope of Indian discourse. Herein Indian language, as well as Indian

geography and architectural practice, becomes the grounding for the International merging.

Alan claims that the main barrier to progress in Auroville is that the language used to communicate its aims might itself become disabling. He points out how terms like “Human Unity” and “Supramental Realisation” get bandied about yet it can be difficult to understand how they might translate into everyday practicality. As he explains:

you read Aurobindo’s *The Life Divine*, and there’s a huge amount in terms of information there...(but) sometimes the bridges that are missing are not evident, and trying to find those bridges is a very important part, and what’s happened, because we haven’t got is the tendency for people to fall back into the old terms of governance or whatever (Alan, 2013).

In agreement with several Aurovilians I spoke with, Alan recognised that these grand ideals have a place in inspiring ideas and values within Auroville, but other, more grounded language might more readily inspire action, because of its more direct practical implications. Like others in the community, and echoing the emergent concepts proposed in the online forum, Alan was keen to investigate Aurobindo’s “divine anarchy,” and other such concepts, which might begin to merge the dichotomies of the Mind.

In some ways, the synthetic concepts I have utilized to portray the tensions in Auroville, might demonstrate the Aurovilian need to entertain both sides of the apparent dichotomy in order to realize its creative re-synthesis. For example, Clare describes “divine anarchy” as ‘a state in which the chaos, variety and ambiguity of existence might be in harmony with itself’ (Clare, 2013). This chimes strongly with the way the term has been utilized within this thesis, as a corollary to “hermeneutic

utopianism”: a means of allowing for diversity of individual interpretation and application, whilst not compromising the grand unified vision that underlies the process, and might be made explicit through it.

### **xiii) Conclusion: Auroville: the renaissance of an Indian Method?**

Aurobindo, in his commentary on the *Isha Upanishad*, points out that the hearer was not simply to absorb the text, but ‘confirm his intuitions and verify ... by his experience, not submitting his ideas to the judgment of the logical reason’ (Aurobindo, 1951, IU: 19-20). Here Aurobindo makes explicit that his ideas are to be tested out through experience. Auroville has gone one step further, to create institutions that might test these ideas within collective experience. The rhetoric of the Auroville community claims not just to interpret the ideas of the text, but apply these ideas to experience in order to transform individual and collective reality.

This chapter has utilized themes elucidated in prior chapters in order to begin understanding some of the ways in which the Auroville community has addressed the tensions of Aurobindo’s work through their translation of these ideas into terrestrial society.

The first tension examined concerned the dialogue between the transcendent notion of the mystical and the empirical means for realizing this capacity in terrestrial experience. This concept makes reference to the first chapter of this thesis, which saw Aurobindo’s mystical text as a reconstruction of a cumulative series of experiences. In this chapter I question how the text itself may feed back into the experiential to promote action beyond itself. Herein certain tensions were identified. Aurovilians

tended to promote the ideal of translating these mystical texts into life, whereas those who had deep knowledge of the text expressed some reticence at the dispersion of these texts into the everyday. There was some conflict over the reduction of Auroville to environmentalism, over “spirituality” which came to be seen as a conflict between Western material practice and Indian ascetic idealism, which formed the very key distinction to be overcome.

The second tension examined the tension of the metaphysical laid down in text, and the potential for this to be appreciated creatively rather than as a fixed notion of “truth”. This led to questions over the status of Auroville and whether it constituted a religious form. Aurovilians faced a dilemma: in positing their aims outside the material they might consign it to something either temporally unknowable, or something negating the physical. However, to place it in form might dogmatise it through reduction to a particular space and time. Nevertheless, the symbolic nature of Auroville spaces and structures came to find a means beyond this binary. Most notably, the Matrimandir and the international pavilion became means of entextualising the truths of the past in order to find utilization in the present - means of delimiting the Divine for experience yet without overriding the timeless nature of that to be unveiled.

The third tension examined the notion of utopia and how this might operate when allowing individuals free interpretation and application of the textual vision. Auroville was conceived less as a model society as such, but a means of moulding humanity into a form capable of realizing a wider consciousness, force and being.

The fourth tension questioned the way Aurovilians upheld a Divine telos whilst at once promoting an “anarchy” for individual expression, in order to promote the free expression of individuals. This creates the problem of holding onto “divinity” whilst not submitting Auroville to a dogma which would cement it in time, thus leaving it closed to further experimentation and eventually, according to Aurobindo’s texts, rendering it an empty shell. The society requires continuous reanimating by the individuals it contains, however this necessitates some degree of conflict when unity is juxtaposed to freedom.

Lastly spiritual materialism, was examined as a means through which Aurovilians utilise the immanent in order to realize the transcendent. Aster Patel, who sees this approach as an “Indian method”, applicable beyond the text, poses it as an alternative to the reductive approach championed by the Western natural sciences which, she argues, can be destructive when applied to the humanities. She sees this method as a move beyond the dissective approach of modern science which may in its technological advances, have, ‘taken us into a space that is unified’, but left other dimensions of ourselves remain behind,

the functioning of being, our thinking, our feeling modes are still in between so we live a life of inbalance (Aster, 2013).

The method itself can be seen as an exemplar of the universal realism proposed by Aurobindo. As examined in chapter two of this thesis, this approach did not negate the truths of prior interpretations (in this case monism, dualism, and qualified non-dualism), but saw each approach as a step on the way to a wider encompassing horizon, which each found its place within. According to this approach, the innovation of the present and the potentiality of the future would not separate itself from the

tradition of the past: the abstractions of the mind, would not separate themselves from the substance of materiality and physicality, and the progressive thoughts of the maverick individual would not stand in disassociation from the wellbeing of the collective. In the creative moment, innovation, or novelty, is cemented by its re-integration in the prior horizon, the foundations on which its creative existence depends: the word must be made flesh, so to speak.

Interestingly, Professor Murali: the academic who initially appeared dismissive of the Auroville endeavour (cited at the beginning of this chapter) became, as our lengthy conversation progressed, increasingly sympathetic to the aspirations of the Auroville community. He came to echo the views of Aster, in suggesting that Aurobindo's views, and potentially the project of Auroville, might constitute a re-invocation of an Indian method. He describes this method as,

unlike science which fragments life for its analysis, [Aurobindo proposed a] spirituality [that] must embrace all... both... heaven and earth', to constitute a recognition of 'the spiritual and aesthetic nature of all existence (Murali:2013).

Murali explains how within "*Letters on Yoga*" and the "*Foundations of Indian Culture*" Aurobindo argues that the 'whole process of Indian renaissance is unfinished', and it is through a 'rediscovery of the Indian roots' (Murali, 2013) that Aurobindo's work initiates, that such a process might be re-ignited. Sharaddhavan echoes this, relating the aims of Auroville, not only to the philosophy of Aurobindo but also in his vision for the future: 'the text, *The foundations of Indian Culture*, is so relevant... how can we become the kind of people who can realise it [the vision]' (Shraddhavan: 2013).

Both Murali and Aster agree that Aurobindo's work is not the final word on this revival but claim that it calls for further action or re-completion. In other words, the

philosopho-intellectual vision of Aurobindo must be translated into the experiential, as his own experience might have been translated into text. Murali argues that the Mother has begun this process of radical re-interpretation by, 'bringing him [Aurobindo] to the experiential and more practical Auroville' (Murali:2013).

In a similar way to Aster, Murali believes it might be through a reconnection with the substantial that Auroville might begin to progress to the next stage, however he focuses less upon the body and more upon the Natural world, pointing out how the emphasis on aesthetic harmony within Aurobindo's works might meaningfully be reconciled with 'the Absolute realised in experience of nature'. His work utilizes Aurobindo's work as a means to posit potential new directions for eco-criticism.

Reg was clear that this 'next stage' might be imagined not as the creation of something new, but rather constitute a 'transformed old' (Reg, 2013). For Reg the Auroville initiative was 'not just a show, but a research point... [where individuals], by being in contact with the diversity of the world [and with the opportunity] to work with highest diversity, [might] come to true Identity' (Reg, 2013). For example, the International zone might act to re-imagine the antagonism of cultural differences and, at the same time deride the dissolution of difference, i.e. the tempting shortcut to identity through the rhetoric that all cultural/ faith traditions are "the same", a perspective that tellingly tends to converge in those of the dominant tradition.

Instead Auroville might be seen as a movement aspiring to deconstruct the dominant metanarratives, to re-embrace the complexities and grey areas between the trenchant "Eastern" and the "Western" dichotomisation. However, this re-grounding

in synthesis, is not simply an equal bringing together of two cultures, but remains a rewriting of the Western in quintessentially “Indian” terms,

Auroville is the only place, unique still, where this [synthesis] is consciously attempted... [we are] a collective which builds on top of... its own world- [a] city of human unity- to really test it out... [To,] in the diversity of people, find the collective intelligence. Let's bring in each one's unique contribution... we would jump forward like nothing (Reg, 2013).

Auroville is then one such case study, one such application of Aurobindo's texts, which should remain not just an imposition of text on a social “blank canvas” but remain in dialogue with it. Yves cites Aurobindo to propose that such attempts at human and divine synthesis, should “build on top of... [their] own world” (Yves, 2013). This might, re-visiting Aurobindo's *Synthesis of Yoga*, call for an incorporation of the wisdom of the text (*shastra*) with the social space and the representatives of tradition (*guru*) to bring each into dialogue with the unique and ever shifting time (*Kala*) and, most importantly, the energy of the individuals who wish to enliven such ideas anew (*utsaha*).

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has provided a sweeping trip through the life and texts of Aurobindo, to consider the potential for these ideas to find interpretation and application beyond their original textual formulation. The chief argument of this thesis is the positing of a common narrative between the textual oeuvre of Aurobindo, the Mother's imagining of Auroville community, and the spiritual- material practise of members of this community today. In order to provide evidence for this narrative I have brought together the multifarious aims of Aurobindo's diverse textual corpus in order to understand their mutual simultaneity. To briefly surmise: in his own experiences, Aurobindo posits the culminative realisation of the *Purushottama*; in his poetic texts, he posits the chief realisation of *mantra*; in his philosophical texts, the realisation of the *Supermind*, and in his socio-political texts, the realisation of the *Subjective age*. I have argued that the telos of each of these texts - though consigned within their own disciplinary boundaries - remain coterminous, and illustrate an integral aspiration and transformation of mankind that goes beyond the metaphysical, the ascetic and the strictly spiritual, to have implications for social life and human creativity.

Each of these states represent the overcoming of an essential distinction between; spirituality and materiality; ideal and manifestation, creator subject and created object, and between the individual and the social manifestation. These tensions, for Aurobindo, find their end and essential union, in the process of development and greater self- realisation of the individual. Human beings, for Aurobindo, become the potential term of synthesis in the system, the mode in which the oppositions find their merging.

Thus, although Aurobindo, and the focus of this thesis, appears an examination of outer phenomena, i.e. of texts, poetry and society, and their development, these forms are products of interest only in their relationship to the development of individual. Firstly, they act as indicators of the phenomenology of the individual, and secondly, and more importantly, they might act as tools - or forms and processes - for the individual's creativity and self expression to be realised and further developed. The realisation of each of these highest states of individual, social and textual expression requires, for Aurobindo, a complete shift in the individual's orientation to the world.

I have attempted to point to the unity of each these foci through aligning them with a theory of creativity that might encompass and transcend each. In my view, and as could be developed further in later research, the process of individual creativity becomes the lynchpin for the realisation of Aurobindo's telos, and its potential application beyond text. It is through the exercise and development of the essential creative relationship; between the individual as creator, and the acts and objects of his creation, i.e the texts, poetry and social form studied herein, that the individual's "re-creation", or greater self-realisation is made manifest.

As Aurobindo accounts within *The Life Divine*, the creativity of the current mentality, involves a "knowledge by separation", or a disjunct between "creator", "act of creation", and "object of creation". Thus, the individual in understanding only through mental constructs sees these outer creative forms as distinct from self. However, the telos of Aurobindo's philosophy: the evolutionary realisation of *Supermind* (the highest seeing), *purushottama* (the highest spiritual realisation), *mantra* (or highest poetic utterance), and the *subjective age* (or the highest social form), is one wherein the disjunct or tension between the subject, the act and the object of his creation become non-distinct.

This is echoed in the community of Auroville, wherein the forms utilised, i.e. the holistic education; fluid, symbolic architecture; emphasis of bodily practise and mantric utterance, and even the Auroville society as a whole, are conceived by some - though most notably here Jean Yves - to operate not for the sake of themselves but in order to further individual realisation. This is built into the very rhetoric of the community as an “experiment”: as a project that aims, not at its own completion - since this would render the individual fixed - but rather at its own “self overcoming”, its realisation of an implicate social and self potential through pragmatic means. Of course, for Aurobindo, at the highest mode of seeing we might neither speak of “individual”, “society” or even the “transcendent Divine”, with any term of distinction. This move to increasing non-distinction and identity maps the three key realisations in Aurobindo’s metaphysics. First, was the realisation of the individual, in his creative phenomenal distinction; second, the realisation of the universal, i.e. the essential union between the Divine and His manifold expression and, thirdly, the realisation of the transcendent, which might find, play and recreate, himself in either poise of Being (individual and universal) without losing his undergirding and infinite Self beyond these formulations.

These realisations, as I have attempted to illumine throughout this thesis, do not simply refer to the metaphysical. The metaphysical, or cosmology of *The Life Divine*, provides a model for particular expression, and cumulative synthesis, but this model can also be found at the basis of Aurobindo’s poetic and socio-psychological texts, and ultimately, it could be ventured, within the Auroville community.

Aurobindo himself, in his spiritual biography, arguably provides the model for the kind of form this ongoing process of self –re-creation might follow. As illustrated in chapter two of this thesis, Aurobindo utilised these personal spiritual experiences as

a lens through which to perform a synthetic reconstruction, or “transcreation” of the Vedantic interpretation that preceded him. This reconstruction was able to bring together truths previously considered as mutually distinct, in a way that both synthetised them in a universal system. Each truth was retained in its singularity, and yet transcended in being brought each of these parts in the creation of his own system and philosophy.

Herein the threefold realisation that Aurobindo proposes in his teleology: the realisation of the individual, universal and transcendent self, is foreshadowed in the content of each partial truth incorporated into his synthetic system. The realisation of the veridicality of “individual” truth, in dialogue with Madhva; the realisation of a sole “universal” truth, in dialogue with Sankara, and the realisation of the “transcendent” truth which allowed for a simultaneity of individual and universal truth, in dialogue with Ramanuja. Each of these truths, in Aurobindo’s system, builds upon the prior formulation, as the poetic climber reaches new vantage points to view the shifting horizon anew.

The thesis begins with examination of Aurobindo’s life and spiritual experiences as the basis for his mystical texts as well as the parallel ideas within his social and poetics texts which, I argue, follow a very similar trajectory. In the second chapter the focus narrows to consider Aurobindo as a model for the very process of synthetic reconstruction he proposes. This chapter provides a means of unifying the creative process with both the natural evolution of the world and the textual evolution of metaphysics, within which Aurobindo both participates and posits his works. I have aligned this with a “poetic” rather than metaphysical process, highlighting these ideas not simply as intellectual but arising as a result of temporal, sensate experiences, and

necessarily requiring re-application, or better re-discovery, within the material domain. As Aurobindo proposes in *The Future Poetry*,

The whole of life and of the world and Nature... [are seeking] the discovery of the divine reality within it and of man's own divine possibilities,~this is the delivering vision for which our minds are seeking and it is this vision of which the future poetry must find the inspiring aesthetic form and the revealing language' (Aurobindo, FP, BCL, 1969: 285).

The poetic process might provide the best means both to characterise Aurobindo's project and to unify the various offshoots that have been inspired by it. This is because the poetic remains open to the individual and his own interpretation of the world, texts and ideas, and their reworking beyond the confines of the Mind and its reason.

The third chapter acts to bridge the works of abstract Indian philosophy discussed in the preceding chapters, and introduces Aurobindo's Western consort, Mirra Alfassa (The Mother). The chapter also acts to synthetise the symbolic identity of Aurobindo and the Mother, showing the reconciliation of the Superconscient representamen with Aurobindo: the Supermind with the Mother and the realisation of the Supraphysical, arguably represented by the Auroville community. I go on to question whether the outcome of the dialogical relationship between Aurobindo and the Mother, i.e. the Auroville community, might be considered utopian. This is tricky to demonstrate since the society exists not solely as an end in itself, but rather as a means to an end, i.e. as a substance and instrumentation to be utilised for the higher end of enabling individuals to realise greater consciousness. The necessary freedom allotted to the individual, in interpreting and applying the vision, was compared to hermeneutics, as a method which promotes freedom of interpretation without denying a grounding in unity. It was posed that Auroville might constitute a kind of

modern day utopia, due to its fixed and telos, i.e. the realisation of the Supraphysical or the Superconscient on Earth in the genesis of the Superman and the gnostic age of human unity. However, it was one necessitating an open means of realisation.

The fourth chapter brought these ideas to an understanding of Auroville, an International intentional community founded to realise Aurobindo's spiritual views in practise. Here I demonstrated the methods and problems in this attempted, theorizing and drawing upon my fieldwork data. Aurovilians discussed the multivariant ways in which they imagined their project to move away from the fixity of dogma or "religion," towards a spirituality that utilises the processual.

Herein discourse and practise was utilised to overcome the tensions that Aurobindo believed were characteristic of the mind, in order to find means of moving beyond it. Of particular interest here was a practise I have termed, "Spiritual Materialism", or a utilisation of the immanent structures of body, language and physical and architectural objects as a means of realising the transcendent. This involved a re-imagining of the self in the universe, not only as a subject, but also an object non-distinct from the terrestrial universe and from other individuals.

My original contribution to knowledge is in bringing together elements of the study of Aurobindo that have previously been attempted in a piecemeal fashion. Firstly, I have considered behind his diversity of texts and their differing disciplinary focus as unified in an approach, which considers development as a process of past and present re-synthesis. Secondly, I have taken him seriously as a thinker who proposes that the "truths" of text imply application, or rather realisation, through their re-working by others in the differing temporal, physical and social moments in which they find themselves.

The clear limitations of this project are a result of its ambitious nature and tendency to jump between what may be considered wholly differing foci, in the attempt to demonstrate potential narrative between them. However certain themes uncovered could find fruitful development elsewhere. This project and perhaps the findings in Auroville might have implications for the separation of doxos and praxis, transcendence and immanence, and notions of sacred and profane, in Religious Studies. However, there is also scope for examining in greater depth the concept and practice of “Spiritual materialism” amongst certain Aurovilians. This method, described as an “Indian method” for greater self-realization, might be interestingly excavated both in its narrative origin (as a development of a “Hindu Renaissance”), and in its future mileage, as a theory promoting practice and discourse beyond the divisions of East and West, Religion and Science, Spirituality and Materiality. Beyond Aurobindo and the Auroville community, this thesis might also speak to the hermeneutic concerns other philosophies of practice. It points to the complexity in which ideals might be re-interpreted, re-imagined and re-applied over time, to remain relevant, dynamic and embodied in the shifting concerns of the individual and communal lives they touch.

## **APPENDIX: The Mother's Documents in Auroville.**

### **A Dream**

There should be somewhere on earth a place which no nation could claim as its own, where all human beings of goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world and obey one single authority, that of the supreme Truth; a place of peace, concord and harmony where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his sufferings and miseries, to surmount his weaknesses and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the concern for progress would take precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the search for pleasure and material enjoyment.

In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their souls; education would be given not for passing examinations or obtaining certificates and posts but to enrich existing faculties and bring forth new ones. In this place, titles and positions would be replaced by opportunities to serve and organise; the bodily needs of each one would be equally provided for, and intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority would be expressed in the general organisation not by an increase in the pleasures and powers of life but by increased duties and responsibilities.

Beauty in all its artistic forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, would be equally accessible to all; the ability to share in the joy it brings would be limited only by the capacities of each one and not by social or financial position.

For in this ideal place money would no longer be the sovereign lord; individual worth would have a far greater importance than that of material wealth and social standing. There, work would not be a way to earn one's living but a way to express oneself and to develop one's capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole, which, for its own part, would provide for each individual's subsistence and sphere of action.

In short, it would be a place where human relationships, which are normally based almost exclusively on competition and strife, would be replaced by relationships of emulation in doing well, of collaboration and real brotherhood.

### **The Auroville Charter**

- 1 Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But, to live in Auroville, one must be a willing servitor of the divine consciousness.
- 2 Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.
- 3 Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.
- 4 Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity.

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## **Bibliography of fieldwork respondents.**

### **Auroville Community, Pondicherry: September- December 2013**

Alan: Long term Aurovilian: Editor of *Auroville Today* magazine

Ananda: Non- Aurovilian: Academic and founder of SACAR (Sri Aurobindo Centre of Advanced Research)

Antim: Aurovilian: Staff at *Savitri Bhavan*: house of Aurobindo and Mother's works.

Anu: Long term Aurovilian: Staff at *Bharat Nivas*: Auroville Cultural Centre

Aster: Long term Aurovilian: Academic and affiliate of *Bharat Nivas*

Clare: Long term Aurovilian: Auroville Council Member

Daphne: Newcomer

Frances: Non- Aurovilian: Café owner and long term resident of neighbouring village

Gaurav: Non- Aurovilian: Film-maker and Auroville researcher

Grace: Aurovilian

Jaya: Aurovilian: Planner: Auroville *Centre for Human Unity*

Jean Yves: Long term Aurovilian: Teacher at High School in Auroville

Dr Karan Singh: Non Aurovilian: Chairman of Auroville Governing Board

Krishnan: Long term Aurovilian: Director of *Arka*: Hostel for senior Aurovilians

Martin: Long term Aurovilian

Mary: New Aurovilian

Prof Murali: Non Aurovilian, Academic at Pondicherry University, English Department

Reg\*: Long term Aurovilian: Architect

Rod: Long term Aurovilian: Teacher and Academic

Sanjeev: Aurovilian: Director of *SAIIER*: Sri Aurobindo Institute for Integral Education and Research

Shivaya: Aurovilian: Planner at Auroville *Centre for Human Unity*

Shraddhavan: Long term Aurovilian: Founder of *Savitri Bhavan*

Sonja: Long term Aurovilian: Member of Auroville Council