



MIND IN NYĀYA PHILOSOPHY AND SRI AUROBINDO: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Dr Md Mijanul Islam

SACT, Dept. of Philosophy
 Chanchal College, Chanchal, Malda, W.B

Abstract

The nature of the mind has been a subject of sustained inquiry within Indian philosophical traditions, where it is generally conceived as a subtle, non-physical instrument mediating between consciousness and the empirical world. While various systems offer divergent accounts of its functions and ontological status, they converge in recognizing its indispensability in the processes of cognition, volition, and experience. In Indian knowledge tradition, much debate has been carried out on the mind. Here, mind is referred to as ‘manas’, and is placed under the sort of internal sense organ. It has been judged a crucial organ for acquiring knowledge. The notion of mind is understood in many different ways by various cultural and religious traditions. This paper undertakes a comparative study of the conception of mind in the Nyāya system and in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. While Nyāya posits the mind as a single, atomic, non-material entity functioning as the link between sensory organs and the self. Sri Aurobindo presents a multi-layered, evolutionary, and transformative model of mind culminating in the supramental consciousness. The analysis highlights significant contrasts between these two traditions and indicates how each contributes uniquely to the broader Indian understanding of mind.

Keywords: Manas, Indriya, Overmind, Supermind, Yogic Consciousness, Saccidānanda

The Nyāya philosophy is a system of logical realism. In philosophy, realism means the theory or doctrine that the existence of things or objects of the world is independent of all knowledge or relation to mind. The existence of ideas and images, feelings of pleasures and pain, is dependent on some mind. According to them, mind (manas) is the sixth sense and an internal organ that perceives such qualities of soul as desire, hatred, pleasure and pain etc. It is everlasting and not *ahamkārika* (not born out of the ego factor), non *Bhautika* (not derived from bhutas), atomic in size and situated in the heart; co-existing with the soul. According to this school, the mind is a subtle element. It is not the subject of direct perception, so it can only be inferred. Nyāya mentions the following roles of mind: remembrance, inference, verbal cognition, doubt, intuition, dream, speculation, and internal perceptions i.e. pain, pleasure, desire etc. Sense organs cannot perceive the objects in the absence of mind, as only its proximity ensures perception. Internal perceptions such as pain, pleasure, desire, aversion etc. cannot be perceived by sense faculties, and they indicate the existence of a separate faculty, which is termed the mind, as Gautama says: *Yugapajjñānānutpattiḥ manaso līṅgam*.¹ In the commentary of the same aphorism Vātsyāyana says: *Yugapacca khalu ghrāṇādinām gandhādinām ca sannikarṣesu satsu yugapat jñānāni notpadyante tenānumīyate asti tattadindriyaśaṃyogi sahakāi nimittāntaramavyāpi*.²

It is remarkable that Nyāya has accepted the notion of *Indriyas* in the form of five organs of cognition and does not include the five motor organs in the category of sense organs. It is the grounds that there is no straight mention in the *Nyāyasūtrās* to admit mind as *Indriya*. However Vātsyāyana argues that it cannot be declared that mind is not an indriya just as it is not calculated among Indriyas. To him, mind is an organ, but it is detached from five senses, because of its cognition in relation to inner states of thoughts, feeling and desire. Yet the soul is the accurate cognizer and mind arbitrates between the soul and the senses as a tool of the cognition.

In the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, the concept of Manas (mind) plays a crucial role in the understanding of human consciousness and its evolutionary journey. This theory derives from his ontology. With respect to the mind, Sri Aurobindo asserts that evolution will not stop with Homo sapiens. Sri Aurobindo has provided an insightful account of the concept of mind. *The Life Divine* has exposed Sri Aurobindo's thesis that mind is an instrument of ignorance first to him, human mind,



Cover Page



properly speaking, is 'sense-mind' which is under the pull of vital aspects of being. Secondly, mind is only a link in the evolutionary ladder. Thirdly, higher reaches of mind newer dimensions of Consciousness.³

Sri Aurobindo acknowledges various levels of mind. These are: Mind, Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition, Overmind and Supermind. So let us now assume an adequate empirical approach to Sri Aurobindo's plans. Whatever his outlook to it, he posits and identifies mind as an entity. He is, therefore in line with the other thinkers who have expressed their views on the nature of mind. Like them, he develops a conceptual framework of the entity in his own way. 'According to him, Mind is an instrument of analysis and synthesis'. Mind specified naturally is the lower manifestation of the supermind, but this situation of mind will be modified through *yoga*. Through this yogic process, when the *Caityapurusa* is brought forward, the physical and mental selves are gradually remodeled. At this step, the supramental consciousness is personal and free from all burdens. It will role as the lead rendering the physical self-etc. into enlightenment. Once this turns into attainable through some yogic process, a person will be able to perceive the Divine image, from which the Age of Superman starts. Though, once mental self (*manomayakoṣa*) enfolded by physical self (*annamayakoṣa*) and moreover very important self (*prānamayakoṣa*) our mind is not free and does not develop itself.

When our yogic process starts our mind goes on to be developing primarily. It is modified into higher mind that is higher than ordinary mind. Sri Aurobindo speaks that the Higher Mind is a first plane of spiritual consciousness where one becomes constantly and closely aware of the one everywhere and knows and sees things habitually with that awareness. The Higher Mind is situated just above the conventional mental level. It represents a luminous and clarified form of thought that is open to the luster of infinite. It is a method of spiritual awakening that involves entering into the inner realms of consciousness.

It communicates the upper knowledge in a type that the mind after it is intensified, broadened, made spiritually supple, can receive. It is, according to him, a mind no longer of blended light and darkness or half-light, but a big clarity of the spirit. Its fundamental substance is a Unitarian sense of being with a dominant multiple dynamization capable of the formation of a multitude of facets of awareness, ways of action, forms and significances of becoming. It is so, a power that has proceeded from the overmind, — but with the supermind as its ulterior origin, but its special character, its activity of consciousness are dominated by thought; it is a luminous thought-mind, a mind or spirit-born conceptual awareness. Then the illumined mind is far more advanced than higher mind. The illumined mind is not a mind of elevated thought alone; rather, it is a mind filled with spiritual light. The intuitive mind is the primary plane which there is a real opening toward the complete possibility of realization, for it is through this plane that the evolving soul advances to the overmind, which in turn prepares the way to the supermind. It is a higher structure of reason or intellect. It is a sort of truth image, truth hearing, truth memory and truth-discernment. It is the actual step in entirely opening of realization.

The Overmind receives the supramental light and subsequently diversifies, distributes, and articulates it into discrete aspects, powers, and innumerable multiplicities. Its primary function is to mediate the transformative ascent of consciousness by serving as an intermediary stage of transmutation. In the hierarchical progression of consciousness, the overmind represents a delegated formulation of the Supermind, metaphysically conceived as the agency that supervises and sustains the terrestrial order. Within this framework, the Overmind may be understood as the characteristic consciousness the visionary poets and sages such as Rabindranath Tagore and Kalidas. Their works exemplify a degree of overmental illumination, enable them to craft distinctive poetic visions and highly refined literary styles. Such creation transcends the confines of the individual ego and expresses dimensions that are universal, timeless, and archetypal. Concepts such as '*Sārthavihin Karma*' among others are also associated with the operations of the Overmind.

The further unfolding of the Supermind projects itself as the mind, which constitutes the finite mode of human knowledge. The mind's characteristic movement is a labour of division: it separates, distinguishes, adds, subtracts and arranges. Yet this activity, however useful for the operations of life, is circumscribed by its own nature. For the mind, standing upon the narrow ridge of the finite, cannot transgress its inherent boundaries. It cannot seize the Infinite, it can



Cover Page



only turn endlessly within the orbit of its limited formulations. The infinite, therefore, eludes the grasp of the mental consciousness. It is not by the mind's effort that the finite is attained; rather, the mind itself subsists by the secret governance of the Infinite. Only when the mind is uplifted, transformed, and illumined by higher levels of consciousness does it begin to participate in a more spacious truth, permitting a glimmer of the Infinite to enter its field. Evolution itself is the outward gesture of a deeper truth: the involution of consciousness into matter. Matter evolves life because life is already concealed within it; life evolves mind because mind sleeps veiled within life. But hidden behind mind there is the psyche-the soul-principle, which bears the spark of the Divine and ensures the being's pilgrimage toward *Saccidānanda*. This march is fulfilled through the supramental transmutation of the mind, by which consciousness is progressively released from its obscurity. The ascent from mind to Supermind is thus not a mere series of stages but an inner awakening into ever-more integral modes of being. The Supermind is the original truth-consciousness, the eternal mediator between the Absolute and its cosmic unfolding. Its work is to lead the soul from partial knowledge to integral knowledge, from error to a more consummate truth. When the mind has completed its long labour of purification and surrender, the spirit becomes capable of uniting with the Supreme Reality. In that union lies the true freedom of consciousness- the liberation into its own infinite Self.

Sri Aurobindo situates the Overmind as the highest of the planes below the Supramental, describing it as a delegated power of the supramental consciousness. In its absence, there would be no evolutionary movement within the inconscience of matter and, consequently, no gradual emergence of consciousness through material evolution. He posits a fundamental division within the universe of consciousness: an upper hemisphere comprising *Sat*, *Chit*, and *Ananda*, and a lower hemisphere consisting of Mind, Life, and Matter. The Overmind functions as the intermediary boundary between these two hemispheres. Although inherently luminous, it withholds from the lower hemisphere the fully indivisible supramental light. It receives the supramental illumination and disperses it into separated aspects, powers, and multiplicities. The Overmind perceives reality comprehensively—calmly and steadily—across vast extensions of space, time, and cosmic relations; it acts with the same global and synthetic grasp. In Sri Aurobindo's metaphysical scheme, it is identified as the plane of the great gods, the Divine Creators.

Beyond the domain of mind, psychological experience encounters another order of energy and another note in the scale of Being. Sri Aurobindo designates this as the Supermind. He explains that the Supermind, lives and acts natively in a domain of experience of which the mind becomes aware by reflective experience and vaguely calls Spirit or Spiritual Being. Positioned between *Saccidānanda* and the lower creation, the Supermind alone contains the self-determining truths of the Divine Consciousness and is indispensable for any truth-based creation. It embodies the Real-Idea inherent in all cosmic force and existence—an infinite consciousness that determines, combines, and upholds relations, order, and the fundamental lines of manifestation. Beyond the supramental plane—an intermediate stage between Overmind and Mind leading toward the complete realization of *Saccidānanda*—lie the highest ranges of the Manifested Spirit. On these planes, existence is not based on the differentiation of the One into multiplicity; rather, it manifests a pure identity in oneness. Nonetheless, the supramental Truth-Consciousness is not absent here, for it is an inalienable power of *Saccidānanda*.

Sri Aurobindo acknowledges the ambiguity surrounding the term Supermind, which might be misinterpreted either as an elevated form of mind still within the mental principle, or as a general reference to everything beyond mind. To avoid such imprecision, he proposes an ancillary clarification: 'Truth-Consciousness' more accurately denotes the essential meaning of the term Supermind. He also recognises the complexity of distinguishing between the Supermind and the Overmind. The former represents the full and integral Truth-Consciousness, whereas the latter receives truths in a separated manner and assigns them distinct activities. Between the Supermind and the human mind lie numerous intermediate planes of consciousness, of which the Overmind is the highest. It is a domain replete with light and power. Yet, from the perspective of what lies above it, the Overmind marks the point at which the soul begins to turn away from indivisible and total knowledge toward the movement that eventually leads to Ignorance. Although the Overmind does not itself constitute Ignorance, it initiates the first decisive step that makes the descent into Ignorance inevitable.



Functionally, the Overmind surpasses even the universal mind. Operating within the universe of Ignorance, it nevertheless maintains a vast, direct, and masterful cognition of cosmic truth. Rather than generating illusion or falsehood, it acts as a creator of truth. As a principle of cosmic truth, it exhibits an immense catholicity and universalizing power. It gathers and distributes diverse forces, enabling each to undertake autonomous yet effective modes of action. While it acts as a protective and delegated expression of supramental consciousness, it does not preserve the complete, indivisible integrality of supramental truth, even though it retains a clear awareness of the essential truths of things.

Conclusion

The above discussion demonstrates that Sri Aurobindo's conception of mind diverges significantly from the Nyāya theory. In Nyāya philosophy, mind (*manas*) is a single, real, and independent substance (*dravya*). By contrast, Sri Aurobindo conceives mind as a multi-tiered reality with several planes and gradations, a conceptual innovation that marks a major development in modern Indian metaphysics. Moreover, according to Nyāya mind is regarded as transcending physical existence; it cannot be equated with the brain but stands as a subtler and more comprehensive principle of consciousness.

Notes and References

1. *Nyāyadarśana*, 1/1/6.
 2. *Vātsyāyana bhāṣya*, 1/1/16.
 3. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1970, Book I, p. 162.
- Aurobindo, Sri. (1969). *Basis on Yoga*. Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
- (1970). *The Life Divine*. Vol.18, Birth Centenary Library, Popular Edition, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
- (1970). *The Life Divine*. Vol.19, Birth Centenary Library, Popular Edition, SriAurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
- Bhal, V. M. (1964). *Yogic Powers and God Realisation*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay.
- Bucke, R.M. (1969). *Cosmic Consciousness*. E.P. Dutton, New York.
- Carlton, Eric. (1977). *Ideology and Social Order*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- Chakravarty, Satyajyoti. (1991). *Sri Aurobindo on the Philosophy of Yoga*. Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi.
- Chakravarty, Satyajyoti. (1997). *The Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo*. AC Publications Private Limited, New Delhi.
- Cornelissen, Matthijs (ed.). (2001). *Consciousness and Its Transformation*. Sri Aurobindo Centre of Education, Pondicherry.
- Mohanty, J. N. (1986). *Essays on Indian Philosophy, Traditional and Modern*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Satprem. (1996). *Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness*. Mira Aditi, Mysore.
- Sharma, Chandradhar. (1987). *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*. Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi.
- Sharma, R. N. (1996). *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*. Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi.



Cover Page



-
- Shanmukham, N. Jaya.(1988). *Sri Aurobindo and the Indian tradition*. Crown Publications, New Delhi.
- Sobel, Prem.& Jyoti. (2007). *The Hierarchy of Minds*. Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
- Srinivasan. G. (1998). *Philosophical Perspectives East West*. Associated Printers and Publishers, Mysore.
- Srivastava, R. S. (1984). *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*. Sharda Publications, Ranchi.