

‘Aurobindo’s Integralism:
Study of Religion and the Hermeneutics of Tradition’

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ABSTRACT

This thesis, as an enquiry into the integral philosophy of Aurobindo and its contemporary relevance, offers a reading of Aurobindo’s key texts by bringing them into conversation with religious studies and the hermeneutical traditions. The central argument advanced is that Aurobindo’s integral philosophy is best understood as hermeneutical philosophy of religion. Such an understanding of his philosophy, offering both substantive and methodological insights for the academic study of religion, subdivides into three interrelated aims: first, to demonstrate that the power of the Aurobindonian vision lies in its self-conception as a traditionary-hermeneutical enquiry into religion. Here, I argue that the structure of the Aurobindonian enquiry into religion reveals a traditionary-hermeneutical enquiry. Secondly, I aim to draw substantive insights from Aurobindo’s enquiry to envision a way beyond the impasse within the current religious-secular debate in the academic study of religion. Working out of the condition of secularism, the dominant secularists demand the abandonment of the category ‘religion’ and the dismantling of the academic discipline of religious studies. Aurobindo’s integral work on ‘religion’, arising out of the Vedānta tradition, critiques the condition of secularism that undergirds the religious-secular debate. His three key texts – *The Life Divine*, *The Human Cycle*, and *The Synthesis of Yoga* on metaphysics, history, and yoga respectively – while building up an integral philosophy, can be used to contribute to different aspects of this debate. Finally, informed by the hermeneutical tradition and building on the methodological insights from Aurobindo's integral method, I explore a hermeneutical approach for the study of religion which is dialogical in nature. The pursuit of this threefold aim develops my central argument through the following chapters.