

Monistic Thought of Three Indian Philosophers: Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo

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Abstract

In contemporary Indian Philosophy, Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, and Sri Aurobindo are popularly known as monistic philosophers having a spiritual bent of mind of their own. Naturally there are some similarities and dissimilarities among them. What are the similarities? And what are the dissimilarities among them? The present paper concerns about the discussion of those similarities and dissimilarities as well as their precious thoughts. Again, of being monists, we find a unique attribute of each of these philosophers towards life and reality. We will focus upon this uniqueness as well.

Keywords: Contemporary Philosophy, Monism, Practical Vedānta, Integrated Yoga, Veda.

Derived from the verbal root 'bid', the suffix 'ach' added to it, the word 'VEDA' means knowledge. What type of knowledge is this? According to Yājñavalkya, it is such a type of knowledge that can be acquired neither by perception nor by inference. He said,

'Pratyakṣeṇānumityā vā yastūpāyo na vidyate|
Eṇaṃ vidanti vedena tasmāt vedasya vedatā ||'

[Sāyaṇāchārya's Bhāṣya on Oitareya Brāhmaṇa, R̥gveda]

This is the uniqueness of the Vedas. There are two ancient divisions of the Vedas - mantra and brāhmaṇa. The mantra is the root, brāhmaṇa is its interpretation. The connotation of the theory and the practice in the mantra has been revealed in brāhmaṇa. The last part of brāhmaṇa is āraṇyaka and the last part of āraṇyaka is the Upaniṣada. It is true that, there is a precedent between the mantra and the Upaniṣadas, but that precedent is not temporal but expressive. The beginning of the literature is the mantra and its end is the Upaniṣadas. This Upaniṣada is the last part of the Veda. This is what is called śruti prasthāna of the Veda. Later on, we find its development in the smṛti and purāṇa.

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There is no tarka (argument) in the smṛti. The vedānta that deals with the śruti and śruti prasthāna is called Ādi Vedānta. Then comes intellectual analysis of the Vedānta. In intellectual analysis, the issue of refuting the doctrine of other and self-defense became the main issue. Then the Veda Mīmāṃsā Sutra was written. This is the Nyāyaprasthāna of the Vedānta. It is the beginning of the Navya-Vedānta.

The difference between Ādi and Navya Vedānta is also significant. It can be said that, Ādi Vedānta is radiant in wisdom of the sage. On the other hand, Navya Vedānta is rich by thought of the Muni. Here, Srīmat Anirvan has differentiated between the Ādi and Navya Vedānta in the *Vedānta Jigñāsā*. In his words,

The means of the knowledge of the sages is reconciliation and the means of Muni's knowledge is argument. Basically, the vision of one is supernatural and the vision of the other is direct or spiritual. One feels the sweetness of the Vedānta and one feels its richness. The Vedānta Jigñāsā is fulfilled if one can reconcile the two streams of Mīmāṃsā (Conciliation) and Tarka (argument). The radiance of the heart then awakens the mind with the light of the unseen that is called **Manisha**.¹

According to Anirvan, a synthesis of vision is needed in the thinking and practice of Vedānta. In contemporary Indian philosophy, this message of synthesis is vibrant in the writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, and Sri Aurobindo – the three Vaidāntikans of Bengal. The present paper will focus upon the thinking of these three Vaidāntikans.

Monistic Thought of Rabindranath

Rabindranath's Vaidāntik thought is mainly expressed in three stages. The speech given by Rabindranath Tagore at Santiniketan between 1315 to 1322 Bangabda is known as 'Santiniketan Speech'. In this speech, he expressed his thoughts about God, the world, creatures etc. Needless to say, Vedānta has an effect on all these thoughts. These constitute the first stage of Vaidāntik thought of Rabindranath Tagore. Notable among the writings of this stage are *Sādhanā* (1913), *Personality* (1917), *The Religion of Man* (1933) etc. His second stage of Vaidāntik writings are based on the interpretation of the ideal culture of India. Incidentally, the reflection of Vedānta is evident in the kind of features that Rabindranath points out in the discussion on *Sanchayer Dharma*. The third stage of Vaidāntik writings are his innumerable poems and songs. In some poems where advaita thoughts

has been expressed are, 'Achal Smriti', 'Ananta Jibon', 'amar majhe tomar lila hobe' etc. Some famous songs which express the advaita thought of Tagore are “Venge mor ghorer chabi niye jabi ke amare”, “Amar hiyar majhe lukiye chhile...” etc. A sense of uniqueness has been manifested through all these songs and poems which are rich in monistic consciousness.

According to Rabindranath, Brahma is, by no means, a separate entity from the world. The manifestation of Brahma is the same in all the various conflicts of this world e.g., darkness – light, happiness – sorrow, good – evil etc. Thus, Rabindranath gave a unique explanation of knowing the Brahma. According to him, Brahma is known only by the overall philosophy of the infallible law by which the world is governed. And this is why we see Rabindranath saying in the *swavablabh* article that

gradually, when man was taught to view the whole world as one, he realized that, even what seemed to be an outstanding rule, was not different from the general rules. Then he gained the right to see the advent of Brahma uninterruptedly everywhere, and he found the joy and refuge in the idea of that great unbroken unity. Then man's knowledge and action became free from illusion and became wide and pleasing. Idiocy and narrowness began to disappear from his religion, society, and state.² (My translation)

Another feature of Rabindranath's thought on Brahma is that he speaks of tying the fragmented and the isolated into a whole rhythm. So, according to him,

... that our soul wants Brahma means that it is distressed by many, so it wants the one, it is scattered by the restless, so it wants the constant, it doesn't want something new, it wants *Rasānām rasatama*, which denotes the one who is the best of all.³ (My translation)

Rabindranath saw the material world as an expression of totality. This monistic whole is the cosmos. So, the world is not false or relative. It's authenticity as an object is an expression of wholeness.

Māyāvād in the philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore has been revealed in such a unique way. He acknowledged the Māyāvād but he maintained his own meaning of the word 'Māyā'. According to him, this is a kind of darkness (Andhatā). This darkness refutes the whole truth. This is why Rabindranath Tagore said in the *Nirvishes* article that,

... this thing which is not in the form of Brahma, but it exists. What can it be

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named? Vedānta gave it the name 'Māyā' – it is a fact that Brahma is true but that (Māyā) is not. That is Māyā. Whenever I went to see it with Brahma, I did not see it anymore. From the point of view of Brahma, everything is eternally consummated in the integral circle. From my aspect, it is divided into conflicts, differences, and pluralities.⁴ (My translation)

Brahmopalabdhī is the idea of integrity of the world. The beginning of this philosophical thought of Rabindranath Tagore was in *Shantiniketan Essays* and its result reflected in his famous book *Religion of Man*.

Influence of Maharshi Devendranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore mentioned himself as a proud member of a family where texts of the Upanishads were used in daily worship; and he has had before him the paradigm of his father Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, who lived his long years in the closest communion with God, while not neglecting his duties to the humankind, or allowing his dedicated interest in all human associations to suffer any abatement.

Rabindranath's ceremonial schooling began in Kolkata's Oriental Seminary. Then for a few years, he studied in an ordinary school, the institution recognized by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. Next, he went to St. Xavier's school, but due to his irregularity as a student, he was unable to continue with his learning there. However, he continued to follow his education at his residence. A momentous event in his life in this phase was the expedition to the Himalayas that he took with his father in 1873. On his way, father and son spent some specious time in Santiniketan. That was the first time that Rabindranath would leave the city and experience nature's open vistas. In this trip, Rabindranath was able to become close to his father that was a vital occurrence in the poet's life. His father's unique individuality overwhelmed the young poet. In his isolated accommodation in the Himalayas, Devendranath taught his son about the Sanskrit language and literature. In the evening, the father educated the child about the planets of the sky. In this way, Devendranath was able to transfer his love of the environment and the creation to the burgeoning poet.

Rabindranath's attraction for Baul way of life

Rabindranath was specially influenced by the Baul community. In Rabindranath's thought, conception and discussion, the context of Baul comes up in various ways. Mainly, the motivation of the Baul community of Silaidaha was thus transformed into 'Rabindra-Baul'. His education,

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action, dress, philosophy and thought clearly reflected his attraction for the Baul. In his essay, dramas, dances all above the philosophy, he tried to capture the ideology of the Baul community in particular, their philosophy, their songs in different manners.

Rabindranath's soul was connected with the philosophy and religious thought of the Bauls, and he incorporated the worship and songs of the Bauls into his philosophy and creations. Like the Baul, Rabindranath also ignored external communal religion and considered inner religion as his own. In the words of Rabindranath, I cannot say that I know fully and clearly what my religion is. This saying is echoed in Lalan's song.

While living in Shilaidaha, the poet realizes that these Bauls speak of a man who secretly resides in the heart of every human being and who is formless. It is the man of such love, the god of life, that the Bauls desire and experience a deep divine bliss. Rabindranath also realizes that there is no restriction on the passion of this 'Prāṇer Devatā'. So, he presented this philosophy of the Bauls to the countrymen through his songs, prose, and poetry.

Although Rabindranath's inspiration of life-thought and Baul's inspiration of their philosophy are different, the similarity of Rabindranath's 'Jiban Devatā' with Baul's 'Moner Mānuṣ' is easily discernible. Just as the 'Moner Mānuṣ' lives in the hearts of the Bauls and plays hide and seek, in the same way Rabindranath's search for that 'Jiban Devatā' and the pain of not getting it are expressed in his various songs of Pūjā, Prem and Prakriti.

Baul music, their theology, etc. inspired Rabindranath but he was never interested in the secret practices and rituals of the Bauls. Baul songs are a big part of their pursuit. Their deep spiritual questions have been expressed through these songs. Rabindranath accepted Baul's philosophy only as a way of life philosophy, ignoring ritualistic activities.

Rabindranath himself composed some Baul songs. They are not imitations of Baul, rather they can be said to have acquired uniqueness in Rabindranath's own style. During the Swadeshi movement he composed many songs with tunes taken from Baul.

Monistic Thoughts of Vivekananda

According to Vivekananda, all people in the world should practice Vedānta

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because Vedānta is the sovereign religion. He acknowledges that, Brahmasūtra is the best philosophy, the Gīta is the best commentary on Vedānta and liberation or freedom is the main mantra of the Upaniṣadas. Vivekananda's lectures on the Vedānta are the following: lecture on the philosophy of Vedānta at a meeting of the Graduation Philosophical Society of Harvard University in the USA on March 25, 1896, lectures on Vedānta at the Hindu College premises in Jaffna on January 23, 1897, lectures on Vedānta in Madras, his lectures on Vedānta at the Calcutta Star Theatre, lecture at Lahore on 12th November, 1897, lecture on Vedānta in the Dakbanglow at Khetri on December 20, 1898, etc. Through this discourse, Vivekananda wanted to convey to everyone that, the universal, omnipresent, and sovereign Sanātan Vedānta as well as the philosophy of Vedānta is the religion that will enlighten the people of the upcoming world.

Vivekananda learned the Advaita Vedānta from his mentor Sri Ramakrishna and under his influence; he perceived the material world and the spiritual world. There are two aspects of Vivekananda's philosophy – Jñānayoga and Karmayoga. His Jñānayoga is similar to the Acharya Sankara's Advaita Vada and his Karmayoga is practical Vedānta. This practical Vedānta is entirely his own and he was the first to speak of practical Vedānta. This practical Vedānta is the interpretation of Vedānta that he has given in consonance with the present time. He says that, the ultimate goal of the Vedas and the essence of the Vedas is Vedānta. Today, Vivekananda's Vedānta is regarded as 'neo-Vedānta'. According to this doctrine, Brahma is Saguṇa and Nirguṇa, Sākāra and Nirākāra. The main thought of this doctrine of 'neo-Vedānta' was conceived by Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda enriched it further with detailed reasoning and gradually turned it into a philosophical opinion.

According to Shankaracharya, 'Saccidānanda' is the embodiment of Brahma. Vivekananda said that, infinity is 'sat', 'chit' and 'ānanda'. He has explained *sat* in the sense of existence, *chit* in the sense of consciousness in the same way as the monotheists, but in Vivekananda's philosophy, the interpretation of *ānanda* is different from the interpretation of the Advaita Vadas. He regarded *ānanda* as love. He called the soul Brahma like the Advaitabadis and this is the one. According to him, there is no such division as I-You, everything is one. Brahma is that sea and all the creations

are just different waves of that sea.

Regarding the fact that Brahma is the essence of the world, he said that, 'the essence of the world is Brahma, the form of all living beings. He is the ultimate treasure of your life; that is why I say, you are him – **Tattvamasi**.⁵

Different types of Yoga:

Swami Vivekananda used the term 'Yoga' very simply and combined the two meanings of the word, i.e. 'union' and 'a form of penance'. He advocated four types of yoga:

1. Karmayoga: the method in which a man realizes his own divinity through works and duty.
2. Bhaktiyoga: the consciousness of the divinity through dedication, devotion, and love of a personal God.
3. Rājayoga: the consciousness of the divinity through the self-control of mind.
4. Jñānayoga: the consciousness of a man's own divinity through knowledge.

In his words,

We claim that concentrating the powers of the mind is the only way to knowledge. In external science, concentration of mind is putting it on something external; and in internal science, it is — drawing towards one's self. We call this concentration of mind, Yoga.⁶

[This discussion followed the lecture on the Vedānta Philosophy delivered by the Swami at the Graduate Philosophical Society of Harvard University, U. S. A., March 25, 1896., Vol. I, p. 36, 2nd ed.]

These Yogas, divided into different groups, can primarily be classed into four; and each is only a process leading indirectly to the recognition of the Absolute, they are appropriate to different temperaments. The Absolute is ever boundless, ever perfect; but the ignorance that has covered its character for a time is to be removed. So, the entire scope of all systems of Yoga is to clear up this ignorance and permit the *Ātman* to restore its own personality.

Karmayoga: The entire process of Karmayoga has been described in the book *The Yoga of Action* or *Karma Yoga*. It is a collection of lectures of

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Swami Vivekananda, transcript by Joseph Josiah Goodwin, published in February 1896 in New York City. According to Vivekananda, Karmayoga is the purification of the mind by action. The result of righteous actions will be righteous and the result of unrighteous deeds will be unrighteous. The *voktā* (one who is impacted) of action is the body or mind. The soul can never be the *voktā* of action. Karma can only cast a veil over the soul. Ignorance is the veil cast by evil deeds. If the action is done for enjoyment, then that action will not purify the mind even if it produces that particular devotion. So, all the actions have to be done without a desire for fruit. A Karma Yogi must forever renounce fear and all fruition and desire as these karmas produce attachment.

Relevantly, he gives the example of Niṣkāṁ Karma in the Gita, saying that the Gita teaches Karmayoga. If you work with yoga, you do not have the feeling of a small ego anymore. As a result, the sense of 'I did this', 'I did that' also disappears. But the people of the West cannot take this feeling to heart. They say that if there is no sense of ego then how can people act? To this Swamiji said, if one gives up the sense of ego and works in yoga, it will be infinitely better and everyone will experience it in their life. He believed that, our mind becomes pure through this selfless action and we can identify ourselves with all of us. This realization is immortality.

Bhaktiyoga: According to Vivekananda, Bhakti is the greatest path to union with this Absolute. He said,

Bhakti is greater than Karma, greater than Yoga, because these are intended for an object in view, while Bhakti is its own fruition, its own end.⁷

Bhakti or worship or love is the easiest, agreeable and most natural method of man to realize the Absolute. The natural state of this world is attraction; and that is definitely followed by an ultimate diversity. Even so, love is the natural impulsion of union in the individual heart, and though itself a vast cause of misery, appropriately directed towards the suitable object, it brings deliverance. The object of Bhakti is God. Love cannot be possible without a subject and an object. The object of love again must be at first a being who can reciprocate our love. Therefore, the God of love must be in some wisdom a human God. Apart from the query whether such a God exists or not, it is a fact to those people who have love in their heart for this Absolute who appears as a God of love, as personal.

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The lower form of this worship, which exemplifies the idea of God as a judge or punisher or someone to be obeyed through fear, does not deserve to be called love. Although, these lower forms are the forms of devotion that gradually evolve into higher forms. In this regard, Swamiji represented love as a triangle, of which each angle corresponded to one of its undividable characteristics. He said,

The first angle of our triangle of love is that, love knows no bargaining. Wherever there is any kind seeking for something in return, there can be no real love; it becomes a mere matter of shop keeping.⁸

The devotee loves the God for His lovable nature. There is no other reason organizing or directing this divine sentiment of the true devotee. So, the real love is the first angle of that triangle where our position is always that of the giver. So, give your love to the God, but do not expect anything in return from him.

Love's second angle is that, love knows no fear. The love to God through fear is definitely the lowest part, an undeveloped form of men. The devotion to God here is from the fear of punishment. They are afraid, if they do not obey Him, they will be whipped. Vivekananda said that,

Fear comes from the selfish idea of cutting one's self off from the universe... If a man thinks he is a little nothing, fear will surely come upon him... love and fear are incompatible, God is never to be feared by those who love him.⁹

We are only chanting His name because we love God.

The third angle of the love-triangle is that, love knows no rival. Swami Vivekananda said that,

True love never comes until the object of our love becomes to us our highest ideal... The highest ideal of every man is called God.¹⁰

The combination of all the highest ideals of beauty, of sublimit and of supremacy give us the completest formation of the loving and lovable God. All the different movements that we see in society are followed by the various ideas in different souls trying to come out and become concretized. The object of Bhakti is God. A man with a particular nature imposes that nature on his God. But this is not right. God truly loves us. We can reach Him only by the pure thought of Him, by repeating holy words, learning holy books and keeping the holy concept close to our heart.

Rājayoga: Rājayoga is a path to realizing immortality through body-mind

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control. According to Vivekananda, God is pleased with him who has the both practices of yoga and knowledge. One who practises *Mahāyoga* once, twice, thrice, or always should be known as a god. There are two types of yoga – *Abhābyoga* and *Mahāyoga*. When one can think of oneself as empty and devoid of all qualities, it is called *Abhābyoga*. The yoga in which the soul is conceived as blissful, pure, and identical with Brahman is called *Mahāyoga*. The yogi realizes both these yogas. In the *Mahāyoga*, the yogi experiences himself and the whole world as God. This is the best of all yogas. Swami Vivekananda included these two yogas in Rājayoga.

Rājayoga has many parts – *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi*.

In this context, Swami Vivekananda described the Psychic Prāṇa. Swamiji wrote:

according to the Yogīs there are two nerve currents in the spinal column, called Pingalā and Idā and there is a hollow canal called Suṣumnā running through the spinal cord. At the lower end of the hollow canal is what the Yogīs called the 'Lotus of the Kuṇḍalinī'. They described it as a triangle in form, in which, in the symbolical language of the Yogīs, there is a power called the Kuṇḍalinī coiled up. When that Kuṇḍalinī awakes, it tries to force the passage through this hollow canal, and as it rises step by step, as it were, layer after layer of mind becomes open, all these different visions and wonderful powers come to the Yogī. Rousing of the Kundalinī' is the one and only way to attaining the Divine wisdom and super conscious perception, the realization of the spirit. On this state of yoga, Yogīs can obtain the Psychic Prāṇa.¹¹

According to Vivekananda, such yoga is not for the weak as it requires deep self-confidence and physical-emotional strength. This gradually makes the Yogī possess some opulence and power. The last phase helps the Yogī to realize oneness with God. Such yoga helps in the practice of full Samādhi.

Jñānayoga: In the context of the discussion of Jñānayoga, Swamiji first gave the definition of *jñāna* (knowledge). He said:

Jñāna is 'creedlessness'; but that does not mean that it despises creeds. It only means that a stage above and beyond creeds has been gained. The Jñānī (true philosopher) strives to destroy nothing but to help all. All rivers roll their waters into the sea and become one. So, all creeds should lead to Jñāna and become one.¹²

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So, the Jñānayoga is the consciousness, a realization of a man's own spirituality (divinity) through knowledge.

It is the fact that, there are no differentiation between matter, mind, and soul. They are only different kind of phases of experiencing the one. One must not only gain knowledge of this absolute truth, but also realize it. In this case he refers to the tradition of Indian philosophy, which is a useful process in acquiring any knowledge – *Śrabana*, *Manana* and *Nididhyāsana*. At first, the soul only exists – this knowledge has to be heard. Then this knowledge has to be judged in all aspects, which is *Manana*. And finally, that knowledge has to be realized through meditation. These are the three stages of *Jñānayoga*. Constant meditation on Tattva and reminding the soul of its true nature is the only path to this yoga. This yoga may make sense to many, but very few people can achieve success in this yoga. This is an extreme truth which needs concentration to understand. But this concentration is not an easy path. Concentration requires all the energy of the soul.

Constant practice of this knowledge first controls, then destroys bodily desires. According to Vivekananda, this is renunciation. This renunciation is the most essential stage in Jñānayoga. This renunciation frees one from all selfishness. This is called *Vairāgya* (dispassion). When this *Vairāgya* comes, a beneficial aspect of renunciation is revealed, called *Brahmānubhūti*. When this feeling is awakened, we realize that we are in everything. I am the one. I am not pleasure, not sorrow. I am *Saccidānanda*. I have no change in eternity. This is the elixir of knowledge.

Monistic Thoughts of Sri Aurobindo

The philosophy of Sri Aurobindo is regarded as **Integral Monism**. The main thought of integral monism is that, consciousness and matter are equally true. He said,

The affirmation of a divine life upon earth and an immortal sense in mortal existence can have no base unless we recognize not only eternal spirit as the inhabitant of this bodily mansion, the wearer of this mutable robe, but accept matter of which it is made as a fit and noble material out of which he weaves constantly his garbs, builds recurrently the unending series of his mansions.¹³

That means, this material body is the living place of the conscious being.

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The immortal has worn a momentary outfit. So, the game of this outfit with the materiality, its success is undeniable. Only by affirming this thought, the divine life will be worth in our mortal world.

By Sri Aurobindo's theory, it is clear that he spoke about gaining the divine life. In this context, his books which are written in Pondichery may be mentioned. From 1914 to 1918, the famous books like *The Life Divine*, *The Human Cycle*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Ideal of Human Unity* etc. were written by Sri Aurobindo and these were published in the *Arya* magazine. These writings were written with a special intention. Professor Sunil Roy said that,

The philosophy of Sri Aurobindo is as far reaching as it is multilevel deep. Seeing the nature of Indian's life, the sympathetic philosopher has given the solution in his trilogy- in the commentaries of the Veda, the Upanishadas and the Gita. He wrote, *The Secret of the Veda*, *Eight Upanishadas* and *Essays on the Gita*. He presented a picture of the divine destiny of mankind in his book *The Life Divine*. The way to attain divine life is indicated in *The Synthesis of Yoga*. In *The Human Cycle*, he gives an account of the form that this divine destiny has taken or will take in the society and the state as well as the whole world. After that he did not forget to highlight the ideal of divine life. And he did it in the book *The Ideal of Human Unity*. Around all these things, his wonderful novel *Savitri* has been created.¹⁴

In the theory of divine life, an extreme monism was affirmed as a cause of creation, equilibration and dissolution. This theory has two aspects – perpetual consciousness and its consequence in the world of phenomenon. In the course of evolution of human nature, it is certain that man will one day be able to realize his own divinity. But it will take a long time. To speed up his pace, Sri Aurobindo spoke of the practice of integral yoga. By practicing the integral yoga, the devotee will become a divine human being. This paves the way of the devotee's own liberation. But it is not only the liberation of one's own soul that Sri Aurobindo intends.

The real purpose, the real aim is in whole men, not just a few wise men. It will be in all nations, the development and self-expression of the world human spirit, transmission of God's manifest power, knowledgeable joyful dalliance.¹⁵

Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo

The basic framework of Aurobindo's philosophy rests on the idea that both body and soul are real. Understanding of the world and life is possible only

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through their real coordination. According to him this is the real philosophy. That's why Haridas Chowdhury named his philosophy as 'Integral Monism'.

In his philosophy there are two evolutions – one of the outer worlds and the other of the inner consciousness of being or the world of consciousness. It should be noted that he was influenced by the philosophies of various philosophers before him. Among them Plato, Aristotle and Whitehead are notable names. A discussion of the evolutionary method is essential to a better understanding of his philosophy .

The process of Evolution

Aurobindo mentions two methods of creation, one of which is the descent of the self-contained entity into the mundane form. In this phase, the creation is moving downwards. Then again, the creation is upward and then it moves towards the self-situated entity. He calls this phase ascension. This method is also called compression or involution.

So now the question would be what is the necessity of the descent of that Absolute being? To this he replies that he had descended into the worldly form for the purpose of manifesting himself. Then, by gradual evolution, first from unconscious to life, from life to mind – thus gradually modern man arose. Matter is unconscious but soul is the conscious being. So how can the origin of life be from matter? In answer to this he says, conscious being arose in matter because there was potentiality of being in matter. Similarly, Mind arose from conscious being because it was potentially there. According to Sri Aurobindo, evolution from nothing cannot be possible.

Although human is the most advanced organism of evolution, but the evolution process does not stop here, it progresses in two streams. One is the development of the outer body through birth cycles and the other is the development of the inner being. A growing consciousness also requires appropriate changes in the body. On the one hand consciousness develops, and on the other its suitable body or receptacle is created. This change occurs in a threefold manner – Widening, Lightening and Integration. Nothing is completely ruled out in this method. Everything is ultimately connected integrally. This is the most important character of evolution. In his words,

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...spirit is a final evolutionary emergence because it is the original evolutionary element and factor. Evolution is an inverse action of the involution: what is an ultimate and last derivation in the involution is the first to appear in the evolution. What was original and primal in the involution is in the evolution the last and supreme emergence.¹⁶

In this context, he talked about eight theories of creation. These are: pure existence, conscious being, absolute pleasant, super mind, mind, soul, life, and matter. The first four are located in the upper hemisphere and the last four in the lower hemisphere. According to him, *Sacchidananda* is the source of all. He is immersed in certainty and gradually emerges to pass into Self. Prana is the lower manifestation of His will power; mind is the counterpart of His creative power. According to him this transcendental level possesses truth itself. But it is not easy to get this. Through yoga, which according to Aurobindo is integral yoga, this level can be attained gradually. The levels through which one has to pass before attaining this level are:

1. Higher Mind
2. Illumined Mind
3. Intuitive Mind
4. Overmind
5. Supermind

However, he said that,

The overmind change is the final consummating movement of the dynamic spiritual transformation, it is the highest possible status-dynamics of the spirit in the spiritual mind plane.¹⁷

To rise from overmind to the level of supermind is only the grace of God. At this supermind stage, man will feel the unity with the Absolute being. Then he will feel that everything is the same. Sri Aurobindo said that, 'The intermediate link exists. We call it the Supermind or the truth-consciousness.'¹⁸ Only in this supermind stage, the absolute truth appears. Aurobindo said that, in this state, the 'Divine life' can be achieved.

Monistic thoughts in the above three philosophers

The philosophies of Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo are all in favour of monism and this philosophy is reflected in their various writings. Tagore's various songs and poems have repeated

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glimpses of this monistic theory. In the *Gitanjali* he says,

That I should make much of myself
And turn it on all sides, thus casting
Coloured shadows on Thy radiance-
Such is Thy *maya*.

Thou settest a barrier in Thine own
Being and then callest Thy severed self
In myriad notes. Thy self-separation
Has taken body in me.

[Song no. 71, *Gitanjali*]

This thought is also seen in Vivekananda's writings:

Thus day by day, till Karma's power spent,
Release the soul for ever. No more is birth,
Nor, I, nor thou, nor God, nor man. The 'I'
Has All become, the All is 'I' and Bliss.

Know thou art That, Sannyasin bold! Say -

'Om tat sat, Om!

[Song of the Sannyasin, poem no. 13, *Jnānayoga*]

By giving the explanation of monistic thought, Sri Aurobindo said,

To find and embody All-Delight in an intense summary of its manifoldness, to achieve a possibility of the infinite Existence which could not be achieved in other conditions – to create out of Matter a temple of the Divine would seem to be the task imposed on the spirit born into the material universe.¹⁹

Conclusion

Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, and Sri Aurobindo – these three world famous philosophers are contemporary with one another. But they have another similarity, that is, all three of them are monist Vedāntins. Generally, Veda, Vedānta and Upaniṣadas originated in Tapovan and they were propagated and spread by the sages. Shankaracharya, the proponent of Advaita Vedānta very beautifully established that the world and life are identical with advaita tattva (theory), by expressing his doctrine. But this is not suitable for the present time due to its obscurity and complexity. But it

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is very important for human beings to realize this theory. Thus Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo presented this ancient Advaita *tattva* (theory) to satisfy the needs of present day. Thus, Advaita *tattva* began to be re-established in India as well as abroad. In this context, it is to be noted that, Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, in his famous book *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, said that, 'Ancient wisdom restated to meet the needs of the present day.' It is also noteworthy here that Vivekananda gave his speech abroad under the title 'Practical Vedānta'. So, his theory of Vedānta can be named as 'Practical Vedānta'. Sri Aurobindo however, did not attribute to his monistic thought any appellation. He never said that, his philosophy is integrated monism. Haridas Chowdhury named his philosophy by this term. Now the question is can we attribute Rabindranath's philosophy to such a classification? That matter needs to be examined. Finally, it may be asserted that, the way in which these philosophers established the importance of the Advaita *tattva* of Vedānta, which originated in Tapovan, in our everyday society is truly admirable.

Endnotes:

- ¹ Srimat Anirvan, *Vedānta Jijñāsā* (Halisahar: Asam-Bangiya Saraswata Math, 1965), preface.
- ² Rabindranath Tagore, *Rabindra Rachanabali* (Bolpur: Viswabharati, 1953), p. 406. 14th Volume.
- ³ Tagore, *Rabindra Rachanabali*, p. 409.
- ⁴ Tagore, *Rabindra Rachanabali*, p. 304.
- ⁵ Satyaprasad Sengupta, *Vivekananda Smriti* (Kolkata: Calcutta Book House, 1964), p.1.
- ⁶ Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* Mayavati Memorial Edition (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1947) p. 221.
- ⁷ Vivekananda, *Bhakti Yoga* (Tanarian Hills, England: Celephais Press, 2003) p.3.
- ⁸ Vivekananda, *Bhakti Yoga*, p. 77.
- ⁹ Vivekananda, *Bhakti Yoga*, p. 79.
- ¹⁰ Vivekananda, *Bhakti Yoga*, p. 80.
- ¹¹ Vivekananda, *Raja Yoga* (Tanarian Hills, England: Celephais Press, 2003) p. 41.

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- ¹² Vivekananda, *The Complete Works*, p. 199.
- ¹³ Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (Pondichery: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2001), p. 10.
- ¹⁴ Sunil Roy, *Sri Aurobinder Darshan Manthane* (Bardhaman: The University of Burdwan, 2007) p. 16.
- ¹⁵ Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobinder bangla Rachana* (Pondichery: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2001), p. 30.
- ¹⁶ Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (Pondichery: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2001), p. 113.
- ¹⁷ Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p. 989.
- ¹⁸ Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p. 155.
- ¹⁹ Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p. 615.