Chapter Two

Intellect and the Intellectual

Limitations of the Intellect

Intellect is part of Mind and an instrument of half-truth like the rest of the Mind.

Intellectual activities are not part of the inner being — the intellect is the outer mind.

Its [the intellect's] function is to reason from the perceptions of the mind and senses, to form conclusions and to put things in logical relation with each other. A well-trained intellect is a good preparation of the mind for greater knowledge, but it cannot itself give the Yogic knowledge or know the Divine — it can only have ideas about the Divine, but having ideas is not knowledge. In the course of the sadhana intellect has to be transformed into the higher mind which is itself a passage towards the true knowledge.

It is no use trying to decide the things of the Spirit by the power and in the light of the intellect. The intellect can only reason and infer and its reasonings are partial and its inferences vitiated by error. One has to awaken the divinations in the soul, the psychic being, and wait for a higher knowledge which comes from above.

It is not safe to listen to or be influenced by the mental of other sadhaks. The Yoga aims at union with the Divine which will bring a spiritual oneness with other sadhaks, but a oneness in the Divine, in the Truth, not in the ignorance of the mind and the vital.
It is not by intellect that one can progress in the Yoga, but by psychic and spiritual receptivity—as for knowledge and true understanding it grows in sadhana by the growth of the intuition, not of the physical intellect.

* The intellect can be as great an obstacle as the vital when it chooses to prefer its own constructions to the Truth.

* What you have said is perfectly right. To see the Truth does not depend on a big intellect or a small intellect. It depends on being in contact with the Truth and the mind silent or quiet to receive it. The biggest intellects can make errors of the worst kind and confuse Truth and falsehood, if they have not the contact with Truth or the direct experience.

* The intellect of most men is extremely imperfect, ill trained, half developed—therefore in most the conclusions of the intellect are hasty, ill founded and erroneous or, if right, right more by chance than by merit or right working. The conclusions are formed without knowing the facts or the correct or sufficient data, merely by a rapid inference and the process by which it comes from the premisses to the conclusion is usually illogical or faulty—the process being unsound by which the conclusion is arrived at, the conclusion also is likely to be fallacious. At the same time the intellect is usually arrogant and presumptuous, confidently asserting its imperfect conclusions as the truth and setting down as mistaken, stupid or foolish those who differ from them. Even when fully trained and developed, the intellect cannot arrive at absolute certitude or complete truth, but it can arrive at one aspect or side of it and make a reasonable or probable affirmation; but untrained, it is a quite insufficient instrument, at once hasty and peremptory and unsafe and unreliable.

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Intellectual statements about these things do not lead very far, for the basis of true statement is a consciousness which sees things not as the mind sees them but with a direct inner view, and unless one enters into that consciousness itself, it is difficult really to understand the intellectual statement. It is by sadhana only that one can enter into that consciousness in which one sees the divine reality behind things.

*The point is that people take no trouble to see whether their intellect is giving them right thoughts, right conclusions, right views on things and persons, right indications about their conduct or course of action. They have their idea and accept it as truth or follow it simply because it is their idea. Even when they recognise that they have made mistakes of the mind, they do not consider it of any importance nor do they try to be more careful mentally than before. In the vital field people know that they must not follow their desires or impulses without check or control, they know that they ought to have a conscience or a moral sense which discriminates what they can or should do and what they cannot or should not do; in the field of intellect no such care is taken. Men are supposed to follow their intellect, to have and assert their own ideas right or wrong without any control; the intellect, it is said, is man’s highest instrument and he must think and act according to its ideas. But this is not true; the intellect needs an inner light to guide, check and control it quite as much as the vital. There is something above the intellect which one has to discover and the intellect should be only an intermediary for the action of that source of true Knowledge.*

*There is no reason why one should not receive through the thinking mind, as one receives through the vital, the emotional and the body. The thinking mind is as capable of receiving as these are, and, since it has to be transformed as well as the rest, it must be trained to receive, otherwise no transformation of it could take place.*
It is the ordinary unenlightened activity of the intellect that is an obstacle to spiritual experience, just as the ordinary unregenerated activity of the vital or the obscure stupidly obstructive consciousness of the body is an obstacle. What the sadhak has to be specially warned against in the wrong processes of the intellect is, first, any mistaking of mental ideas and impressions or intellectual conclusions for realisation; secondly, the restless activity of the mere mind, caṅcalam manah, which disturbs the spontaneous accuracy of psychic and spiritual experience and gives no room for the descent of the true illuminating knowledge or else deforms it as soon as it touches or even before it fully touches the human mental plane. There are also of course the usual vices of the intellect, — its leaning towards sterile doubt instead of luminous reception and calm enlightened discrimination; its arrogance claiming to judge things that are beyond it, unknown to it, too deep for it by standards drawn from its own limited experience; its attempts to explain the supraphysical by the physical or its demand for the proof of higher and occult things by the criterions proper to Matter and to mind in Matter; others also too many to enumerate here. Always it is substituting its own representations and constructions and opinions for the true knowledge. But if the intellect is surrendered, open, quiet, receptive, there is no reason why it should not be a means of reception of the light or an aid to the experience of spiritual states and to the fullness of an inner change.

The Intellect, the Pure Reason and Knowledge

The intellect is made up of imaginations, perceptions, inferences. The pure reason is quite another thing, but only a few are able to use it. As for knowledge, — in Yoga it comes first from the higher mind, but even that does not see the whole Truth, only sides of it.

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Pure reason deals with things in themselves, ideas, concepts, the essential nature of things. It lives in the world of ideas. It is
philosophic and metaphysical in its nature.

**Intelllect, Intellectual and Intelligence**

All depends on the meaning you attach to words used — it is a matter of nomenclature. Ordinarily one says a man has intellect if he can think well — the nature and process and field of the thought do not matter. If you take intellect in that sense, then you can say that intellect has different strata and Ford belongs to one stratum of intellect, Einstein to another — Ford has a practical and executive business intellect, Einstein a scientific discovering and theorising intellect. But Ford too in his own field theorises, invents, discovers. Yet would you call Ford an intellectual or a man of intellect? I would prefer to use for the general faculty of mind the word intelligence. Ford has a great and forceful practical intelligence, keen, quick, successful, dynamic. He has a brain that can deal with thoughts also, but even there his drive is towards practicality. He believes in rebirth (metempsychosis), for instance, not for any philosophic reason, but because it explains life as a school of experience in which one gathers more and more experience and develops by it. Einstein has on the other hand a great discovering scientific intellect, not like Marconi a powerful practical inventive intelligence for the application of scientific discovery. All men have of course an “intellect” of a kind, all for instance can discuss and debate (for which you say rightly intellect is needed); but it is only when one rises to the realm of ideas and moves freely in it that you say, “This man has an intellect.” Address an assembly of peasants, you will find if you give them scope that they can put to you points and questions which may often leave the parliamentary debater panting. But we are content to say that these peasants have much practical intelligence.

The power to discuss and debate is, as I say, a common human faculty — and habit. Perhaps it is here that man begins to diverge from the animal; for animals have much intelligence — many animals and even insects — even some rudimentary power of practical reasoning, but so far as we know, they don’t meet
and put their ideas about things side by side or sling them at each other in a debate, as even the most ignorant human can do and very animatedly does. There too is the beginning of intellect — for the reasons you allege. Also for the reason that it is a common faculty of the race, it can be specialised, so much so that a man whom it is dangerous to cross in debate in the field of literature or of science or of philosophy may yet make a fool of himself and wallow contentedly in a quagmire of blunders and fallacies if he discusses politics or economy or, let us say, spirituality or Yoga. His only salvation is the blissful depth of his ignorance which prevents him from seeing what a mess he has made. Again a man may be a keen legal or political debater, — the two very commonly go together, — yet no intellectual. I admit that a man must have some logical intellect to debate well. But after all the object of debate is to win, to make your point and you may do that even if your point is false; success, not truth, is the aim of debate. So I admit what you say, but with reservations.

I agree also that labels are unsatisfactory — even when applied to less developed persons; what we really do is to pick out something prominent and label with that as if it were all the person. But classification is impossible without that and man’s intellect is driven always to classify, fix distinctions, set apart with a label. The philosophers have pointed out that Science does that too rigidly and in doing so cuts falsely across the truth of Nature. But if we don’t do that, we can’t have any Science.

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X asked me the question and I answered it on the basis of the current meaning of “intellect” and “intellectual”. People in ordinary speech do not make any distinction between intellect and intelligence, though of course it is quite true that a man may have a good or even a fine intelligence without being an intellectual. But ordinarily all thinking is attributed to the “intellect”; an intellectual therefore is a man whose main business or activity it is to think about things — a philosopher, a poet, a

1 Perhaps the crows do in the “Crow Parliament” sometimes?
scientist, a critic of art and literature or of life, are all classed together as intellectuals. A theorist on economy and politics is an intellectual, a politician or a financier is not, unless he theorises on his own subject or is a thinker on another.

Y's distinction is based on those I have made here, but these distinctions are not current in ordinary speech, except one or two and those even in a very imperfect way. If I go by these distinctions, then the intellectuals will no longer be called intellectuals but thinkers and creators — except a certain class of them. An intellectual or intellectual thinker will then be one who is a thinker by his reason or mainly by his reason — e.g. Bertrand Russell, Bernard Shaw, Wells etc. Tagore thinks by vision, imagination, feeling or by intuition, not by the reason — at least that is true of his writings. C.R. Das himself would not be an intellectual; in politics, literature and everything else he was an “intuitive” and “emotive” man. But, as I say, these would be distinctions not ordinarily current. In ordinary parlance Tagore, Das and everybody else of the kind would all be called intellectuals. The general mind does not make these subtle distinctions: it takes things in the mass, roughly and it is right in doing so, for otherwise it would lose itself altogether.

As for barristers etc., a man to succeed as a barrister must have legal knowledge and the power to apply it. It is not necessary that he should be a thinker even in his own subject or an intellectual. It is the same with all professional men — doctors, engineers etc. etc.: they may be intellectuals as well as successful in their profession, but they need not be.

P. S. Argument properly speaking needs some power of logical intellect; but it can be specialised in a certain line. The power of arguing does not by itself make a man an intellectual.

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X's main grievance with respect to the intellectuals is that he is cut off from all discussion of mental things and mental stimulus and so his mental energies are becoming atrophied. But a man who has a mental life ought surely not to be dependent on others for it, since that life is found within — there ought to be springs
within that flow by their own force.

The Intellectual Man and the Emotional Man

If the intellectual [man] will always have a greater wideness and vastness [than the emotional man], how can we be sure that he will have an equal fervour, depth and sweetness with the emotional man?

It may be that homo intellectualis will remain wider and homo psychicus will remain deeper in heart.

Please do not confuse the higher knowledge and mental knowledge. The intellectual man will be able to give a wider and more orderly expression to what higher knowledge he gets than the homo psychicus; but it does not follow he will have more of it. He will have that only if he rises to an equal width and plasticity and comprehensiveness of the higher knowledge planes. In that case he will replace his mental by his above-mental capacity. But for many intellectuals, so-called, their intellectuality may be a stumbling block as they bind themselves with mental conceptions or stifle the psychic fire under the heavy weight of rational thought. On the other hand I have seen comparatively uneducated people expressing higher knowledge with an astonishing fullness and depth and accuracy which the stumbling movements of their brain could never have allowed one to suppose possible. Therefore why fix beforehand by the mind what will or will not be possible when the Above-mind reigns? What the mind conceives as “must be” need not be the measure of the “will be”. Such and such a homo intellectualis may turn out to be a more fervent God-lover than the effervescent emotional man; such and such an emotionalist may receive and express a wider knowledge than his intellect or even the intellect of the intellectual man could have harboured or organised. Let us not bind the phenomena of the higher consciousness by the possibilities and probabilities of a lower plane.

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An unintellectual mind cannot bring down the Knowledge? What then about Ramakrishna? Do you mean to say that the majority of the sadhaks here who have not learned logic and are ignorant of philosophy will never get Knowledge?

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Ramakrishna was an uneducated, nonintellectual man, yet his expression of knowledge was so perfect that the biggest intellects bowed down before it.