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HARIDAS CHAUDHURI

# *The Concept of Brahman in Hindu Philosophy*

THE CONCEPT OF *Brahman* may be said to constitute the central core of the philosophical outlook of Hinduism. It is the master idea in the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, which have been the fountain-source of inspiration in Indian culture down through the ages. It has imparted to Hinduism its remarkable catholicity of outlook, its power to absorb in a spirit of creative synthesis the different streams of cultural influence that have poured into India in the course of the centuries, its boundless vitality in withstanding the successive waves of alien attack in the cultural field, and its limitless toleration in allowing within itself the peaceful growth of all types of doctrinal systems and spiritual practices. It is the concept of *Brahman* which makes Hinduism a kind of universal and eternal religion. Hinduism can, indeed, aptly be described as a religion of no-religion. It is a religion in so far as it emphasizes the necessity of living in harmony with the basic spiritual truths of existence; and yet it is not a religion in so far as it does not set itself in opposition to the other great religions of the world but insists upon the human spirit's going beyond all doctrinal religions. Hinduism has been constant in its affirmation of the essential unity of all religions as different lines of approach to the same fundamental spiritual reality of the world.

Now, what is the meaning of the word "*Brahman*"? What are the philosophical implications of the theory of *Brahman*? The term "*Brahman*" etymologically means the Great, the Supreme. It sums up the Hindu view of the nature of ultimate reality. *Brahman* is the cosmic principle of existence, the ultimate unifying and integrating principle of the universe. It has two inseparable aspects or modes of existence: *nirguna* and *saguna*,<sup>1</sup> impersonal

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<sup>1</sup> *Saguna Brahman* is the Supreme Spirit conceived as the universal principle endowed with such cosmic functions as creation, maintenance, and dissolution. *Nirguna Brahman* has been conceived in various ways. According to Śaṅkara-Vedānta, it is devoid of all attributes or qualifying characteristics. (See Swami Nikhilananda, *The Upaniṣads*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949, Vol. I, pp. 25-31.) According to Vaiṣṇavism, *Nirguna Brahman* is either the self-luminosity and spiritual pervasiveness of the Supreme Personality or His freedom from natural attributes and sensuous qualities, even though He is endowed with such supernal qualities as absolute truth, absolute goodness, absolute beauty, absolute bliss, etc. See Radhāgovinda Nāth, *Sri Sri Caitanya Caritāmṛter Bhumikā* [in Bengali] (Calcutta:

and personal, indeterminable and self-determining. *Brahman*, which is at once indeterminable and self-determining, is thus the unity of freedom and creativity, time and eternity, ineffable silence and perpetual self-expression.

### BRAHMAN AS INEFFABLE SILENCE

*Brahman*, in its indeterminable aspect, is the great Silence<sup>2</sup> in so far as it outsoars all logical conception and verbal characterization. No words are adequate to describe it; no human notion is able to penetrate its inmost essence; no philosophical system can pronounce the last word about the fathomless mystery of its being.

"*Brahman* is that from which our words, together with the mind, turn back frustrated." (*Yata vāco nirvartante aprāpya manasā saba.*)<sup>3</sup>

But this is not to be construed as agnosticism. Even though *Brahman* is inaccessible to the relational way of thinking, or to our conceptual understanding, it is possible for man to attain a direct vision of *Brahman* by transcending the trammels of the intellect. *Brahman* can be immediately apprehended by what has been called knowledge-by-identity or knowledge-by-being.<sup>4</sup> One can realize *Brahman* by being one with *Brahman*. The vision of *Brahman* is in the nature of supersensuous and supra-rational immediate experience born of the complete integration of personality.

The closest rational approach to the essential nature of *Brahman* is provided, perhaps, by such terms as pure being, pure consciousness, and pure joy. So, it may be said that the primordial manifestation of *Brahman* in the intelligible sphere is infinite being-consciousness-joy (*sat-cit-ānanda*).<sup>5</sup> *Brahman* is pure infinite being, not in the sense of an abstract concept common to different forms of existence, but in the sense of the indeterminable creative

Bhaktigranthapracārahānda, Bangābda 1355), p. 80. *Brahman* being of the nature of infinite conscious delight (*cidānandarūpam*), *Nirguṇa* may also be taken to mean the delight of unvarying self-existence as distinguished from the delight of variable self-manifestation. See Śāntadās Bābājī, *Vedānta Darśana* (Calcutta: Chakravarty, Chatterjee and Co., Śākābdā 1854), p. 10. Finally, *Nirguṇa Brahman* may also be interpreted as the supra-cosmic poise of being of *Saguṇa Brahman*, that is to say, *Brahman* in so far as it is indeterminable in being and inexhaustible in richness of content. See Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (New York: Sri Aurobindo Library, Inc., 1951), pp. 287-288. This would be a synthesis of the standpoints of Śāṅkara and Rāmānuja.

<sup>2</sup> *Nirguṇa Brahman* is Silence in the sense that it is beyond all verbalized expression. See S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1951), Vol. I, p. 178.

<sup>3</sup> *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* II.4.

<sup>4</sup> Knowledge of *Brahman* is immediate non-dual experience, in which the distinction between knower and known is transcended. Thus, knowledge-by-being and knowledge-by-identity mean the same thing. See *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* II.1.

<sup>5</sup> *Brahman* in its inmost essence is, strictly speaking, entirely inexpressible. The utmost that can be said by way of indicating the essential nature of *Brahman* is that it is infinite being, infinite consciousness, and infinite joy.

source of all existence. As pure being, it is, in essence, beyond the dualities of life and death, or of existence and non-existence. *Brahman* is pure infinite consciousness, not in the theological sense of an all-inclusive knower, but in so far as it is that pure unobjective light of consciousness which lights up all empirical and objective knowledge. As pure consciousness, *Brahman* is beyond the polarity of subject and object, knower and knowable. *Brahman* is pure infinite joy, not in the religious sense that it is the bliss-bestowing ruler or the supreme lover of the world, but in so far as it is beyond the psychic polarities of pain and pleasure, sorrow and joy, and beyond the duality of lover and beloved.

As being-consciousness-joy, *Brahman* is the unity of fact, thought, and value. Realism, idealism, and pragmatism build upon these three inseparable aspects of the same reality. Realism lays stress upon the moment of fact as the primary and determining factor. Idealism emphasizes the moment of thought as the primary and determining factor. Pragmatism fastens upon the moment of value as the primary and determining factor. According to the theory of *Brahman*, fact, thought, and value—being, consciousness, and joy—are, in ultimate analysis, interwoven and interrelated aspects of the same indivisible reality.

*Brahman* is indeterminable, not in the sense that it is incapable of self-determination, but in the sense that though it is capable of endless self-determination, it cannot be limited to, or identified with, any specific determination, or sum of determinations, or the collectivity of all determinations. Unfathomable and inexhaustible in its essence, *Brahman* as the ineffable Supreme transcends the limitations of all self-expression, whether cosmic or individual. As inexhaustible and illimitable, the Supreme is called *Nirguna Brahman*; but, as endowed with the power of endless self-determination and revealed as the universal creative principle, it is called *Saguna Brahman*. *Saguna Brahman* performs the threefold cosmic function of creation, maintenance, and dissolution in regard to the cosmic manifold.<sup>6</sup> It creates the world, pervades and permeates it, controls it as a principle of immanent finality, and periodically dissolves it on the fulfillment of a particular plan of evolution, so that it can be recreated anew in accordance with a new scheme of evolutionary self-manifestation. The whole process of self-manifestation which constitutes the essence of the beginningless and endless

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<sup>6</sup> *Saguna Brahman* is the same as *Īvara* (the Lord of the universe), who is the creative source of all multiplicity. See Swami Nikhilananda, *The Upanisads*, Vol. I, p. 49. According to Śaṅkara, *Saguna Brahman* is, from the ultimate standpoint, an unreal superimposition upon *Nirguna Brahman*. According to Aurobindo, *Saguna Brahman* is as real a form of manifestation of the Supreme as *Nirguna Brahman*. See Sri Aurobindo, *Isha Upanishad* (Calcutta: Arya Publishing House, 1924), p. 52.

cosmic flow may be said to be prompted by a kind of "purposeless purpose."<sup>7</sup> The "purpose" operative in the world process is no desire or need or want in *Brahman*. It is called *līlā*, the self-expansive urge of delight, the outflow of creative joy, the spirit of playful self-expression. Law is the mechanism through which creative joy expresses itself in infinitely diverse forms. So, *Saguna Brahman* is, indeed, the supreme artist of the world. The world of endless variations is a spontaneous outpouring of the fullness of his joy.<sup>8</sup>

### BRAHMAN AS IDENTITY OF ALL FUNDAMENTAL POLARITIES

According to the theory of *Brahman*, reality is, in its deepest essence, beyond all such polarities as one and many, infinite and finite, absolute and relative, and the like. But, viewed from the human standpoint, reality may be described as the identity or creative unity of all polar opposites. This is *Saguna Brahman*. He may be described as the One endowed with the power of manifesting Himself as an endless many;<sup>9</sup> He is the Infinite having the inherent power of manifesting Himself under the aspect of finitude.<sup>10</sup> *Saguna Brahman* is at once the archetypal male and the archetypal female.<sup>11</sup> That is why the Vedānta calls it *Īśvara-māyā*; the Tantras call it *Śiva-Śakti*; Vaiṣṇavism calls it *Rādhā-kṛṣṇa*, or *Sitā-Rāmā*, or *Viṣṇu-Lakṣmi*. As the archetypal male, *Brahman* is immutable and eternally perfect, sufficient unto itself, and is supreme knowledge or absolute thought. As the archetypal female, *Brahman* is endless creativity, the perpetual becoming of time, the dynamic flux of empirical existence, the principle of objectivity and love—that is, the creative principle which brings into existence the objective world as an object of enjoyment for the pure subject. These two, the masculine and the feminine factors—*Kṛṣṇa* and *Rādhā*, or *Śiva* and *Śakti*—are, however, two inseparable aspects of the same cosmic principle.

<sup>7</sup> The purpose, in this context, is not to be taken in its ordinary sense of the fulfillment of any want or desire. It is the self-expansive urge of creative delight inherent in *Saguna Brahman*, or His will to express the joy of variable self-manifestation. See *Brahma-sūtra*, II.1.32.

<sup>8</sup> *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* III. 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* III. 6. "Brahman willed, 'I am one, I shall become many, and be manifested.'" <sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The Lord says in the *Gītā*, "I am manifested in the world of life as an eternal portion of myself in individualized form." *Bhagavad-gītā* XV.7.

<sup>11</sup> *Saguna Brahman* is *Brahman* endowed with attributes and dynamic creative power (*śakti*). In Hindu philosophy, the creative energy of the spirit, the principle of becoming, is described metaphorically as the feminine principle, whereas the principle of being (*satīā*), which is the basis and support of the creative flow of becoming, is characterized metaphorically as the male principle. While Vedānta lays special stress upon pure being, Tantra lays special stress upon pure becoming or energy. According to both, however, reality in its deepest essence is conceived as beyond male-female static-dynamic differentiation.

There are some systems of thought in Hinduism which separate the masculine and the feminine components of the cosmic principle and conceive of them as forming an irreducible dualism. For instance, in the Sāṃkhya philosophy we find that the archetypal male and the archetypal female are conceived as the ontologically discontinuous principles of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*.<sup>12</sup> The manifested world is explained as the offspring, as it were, of some kind of union of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. And *prakṛti*, the ultimate principle of objectivity, is conceived as determined in all its functioning by the "desireless will" of *puruṣa*. It is in order to satisfy *puruṣa* that *prakṛti* functions, sometimes in an extraverted way toward creation and evolution, and sometimes in an introverted fashion toward liberation and involution. *Prakṛti* is, indeed, like a dancing girl who is never tired of dancing and unfolding the charms and graces of her form so long as *puruṣa* is interested in her dancing; but as soon as *puruṣa* is satiated with the delights of self-externalization and is seized with a kind of nostalgic longing for self-realization, *prakṛti* shrinks back, stops dancing, and helps *puruṣa* to realize the pure essence of his being.<sup>13</sup> This spirit of close co-operation between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, and the teleological subordination of the latter to the former, make their ontological dualism more apparent than real. So, in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, the apparent dualism of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, i.e., the dualism of being and becoming, subject and object, is described as only a derivative stage in the objective self-manifestation of the one undivided bipolar spiritual reality of the world.<sup>14</sup> Evolutionary nature (*aparā prakṛti*) is described there as the lower form of manifestation of the regulative higher nature, or the spiritual Supernature (*parā prakṛti*), of the Supreme Spirit (*Puruṣottama*).

*Brahman* has been described in the Upaniṣads as abundance, plenum, infinite fullness. *Brahman* is so completely infinite that even the subtraction of an infinite world of finite forms cannot destroy its infinity or diminish its plenitude of being. The logic of the infinite entails that if you take an infinite from an infinite what remains is the infinite. This implies that *Brahman* is capable of existing simultaneously in many forms.<sup>15</sup> The indeterminate transcendent, the unitary universal, and the multiple individual—these are different forms of existence of the same *Brahman*. The

<sup>12</sup> Sāṃkhya believes in the dualism of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. *Puruṣa* is pure being and consciousness, and is metaphorically described as the male principle. *Prakṛti* is conceived as the unconscious principle of perpetual becoming, and is metaphorically described as the feminine principle. *Prakṛti* has been compared to a dancing girl who dances for the enjoyment of *puruṣa*, and then ceases to dance for his liberation. See S. C. Chatterjee and D. M. Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy* (4th ed., Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1950), p. 289.

<sup>13</sup> S. Sastri, trans., *Īśvarakṛṣṇa's Sāṃkhya-Kārikā* (Madras: Madras University, n.d.), p. 59.

<sup>14</sup> See Anilbaran Roy, ed., *The Message of the Gita* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1946), pp. 109-111.

<sup>15</sup> See Sri Aurobindo, *Isha Upaniṣad*, pp. 36-37.

inmost essence of individualized existence is called the *Ātman*, the Self. The *Ātman* is not the same thing as the ego which is the organizing principle of the conscious mind. Nor is it to be understood as the mere aggregate of such different members of embodied existence as body, life, mind, and the unconscious psyche. The *Ātman* is, in truth, the ultimate integrating principle of the totality of subjective existence. It is *Brahman* in that mode of being in which it sustains the development of an individual as a unique medium of its objective self-expression. So, the *Ātman*, the true Self<sup>16</sup> of the individual, is not, in essence and being, different from *Brahman*, the cosmic principle.

This brings us to a very significant implication of the theory of *Brahman*, to wit, the essential identity of the individual self with the universal spirit. *Ātman*, the unifying principle of subjective existence, is affirmed to be in essence non-different from *Brahman*, the unifying principle of objective existence.<sup>17</sup> Different analogies are often employed to express the relation of identity between the individual self and the Supreme Spirit, namely, the analogy of infinite space as related to finite portions of space,<sup>18</sup> the analogy of the one moon as related to its plurality of reflections on the surface of a lake,<sup>19</sup> and the like. But, philosophically speaking, analogies are more misleading than helpful, in so far as they create special difficulties of their own. *Ātman* and *Brahman* are not, of course, identical in the sense that they are synonymous terms. According to some, they are in essence the same reality viewed from different standpoints, the subjective and the objective.<sup>20</sup> According to some, they are different poles of being or modes of existence of the same reality.<sup>21</sup> The individual self is identical with the Supreme Spirit in

<sup>16</sup> "Self" in the capitalized form denotes the inmost spiritual essence of the individual, which is to be distinguished from the mind, the intellect, the ego, or the empirical self conceived of as a flux or stream of consciousness, and also from the soul conceived of as a particular mental substance. The Self or *Ātman* is the Absolute viewed from the subjective standpoint (*Sāṃkhya*), or a real mode of existence of the Absolute (*Aurobindo*).

<sup>17</sup> The differentiation between the subjective and the objective is relative to the discursive understanding. The discovery of *Brahman* is the discovery of the unity of existence beyond the subject-object differentiation; but this discovery is made in the Vedas and the Upanisads by tracing the multiplicity of the objective world to its unitary source. The discovery of the *Ātman* is the discovery of the inmost center of human personality beyond the mind, the ego, and the intellect, which are responsible for all divisions and separations, including the subject-object differentiation. But this discovery is made in the Upanisads through subjective self-exploration and self-analysis. By both subjective and objective routes, what is ultimately attained is the non-dual and indivisible pure consciousness which is manifested as the differentiated world characterized by subjective and objective poles. Vedānta affirms this identity of *Ātman* and *Brahman*, both on the authority of mystic realization and on the strength of rational analysis. See Chatterjee and Datta, *op. cit.*, pp. 406-411.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 411.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 410.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 403-404.

<sup>21</sup> See Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Book 2, Part I, Chap. III.

being and essence; but it is different from the latter in function and form of manifestation. And, even though the Supreme Spirit is indivisibly present in the individual self, it cannot be said to be contained or exhausted in the latter. According to some, again, the individual self is part and parcel of the Supreme Spirit.<sup>22</sup> It is not, of course, a part in the usual acceptation of the term, because the Supreme Spirit is assuredly partless and indivisible in character. Nor can *Brahman* be said to be present in the individual self only partially or in a limited degree, because *Brahman* surely cannot be said to admit of any quantitative determination. The truth is that individual selves are in essence different unique centers of creative self-expression of the same undivided reality, *Brahman*.

#### BRAHMAN AND THE WORLD

Viewed from the human perspective, *Brahman* is the creative source of the cosmic manifold: *Brahman* creates the world, and pervades, controls, and guides the world process. But, at the same time, *Brahman* transcends the world in respect of its unfathomable essence, its inexhaustible possibilities, and its absolute freedom. The relation between *Brahman* and the world, if we can speak of any relation at all, is an asymmetrical one, because even though the world is pervaded by *Brahman*, *Brahman* cannot be said to be pervaded by the world. The world is a form of appearance of *Brahman*,<sup>23</sup> but appearances cannot be said to be the stuff of which *Brahman* is made. The world process is a creative adventure of *Brahman*. It is the process of its objective self-manifestation in the apparent contraries of its nature.<sup>24</sup> *Brahman* is indivisible being-consciousness-joy. Matter, which is infinite divisibility, dark inconscience, and utter insentience, is the utmost limit of the self-externalization or self-alienation of *Brahman*, the Supreme Spirit. The process of cosmic evolution is the process of the increasing self-manifestation of *Brahman* in the conditions provided by matter.<sup>25</sup>

The world is in essence the infinitely diversified expression of the super-conscious creative energy (*māyā* or *śakti*) of *Brahman*. It may be described

<sup>22</sup> This is the view of Rāmānuja. See S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgītā* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948), p. 329.

<sup>23</sup> The world is an appearance in the sense that it does not exist by itself, but is a beginningless and endless process of creation and dissolution sustained by the creative power of *Brahman* called *māyā* or *śakti*. Whether this process is real or unreal, and, if unreal, in what sense it is unreal, are matters of philosophical controversy.

<sup>24</sup> In *Mundaka Upaniṣad* I.1.8, it is said, "*Brahman* expands by means of austerity, and from it primal matter is produced; from matter *prāṇa* (life); from *prāṇa*, mind; from mind, the elements; from the elements, the worlds; thence works, and from works, their immortal fruits."

<sup>25</sup> This point has been brought out at length by Sri Aurobindo. See *The Life Divine*, pp. 628-631.



as the interweaving of endless forms assumed by the primordial creative energy. The manifestation of the cosmic creativity in inconscient form is physical energy, which constitutes the essence of matter. The manifestation of the cosmic creativity in subconscient form is vital energy, which constitutes the essence of life. The manifestation of the cosmic creativity in subrational form is sense-bound mental consciousness, which constitutes the essence of the animal mind. The manifestation of the cosmic creativity in rational form is rational self-consciousness, which constitutes the essence of humanity. Finally, the manifestation of cosmic creativity in superconscient form is spiritual energy, which constitutes the essence of the divine spirit. The divine superconscient is characterized by unfettered truth-vision and creative delight. Those who have a glimpse, or more or less enduring experience, of the superconscient are persons whom we call mystic seers, spiritual masters, god-intoxicated saints, ambassadors of God on earth,<sup>26</sup> and the like.

#### SPIRITUAL FREEDOM

We have seen that, according to the theory of *Brahman*, individuality and universality are interrelated forms of manifestation of the same basic reality. The question may now be raised: What is the highest goal or the *summum bonum* of the individual? The answer of Hindu philosophy is embodied in its concept of *mukti*, spiritual freedom. *Mukti* means freedom from ignorance and, consequently, the attainment of the directness of truth-vision (*jñāna*). It implies transition from all forms of narrowness of outlook and a limitless expansion of consciousness. It implies emancipation from all kinds of emotional attachment and psychic dependence. *Mukti* signifies freedom from such psychic polarities as pain and pleasure, love and hatred, attraction and repulsion, and the consequent attainment of mental balance and equilibrium (*samatā*). Finally, *mukti* means conscious abiding in *Brahman* (*Brāhmisthiti*), which is another name for spiritual integration. It involves the reorganization of the entire personality in the light of one's knowledge of the supreme truth.

*Mukti*, spiritual freedom, is essentially a matter of knowledge.<sup>27</sup> It is not mediate knowledge via the senses or the discursive understanding, but an immediate apprehension of reality born of the complete integration of personality. It is not a passive state of the mind, but a dynamic experience which

<sup>26</sup> Those who attain spiritual fulfillment are integrated with the supreme truth, and dedicate their lives, as did the Buddha, the Christ, Śaṅkara, etc., to the interests of the reign of truth in the world.

<sup>27</sup> *Mukti* is not the attainment of a new and foreign condition, but the realization of the inmost essence of one's being. See Chatterjee and Datta, *op. cit.*, p. 414.

is capable of transforming the entire personality into an active center of self-manifestation of the supreme truth. It is not a condition of blessedness to be attained in a hypothetical hereafter, but a state of self-integration which can be attained here and now in this very world (*jīvanmukti*). So, the charge of other-worldliness, which is often brought against Hinduism, rests upon a regrettable misunderstanding. The highest goal of life, according to Hinduism, is not attainment of a hypothetical heaven beyond the grave, or perpetuity of existence in time, but one's conscious integration with the fundamental truth of existence, which is non-temporal in character. Since the non-temporal pervades every moment of time, such conscious integration can be achieved at any time in our wordly life as soon as the inner psychic tensions and emotional conflicts are completely liquidated. The immediate experience of *Brahman* is neither a transcendental mystic flight<sup>28</sup> nor a mysterious rapture of trance, but the direct realization of the fundamental oneness of all existence and of the rootedness of the All of existence in the absolute freedom of the spirit.<sup>29</sup>

#### BRAHMAN AND THE VOID

The *Brahman* of Hindu philosophy and the *Śūnyatā* or Void of Buddhism are ordinarily supposed to be radically divergent conceptions. *Brahman* means fullness of being, plenitude or abundance, whereas *Śūnyatā* means emptiness. Where is the point of contact between fullness and emptiness? On closer examination it will be found that the difference is more apparent than real and that it is a distinction in emphasis only. *Brahman* is the unity of supra-cosmic silence and cosmic creativity (*nirguṇa* and *saṅuṇa*), the unity of absolute freedom and universal law (*anantam* and *ṛtam*). In the Upaniṣads there are negative as well as positive descriptions of *Brahman*; descriptions in terms of "*neti, neti*" ("not this, not this"),<sup>30</sup> as well as in terms of "*iti, iti*" ("this is it, this is it").<sup>31</sup> Negative descriptions intend to bring out the inadequacy of logical formulations in regard to the nature of ultimate reality, whereas positive descriptions seek to bring out the nature of the supreme truth as the ultimate unifying and integrating principle of existence. The

<sup>28</sup> Because *Brahman* is eternally present within us and in the world. "That art thou"; "All this [that you see] is indeed *Brahman*."

<sup>29</sup> To know *Brahman* as *Saṅuṇa* is to realize the unity of the cosmic manifold in His creative power. To know *Brahman* as *Nirguṇa* is to realize that the entire empirical flux of the one and the many is an appearance, and as such is rooted in that non-dual truth which is absolutely free from all determinations and all limitations of cosmic expression.

<sup>30</sup> See *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* III. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, where it is successively pointed out that *Brahman* is not matter, life, mind, intellect, etc.

<sup>31</sup> *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* I. 2: "All this is indeed *Brahman*. This *Ātman* is *Brahman*."

concept of *Brahman* does not imply faith in the ultimacy of mere non-being or absolute nothing. It seeks to express the profound spiritual truth that ultimate reality is beyond all conceptual formulation in terms of being and non-being, one and many, conscious and unconscious. The Void, properly understood, is the same as *Nirguṇa Brahman*. It was the spiritual mission of the Buddha to restore the profound Upaniṣadic insight into the unfathomable depth of ultimate reality as against the prevailing intellectualism and ceremonialism of his time. But, while Buddhism as a reform movement within Hindu society had to be mainly negative in its philosophical articulation, Hindu philosophy at its best has always endeavored to maintain a balance between the negative and the positive aspects of reality.

#### BRAHMAN, TAO, AND T'AI CHI

The *Brahman* of Hindu philosophy bears close resemblance to the *Tao* (the Way) of Taoism and the *T'ai Chi* (the Great Ultimate) of Neo-Confucianism. They are all proclaimed, in their essence, to be logically indefinable and conceptually indeterminable,<sup>32</sup> but, nevertheless, the ultimate source and ground of all determinations. "The *Tao* which can be named is not the true *Tao*," says Lao Tzū.<sup>33</sup> But the nameless *Tao* is also the ultimate ground of *yang* and *yin*, which are the active and passive principles of cosmic existence. Similarly, Neo-Confucianism affirms that in the beginning there was the *T'ai Chi*, which is the ground of such mutually opposed determinate principles as *yang* and *yin* (the active and passive principles), or *li* and *ch'i* (reason and vital force, or the universal and the particularizing principles).<sup>34</sup>

The concept of *Tao* has been developed mainly, however, as a universal essence behind the multitudinous forms and processes of Nature, and has consequently imparted to Taoism the character of naturalistic mysticism. The concept of *T'ai Chi*, on the other hand, has been developed mainly as the principle of unity and harmony underlying the multitudinous transactions and interrelations of human society, and has consequently imparted to Confucianism the character of ethical realism. In Neo-Confucianism there is a greater emphasis upon the reality of the transitory determinations of the infinite background of existence and upon the facts of human relationships. According to Hinduism, Nature and human society are both modes of mani-

<sup>32</sup> That is to say, inexpressible in terms of logical notions and philosophical concepts.

<sup>33</sup> *The Three Religions of China*, 2d ed., by Soothill (1925), p. 56, quoted by Radhakrishnan in his *The Bhagavadgītā*, p. 21, footnote.

<sup>34</sup> See Wing-tsit Chan, "The Story of Chinese Philosophy," in Charles A. Moore, ed., *Philosophy—East and West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), pp. 56–58.

festation or grades of evolutionary self-fulfillment of *Brahman*, the Supreme.<sup>35</sup> But neither the unbroken unity of Nature nor the ideal harmony of human relationships exhausts the significance of the concept of *Brahman*. *Brahman* has also a mode of existence which may be called, to borrow Rudolph Otto's suggestive phrase, the "Numinous," in so far as it is entirely beyond all categories of the human mind.

In the Void of Buddhism both being and non-being are denied. Being as well as non-being may be granted "dependent reality" and "secondary truth," but the Void transcends them all.<sup>36</sup> In Taoism the greater emphasis is upon non-being (*wu wei*). "Heaven and Earth and all things come from being," says the *Tao-tê Ching*, "and being comes from non-being."<sup>37</sup> It has been said that in Neo-Confucianism both being and non-being are synthesized in reality, which is conceived as "a continuous process of production and re-production." According to the philosophy of the Upaniṣads, *Brahman* in its aspect of supra-cosmic silence (*nirguṇa*) is beyond both being and non-being in so far as it completely transcends all categories of the human mind. But, in its mode of existence as cosmic creativity (*saguṇa*), *Brahman* sustains the world process as an interplay of being and non-being. The supra-cosmic and the cosmic, freedom and creativity, are equally real aspects of *Brahman*,<sup>38</sup> even though the former may be logically more fundamental than the latter. It is a complete misunderstanding of the true spirit of Hindu philosophy to suppose that it encourages a negative attitude to life. The truth is that Hindu philosophy has always acknowledged negativity as an important factor in the right type of affirmation of life. In order to understand the world from the true perspective, in order to appreciate the proper significance of the temporal order in the context of the eternal, in order to participate in the drama of life in a spirit of detachment, freedom, and mental equilibrium, periodic retirement into the silence of the transcendental has been considered essential.

### BRAHMAN AND THE ABSOLUTE

The word "*Brahman*" is often rendered in English as the Absolute. But the Absolute as it is usually understood in the idealistic philosophical systems of the West can hardly be regarded as synonymous with *Brahman*. An ade-

<sup>35</sup> In the *Gītā*, God reveals Himself as the World-Spirit that destroys in order to manifest new divine possibilities in human society. See Anilbaran Roy, ed., *The Message of the Gita*, XI.

<sup>36</sup> See Wing-tsit Chan, "Syntheses in Chinese Metaphysics," in Charles A. Moore, ed., *Essays in East-West Philosophy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1951), p. 164.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>38</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1953), p. 72.

quate grasp of the distinction between *Brahman* and the Absolute is vital to a proper understanding of the true spirit of Hindu philosophy. In Western philosophy, the Absolute has been conceived either as the negation of the relative, or as the synthetic unity of the world of relations and distinctions. The Absolute as the total negation of the world of relativity must be entirely unknown and unknowable, as Herbert Spencer contends. The Absolute conceived as the unifying principle of the relative world is in some respects dependent upon the world as the world is dependent upon the Absolute, as Hegel and his followers contend.<sup>39</sup> Even those Hegelian thinkers who are serious with regard to the element of transcendence in the nature of the Absolute, and who, in consequence, conceive of the Absolute as supra-rational and super-relational immediate experience, imagine such transcendence as a function of the world of appearance. For instance, Bradley and Bosanquet maintain that the Absolute transcends the world of appearance only in respect to the specific quality of its experience, and that this specific transcendent quality is the outcome of an all-pervasive transmutation of the multitudinous appearances of the world. In the view of Bradley, appearances are the stuff of which the world is made. There is nothing in the Absolute which is not to be found in the appearances, but, as Bradley hastens to add, "with appearances alone to its credit, the Absolute would have been bankrupt."<sup>40</sup> This qualification does not refer to any transcendent poise of being of the Absolute. Nor does it refer to any element in the nature of the Absolute which is independent of the world of appearance. It simply intends to remind us of the fact that the appearances or the phenomenal diversities of the world undergo varying degrees of modification and transformation in giving rise to the specific quality of experience which is characteristic of the Absolute, and which is, by the very nature of the case, inaccessible to any man.

The conception of the Absolute as the total negation of the relative and the finite is repugnant to the theory of *Brahman*.<sup>41</sup> The theory of *Brahman* is, as we have seen, emphatic in its affirmation of the essential identity of *Brahman* and *Atman*, of the Divine and the Self, of the universal and the individual. This implies that *Brahman* is the immanent truth of the world of the finite and the relative. And consequently, *Brahman* is not entirely

<sup>39</sup> See H. S. Macran, *Hegel's Doctrine of Formal Logic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), p. 84.

<sup>40</sup> F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 433: "The Absolute has no assets beyond appearances." Again, "Reality without appearance would be nothing, for there certainly is nothing outside appearances." *Ibid.*, p. 432.

<sup>41</sup> This is evident from such declarations as "*Sarvam khalvidam Brahman*" (All this is indeed *Brahman*). *Cbândogya Upaniṣad* III.14. The finite world, in so far as it is assumed to be self-contained and self-existent is declared unreal in the Upaniṣads, but the finite world in its true essence is a form of manifestation of *Brahman*, and, therefore, is identical therewith.

unknown and unknowable,<sup>42</sup> but is, rather, the basic condition of all differentiated knowledge and capable of intuitive realization. The Absolute, conceived as the synthetic unity of the world of relativity, may be regarded as an aspect or mode of existence of *Brahman*. It is *Saguna Brahman*, *Brahman* in its poise of being as cosmic creativity. It has been seen that *Brahman* as conceived in the Upaniṣads is not only *saguna* but also *nirguna*, not only cosmic creativity but also supra-cosmic silence, not only synthetic unity but also the non-dual supreme (*advaitam*). *Brahman* as the non-dual Supreme is beyond the scope of application of such categories as unity, creativity, and the like. *Nirguna Brahman* cannot be properly described even as transcendent, because transcendence implies relationship to an other which it transcends. *Nirguna Brahman* is that to which the relational way of thinking simply does not apply. The desire to know the relation between *Nirguna* and *Saguna Brahman* would arise from a failure to grasp the non-relational character of *Nirguna Brahman*. All that can be said is that *nirguna* and *saguna*, silence and creativity, are two poises of being or modes of existence of the same supreme reality called *Brahman*.<sup>43</sup> *Brahman* as the identity of such logical incompatibles is, indeed, the profoundest mystery of existence.

#### BRAHMAN AND THE UNDIFFERENTIATED AESTHETIC CONTINUUM

Professor F. S. C. Northrop has interpreted the concept of *Brahman* as that of the "undifferentiated aesthetic continuum." By this is meant that *Brahman* is the totality of all that which is immediately given to our sense experience, considered in its aspect of unity, divested of all differentiations. "*Brahman* is what we immediately apprehend with all the distinctions and differentiations within it abstracted away."<sup>44</sup> Northrop has laid much emphasis upon the fact that *Brahman* is a concept by intuition, and has drawn a line of demarcation between a concept by intuition and a concept by postulation.<sup>45</sup> Now, it is true that *Brahman* is essentially a concept by intuition. It has been repeatedly affirmed in the Upaniṣads that *Brahman* can be known not by logical reasoning, nor by mere erudite scholarship, but by spiritual intuition born of self-discipline and self-integration. But it has been the endeavor of the philosophical works of the Vedānta—e.g., the works of Śam-

<sup>42</sup> *Brahman* is unknowable as an objective content and inaccessible to the mind and the intellect, but it is surely attainable in a supra-intellectual immediacy of experience called *turiya* or *samādhi*. See Swami Nikhilananda, *The Upaniṣads*, Vol. II, pp. 248-249.

<sup>43</sup> See Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, pp. 125-126.

<sup>44</sup> Northrop, "The Complementary Emphases of Eastern Intuitive and Western Scientific Philosophy," in Charles A. Moore, ed., *Philosophy—East and West*, p. 192.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 186-187.

kara, Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, and others—to show that *Brahman*, which is essentially a concept by intuition, can also be vindicated as a concept by postulation. According to the Vedānta philosophy, a thoroughgoing analysis of the incontrovertible facts of our experience leads us to the concept of *Brahman* as the postulate or presupposition of all our experience. Śaṅkara and his followers have tried to show, for instance, how an analysis of such different phases of human experience as waking, dream, dreamless sleep, and mystic realization (*turiya*) constrain us to formulate the notion of pure unobjective consciousness as the one fundamental reality which is called *Ātman-Brahman*.<sup>46</sup> Being established on independent logical grounds, the concept of *Brahman* is thus as much a concept by postulation as a concept by intuition.<sup>47</sup> Reason is not in essence totally opposed to spiritual intuition, but is an inadequate mode of apprehension which is fulfilled and consummated in intuition.

It is definitely wrong to identify *Brahman* with the aesthetic factor in the nature of existence. The aesthetic and the theoretic factors are in truth inseparable aspects of the world of manifestation, which is called "*jagat*," i.e., the cosmic flux, in Hindu philosophy. *Brahman*, in its inmost essence, is none of these—neither the theoretic factor, i.e., thought in its universalized form (e.g., absolute thought), nor the aesthetic component in its undifferentiated totality. The concept of *Brahman* truly represents a radically different dimension of existence, and that is why the Upaniṣads had to employ the language of "not this, not this" ("*neti, neti*") in an attempt to direct our mind toward its innermost essence. But even though *Brahman* transcends, in respect of its deepest essence, both the aesthetic and the theoretic factors in the nature of empirical existence, still it may also be said to include them in a sense, in so far as sensuous immediacy and rational mediation are interrelated factors in the creative self-expression of *Brahman*. The immediacy characteristic of the experience of *Brahman* is not to be confounded with that of sentient experience; rather, it is akin to (though not quite the same as) what F. H. Bradley in his *Appearance and Reality* calls "that superior form of immediacy" where "thought must reach its consummation."<sup>48</sup>

What Northrop calls the aesthetic continuum corresponds, strictly speaking, to the concept of *prakṛti* or *māyā* in Hindu philosophy. *Prakṛti* or

<sup>46</sup> The same fundamental reality is called *Brahman* in so far as it is the creative source of the objective world, and is called *Ātman* in so far as it is the inmost essence of psychological existence.

<sup>47</sup> See Chatterjee and Datta, *op. cit.*, p. 399 and also p. 406, where it is rightly pointed out that according to Vedānta the theories of *Brahman* and *Ātman* not only rest upon the authority of revealed texts and spiritual realization, but can also be independently established on logical grounds.

<sup>48</sup> Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 152.

*māyā* is the totality of empirical existence considered as a creative flow.<sup>49</sup> It has two forms: unmanifest and manifest (*avyakta* and *vyakta*). In its manifest form it is characterized by endless differences and differentiations, such as sounds, colors, forms, etc.; it is the infinitely diversified world of our experience. In its unmanifest form it is the sum total of existence in its undifferentiated unity and creative potentiality. What Northrop calls the undifferentiated aesthetic continuum is in truth the unmanifest *prakti* of Hindu philosophy.

It is also a grievous mistake to describe *Brahman* as a continuum. By continuum Northrop means an all-embracing field, a field including the manifold of sensuous intuition. But, as John Wild has rightly pointed out,<sup>50</sup> it is improper to apply the word "continuum" to *Brahman*, which is conceived as "an indivisible unity," and which is "altogether without parts of any kind." If *Brahman* is to be represented in any way at all, it is to be represented, not as a continuum, but as a metaphysical point (*bindu*). Just as a mathematical point has only position but no magnitude, similarly *Brahman* as the metaphysical point is the undivided and indivisible unity of pure being, which is, in its deepest essence, beyond all spatio-temporal extension. *Brahman* is, indeed, beyond quantitative measurement and qualitative determination, and as such it defies all logical articulation.

Northrop has brought out with admirable precision, however, the practical implications of the concept of *Brahman*. He is perfectly right in assuming that the experience of *Brahman* entails the following consequences:<sup>51</sup> (1) realization of the uninterrupted unity of all existence; (2) love of peace and dynamic compassion for the entire creation; (3) readiness to accept change as the very stuff of our existence; (4) perception of the inadequacy of all determinate logical and ethical principles as a theoretical equivalent of the concrete texture of reality; and (5) devotion to the aesthetic and spiritual values of life.

#### BRAHMAN AND THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

Dr. C. G. Jung, the founder of analytical psychology, has interpreted the concepts of *Brahman* and *Ātman* in Hindu philosophy from the psychologi-

<sup>49</sup> The concept of *prakti* in Sāṃkhya, as well as the concept of *māyā* in Vedānta, is essentially a dynamic principle that accounts for the entire world process, including matter at one extreme and thought at another. See Chatterjee and Datta, *op. cit.*, pp. 271-278, and also p. 377.

<sup>50</sup> In Charles A. Moore, ed., *Philosophy—East and West*, p. 262.

<sup>51</sup> F. S. C. Northrop, *The Meeting of East and West* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), Chaps. IX and X. (1) is the implication of Northrop's characterization of *Brahman* as an "all-embracing continuum." For (2), see pp. 329-335. For (3), see pp. 336-337. For (4), see pp. 381-386. For (5), see p. 403.



cal point of view. The *Ātman*, the Self, is, Jung rightly points out, far more comprehensive than the ego, for the Self is the center of our total psychical existence, including the conscious and the unconscious, whereas the ego is essentially the focal point of consciousness.<sup>52</sup> Jung interprets the concept of *Brahman* as the center or essence of the collective unconscious. The great Vedāntic truth concerning the essential identity of the cosmic and the psychical principles is, in his view, indicative of a very deep layer of unity in the unconscious, a unity behind or under the world of personal phantasies and desires, a unity transcending the chaotic disorder of instinctive forces, a unity beyond the darkness of the personal unconscious. The identity of the Self and the Supreme (*Ātman* and *Brahman*) represents the all-containing unity of what Buddhists call the "*bodhi-mandala*"—the magic circle of enlightenment, when the meditator feels his essential identity with his object of meditation, *Brahman* or *Amitabha*.<sup>53</sup>

What Jung says about the concepts of *Ātman* and *Brahman* does, indeed, contain a good deal of precious truth from the psychological point of view, but it must be pointed out that a psychological interpretation of philosophical concepts does not exhaust their total significance; nor is the psychological point of view decisive in determining the nature of ultimate reality. Psychologically, *Brahman* may be regarded as the center of the collective unconscious, but from the philosophical standpoint the concept of *Brahman* sums up the nature of the universe in its innermost essence and functions as the ultimate basis, not only of the psychological distinction between the conscious and the unconscious, but also of the more fundamental distinction between the psychical and the physical or between the inner and the outer. It is the failure to grasp this ontological significance of the concept of *Brahman* that has led Jung to characterize the method of Yoga as an introverted movement of consciousness. We of India know that *yoga* is essentially a method of achieving union with the fundamental truth of existence and the creative purpose of life. Those who realize *Brahman* not only achieve a wonderful measure of self-integration but also become transformed into immensely dynamic personalities who dedicate themselves to the good of humanity and to the establishment of peace in the world. The *Bhagavad-gītā* teaches that realization of *Brahman* and abiding in *Brahman* (*Brāhmisthiti*) is not incompatible with even such an all-absorbing outward activity as warfare. That is why the supreme Godhead of the Hindus is at once an archetypal introvert

<sup>52</sup> C. G. Jung, *Psychological Types* (London: Kegan Paul and Co., 1933), p. 475.

<sup>53</sup> See C. G. Jung, "The Psychology of Eastern Meditation," in K. B. Iyer, ed., *Art and Thought* (London: Luzac and Co., 1947), p. 178.

and an archetypal extravert. Śiva, for example, is at once the prince of ascetics and the king of dancers, whose ecstatic dance constitutes the rhythm of the entire creation. He is at once the most auspicious and the most terrible, the unity of the daunting and the fascinating. Similarly, Kṛṣṇa is not only the God of love and devotion but also the God of war and destruction, who mobilizes the forces of righteousness and progress against antisocial and reactionary tendencies with a view to the establishment of the reign of law in human society.

### BRAHMAN AND THE SPIRITUAL RENAISSANCE OF INDIA

The history of the spiritual renaissance of India is the history of the reaffirmation of the concept of *Brahman*, not only as the ultimate principle of thought, but also as the central principle of living. It is the history of the application of the concept of *Brahman* to the reorganization of the national and cultural life of India. Sri Ramakrishna, the prophet of the harmony of all religions, points out that the immediate experience of *Brahman* involves the vivid realization of the essential unity of the great historical religions of the world, which are different pathways leading to the same goal.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, such fundamental philosophical positions as pluralism, monism, and non-dualism are not to be statically viewed as mutually exclusive water-tight logical systems, but should be dynamically conceived as different stages in man's spiritual unfoldment. The multiple self, the personal God, and the impersonal Absolute, are different moments in the life of the same *Brahman*. So, the most important thing in religion is to realize the Supreme directly and to bring into life and society something of the creative light of that realization.

Rabindranath Tagore, the great poet-seer of India, laid special emphasis upon the aspect of *Brahman* as joy and beauty and harmony.<sup>55</sup> Even though essentially beyond all forms, *Brahman* as creative joy bursts forth in endless forms and in an unending procession of visible patterns. In Tagore's view, life is a magnificent feast of the Infinite's creative delight, in which man has been invited to participate.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the aim of life is not to turn one's back upon the bonds of human relationship, but to realize the divine in the midst of all relations. The ideal of life is to enter into a creative

<sup>54</sup> See Romain Rolland, *Prophets of the New India*, E. F. Malcolm-Smith, trans. (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1930), pp. 63-64.

<sup>55</sup> See Tagore, *Gītāñjali* (in Bengali) (Calcutta: Viśvabhāratī-Granthālaya, Bangābda 1355), poems 5, 8, 67, 120; also *Sāntiniketan* (in Bengali) (Calcutta: Viśvabhāratī-Granthālaya, Bangābda 1356), Vol. I, p. 116, and Vol. II, pp. 132, 229.

<sup>56</sup> See *Gītāñjali* (in English) (London: Macmillan & Co., 1949), poem 16.

fellowship with the divine artist and to realize the harmony of *Brahman* more and more through a cultural intermingling of the different races and peoples of the world.

Mahatma Gandhi, the architect of India's political independence, succeeded in rousing the political consciousness of the teeming millions of India because his leadership was in keeping with the spirit of Indian culture. He emphasized the impersonal character of *Brahman* as the principle of unity behind all philosophical and religious differences of mankind.<sup>57</sup> Truth and non-violence were for him the two inseparable aspects of *Brahman* or ultimate reality. If truth implies the character of *Brahman* as the unity of thought and existence, non-violence or love implies the character of *Brahman* as the harmony of human relationship. It was Gandhi's firm conviction that the Kingdom of God (*Rāmrajya*) can be established in the world only by a thoroughgoing application of the principles of truth and non-violence to the social, political, and international problems of our existence. His whole life was an unceasing effort to carry this conviction into effective reality; it was, indeed, a series of rigorously conducted experiments with truth in the sphere of collective living. He guided the freedom movement of India with spiritual weapons, taking his stand upon the conviction that for the effective fulfillment of a noble end it is also necessary to employ noble means, and that the power of evil can be successfully resisted with soul-force, which is vastly superior to the destructiveness of the machine. In mobilizing the nationalist forces of India against the armed might of the British Empire he used to say, "We must not have any hatred in our mind against the British people,—no hatred in thought, speech and action. We want to resist evil with love. And love's method of resistance is non-violent non-cooperation with the forces of injustice."<sup>58</sup> The history of the political independence of India is a convincing demonstration of the invincible power of organized non-violence in subduing the forces of evil and injustice.

Another outstanding leader of renescent India was Sri Aurobindo, at once a mystic poet and a spiritual master, a prophet and a philosopher. The celebrated French thinker Romain Rolland has acclaimed him as "having realized the most complete synthesis achieved up to the present between the genius of the West and of the East."<sup>59</sup> The concept of *Brahman* occu-

<sup>57</sup> See the chapters entitled "The Gospel of Truth" and "Truth is God," in P. K. Prabhu and U. R. Rao, eds., *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946). See also Mahadev Desai, *The Gospel of Selfless Action, The Gita According to Gandhi* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1948), pp. 7-8.

<sup>58</sup> *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, Chaps. X, XII, XIV.

<sup>59</sup> See *Prophets of the New India*, p. 627.

pies a central place in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. *Brahman*, properly interpreted, contains within itself, so holds Sri Aurobindo, the principle of reconciliation of the highest values of the civilizations of the East and the West.<sup>60</sup> *Brahman* is the name given to that fundamental truth of existence which is the unity of time and eternity, freedom and creativity, silence and activity.

According to the theory of *Brahman* as interpreted by Sri Aurobindo, the uniqueness of individual self-expression, endless cosmic creativity, and supra-cosmic freedom are equally real and eternal factors in the nature of reality.<sup>61</sup> It follows from this that the true significance of life lies neither in exclusive glorification of individuality nor in the liquidation of individuality in a supra-cosmic silence. The ideal of life is, rather, the realization of the unity of all individuals in the cosmic creativity and the maximum intensification of individual self-expression on the solid foundation of spiritual freedom. The material world is, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, neither independently real, nor transcendently unreal. It is, rather, the scene of progressive self-manifestation of the superconscient real in the conditions provided by inconscient matter.<sup>62</sup> So, the future of humanity lies in a creative fusion of the material and the spiritual values of life—in an active reconciliation of the psychological, aesthetic, and spiritual values with the material, economic, and political values of life.<sup>63</sup>

Sri Aurobindo looks upon the creative flow of time as a play of hide-and-seek between Nature and Spirit.<sup>64</sup> Matter is Spirit, Spirit hiding itself behind Nature's mask of inconscience. The process of evolution is Nature constantly straining forward toward increasing manifestation of the Spirit within herself. Life, mind, and reason—the vegetable kingdom, the animal kingdom, and the human race—represent different grades in the objective self-articulation of the Spirit in matter. The history of human civilization is the history of the evolutionary development of Nature toward the next higher manifestation of the Spirit in material conditions in the form of Super-manhood.<sup>65</sup> Super-manhood is, in truth, the vision of a unique world order, an era of peace, progress, and harmony. The effective realization of this

<sup>60</sup> See Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, Book 2, Chap. XV, where Sri Aurobindo shows that timeless perfection (*akṣara*) and unceasing change (*kṣara*) are equally real aspects of ultimate reality (*Puruṣottama*). So, the highest ideal of life is neither mere spiritual liberation nor mere dynamic self-expression, but active co-operation with the creative impetus of life on the basis of spiritual liberation (*ibid.*, Book 2, Chap. XVI).

<sup>61</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p. 348.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 103–104.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 1, Chaps. II, III.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102–104.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 753–754.

ideal depends upon a radical change of the inner nature and consciousness of man, and not simply upon a change of the social and political externals of life. This change of inner consciousness can be effectuated by organized spiritual endeavor and by bringing into overt operation in our life and society powers of consciousness higher than the mental and the rational. Man has evolved out of the matrix of animal consciousness with the emergence of the rational mind as the dominant power of being. Similarly, Sri Aurobindo maintains, human evolution is destined to blossom forth into supermanhood with the emergence of the supermind or the intuitive and dynamic truth-consciousness as the dominant power of living.<sup>66</sup> The Supermind will not have to come from without, because it is the latent divine possibility of human nature.

It is thus evident that the theory of *Brahman*, rightly understood, combines faith in the reality of the higher spiritual values of life *and* the spirit of active fellowship with the creative force of evolution toward the ideal of a world order of abiding peace, progress, and harmony (*Dharmarājya*).<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 754. Also Book 2, Chap. XXVI.

<sup>67</sup> This is well brought out in the *Gītā*, where Kṛṣṇa urges Arjuna to co-operate actively with the world spirit, being consciously united with the supreme Godhead (VIII. 7). Kṛṣṇa's ideal behind this advice is the establishment of truth in the world (IV. 7-8).