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## UNIT 2      SRI AUROBINDO ON INDIAN SCRIPTURES

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### 2.0      OBJECTIVES

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- To expose the students to the spiritual depth of Sri Aurobindo.
- To encourage them to appreciate his appreciation and interpretation of Indian Scriptures.

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### 2.1      INTRODUCTION

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In order to study the impact of Indian scriptures on Aurobindo we first trace his spiritual journey. Then we see his own experience of the Divine which is reflection in his study and interpretation of the Indian Scriptures. For this section we base ourselves primarily on the Aurobindo Ashram website (SAL 2011).

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### 2.2      THE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES OF AUROBINDO

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After his return to India, the Divine too, Aurobindo continued to work unseen, within, revealing himself only on certain occasions. In his very first year at Baroda, Sri Aurobindo was going in a horse carriage and there was the possibility of a major accident. Suddenly he felt a Being of Light emerge from him and avert the accident. He described it in a sonnet written later on: "Above my head a mighty head was seen, a face with the calm of immortality and an omnipotent gaze that held the scene in the vast circle of its sovereignty. His hair was mingled with the sun and breeze; The world was in His heart and He was I: I housed in me the Everlasting's peace, the strength of One whose substance cannot die." (SAL 2011).

In 1903 Sri Aurobindo went to Kashmir with the Maharaja. There on the Hills of Shankaracharya he had a revelatory spiritual experience. In another context, he described a similar experience thus: "One stands upon a mountain ridge and glimpses or mentally feels a wideness, a pervasiveness, a nameless Vast in Nature; then suddenly there comes the touch, a revelation, a flooding, the mental loses itself in the spiritual, one bears the first invasion of the Infinite."

Once Sri Aurobindo visited a Kali Temple on the bank of the Narmada. He said: "With my Europeanised mind I had no faith in image-worship and I hardly believed in the presence of God." But he was compelled to do so when he looked at the image and saw a living Divine Presence. As he wrote afterwards: "You stand before a temple of Kali beside a sacred river and see what? - a sculpture, a gracious piece of architecture, but in a moment mysteriously, unexpectedly there is instead a Presence, a Power, a Face that looks into yours, an inner sight in you has regarded the World-Mother."

The fourth experience has an interesting background. His younger brother Barin fell seriously ill with mountain fever. When the doctors were helpless, a Naga Sannyasi happened to come there. He took a cup of water, cut it into four by making a cross with a knife while chanting a mantra and asked Barin to drink it. The next day Barin was completely cured. Sri Aurobindo was greatly impressed and this also proved to be his conscious entry into the field of Yoga. He says. "I thought that a yoga which requires me to give up the world was not for me. I had to liberate my country. I took it up seriously when I learnt that the same tapasya which one does to get away from the world can be turned to action. I learnt that yoga gives power and thought: why should I not get the power and use it to liberate my country?"

### **Backdoor entry into Yoga**

Sri Aurobindo said humorously that he had a backdoor entry into yoga. But the immediate result was that he took up the practice of pranayama. Soon there were some startling physical and psychological results. His mind and memory worked with a greater illumination and power. His skin also became smooth and fair. But it ended with that and when Sri Aurobindo fell seriously ill he stopped, and began to look for another way. This new way opened up much later on but for the moment, the important outer event was that the scene shifted from Baroda to Calcutta.

### **Calcutta**

We may perhaps end the Baroda period with a comment of A. B. Clark, the principal of Baroda College: "So you met Aurobindo Ghosh. Did you notice his eyes? There is a mystic fire and light in them. They penetrate into the beyond." And he added, "If Joan of Arc heard heavenly voices, Aurobindo probably sees heavenly visions".

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## **2.3 NATIONALISM BEGINNING IN BENGAL (1906-1910)**

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The freedom movement was given a big impetus by the decision of Lord Curzon to partition Bengal. Protest meetings were held all over the country and a mass agitation was launched in Bengal. In June 1906 Sri Aurobindo took one year's leave without pay and went to Bengal to participate in the movement. In 1907 Sri Aurobindo left Baroda College and joined the newly established Bengal National College, as its principal. His salary of Rs.150/- per month was only one fifth of what he was getting in Baroda (SAL 2011).

He had already been contributing articles to the Bengali weekly "Yugantar". Now Bipin Chandra Pal started the daily "Bande Mataram" and Sri Aurobindo soon became its chief editor, though his name was not printed, to avoid prosecution. Overnight, the paper became the organ of the Nationalist Movement and a mighty force in Indian Politics. *The London Times* complained that its articles reeked of sedition but were so cleverly worded that no action could be taken. Mr. Radcliff, editor of *The Statesman*, said about the *Bande Mataram*:

"It had a full-size sheet, was clearly printed on green paper, and was full of leading and special articles written in English with a brilliance and pungency not hitherto attained in the Indian press. It was the most effective voice of what we then called nationalist extremism".

Bipin Chandra Pal described the role of Sri Aurobindo in the *Bande Mataram*: "Morning after morning, not only Calcutta but the educated community almost in every part of the country eagerly awaited its vigorous pronouncements on the stirring questions of the day.... It was a force in the country which none dared to ignore, however much they might fear or hate it; and Aravinda was the leading spirit, the central figure, in the new journal!" (SAL 2011).

An attempt was made to prosecute Sri Aurobindo for sedition in July 1907, but the charges could not be proved, and he was acquitted. In the meantime differences of policy and approach were building up between the moderates and the nationalists. A historic session of the Indian National Congress was held in Surat where it split into two and the nationalists led by Sri Aurobindo and Tilak held a separate meeting. Henry Nevinston, a member of Parliament from England who happened to be present, describes his impressions of Sri Aurobindo and the scene after the split (SAL 2011):

"...a youngish man, I should think still under thirty. Intent dark eyes looked from his thin, clear-cut face with a gravity that seemed immovable.... Grave with intensity, careless of fate or opinion, and one of the most silent men I have known, he was of the stuff that dreamers are made of, but dreamers who will act their dreams, indifferent to means....".

"Grave and silent - I think without saying a single word - Mr. Aravinda Ghosh took the chair, and sat unmoved, with far-off eyes, as one who gazes at futurity. In clear, short sentences, without eloquence or passion, Mr. Tilak spoke till the stars shone out and someone kindled a lantern at his side.

"Sri Aurobindo, who always liked to work from behind the scene, had been pushed into the fore-front of the freedom movement. He was its acknowledged leader. The whole country rang with the cry of *Bande Mataram* and a new spirit swept across the country. People had awakened to the need of Swaraj - complete independence- and were willing to give their lives to attain it."

In the midst of this turmoil Sri Aurobindo met in Baroda a Maharashtrian Yogi called Vishnu Bhaskar Lele. Lele asked Sri Aurobindo to remain in seclusion for three days. He told him to sit in meditation and not to think. He would find that thoughts were not his own but came from outside and should be thrown away. Sri Aurobindo describes his experience: "I did not think either of questioning the truth or the possibility, I simply sat down and did it. In a moment my mind became silent as a windless air on a high mountain summit and then I saw one thought and then another coming in a concrete way from outside; I flung them away before they could enter and take hold of the brain and in three days I was free." (SAL 2011)

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## 2.4 THE BRAHMAN CONSCIOUSNESS

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In three days Sri Aurobindo had achieved the silent mind which deepened into an experience of the Brahman Consciousness. He asserts: "When I was in Bombay, from the balcony of a friend's house I saw the whole busy movement of Bombay as a picture in a cinema show, all unreal and shadowy." (SAL 2011)

But there was a problem. Sri Aurobindo had to address a national meeting after three days. His mind had become calm and blank. How was he to give a speech? Lele told him that it did not matter. He had only to bow down to the audience as Narayana and everything would be all right. As usual Sri Aurobindo followed the directions without questioning and he found that something else spoke through him. And thus it was for the rest of his life. Everything was done from the silent Brahman Consciousness, writing, speaking or the most intense political activity.

This was another great turning point in Sri Aurobindo's spiritual life. He began listening to a Voice within and Lele told him to follow it and that he now had no need for any further instructions or an external Guru. But the Divine had a very different setting for the next major spiritual experience of Sri Aurobindo - the prison-cell of Alipore in Calcutta.

### **The Prison-Cell of Alipore**

The atmosphere in Bengal was tense. The British Government had let loose repressive measures to crush all resistance. In this charged atmosphere an unsuccessful attempt was made on the life of Magistrate Kingsford. Two Bengali youths threw a bomb at his horse carriage. Immediately the police carried out raids on the Manicktolla Gardens, a family property of Sri Aurobindo, where many revolutionaries were undergoing training. Sri Aurobindo was also arrested from his house. He was imprisoned and, for a long time, kept in a small cell in solitary confinement (Srinivasa Iyengar 1985).

Thus began one of the historic trials of the Indian freedom movement. There were 49 accused and 206 witnesses. 400 documents were filed and 5000 exhibits were produced consisting of bombs, revolvers, acid, etc. The judge C.B. Beechcroft had been a student with Sri Aurobindo at Cambridge. The Chief Prosecutor Eardley Norton kept a loaded revolver on his briefcase throughout the trial. The case for Sri Aurobindo was taken up by C. R. Das. The trial lasted for one full year. At the end C. R. Das addressed the court in these ringing words: "My appeal to you is this, that long after the controversy will be hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, the agitation will have ceased, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone, his words will be echoed and re-echoed, not only in India but across distant seas and lands. Therefore, I say that the man in his position is not only standing before the bar of this Court, but before the bar of the High Court of History." (SAL 2011)

Sri Aurobindo was found not guilty and acquitted. But this period of one year was a very important period in Sri Aurobindo's life. It was a period of intense sadhana when he had the experience of Krishna as the Immanent Divine. This is how he described the experience in a speech in Uttarpara: "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."

Sri Aurobindo saw the same smiling Krishna in the magistrate and even the prosecuting counsel. Where was there any place for fear? When Sri Aurobindo had entered the prison he had said:

"The agnostic was in me, the atheist was in me, the sceptic was in me and I was not absolutely sure that there was a God at all."

But now all was changed. As Sri Aurobindo said afterwards: "I have spoken of a year's imprisonment. It would have been more appropriate to speak of a year's living in an ashram or a hermitage. The only result of the wrath of the British Government was that I found God." (SAL 2011)

### **India's New Mission**

After his release Sri Aurobindo re-entered the political field with a new vision and purpose. India's freedom was necessary if she had to rise and be great and he declared: "India does not rise as other countries do, for self or when she is strong, to trample on the weak. She is rising to shed the eternal light entrusted to her over the world. India has always existed for humanity and not for herself and it is for humanity and not for herself that she must be great." (SAL 2011)

Sri Aurobindo also started two weeklies: the 'Karmayogin' in English and the 'Dharma' in Bengali. But the air was full of rumours of an impending arrest. The view of the British Government was clearly expressed in what Lord Minto wrote about Sri Aurobindo: "I can only repeat that he is the most dangerous man we have to reckon with."

### **Aadesh: The Inner Command**

One day when Sri Aurobindo was sitting in the Karmayogin office, news was received that the Government intended to arrest him. Immediately, there was an agitated discussion all around. Sri Aurobindo sat calm and unmoving and heard a distinct voice tell him, "Go to Chandernagore". Sri Aurobindo went straight to the Ganga and boarded a boat for Chandernagore which was then a French settlement. Soon he received another 'adesh' to go to Pondicherry. Sri Aurobindo remarked later: "I could not question. It was Sri Krishna's adesh. I had to obey. Later I found it was for the Ashram, for the Yogic work." (SAL 2011)

Sri Aurobindo's work in the political field had come to an end. The country had awakened to the call of the Mother and freedom was assured. It was more important to see what India would do with that freedom and what man would do with his future. It was for this work that Sri Aurobindo sailed for Pondicherry to start the most important chapter of his earthly life.

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## **2.5 MYSTIC IN PONDICHERRY (1910-1950)**

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Sri Aurobindo reached Pondicherry on 4th April 1910. He was then 38 years old. He was received by several revolutionaries of Pondicherry. In fact some of them had been waiting for an Uttarayogi, a yogi from the north. They had heard the prophecy that he would come as a fugitive and practise the Poorna Yoga. He would be recognised by three statements. These statements were made by Sri Aurobindo in a letter he wrote from Baroda to his wife Mrinalini Devi on August 30, 1905 where he spoke about his "three madnesses." This letter was later found by the police and produced in court during the Alipore Bomb trial (Srinivasa Iyengar 1985).

### **Three Madnesses**

"I have three madnesses," accepts our Master. He elaborates as follows (SAL 2011).

The first one is this. I firmly believe that the accomplishments, genius, higher education and learning and wealth that God has given me are His. I have a right to spend for my own purposes only what is needed for the maintenance of the family and if otherwise absolutely essential...

The second folly has recently taken hold of me: It is this. By whatever means I must get the direct realisation of the Lord. The religion of today consists in repeating the name of God every now and then, in praying to Him in the presence of everybody and in showing people how religious one is; I do not want it. If the Divine is there, then there must be a way of experiencing His existence, of realising His presence; however hard the path, I have taken a firm resolution to follow it. Hindu dharma asserts that the path is to be found in one's own self, in one's mind. The rule that enables one to follow the path is also given to me...

The third folly is this: whereas others regard the country as an inert object, and know it as the plains, the fields, the forests, the mountains and rivers, I look upon my country as the mother, I worship her and adore her as the mother. What would a son do when a demon sitting on the breast of his mother is drinking her blood? Would he sit down content to take his meals, and go on enjoying himself in the company of his wife and children, or would he, rather, run to the rescue of his mother? I know I have the strength to uplift this fallen race; it is not physical strength, I am not going to fight with the sword or with the gun, but with the power of knowledge. The power of the warrior is not the only kind of force, there is also the power of Brahman which is founded on knowledge. This is not a new feeling within me, it is not of a recent origin, I was born with it, it is in my very marrow. God sent me to the earth to accomplish this great mission."

Mrinalini passed away on December 17, 1918 in Calcutta, before she could come to Pondicherry. From 1910 for several years Sri Aurobindo lived with a few followers depending entirely on donations to maintain them. Outwardly and financially these were very difficult times. Sri Aurobindo pointed out the precarious nature of their position in a letter to Motilal Roy written half humorously but also half seriously: "The situation just now is that we have Rs. 1 1/2 or so in hand. Srinivasa is also without money... No doubt, God will provide, but He has contracted a bad habit of waiting till the last moment. I only hope He does not wish us to learn how to live on a minus quantity like Bharati."

### **The Mother arrives**

But the inner yoga, intense and unwavering went on unaffected by outward circumstances. For four years it was a lonely and solitary journey. His sadhana and work were still waiting for the coming of the one who was to be his true collaborator, the Mother. And she came from France in 1914. On March 29th a young French woman, Mirra Richard, came to Pondicherry with her husband Paul Richard and met Sri Aurobindo for the first time on the physical plane. One has to say on the physical plane because Mirra was far on the path of spirituality and had already been inwardly in contact with a person whom she called Krishna, and who had been helping her and guiding her.

When Mirra saw Sri Aurobindo she recognised in him the Krishna of her vision and knew that her place and work were with him in India. She wrote in her diary the next morning:

"It matters little that there are thousands of beings plunged in the densest ignorance, He whom we saw yesterday is on earth; His presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, and Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth."

Immediately there was a greater impetus to the movement. On August 15th 1914, the monthly *Arya* was launched. The *Arya* continued for seven years and through it Sri Aurobindo presented to the world his great spiritual vision and the path to attain it. Nearly all the major works of Sri Aurobindo which were published later in book form - *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *On the Veda*, *The Upanishads*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, *The Future Poetry* - all of them first came out serially in the *Arya*. It was a veritable torrent which flowed, month after month, on a variety of subjects, words of surpassing depth and beauty. And none of it was thought out; it did not even pass through his mind, but flowed straight from the silent consciousness into his pen.

In 1915, with the outbreak of the First World War, the Richards had to go back to France. Mirra went to Japan in 1916 and returned to Pondicherry in 1920, never to leave.

### **The Descent of the 'Overmind' Consciousness**

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother believe that evolution is primarily a process of the manifestation of higher and higher levels of consciousness upon earth. As life descended into inert matter, and mind into unconscious life, so too higher levels are waiting to descend. The highest of these is the Supermind and it was the constant endeavour of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to bring it down for a radical and permanent transformation of the earth. But before the Supermind could descend, other planes had to manifest to build the proper base.

It was a momentous day. It also brought about many outward changes. Sri Aurobindo now installed Mirra as the Mother of his spiritual endeavour, his collaborator and equal, and handed over to her the responsibility of the inner and outer life of the small group of sadhaks who had gathered around him. He then withdrew into seclusion, to concentrate on the next step of his Yoga.

### **The Ashram Grows**

This was also the beginning of what has now grown into a spiritual community of nearly fifteen hundred persons, known as the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The Ashram grew and expanded under the Mother's guidance. Though Sri Aurobindo had withdrawn physically he continued to guide the disciples inwardly and through letters. Day after day, he sat late into the night answering their smallest queries, apparently even the most trivial, and pouring out his love and light.

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## **2.6 SRI AUROBINDO LEAVES HIS BODY**

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On December 5, 1950, at the age of 78, Sri Aurobindo left his physical body. His body was kept in State for four days and given Samadhi on December 9, 1950. Dr. P. K. Sanyal, who had attended on Sri Aurobindo during his last illness, was surprised to find that the body had not decomposed. He asked the Mother about this phenomenon (Navajata 1972). He described what happened:

"The Mother and I had a look at Him; how wonderful, how beautiful He looked, with a golden hue. There were no signs of death as science had taught me, no evidence of the slightest discoloration, or decomposition. The Mother whispered, 'As long as the supramental light does not pass away, the body will not show any signs of decomposition, and it may be a day or it may take many more days.' I whispered to Her, 'Where is the light you speak of - can I not see it?' I was then kneeling by Sri Aurobindo's bed, by the Mother's feet. She smiled at me and with infinite compassion put her hand on my head. There He was - with a luminous mantle of bluish golden hue around him."

But the dreams of Sri Aurobindo continue to become a reality. The world moves forward on the destined way. Sri Aurobindo was first and foremost a poet. And his greatest work, on which he spent his maximum love and care, was his Epic "*Savitri*." What he wrote there is very well applicable to himself: "One yet may come armoured, invincible; His will immobile meets the mobile hour; The world's blows cannot bend that victor head; Calm and sure are his steps in the growing Night; The goal recedes, he hurries not his pace, He turns not to high voices in the Night. He asks no aid from the inferior gods; His eyes are fixed on the immutable aim."

There is perhaps no better way to end this narration of Sri Aurobindo's life than to quote the message given by the Mother, which is engraved on his Samadhi: "To Thee who hast been the material envelope of our Master, to Thee our infinite gratitude. Before Thee who hast done so much for us, who hast worked, struggled, suffered, hoped, endured so much, before Thee who hast willed all, attempted all, prepared, achieved all for us, before Thee we bow down and implore that we may never forget, even for a moment, all we owe to Thee."

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## 2.7 SRI AUROBINDO ON INDIAN SCRIPTURES

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Obviously our Master was enamoured and fascinated by the Indian scriptures. He studied them thoroughly and personalised them, so that they became part of his existence. But he was not a slave even to the Sacred Scriptures. Stephen H. Phillips (1986) who has written a very illuminating book on Aurobindo, thinks of Aurobindo as a "mystic empiricist" who has high regard for Indian scriptures. He says that Aurobindo had a "metaphorical understanding" of the Indian Scriptures and so he could interpret them creatively to make them relevant for the Indian context. In order to see how Aurobindo creatively interprets the Indian Scriptures, we take one specific case of The Upanishads. Written in between May and September 1920, in Arya, the following gives us an idea of how Aurobindo appreciates the Indian Scripture.

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## 2.8 SRI AUROBINDO ON THE UPANISHADS

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[To give an idea of his view on Indian Scriptures, we have some extracts from his writings on the Upanishads, written by Aurobindo himself, in Arya between May and September 1920.]

"The Upanishads are the supreme work of the Indian mind, and that it should be so, that the highest self-expression of its genius, its sublimest poetry, its greatest creation of the thought and word should be not a literary or poetical masterpiece of the ordinary kind, but a large flood of spiritual revelation of this direct and profound character, is a significant fact, evidence of a

unique mentality and unusual turn of spirit. The Upanishads are at once profound religious scriptures, - for they are a record of the deepest spiritual experiences, - documents of revelatory and intuitive philosophy of an inexhaustible light, power and largeness and, whether written in verse or cadenced prose, spiritual poems of an absolute, an unfailing inspiration inevitable in phrase, wonderful in rhythm and expression. It is the expression of a mind in which philosophy and religion and poetry are made one, because this religion does not end with a cult nor is limited to a religio-ethical aspiration, but rises to an infinite discovery of God, of Self, of our highest and whole reality of spirit and being and speaks out of an ecstasy of luminous knowledge and an ecstasy of moved and fulfilled experience, this philosophy is not an abstract intellectual speculation about Truth or a structure of the logical intelligence, but Truth seen, felt, lived, held by the inmost mind and soul in the joy of utterance of an assured discovery and possession, and this poetry is the work of the aesthetic mind lifted up beyond its ordinary field to express the wonder and beauty of the rarest spiritual self-vision and the profoundest illumined truth of self and God and universe. Here the intuitive mind and intimate psychological experience of the Vedic seers passes into a supreme culmination in which the Spirit, as is said in a phrase of the Katha Upanishad, discloses its own very body, reveals the very word of its self-expression and discovers to the mind the vibration of rhythms which repeating themselves within in the spiritual hearing seem to build up the soul and set it satisfied and complete on the heights of self-knowledge.

“This character of the Upanishads needs to be insisted upon with a strong emphasis, because it is ignored by foreign translators who seek to bring out the intellectual sense without feeling the life of thought vision and the ecstasy of spiritual experience which made the ancient verses appear then and still make them to those who can enter into the element in which these utterances move, a revelation not to the intellect alone, but to the soul and the whole being, make of them in the old expressive word not intellectual thought and phrase, but Sruti, spiritual audience, an inspired Scripture. The philosophical substance of the Upanishads demands at this day no farther stress of appreciation of its value; for even if the amplest acknowledgement by the greatest minds were wanting, the whole history of philosophy would be there to offer its evidence.

“The Upanishads have been the acknowledged source of numerous profound philosophies and religions that flowed from it in India like her great rivers from their Himalayan cradle fertilising the mind and life of the people and kept its soul alive through the long procession of the centuries, constantly returned to for light, never failing to give fresh illumination, a fountain of inexhaustible life-giving waters. Buddhism with all its developments was only a restatement, although from a new standpoint and with fresh terms of intellectual definition and reasoning, of one side of its experience and it carried it thus changed in form but hardly in substance over all Asia and westward towards Europe. The ideas of the Upanishads can be rediscovered in much of the thought of Pythagoras and Plato and form the profoundest part of Neo-platonism and Gnosticism with all their considerable consequences to the philosophical thinking of the West, and Sufism only repeats them in another religious language.

“There is hardly a main philosophical idea which cannot find an authority or a seed or indication in these antique writings - the speculations, according to a certain view, of thinkers who had no better past or background to their thought than a crude, barbaric, naturalistic and animistic ignorance. And even the larger generalisations of Science are constantly found to apply to the

truth of physical Nature formulas already discovered by the Indian sages in their original, their largest meaning in the deeper truth of the spirit.

“And yet these works are not philosophical speculations of the intellectual kind, a metaphysical analysis which labours to define notions, to select ideas and discriminate those that are true, to logicise truth or else to support the mind in its intellectual preferences by dialectical reasoning and is content to put forward an exclusive solution of existence in the light of this or that idea of the reason and see all things from that viewpoint, in that focus and determining perspective. The Upanishads could not have had so undying a vitality, exercised so unflinching an influence, produced such results or seen now their affirmations independently justified in other spheres of inquiry and by quite opposite methods, if they had been of that character. It is because these seers saw Truth rather than merely thought it, clothed it indeed with a strong body of intuitive idea and disclosing image, but a body of ideal transparency through which we look into the illimitable, because they fathomed things in the light of self-existence and saw them with the eye of the Infinite, that their words remain always alive and immortal, of an inexhaustible significance, an inevitable authenticity, a satisfying finality that is at the same time an infinite commencement of truth, to which all our lines of investigation when they go through to their end arrive again and to which humanity constantly returns in its minds and its ages of greatest vision. The Upanishads are Vedanta, a book of knowledge in a higher degree even than the Vedas, but knowledge in the profounder Indian sense of the word, Jnana. Not a mere thinking and considering by the intelligence, the pursuit and grasping of a mental form of truth by the intellectual mind, but a seeing of it with the soul and a total living in it with the power of the inner being, a spiritual seizing by a kind of identification with the object of knowledge is Jnana. And because it is only by an integral knowing of the self that this kind of direct knowledge can be made complete, it was the self that the Vedantic sages sought to know, to live in and to be one with it by identity. And through this endeavour they came easily to see that the self in us is one with the universal self of all things and that this self again is the same as God and Brahman, a transcendent Being or Existence, and they beheld, felt, lived in the inmost truth of all things in the universe and the inmost truth of man's inner and outer existence by the light of this one and unifying vision. The Upanishads are epic hymns of self-knowledge and world-knowledge and God-knowledge.

“The great formulations of philosophic truth with which they abound are not abstract intellectual generalisations, things that may shine and enlighten the mind, but do not live and move the soul to ascension, but are ardours as well as lights of an intuitive and revelatory illumination, reachings as well as seeings of the one Existence, the transcendent Godhead, the divine and universal Self and discoveries of his relation with things and creatures in this great cosmic manifestation. Chants of inspired knowledge, they breathe like all hymns a tone of religious aspiration and ecstasy, not of the narrowly intense kind proper to a lesser religious feeling, but raised beyond cult and special forms of devotion to the universal Ananda of the Divine which comes to us by approach to and oneness with the self-existent and universal spirit.

“The Upanishads are the creation of a revelatory and intuitive mind and its illumined experience, and all their substance, structure, phrase, imagery, movement are determined by and stamped with this original character. These supreme and all-embracing truths, these visions of oneness and self and a universal divine being are cast into brief and monumental phrases which bring them at once before the soul's eye and make them real and imperative to its aspiration and

experience or are couched in poetic sentences full of revealing power and suggestive thought-colour that discover a whole infinite through a finite image. The One is there revealed, but also disclosed the many aspects, and each is given its whole significance by the amplitude of the expression and finds as if in a spontaneous self-discovery its place and its connection by the illumining justness of each word and all the phrase. The largest metaphysical truths and the subtlest subtleties of psychological experience are taken up into the inspired movement and made at once precise to the seeing mind and loaded with unending suggestion to the discovering spirit. There are separate phrases, single couplets, brief passages which contain each in itself the substance of a vast philosophy and yet each is only thrown out as a side, an aspect, a portion of the infinite self-knowledge. All here is a packed and pregnant and yet perfectly lucid and luminous brevity and an immeasurable completeness. A thought of this kind cannot follow the tardy, careful and diffuse development of the logical intelligence. The passage, the sentence, the couplet, the line, even the half line follows the one that precedes with a certain interval full of an unexpressed thought, an echoing silence between them, a thought which is carried in the total suggestion and implied in the step itself, but which the mind is left to work out for its own profit, and these intervals of pregnant silence are large, the steps of this thought are like the paces of a Titan striding from rock to distant rock across infinite waters. There is a perfect totality, a comprehensive connection of harmonious parts in the structure of each Upanishad; but it is done in the way of a mind that sees masses of truth at a time and stops to bring only the needed word out of a filled silence. The rhythm in verse or cadenced prose corresponds to the sculpture of the thought and the phrase. The metrical forms of the Upanishads are made up of four half lines each clearly cut, the lines mostly complete in themselves and integral in sense, the half lines presenting two thoughts or distinct parts of a thought that are wedded to and complete each other, and the sound movement follows a corresponding principle, each step brief and marked off by the distinctness of its pause, full of echoing cadences that remain long vibrating in the inner hearing: each is as if a wave of the infinite that carries in it the whole voice and rumour of the ocean. It is a kind of poetry - word of vision, rhythm of the spirit, - that has not been written before or after.” (Aurobindo)

### Check Your Progress I

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Narrate the spiritual experiences of Aurobindo.

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2) How does Aurobindo view Indian Scriptures?

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## 2.9 LET US SUM UP

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After focussing on his deep spiritual experience, we saw how Aurobindo accepts, affirms and interprets the Indian scriptures, making them relevant for his context.

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## 2.10 KEY WORDS

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**Adesh:** The inner (divine?) commandment, which must be followed. Similar to the voice of the conscience.

**Sadhak:** A spiritual aspirant, generally a devotee, a student, who is following a spiritual teaching or tradition or guru in order to attain realisation.

**Tapasya:** Tapasya in Sanskrit means "heat". In Hinduism, it is used figuratively, denoting spiritual suffering, mortification or austerity, and also the spiritual ecstasy of a yogi.

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## 2.11 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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