Philosophy attempts to know the reality that embraces all existence. In the course of its development in the West, in view of the distinct claims of experience and reason as sources of knowledge, we come across two exclusive approaches, one of Realism and another of Idealism, along with a variety of world-views as a result of the interaction between the two. Each of these views do reveal in a unique manner some aspect of Reality, but fall short of comprehending the whole, and eventually on being drawn to its logical culmination is found breaking down at some point due to the revelation of its inherent self-contradiction. This development culminated in the realisation that "Reality transcends Thought".

It is quite evident that man becomes aware of reality through experience. An exclusive concentration on this view led to the formation of Realism or what is known as Empiricist Philosophy which pronounced that experience or rather sense-experience is the sole basis of knowledge. It prescribed that knowledge in order to be true is always to be verified and validated with reference to sense-experience. This theory virtually denied epistemic value to the reason and relegated it to the secondary position.

However, on deeper analysis we find that to regard experience as the only source of knowledge involves self-contradiction, because there is no corresponding experience to justify its basic tenets which are formulated on the basis of rational analysis only. Thus the very rejection of epistemic value of reason presupposes the admission of such value. It renders Empiricism philosophically untenable.

This emphasis of Empiricism on the corresponding experience to justify the truth of any proposition seems to be an outcome of its concern for objectivity in knowledge and that for the elimination of subjectivity. This appears to be a
genuine proposition. But this apparently genuine proposition acquires dubious character in reality because the experience or rather the knowledge as such presupposes the ‘subject’ who knows and knows through its mechanism only. Hence, the impact of the ‘subject’ on knowledge cannot be eliminated, nor the truth of its existence be ever established by its verification in and through experience. This indecisiveness with regard to its truth amounts to its virtual denial and this denial necessarily leads thought to self-contradiction and deprives not only Philosophy but all knowledge of its very ground.

The Empiricist Epistemology is integrally related to the Materialistic Ontology, which regards matter as the sole reality and asserts that all that exists is a product of matter and ultimately reducible to it. On the close scrutiny of this view, it will be seen that the very knowledge of the matter presupposes the consciousness, which alone could bring its awareness and which by its very nature is independent of and irreducible to the matter. This irreducibility of consciousness to matter contradicts the view which holds that all is matter.

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This analysis of the Empiricist and Materialist proposition reveals that philosophical inquiry necessarily transcends experience and it further reveals that in philosophical inquiry reason plays a crucial role and its contribution on no count could be denied. It is evident that it is reason which seeks the truth of things that would account for all that exists. And it is through reason only that all theories including the one of Materialism are established. This realisation facilitated the shifting of the emphasis from experience to reason, and rightly so.

The Reason by its very nature relies on its basic criterion of consistency or self-consistency in thought for determining the truth of any belief. Equipped with this criterion it proceeds to analyse our beliefs regarding reality. Its mode of working consists of formulating concepts to explain particular facts. Accordingly the mind in consonance to its nature perceives the separate and static units or parts of the Reality, which, in essence, is indivisible and dynamic, and then correlates those perceptions.

This is done through the process of abstraction in which the mind attempts to comprehend the particulars in the universal, the parts in the whole and the partials or finite in the unity of the Infinite and formulates thereby an integral and all encompassing view of Reality, which is known as Idealism.
This Philosophy of Idealism in a significant departure from the Realist standpoint regarded the reason or thought as the highest and sovereign instrument of knowledge, quite competent to know all that is real, the ultimate Reality. It was believed that the mind would achieve this goal and know the real and complete truth, if it proceeds without any assumption and does not stop midway. The proposition that Reality could thus be revealed in thought and is not beyond its reach seems to be the nucleus of the reasoning which eventually culminated in the equation of Thought and Reality, the Rational and the Real.

This equation of Rational and Real seems to be the outcome of the reasoning that our knowledge of the world-existence being finite and limited, presumes the concept of the Infinite. On the basis of this presumption the Infinite was conceived as the underlying reality of the finite world and that too in the manner that it could satisfactorily account for the order and design that we find here in this world.

For it is quite evident that this existence is certainly not a chaos. If it were so, no knowledge would have been possible. This reasoning brought about the necessity of postulating the Infinite Mind as the basis and ground of the world-existence and thereby justified the equation of the Real and Rational.

This reasoning amounts to mean that the knowledge of the Infinite is a result of speculation which is based on our knowledge of the finite and thus indirectly relegates it to the category of appearance only. It would be the knowledge not of the ‘Thing in Itself’ but of the ‘Thing as It Appears to be’. Thus our thought would encompass the appearances only, while the Reality would remain beyond its range.

If appearance and reality or finite and Infinite are thus separated and are conceived as having no link between the two and if there remains no possibility for the finite even to comprehend the Infinite, the concept of the Infinite loses its ground and become meaningless. This position would delimit the scope of our knowledge to that of the finite, which falls in the realm of Science only. Then, Philosophy ceases to be a pursuit of knowledge and is reduced to the status of mere mental gymnastics.

In this connection it is contended that the conclusion which deprives Philosophy of its value as the pursuit of knowledge is also an outcome of
philosophical inquiry. It is Philosophy pronouncing judgement on Philosophy. Then, the very rejection of Philosophy as knowledge implies its acceptance. Consequently, the value of Philosophy as such remains undeniable.

This argument shows that in knowledge we are not left with an option between acceptance and rejection of Philosophy, but only between a good and bad Philosophy. In this background it will be seen that the Idealist denial of the knowledge of the Infinite does not amount to its unknowability as such, much less to its rejection; it is unknowable in a particular context only.

This observation further exemplified by the several anomalies that crept in the proofs of the existence of God. If God were the creator or the original cause of the world, then to derive world from God would be a valid proposition and not vice versa. But Idealism in its proofs attempts to infer the existence of God on the basis of certain characteristics observed in the world. This amounts to considering the world as the cause of its cause, a self-luminous entity, an entity not in need of any explanation or any ground beyond its existence. But it is not so. Then, the finite cannot be considered as providing the premises to prove the existence of God or the Infinite.

Thus even the idea to prove the existence of God through reasoning, or say through logic seems to be quite irrelevant because so far as logic is concerned the conclusion derived cannot be wider than its premises, but in the subject of the Infinite or God, the mind has to arrive at a wider conclusion. Here the premises adduced to prove the existence of God do not provide a logical basis but are only the indications to help the mind to perceive God, and indication is not a proof. Actually, the idea of proof is quite incompatible to this concept. What can prove that which proves all? Thus the only course open to the reasoning is to recognise the self-evident character of the existence of God.

Besides, it is clear that an argument to prove the existence of God necessarily presumes the idea of God as the existence of the finite presumes the idea of the Infinite. But such idea cannot be originated in mind, which by its very nature is finite and is preoccupied with things finite. Then it can only be a result of some influence beyond itself. This position of mind having an idea, which is not its own product, indicates the possibility of a new dimension of mind capable of turning towards the Infinite or God and receiving its knowledge.
Thus the development of Idealism in the West brought forth the realisation that the Reason falls short of the knowledge of Reality. But this realisation does not amount to its unknowability as such, because that would take away the very ground of knowledge. This position is indicative of the necessity of another mode of acquiring knowledge or rather another dimension of mind to serve this purpose.

This possibility of a new dimension of mind is also indicated by the analysis of the notion of Ideal. Here one has to distinguish a real ideal from the pseudo-ideal. The former as distinct from the later is not a mere figment of imagination, a matter of subjective preference bereft of objective value. It must have its basis in reality, which needs to be established in thought.

The term Ideal refers to the desirable mode of life. And since the desirability of its realisation entails an obligation which in turn implies the possibility of such realisation. This possibility is a pointer to the status of ideal as a potential existence. And the potential though un-manifest or not actual must nevertheless be real or else there remains no scope for its realisation. This observation widens the range of the concept of reality by inclusion of the potential along with the actual in its span.

Now, the Ideal being not the actual cannot be known in the manner the actual is known. Nor can it be derived from the knowledge of the actual. Such derivation renders it meaningless. However, its status of being real entails the necessity and possibility of its knowledge which is indicative another mode of knowledge.

This observation about the requirement and possibility of another mode of knowledge is corroborated even by modus operandi of scientific studies when it had to postulate transcendental entities or consciousness to fill in the lacuna in the knowledge especially while considering the fundamentals of existence like the behaviour of the sub-atomic particles which constitute the matter or inter-convertibility of matter and force or the emergence of new characteristics in the course of the evolution of life and mind from matter.

It is further corroborated by the experience of the great scientists that their discoveries were not merely the products of their labour but had emerged during the course of their working, might be because of an operation of some faculty higher than that of the intellect. Thus at a certain stage of inquiry, Science is
obliged to associate its working with the categories beyond its normal reach because of which the line of demarcation separating Science from Philosophy becomes gradually thin and eventually disappears.

Reason by its very nature encompass the Reality or provide its explanation through conceptualisation which is a process of abstraction that concentrates on its essence. However, it is observed that any concept does not vouch for the complete knowledge of the particulars encompassed as the knowledge of the concept of man does not provide the knowledge any particular person in its entirety. He exceeds the concept of man. Thus the real existence inclusive of its potentialities along with its different states, beginning with the primordial one to the highest possible, invariably transcends the essence.

The knowledge of this existence is beyond the scope of thought or reasoning, but not beyond the scope of knowledge as such. Now with regard to any knowledge since it is Reality that determines the truth the primary requirement is a sort of direct contact with it, whereas inference or speculation play the subsidiary role of organising the data made available and interpreting it in the mental terms.

This observation gives credence to empiricism, but not necessarily to the theory which considers sense experience as the only means. Sense experience has access to the physical reality only, but our knowledge reveals the existence of non-physical or supra-physical reality and the possibility of its knowledge in virtue of which its idea arises in the mind. Actually this mind or knowledge too is not a physical entity.

Thus in absence of a higher reality, non-physical or supra-physical reality and its explicit or implicit awareness, no knowledge, even the knowledge of the physical reality is not possible. This analysis indicates the existence of the direct source of knowledge, of the source other than sense-experience, the source which could be termed as ‘Intuition’. Accordingly even the sense-experience is type of intuition related to the physical reality. However as there are ranges of reality, so are there ranges of intuition and its span is not limited to in any of its range. It is the task of Philosophy to explore these ranges and not to get tied to any one range.
This realisation seems to be at the back of the departure from the Idealism in Philosophy and emergence of the contemporary Philosophies like those of Neo-empiricism and Positivism, Existentialism and Humanism. This trend culminated in Neo-idealism which moved towards the dissolution of the fundamental differences that existed between Idealism and Realism.

It is universally accepted that the Philosophy or philosophising is a form of reasoning, might be the reasoning at its best or the highest, entitling it of the title of fundamental reasoning or reasoning into the fundamentals. It is also accepted that reasoning necessarily presumes some sort of intuition, which shows that the Philosophy worth its name must be realistic or at least must be having a realistic tone.

We find the corroboration of this observation in the journey of Philosophy from raw Empiricism via Idealism towards trans-empiricism. Thus since Philosophy is an intellectual pursuit to know the truth of Reality its underlying logic pushes it to its natural culmination in Realism, to the position in which Philosophy and Realism would be considered as identical terms, being coextensive in their scope.

II

The Infinite by its very definition is not and cannot be a derivative entity. Its truth is not to be derived by the mind, but is to be reflected in it. This refers to a new dimension of mind which is usually described as the Logic of the Infinite. And mind operating in this dimension becomes an adequate instrument of philosophical inquiry.

Since the Infinite is the original cause or the basis of the world existence, there must be its influence or reflection in the world, which might provide indications of the Infinite to a tranquil and receptive mind. Such indications or the knowledge they bring about is not a result of mental working. It is only revealed in or found emerging in this working in the manner the consciousness emerges in the evolutionary process.

It is observed that in the process of evolution when life emerges from matter, and mind from life, there appear the characteristics in the later states that were non-existent in the prior. It shows that the world-existence is truly a progressive movement in which it is not the prior state which is the cause of the later. It is the vast reality, what is known to us as the Supreme, which
progressively manifests itself through and in these states that is the cause of all
that exists and would exist in future along with the new characteristics that
emanate in due course. Likewise the knowledge of God or the Supreme is not the
result of philosophical inquiry, but it emerges in it and the cause of its emergence
is the same Supreme.

We find two movements in the sphere of knowledge. The one is the ego-
centric one that brings down knowledge to the limitations of human
understanding. In this movement mind operates as a closed entity and interprets
according to its light, or according to its conditioning and the experience it had
acquired through the world-contacts. Here the continuously active mind that is
accustomed to interpret the available data necessarily distorts and delimits the
knowledge.

The other movement is that of the mind's ascent to Truth, in which the
mind released of its entanglements and native distortions and delimiting
influences, in a state of pure receptivity allows its understanding to get widened
and transformed in the vastness of Reality. In philosophical inquiry the mind has
to turn to this second movement and instead of attempting to comprise the
Infinite in its limitations, it has to open itself towards the Infinite and receive its
impact.

In this connection the Bhagvadgita along with the Vedas has rightly
pronounced that the roots of the existence are in the higher realm. And so is the
origin of knowledge. It has to descend in mind from there. As the Upanishads say,
man knows Him when He reveals himself to man. Then this knowledge is not a
creation of man, much less the construction of his mind or a product of his mental
pursuit. It is 'apaurusheya'. Man has to receive it and allow it to find expression in
him, in the language with which his mind or the mind in general is well
acquainted.

The Upanishads pronounce that in order that this higher knowledge is
received, man has to make an effort to rise above his prejudices and pre-dispo-
sitions, his mental constructions and conditionings. He has to open himself in
equanimit and transparency of his being towards the Higher. But even this effort
is not a cause or generator of this knowledge. On the contrary, this effort itself is
the result of the working of the Higher in him. All higher ideas and feelings that
arise in man, all his turnings toward the higher values and ideals are the results of
the activity and influence of the Higher in him. It is on account of this influence
only that man can think of God and turn towards him. It is because this fact of the Higher being active in this world that it is developing and progressing.

In light of these observations what is necessary for philosophical inquiry is to recognise the presence of the infinite in the world existence. It is because of this understanding that the ancient sages in India had described the knowledge of the Supreme in terms of reviving its memory – *smruti*. The same understanding is reflected in the Theory of Reminiscence propounded by the Greek mystics.

In this connection it is pertinent to note that there exists a gulf between the finite and the Infinite because of which the world-existence itself through its extension or development cannot reach or become the Infinite. There comes a stage at the height of its progress when all pursuits, all movements of evolution and development come to halt. There is a limit beyond which on its own it cannot proceed any further. Then, as said in the Vedas, after ascending the highest peak of consciousness, one has to take a leap to reach the Sun of Truth.

This final leap of the Vedas is symbolic of the mystic process necessary to reach the Highest. As is said, it is when God in his compassion turns towards man and transmits his influence or reveals himself to man or descends in the world, that the man or the world could realise him. The Vedic leap to the Sun of Truth is the result of this influence or pressure or pull of the Supreme on human consciousness.

Not only this final leap, but also the world's turning and proceeding towards the Infinite, its transition from one state or plane to another, its entire progress becomes possible only through this descent or intervention. It is because the Supreme upholds and moves the world that the world exists, grows and develops and eventually proceeds to realise its final destiny.

Thus in the process of evolution we come across the phenomenon of the stance of the world to ascend towards the Supreme and the Supreme descending in the world. This ascent and descent are the dual movements of the Supreme in its working out of the world-existence. And the two are inseparable. It is through this dual process that the new elements and qualities emerge here. The same appears to be the process of emergence of the knowledge of the Supreme, because of which it is described by the mystics as revelation.

Actually the Supreme is not only having its relationship with this world, it inhabits in the world. It might be un-manifest here, but this un-manifest aspect is
equally real and it determines the future course and direction of the world-process. Hence one who sees, not thinks, the un-manifest in the manifest, the Infinite in the finite and God in the world, or as said by the ancient sages, the one who sees the Divine Will operating in the world-process and identifies himself with this Will, he understands the world truly and fully and acts rightly in the course of his life and fulfils his mission.

Thus the Infinite which is beyond the world phenomena is very much within it also. The two are inseparable. And since man is a portion of the Infinite, he can know or realise it through identification. It would be his self-knowledge. This understanding becomes the basis and foundation of the right philosophical approach.

And in view of this inseparable relationship between the Infinite and the world phenomena, the denial of the one invariably entails the denial of the other. Besides, Philosophy, as shown above, is not even possible without presuming this relationship. Hence the condition of simultaneously embracing in thought the Supreme and the world phenomena, the *Vidya* and *Avidya* of Ishopanishad, and providing satisfactory explanation of their relationship becomes the mark and criterion of the right philosophical thinking.

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Philosophy is an intellectual pursuit of the knowledge of Reality. However, since this pursuit begins in the limitations of human mind, there comes into existence a variety of views of life in consonance with the different states of human understanding. But it is the peculiarity of Philosophy that thought does not remain confined for long to any one view. It always moves from one view to a still wider view, from thesis to antithesis and then to synthesis, towards more and more comprehensive understanding of Truth, to the Truth which could correlate and synthesise its various partial views.

Thus in Philosophy any particular thought is only a step towards a wider thought. Besides, however wide the thought might appear to be, it is only a mental formulation of Truth. Hence when any thought claims finality or having fully comprehended the Truth, it necessarily turns away from Truth. Therefore, it is necessary that one does not become dogmatic or static in the course of philosophical inquiry. That is why Philosophy is described by some eminent
thinkers as an attempt to think without terminating thought process at any stage. In a way it is an endless progression from Truth to Truth.

Moreover, since philosophical thought even in its highest form is only a mental rendering of the Truth, it cannot be taken literally; it is only a symbol and sign of the Truth, a step leading towards its knowledge and realisation. Therefore, Philosophy, as its literal meaning suggests, is not knowledge or wisdom, but only the love for wisdom.

For the Upanishads Philosophy was contemplation, 'manana', a step preceding meditation - 'nidadhyasana' in the course of pursuit of Truth, which finally leads to its realisation - 'sakshatkara'. Thus it was conceived as lower knowledge - apara vidya only which leads man to the higher knowledge - para vidya. It is a means of realisation of the Supreme Truth, a means of the pursuit of the Supreme in life.

Thus Indian thought seems to be in agreement with the approach delineated here after the review and analysis of the development of Philosophy in the West. The characteristic feature of Indian thought is its spiritual perspective, according to which the Supreme Being or Self is the ground of all existence, by knowing which all is known; and although the knowledge of this Supreme seems to be beyond mind, it being mind of the mind, it is quite accessible to human self which, in essence, is its portion.

In Indian tradition there were thinkers like Charvaka and Lokayatas, who deviated from this main current and subscribed to the atheistic views. But they have not succeeded in influencing the main stream of thought or in initiating a parallel movement of thought in India. Ordinarily Buddhism and Jainism too are believed to be atheistic. Still the import of their thought is basically spiritual in nature like other Schools of Indian Thought. Thus Philosophy and Spirituality have become coextensive in India.

III

Indian Philosophy including Buddhist and Jain systems subscribe to the spiritual ideal of liberation as the ultimate goal of human life. All these systems uniformly contend that although man is born in nature, his real self does not belong to it. Nature, it is believed, only hides the real self of man and it is because of ignorance that the reflection of the self in nature is treated as his sole being. This indiscrimination and consequent identification of the self with the nature is
considered by these systems to be the root-cause of all human limitations and the evils that man suffers from.

According to this view the fulfilment of human destiny is not to be found in the worldly progress. These systems contend that the mundane existence of man is the result of his self-alienation that has created an illusion of life, the continuation and enlargement of which would not lead him to his destiny, and the involvement in it necessarily ends in frustration. Man, therefore, should seek and find his real self, for which he is required to transcend the worldly existence and liberate his being from the bondage of nature.

According to these Schools of Thought the need for liberation presupposes a necessary opposition between the worldly life and the self. This presupposition reduces the worldly life to an utter insignificance, as having no purpose of significance of its own. Thus, the world and its entire paraphernalia are only meant to be used in order to transcend it. And after it is being transcended, it is to be conveniently forgotten as if it was never a reality.

This view of life finds an adequate expression and a sort of rational basis in the Vedanta of Shankaracharya, which regards the world phenomena as illusory. Prima facie, it would be rather difficult to regard this school of thought as the representative Philosophy of India, since realistic views were also presented with equal force and were quite influential in the sphere of Philosophy here.

According to these Realists the world-existence is to be understood as a creation of nature or an outcome of God's creative energy, his play - *lila*. But the pertinent question in this connection is whether these views admit that the mundane existence as such as having intrinsic value or significance because of which, the final destiny of human beings could be conceived in terms of the worldly progress, and the perfection and the development of the world or the fulfilment of the original purpose for which it was created would be treated as the goal to be pursued.

In this respect, attention is drawn to the Purva-Mimamsa school of thought, which regards the worldly progress and prosperity – *abhyudaya* as the goal of human life. However, this *abhyudaya* is always considered as having instrumental significance in the interim period and as having its value in virtue of it is contributory to the pursuit of liberation, through purification and subtilisation
of man's being. Thus even for this system the liberation remains the final goal and the world as such is regarded as having no significance of its own.

The Vaishnava and Shaiva Realists considered the world as a creation of God. But this belief also does not imply any specific value for the world as such, nor does it determine man's final destiny in terms of worldly progress. It is meant to merely bring out the necessity of the realisation of God and generate in man an aspiration for the same. Man, according to this view, is expected to look at God only, even while living here. His resolve must be "not this, but that," since the two do not go together. The world, then, is not real in the sense God or the Self is. Thus even through this realistic exercise the world does not gain any intrinsic value or significance.

For these Schools of Thought the value of the world in the final analysis is confined to its being a means and field of the realisation of Brahman, or as being means of liberation from the worldly bondage. The same is the case with Mayavad which ascribes the similar value to the worldly life and give it the status of phenomenal reality -'vyavaharika satta'.

Thus both Realists and Illusionists in India seem to arrive at a common understanding with regard to the status of the world. For, whether the world is considered to be a play – *lila* or an illusion - *maya*, these views are eventually meant to divert the mind of man from the world to God or Brahman, and, therefore, possess pragmatic value only. Both these views subscribe to the supramundane outlook which practically negates the world; whether this negation is the result of the belief in the world having no essence or is considered to be illusory appears to be of no consequence.

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The state of affairs revealed above seems indicative of the association of the concept of liberation with the illusionist world view, on account of which Indian thought had moved towards its culmination in Illusionism. Then the basic point in this respect that remains to be determined is whether this culmination is logically necessary, which requires a thorough analysis of the concept of liberation.

Liberation is a relative term. It presupposes bondage. The self is in bondage of nature and is, therefore, to be liberated. In this context the self is obviously real. Whereas the question whether nature is real or not might be considered
inconsequent at present, because it is believed that on the self being liberated its relationship with nature is severed, after which it is supposed to have no concern with it.

However, for the purpose of clarity in thought it is quite necessary to determine the nature of the relationship between the two. In this connection it is pertinent to know whether this relationship between self and nature is necessary or real and whether it affects or modifies the nature of self. If it affects, the bondage and liberation would constitute its different modes, integrally related to its being.

This would reduce the self to the state of a finite and transient being whose nature undergoes change. It becomes, then, a phenomenal entity and would be bound to remain so. Under these circumstances its liberation or bondage would be quite meaningless, because it cannot be said to be bound by its own essence, and also cannot be thought of as being liberated from it.

The concept of liberation presumes that self does not belong to the category which binds it, and that it has its own nature, the identity of which is irreducible. Then bondage or liberation would not modify its nature, or deduct or add any element to it. It does not affect even its freedom, since freedom is its innate quality and it would not be possible for the self to dissociate itself from this freedom.

The only alternative under this state of affairs is to believe that this freedom is hidden when the self is in bondage and therefore in the state of self-forgetfulness and becomes explicit on his being liberated. Thus, identity of the self in both these states remains intact and for it the liberation would mean self-realisation only.

Here there arises a real difficulty. If the self were not free by nature there would not be any possibility of its liberation, and if it were free, the liberation would not be necessary. In this connection, it is argued that although its freedom is real, but is not the actual, as it is hidden here in the worldly life by the nature and its working, creating an appearance of bondage. Therefore, there has arisen a need for the dissolution of this appearance.

If this argument is accepted, it remains to be inquired into the how and why of the bondage. The self would not have any need for bondage and nature would not inflict such bondage on it, since it being unconscious there would not
be any necessity or possibility for such action. Thus bondage remains a mystery unless it is presumed that the self by its free choice has descended into nature and got bound, and that the self-oblivion is self-chosen.

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In India the process and purpose of bondage was never considered a matter of philosophical inquiry as it had adopted a pragmatic view of life. Accordingly because the primary interest of humans consisted of getting liberated, the unravelling of the mystery of bondage was considered a fruitless exercise. Thus, the bondage was just presumed by the different schools of thought and spiritual disciplines as a matter of fact and any questioning in this connection was considered quite irrelevant.

However, although such questioning might be irrelevant for the spiritual purpose, and rightly so, still it is quite relevant for philosophical inquiry. The pertinent question in connection with the concept of liberation would be regarding the possibility of the awakening of the bound self from self-oblivion and consequent progress to liberation, along with the question regarding the role of self and nature in this process.

It is obvious that nature would not oblige, because if it obliges the liberation would be nature's gift to the self, which could be taken away from it any time. This position is not in consonance with its nature. Here one comes across a dichotomy as nature cannot initiate such action as it is unconscious and for the self in bondage it is not possible. Still the notions of bondage and liberation necessitate the relationship between the two and their role in the descent of the self into bondage and in its ascent to liberation.

Here some sort of relationship between the self and nature cannot be denied because the world would have come into existence because of their cumulative working in which the nature is required to respond to the movements of the self and give effect to such movements as its instrument. This condition would remain a mystery, until the traditional dualism of spirit and nature is overcome and the concept of nature is so modified as to provide for all its different operations.

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In the spiritual traditions of India knowledge - Janna, devotion - Bhatia and action - karma have been prescribed as means of liberation. Although the different thinkers do not agree with regard to their relative value, they unanimously hold that to achieve liberation is quite possible and that there is an effective way for it; whether it is knowledge or knowledge associated with devotion or action or both. However, the virtue of these means lies in their becoming instrumental for the discrimination of the self from nature, which would remove the ignorance that causes bondage so that real truth would manifest.

In this endeavour it is the means and material available in the terrestrial life only that is used. Thus the nature which is instrumental to bondage is utilised for the purpose of liberation. This reveals the possibility of its working in the different dimensions, which necessitates the modification of the traditional concept of nature.

In Indian thought nature is described as an inert substance jada. But simultaneously it is conceived of as possessing three qualities, viz. tamas, rajas and sattwa. Here tamas, of course, signifies inertia, but rajas - activity and sattwa - purity and transparency are the qualities that are not in consonance with its unconscious character. These two qualities account for the major portion of human life and it is because of sattwa that the mental life of man, along with his idealism and aspirations for higher values is found here in the world.

Thus the nature on one hand offers resistance to the spirit and on the other co-operates with it and becomes an instrument in its working. Such contrary modes of working hold the key to the fuller understanding of the nature and its role in the world existence.

It is because this mode of the working of nature in spiritual discipline is ignored along with its contribution to the development of mental and cultural life that the nature is conceived as jada, a thing opposed to the spirit. This belief regarding the opposition between the two or their incompatibility and consequent consideration of the world as evil appears to be confirmed and fortified by the reactions arising out of the frustrating experiences of the aspirants on the path to liberation.

But if nature were really the cause of evil and also incompatible to the life of spirit, as it is conceived to be, it could not have become instrumental to the
self's release, nor the self or spirit could have chosen to descend into it and associate with its working; and in absence of such an operation the world could not have come into existence. But the world does exist, and it is not merely the doing of nature, nor has it come into being out of some limitation of the spirit. It is the result of the collaboration of the spirit and the nature and is an expression of the innate freedom of the spirit.

It appears then, that through the means of an apparent opposition between the spirit and nature, the Supreme is working out its design; and the nature even while it seems to obstruct this cause is really serving it in some manner.

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This would become evident on a close examination of nature's working in the world existence. It seems that the nature has three poises in its operation here. It puts the self in bondage and obstructs its light, it permits the release of the self and provides instruments for the same, and it becomes a means for self-expression of the spirit and a medium of its creative activities. The co-existence of these three aspects indicates that the relation between the self and the nature is not of mutual exclusion but of cooperation and collaboration in the wider scheme of Reality,

This view would be confirmed by the scrutiny of the process of evolution also. In this process, matter which in the beginning is inert and inorganic is found gradually being transformed into a living matter and then into a living and thinking matter, and thereby becoming a vehicle of consciousness. And it is found that without it the spirit could not have manifested, and the nature could not have undergone transformation without the spirit. Thus the two appear to be collaborators working for a common end in the evolutionary process.

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In view of this modified conception of nature, and consequently of the world existence also, a question arises whether the escape from the world is the only and the final goal to be pursued by man. If the nature is capable of becoming a vehicle of the Supreme or the self, why the self moves only to get released from it? Was it an original mistake that it got involved in the nature and created somehow this world, but now it would like to withdraw? It could not be so. It does not seem to be an accident that the world was created. There must be a
definite purpose in the Supreme's descent into nature and the consequent world emergence. This purpose needs to be fulfilled. Then like the self, the world too must have its destiny and liberation might be a precondition of the role of self in the realisation of this destiny.

The self, therefore, needs to be liberated, not in order to escape from the world and to undo all that is being done and then to return to its origin, but in order that the liberated soul may perform its role as a fully conscious being in the scheme of Reality.

Then the nature too has its place in the world scheme. In evolution, as it is observed, the nature undergoes transformation and thereby gradually overcomes its native inertia. Through this transformation of nature a variety of forms that constitute the world emerged and developed. But since inertia of the nature obstructs this process, the forms so emerging necessarily remain imperfect. Then the nature too needs to be liberated from its inertia and become completely receptive, so that it becomes an adequate medium of creation, so that this creation could achieve its perfection. Thus this dual liberation - liberation of the self and that of the nature, and their collaboration seems to be the condition necessary for the fulfilment of the terrestrial destiny.

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The world is actually an outcome of the working of the Supreme. All the events or happenings here that seem good or bad to man's limited vision have their place in its wider scheme. Then all that has emerged here, including ignorance and limitations, has a purpose and eventually contributes towards the fulfilment of that purpose. In reality ignorance is an instrument of the Supreme who in his wisdom upholds it and uses it for the manifestation of the Truth.

Therefore there cannot be a fundamental opposition between knowledge and ignorance - *vidya* and *avidya*; both are to be simultaneously embraced for the realisation of Truth. This secret is revealed in the Upanishads and especially in the Ishopanishad, which proclaims that all this is for the habitation of the Lord. And yet in India the idea of opposition between the Supreme and the world became widely prevalent, giving rise to the exclusive asceticism and a number of supramundane philosophies of liberation.

If the Supreme is the truth of the world-existence, the negation of the world involves self-contradiction and therefore by its inherent logic stands
rejected. The assertion of the Supreme and the denial of the world cannot simultaneously be true. Therefore if the supreme is real, the world too must be real. This seems to be the fundamental truth which necessarily leads philosophical thought to Realism and is responsible for the significant departure from Illusionism in Indian thought.

However, this departure could not succeed to forge a real relationship between the Supreme and the world and override the influence of the supramundane view of life. Indian genius for centuries could not rise above its exclusive preoccupation with the spirit. Consequently Realism in India could not go very far and could not succeed in establishing in thought the intrinsic value of the world.

And yet the right philosophical thinking is expected to be realistic. Philosophy in search of Truth must finally encompass in a single breath the Supreme and the world. And, therefore, the philosophical quest in the West and in India passing from one stage to another seems to move towards finding the Truth by knowing which all is truly known.

IV

The roots of the Indian thought are in the Vedas and the Upanishads. The Vedic sages conceived life as a pursuit for the dawn of the everlasting day, an ascent to the higher peaks of consciousness aiming to reach the Sun of Truth, a journey from human limitations to the Vast - brihat, an inner sacrifice through which man helped by Gods achieves immortality. These sages led man to the shore beyond darkness, where tadekam – ‘That One’ shines. This ‘That One’ according to the Upanishads, is the Supreme Reality, Brahman, which is beyond the world and yet the world too is Brahman and is created by it for its habitation. Thus for both these ancient scriptures the aim of life is to realise the Supreme, to dive deep into its light and bliss. However, in spite of this conviction, the world as such was not treated by them as having a significance of its own.

The position of the Vedanta, which is based on these scriptures, is already discussed above. But in the Tantra discipline we find a departure from this position and a deliberate attempt is made to use the nature, which is considered as an entity that hinders spiritual life, as a means of spiritual growth of man. This conscious recognition of a new dimension of the working of the nature paved the
way to modify its traditional conception, but still its value remained confined to its being merely a means of liberation.

Here a reference is made to the experience of what they call ‘descent’, to show the realistic drift of the Tantras. But even this descent has only a limited scope. The kundalini passing through the six centres of the inner being of man when reaches the highest one, sahasrara - the centre of the thousand petal lotus, and the communion of the individual Self – Jiva and the Supreme Self - Shiva is achieved, the nectar that flows as a result of this communion and sprinkled as it were, in the heart centre is described by the Tantras as descent. This descent only enables man to enjoy the supreme bliss, but it is not meant to enable him to play his role and lead the world to its destiny. Thus Realism of Tantras also does not bestow any significance to the world as such.

The traditional thought in India, in spite of its realistic leanings here and there, basically remained supramundane in nature and considered liberation as the final goal. But, as the analysis presented above shows, the very concept of liberation not only points to the necessity of going beyond it - to the higher goal, for the realisation of which liberation might be a necessary condition, but also to the necessity and possibility of a collaboration of the self and the nature even in the pursuit of liberation. This dissolves the idea of fundamental opposition between the two and thereby opens a way for the formulation of a wider concept of Reality. And a nucleus of such a formulation is found in the synthesis of vidya and avidya in Ishopanishad. This nucleus subsequently developed to its fuller expanse in the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo.

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For Sri Aurobindo Ignorance - avidya is the lower movement of knowledge - vidya, which although not conscious of its value and function in the order of existence, moves in the manner and direction that is in consonance with the Supreme Truth. And, according to him, the entity known as nature in traditional thought is only the lower nature - apara prakriti. Besides it there is a higher nature – Para Prakriti too, which is the creative power – Chitshakti of the Supreme that creates and controls the world and guides it to its destination. It is because this lower nature was conceived independently of the higher nature that it was found to be opposed to the self in Indian thought.
This understanding of the place and role of the ignorance and the lower nature in relation to the manifesting Truth, known to the Vedic Sages as Ritam, paved the way to the integration of the Supreme and the world.

According to Sri Aurobindo, there are three terms of existence: the Individual, the Universal and the Transcendent or the Supreme. The Supreme is the highest term which needs to be realised and then to be fully manifested in the world. The Individual and the Universal are the relative terms, which are supposed to be instrumental to this realisation and manifestation.

A special relationship, therefore, needs to be developed between these terms through which on one hand the growth and development of the individual is facilitated and on the other a consciousness of the universal grows, and finally both the individual and the universal become perfect media of the manifestation of Supreme here on the earth. They are eventually divinised.

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There seems to be, then, a direct relationship between the Supreme and the world. The Supreme has moved to manifest its Truth in and through the world, in the process of which life has developed out of matter and mind out of life, and the matter is being continuously transformed so as to acquire potency for the expression of the increasingly wider and higher consciousness. This process does not stop at the level of the mind because it does not fully receive and reflect the light and power of the highest consciousness, nor does it succeed in establishing a harmony in the existence that has evolved so far.

Mind does attempt to bring harmony, but in all its efforts discords invariably creep in. This indicates that it is not the final term of evolution, and that the process must continue and the states higher to mind must evolve. The present crisis of life also is indicative of the necessity of this departure in evolution. This process has reached a critical stage when the world has to surpass the unconscious or semi-conscious stage of its existence, it has to go beyond ignorance and enter in the field of knowledge, where the development would become a conscious process aiming at the creation of the Divine Life on the earth, the creation of New Life and a New Society.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the existence is divided into lower and higher hemispheres, with an intermediate plane connecting the two. This plane possesses the power to transform the lower existence. It is described in the
Upanishads and Puranas as 'Maharloka or Vijnanamaya Loka, which is known by Sri Aurobindo as the Supramental Plane. But since the real significance of this plane was not realised in the past, and the Vijnanamaya Kosha' of the Taittiriya Upanishad, which is really the Supermind, was understood in the sense as it were an extension of the manomaya kosha or mind, there arose the idea of fundamental opposition between the lower and higher existences, and the consequent need of renunciation of the lower for the achievement of the higher, instead of fulfilment of the lower in the higher.

This Supermind is of the central significance in the scheme of reality envisaged by Sri Aurobindo, in view of which the world process is described as the Yoga for the Advent and Manifestation of the Supermind, through which the world could be eventually transformed and divinised. This transformation or divinisation is beyond the powers of the mind and needs the intervention and activation of the Supermind. This, then, appears to be the condition on the fulfilment of which there would be ushered the dawn of the everlasting day, and as announced by Sri Aurobindo in his epic Savitri, "All earth shall be the Spirit's manifest Home".