

Śraddhā

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The Mother and Sri Aurobindo*

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श्रद्धां लब्ध्वा

Śraddhāvāṁl labhate jñanam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

Editorial

November is a momentous month for us, children of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

24 November : This was the day more than eight decades ago when Sri Aurobindo received in his body, into his physical nature and consciousness the descent of the Anandamaya Krishna, the Overmind Godhead preparing the descent of Supermind and Ananda. That would make possible the descent of the Supermind into matter and make it fully conscious. From this time onwards Sri Aurobindo went into retirement and till he left his body in 1950, he was constantly ascending the different planes of the Supermind and trying to bring down the supreme 'Wisdom-Power-Light-Bliss' and fix it in this earth, into matter, in his own body. This he accomplished when he left his body. The lifeless body was 'charged with ...a concentration of Supramental Light' and the Supramental Knowledge-Power shed a luminous mantle of bluish golden hue around him.

As Nolini Kanta Gupta narrates so wonderfully with his usual rare depth and insight in the chapter on Pondicherry I in his 'Reminiscences'. During the Mother's short stay in Pondicherry in 1914, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother laid down clear plans for the shape their New Creation was to take. Till 1920 Sri Aurobindo was engaged in providing a solid, firm and granite base to this work. After the Mother's final arrival in April 1920 till his retirement post-November 1926, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were busy testing this foundation to make sure that it would be capable of bearing the future load. The next twelve years were concentrated on constructing the superstructure and installing the presiding Deity there. Sri Aurobindo spent the final 12 years of

his earthly life in making this Presence permanent. "All that Sri Aurobindo had wanted to do with his body was to install permanently in an earthly form the Mother Divine."

17 November, 1973 : Twenty three years later, this too was the month when The Mother withdrew from her physical body. We, her children, now feel orphaned and clueless. So long her physical body was there to act as a buffer to protect us from the many shocks that our being is heir to; it was there to break and resist the force of the impact of our karma and thereby reduced the ill effects to a minimum. What do we do then? Sit back and despair? To lift us out of our stupor and show us the way towards Light and hope, let us read what Nolini Kanta Gupta has to say in the few memorable pieces on the significance of the Mother's passing, included in this number.

Starting with this issue of **Sraddha**, we intend to begin each subsequent number with some writing by Sri Aurobindo and/or the Mother. This is a very humble way of offering our Sraddha to the Dual Avatar. Space permitting, there is also a proposal to reproduce some of the 'golden oldies', essays of extraordinary depth and insight written by authors of eminence, most of whom are no more living. These priceless treasures secreted in the age-old vaults of the Advent, Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual, Mother India, Srinwantu, Sri Aurobindo Circle, etc. need to be dug out and their authentic and authoritative views made known to a wider audience, especially among readers of this generation and those who wish to make a serious study of Sri Aurobindo.

We are particularly grateful to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust for permission to reproduce the photograph of Sri Aurobindo, the short quotation from the Mother's *Prayers and Meditations* appended to the photograph, a translation of Sri Aurobindo's Bengali writing on 'The Dharma of the Gita' and the few short pieces of Nolini Kanta Gupta from vol.5 of his Collected Works. Our grateful thanks to Dhanavanti for kindly allowing us to use her exquisite painting 'Rainbow Rhythm' on the cover of the journal. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are reproduced here with acknowledgements and thanks to the Trustees.

The Dharma of The Gita

Sri Aurobindo

This question may arise in the minds of those who have carefully studied the Gita, that though Sri Krishna has repeatedly used the word ‘Yoga’ and described the state of being in yoga, union, yet this is quite unlike what ordinary people understand as ‘yoga’. Sri Krishna has at places praised asceticism and indicated too that the highest liberation can come through the adoration of the Impersonal Divine. But dismissing the subject in a few words, He has explained to Arjuna in the finest portions of the Gita the majesty of the inner renunciation and the various ways of attaining to the supreme state through faith and self-surrender to Vasudeva. There is a brief description of Rajayoga in the sixth chapter but the Gita cannot properly be called a treatise on Rajayoga. Equality, detachment, renunciation of the fruits of work, complete self-surrender to Krishna, desireless work, freedom from the bondage of the three essential modes of Nature and pursuit of one’s own law of works: these are the fundamental truths of the Gita. The Lord has glorified these precepts as the highest knowledge and the most secret mystery.

It is our belief that the Gita will become the universally acknowledged Scripture of the future religion. But the real meaning of the Gita has not been understood by all. Even the great scholars and the most intelligent writers with the keenest minds are unable to seize its profound significance. On the one hand, the commentators with a leaning towards liberation have shown the grandeur of the Monism and asceticism in the Gita; on the other hand, Bankimchandra, well-versed in western philosophy, finding in the Gita the counsel to carry out heroically one’s duty, tried to inculcate this meaning into the minds of youth. Asceticism is, no doubt, the best dharma but very few people can practise it. A religion to be universally acknowledged must have an ideal and precepts which everyone can realise in his own particular life and field of work, yet which if practised fully must lead him to the highest

goal otherwise available only to a few. To carry out one’s duty heroically is, of course, the highest dharma, but what is duty? There is such a controversy between religion and ethics regarding this complex problem. The Lord has said, *gahana karmaṇo gatiḥ*, ‘thick and tangled is the way of works’. ‘Even the wise are perplexed to decide what is duty, what is not duty, what is work, what is not work and what is wrong work, but I shall give you such a knowledge that you will have no difficulty in finding the path to follow’, in a word, the knowledge which will amply explain the aim of life and the law which has to be always observed. What is this knowledge? Where can we find this word of words? We believe that, if we look for this rare and invaluable treasure, we shall find it in the last chapter of the Gita where the Lord promises to reveal to Arjuna His most secret and supreme Word.

What is that most secret and supreme Word?

Manmanā bhava madbhakto madyājī māṁ namaskuru
Mamevaisyasi satyam te pratijāne priyo’si me
Sarvadharmān parityajya māmekam śaraṇam vraja
Ahaṁ tvām sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ.

(Become My-minded, My lover and adorer, a sacrificer to Me, bow thyself to Me, to Me thou shalt come, this is My pledge and promise to thee, for dear art thou to Me. Abandon all dharmas and take refuge in Me alone. I will deliver thee from all sin and evil, do not grieve).

In brief, the meaning of these two slokas is self-surrender. To the extent that one can make his surrender to Krishna, the Divine Force comes down into his body by the grace of the All-merciful, delivering him from sin and conferring on him a divine nature. This self-surrender has been described in the first half of the sloka. One has to be *tanmanā*, *tadbhakta*, and *tadyājī*. *Tanmanā* means to see Him in every being, to remember Him at all times, to remain in perfect felicity, being aware of the play of His power, knowledge and love in all works and events. *Tadbhakta* signifies union with Him founded on an entire faith and love. *Tadyājī* means offering of all works big and small as a sacrifice to Krishna and being engaged in doing rightly regulated action to that end, by giving up egoistic interests and the fruits of work.

It is difficult for a human being to make a complete self-surrender, but if he makes even a little effort then God Himself gives him assurance, becomes his guru, protector and friend and leads him forward on the path of Yoga.

Svalpamapyasya dharmasya trayāte mahato bhayāt. Even a little of this dharma delivers one from the great fear. He has said that it is easy and delightful to practise this dharma. And in fact it is so, yet the result of this total consecration is an inexpressible joy, purity and acquisition of power. *Māmevaiṣyasi* (to Me thou shalt come) means the human being will find Me, will live with Me, will acquire My nature. In these words the realisations of *sādrśya*, God-nature, *sālokya*, living with God, and *sāyujya*, identification with God are mentioned.

One who is free from the bondage of the three essential modes of Nature has indeed acquired *sādrśya*, the nature of God. He has no attachment yet he works; delivered from all sin, he becomes an instrument of Mahashakti and delights in every action of that Power. *Sālokya*, habitation with God, can be realised not only in the Brahmaloaka, abode of the Brahman, after the fall of the body but in this very body. When the embodied being plays with the Lord in his heart, when his mind is thrilled by the knowledge coming from Him, when the intellect constantly hears His words and is conscious of his impulsion in each of his thoughts, this indeed is living in a human body with the Lord. *Sāyujya*, the identification with the Lord, can also be achieved in this body. The Gita mentions ‘living in the Lord’. When the realisation of the Divine in all beings becomes permanent, when the senses see, hear, smell, taste and touch Him only, when the being becomes accustomed to live in him as a portion, then there can be the identification even in this body. But this consummation is entirely the result of an askesis (practice of discipline).

However, even a little practice of this dharma gives great power, unalloyed joy, complete happiness and purity. This dharma has not been created only for people with special qualities. The Lord has said that the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya, the Sudra, man, woman and all beings of inferior birth can come to Him by adhering to this dharma. Even the greatest sinner, if he takes refuge in Him, is quickly purified. Therefore, everyone ought to follow this dharma. In the temple of Jagannath no distinction is made on account of caste. Yet the crowning glory attained through this dharma is in no way less than the supreme state indicated in other religions.

Sri Aurobindo

Arabinda Basu

The appreciation of greatness by us adds nothing to it, on the contrary it is only a proof of our ability to appreciate. To be open and clear in our understanding, to have the proper sense of values, to be attracted by the compelling force of greatness, all this does credit to us instead of increasing the lustre of one who is great. If in addition to appreciating greatness, we follow the precept of Sri Krishna in the Gita, recognise that behind all forms of it is the power of the Divine, gratitude is the only natural sentiment that we should feel. And when we come face to face with such extraordinary greatness as is directly a manifestation of the divine Wisdom, Power and Sweetness, there is every reason to be filled with wonder and to be supremely grateful. For gratitude cleanses the heart, prepares the aspirant for the steep and arduous ascent to the peaks of Truth. If we would climb the Himalayas of the Soul, we must free ourselves of the burden of our unregenerative nature, and to pay homage to the great ones is one of the potent means of achieving that purpose. This brief article is written as a tribute to Sri Aurobindo on the occasion of the anniversary of his *siddhi* which falls in this month.

To many even in India Sri Aurobindo is a mystery. Many have great appreciation for his genius, others genuine admiration for his brief but powerful and pioneer political work and leadership. But very few know, far less understand, what he is doing now. There is a negligible minority which thinks that Sri Aurobindo’s life has been valueless. But much attention need not be paid to this class of detractors because a statesman whom the great journalist Henry Nevinson considered the wisest among India’s political leaders, a poet whom the poet-critic James Cousins has welcomed as a new voice in English poetry successfully blending the mysticism of the East with the vigour of the

This is a translation of the essay ‘Gitar Dharma’, originally written in Bengali and published first in the Weekly Review, *Dharma*. No. 2, August 1909.

West, a metaphysical writer whose work ‘The Life Divine’ was admired by Sir Francis Younghusband as the greatest book produced in his times, a prophet who was hailed by Romain Rolland as the greatest synthesis of the genius of the East and the genius of the West that has been realised to this day, a seer to whom Rabindranath Tagore said that the country was waiting to hear the word from him and through whom the poet expected India would speak to the world : ‘Hearken unto me’, a teacher in whose teaching thousands of weary souls all over the world are finding their way to dynamic self-discovery – such a person can be summarily rejected only by people who have colossal ignorance of the right political, cultural and spiritual values.

But those who admire and revere Sri Aurobindo may be interested to know that the master is seeking to evolve a new principle and power of life in the world through the instrumentality of which ‘Heaven would grow native in mortal soil’. There is increasing recognition of the dismal fact that in spite of Browning’s robust optimism all is not well with the world. Thinkers and poets, artists and scientists, even politicians and pundits of Economics, are at a loss to know where lies the way out of the mad-house that the world is today. All kinds of avenues are being suggested – economic, political, educational and cultural – but none seems to be the right one. Sri Aurobindo says that while these external efforts have to be made because the total perfection of man should and will include the realisation of these values, the true way lies somewhere else. Having the yogic view of the world and life, he considers that something is basically wrong with the very constitution of our consciousness. What is fundamentally responsible for the confusion and turmoil in the world is ourselves. We change, the world also changes, we transform ourselves, life in the world is also transformed. Sri Aurobindo traces the present nature of our life to its leadership by mental knowledge and energy. But mental knowledge is another name for ignorance; not being self-conscious, it does not know its origin or its destiny. And since true consciousness is also Force and Power, mental energy is also lame and limping and not sovereign. The mind with its brilliant array of sensory and intellectual powers has not got the key to the mystery of our existence and life. Nor has it got the capacity to fashion it after a harmonious pattern. The reason is that the world is not

a manifestation of mental intelligence and energy. “Mind is not sufficient to explain existence in the universe”, says Sri Aurobindo, “For mind is that which does not know, which tries to know and which never knows except as in a glass darkly... it is not the power which knows and guides that existence and therefore it cannot be the power which created or manifested it”¹. The world is, in truth, says Sri Aurobindo, a manifestation of the Divine through some faculty of his being which is both perfect knowledge and supreme power. It is only through the overt leadership of this Knowledge-Will that life in it can be transformed. “... the new world whose coming we envisage is not to be made of the same texture as the old and different only in pattern,... it must come by other means, from within and not from without...”². And again, “It is then by a transformation of life in its very principle, not by an external manipulation of its phenomena, that the integral yoga proposes to change it from a troubled and ignorant into a luminous and harmonious movement of Nature”³.

It should be noted, however, that the redress of earthly ills is not Sri Aurobindo’s prime concern, that his ideal is not humanistic. “My Yoga is not for humanity but for the Divine”, he has declared categorically. Sri Aurobindo lives and labours neither for his society, nor for his country, not even for humanity, all his loyalty and love is to and for the Eternal, the Brahman, the Divine. Only the Divine, as integrally realised by Sri Aurobindo, is the Transcendent Reality which cannot be completely described either negatively or positively. For, as Spinoza said, all determination is negation. For Sri Aurobindo the Divine is the all-embracing, yet all-exceeding reality, which baffles all attempts at full description. Consequently though Sri Aurobindo accepts all the formulations of Reality given by the different systems of Spiritual Yoga, he does not consider any of them as complete and final. Reality is not only the differenceless Identity but also the constitutive unity of all apparent differences, not only the featureless, qualityless, static and silent Experience but also the ultimate source, material, ordainer and Experiencer of all features, qualities and dynamism. Thus Brahman is One that is always Many, and yet neither One nor Many. For beyond mental man’s experience of Reality as one existence, *ekam sat*, is that of *Asat* or *Sunya*, Non-existence

or Void. This is the highest realisation that the spiritualised mind of man can attain and the word *Asat* is used because even *Sat*, the ultimate term that the mind can apply to Reality, seems inapplicable. “The mind spiritualises itself by shedding all its own activities and formations and reducing everything to a pure Existence, *Sad-Atman*, from which all things and activities proceed and which supports everything. When it wants to go still beyond, it negates yet further and arrives at an *Asat*, which is the negation of all this existence and yet something inconceivable to mind, speech or defining experience”⁴. The most famous description of Reality in India is perhaps Sat-Chit-Ananda, the shortest yet the completest positive description. The Chit in this metaphysical formula means Chit-Shakti, Consciousness-Force, the own-Nature of the Divine ⁵, which has become the world and everything in it. The play or sport of Chit-Shakti is Delight or Ananda, from which everything is born. *Asat* represents the Divine’s perfect freedom and dissociation from the play of its self-force, it is the status of Reality even beyond that of Sat and Chit-Shakti, which, however, are only two aspects of the self-same Reality. As Sri Aurobindo the poet has sung of Parabrahman:

He is, we cannot say; for Nothing too
 Is His conception of Himself unguessed.
 He dawns upon us and we would pursue,
 But who has found Him or what arms possessed?

 Within Himself He shadowed Being forth,
 Which is a younger birth, a veil He chose
 To half-conceal Him, Knowledge, nothing worth
 Save to have glimpses of its mighty cause,
 And high Delight, a spirit infinite,
 That is the fountain of this glorious world,
 Delight that labours in its opposite,
 Faints in the rose and on the rack is curled.⁶

Reality is the negation of the play of its force of which it is also the unattached witness and Lord and Master, the Ishwara. Impersonal in itself, Reality is the base and support of the Divine Person and also of all relations of personalities, and though Formless, it yet takes form in everything and the universe itself is an image of the Divine. Non-existence in its highest status means where the idea and experience of Self also vanish, Reality is the eternal assertion of itself as the ‘I’ or Atman which supports and sanctions the cosmic play. This is how Sri Aurobindo has realised the Divine and it is not possible for the Mind, however much infused with the spiritual light and intuition, to comprehend all these aspects of the Divine because it lacks the integral vision. How can the Divine be all this is realised only by what Sri Aurobindo calls the Supermind. For it is the Divine alone who can know him in all his aspects and the Supermind is the Divine’s own Knowledge of himself. That is why to realise the Divine through the Supermind is the one aim of Sri Aurobindo’s integral Yoga.

But the Supermind is not only the Divine’s own knowledge of himself but also his own native power of acting, it is not only Wisdom but also Will. That is why the supramental realisation of the Divine is also simultaneously his revelation. Because the Divine is not only the Unmanifest but also the process and product of manifestation, both beyond and in this world, his integral, that is the supramental, realisation will also reveal him in life in the world. Being absolute knowledge and power, the Supermind will change the face of human existence and life in such a radical manner that verily it will be a real transformation. Delight which is the foundation of this glorious world will also be its brick and cement and mortar, and harmonise men in the life divine. “By this Yoga we not only seek the Infinite, but we call upon the Infinite to unfold himself in human life”⁷. It is this new life that Sri Aurobindo is seeking, not for himself or for humanity as such, but because the Divine wills it. “It is a higher truth I seek, whether it makes men greater or not is not the question, but whether it will give them truth and peace and light to live in and make life something better than a struggle with ignorance and falsehood and pain and strife...It is a question between the Divine and myself – whether it is the Divine Will or not, whether I am sent to bring that down or open the way for its descent or at least make it more possible or not”⁸.

We have said that the supreme Divine is both the static and the dynamic Brahman. The dynamic Brahman as Consciousness-Force is the divine Maya, the Devi Maya of the Vedas, which measures the immeasurable, informs the formless and embodies the Spirit. Through the divine Maya is effected the Divine's self- or de-limitation resulting in his self variation. The inherent possibilities inherent in the bosom of the Infinite are manifested as multiple centres of himself through de-limitation and self-individualisation. This is the original act of the divine conscious power and mentioned in the Upanishads in the passage : *Eko 'ham vahusyām prajāveva* – I am one, I shall be Many for the sake of creation. These centres of the Divine never lose their inherent sense of identity, so that in spite of distinction, there is no discord, in spite of variety there is no exclusion. And the original range of realities where the Divine's self-individualisation starts is the Supermind. This is the real-ideal world, the first product of the loosing forth, *Sṛṣṭi*, of Chit-Shakti, which though not the Divine in his absolute self-being, yet retains all the divine qualities like Unity, Knowledge, Power and Love pure and undiminished. Now this world of ours of ignorance and misery is a result of the involution, of progressive self-veiling of the Supermind. The living sense of identity recedes to the background as the self-veiling proceeds till it is lost in matter or the physical plane of existence and difference becomes the law of life. The Supermind involves itself till through Mind and Life it becomes Matter which is the immediate, but not the ultimate, source of this world and terrestrial life. Clash and conflict is the rule in matter and Nature red in tooth and claw is its mistress. This is the nature of the world, fundamentally a formation of consciousness, but phenomenally and actually the field of the play of the Mind , Life and Matter, of Manas, Prana and Anna, the field of ignorance, in which the centres of conscious being shut out the awareness of essential unity and indulge in exclusive self-concentration, each regarding itself as separate from the others, the totality and the essence. All that we suffer is a consequence of this black-out of the consciousness of the identity and unity of our own being and life with the being and life of the cosmos. This is Avidya, the fall of the Mind from Vidya, the Supermind, and “proceeds from the individualised soul viewing everything from its own standpoint and excluding all others; it proceeds, that

is to say, by an exclusive.... self-identification of the soul with a particular temporal and spatial action which is only a part of its own play of being; it starts from the soul's ignoring the fact that all others are also itself, all other action its own action and all other states of being and consciousness equally its own as well as the action of the one particular moment in Time and one particular standing-point in Space and the one particular form it presently occupies”⁹.

It is true that our world is immediately created by the mental Maya or ignorance. Maya is creative energy but the energy that has fashioned the world is not conscious nor is it absolute. Life in the world is not guided by the knowledge of Truth and also all its achievements are imperfect. “All that we do is ever still to do”, and not knowing the goal, we always journey but nowhere arrive. And even if Mind by a supreme effort can catch some distant gleam of Truth, life keeps to its human middle way and swings always between opposites. “Even if Mind is able to reflect some image of essential Truth in its substance, yet the dynamic force and action of Truth appears in it always broken and divided”¹⁰. That is why some heroic souls seek a permanent achievement not in but beyond the world, and because all power seems to be unconscious and therefore corrupt, they search after a realisation which is static and silent. In effect it means a realisation of the pure element, the spiritual stuff in us and through it, of the Reality. Whatever may be the form of that realisation, it leaves the mind, life and body – and these make up our world – to their unconscious working and impure dealings, a realisation certainly very high but also certainly very incomplete.

Ages of spiritual sadhana bear witness to the reality of this achievement. But that the world is a creation of misleading Maya does not prove that the issue is between a life in Ignorance and a high but static realisation. Since there is the dynamic aspect of the Divine, he must be realised in Power also. In fact there are systems of Yoga like the Gita's, the Shakta, Shaiva and the Vaishnava Yogas, which accept the dynamic realisation also as part of their aim. Accepting also the reality of the individual soul, these prefer a life of relation with the personal Divine to absorption in the Impersonal. But this life is possible only in the highest Heaven or in the Divine's own plane of existence.

For these Yogas also consider life in the Ignorance as incorrigibly dark, painful and futile. The possibility of the world's transformation, the special characteristic note of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, is not even thought of by them. But because Sri Aurobindo has seen the common substantiality of everything in spite of innumerable forms, and also because he knows that these innumerable forms are taken through the Supermind by the supreme Consciousness-Force deploying itself in various manner, he is categorical that Matter, *Jada*, can be transmuted into the luminous substance of the divine Spirit. And if Matter is capable of transmutation, certainly the vital, *Prāṇa*, and the Mind, *Manas*, the elements of our normal personality, can also be made perfect vessels of the splendours of the Spirit. The triple world of Mind, Life and Matter, the field of Ignorance, has to be the world of Knowledge. The world in which the Divine seems to have lost himself is intended to be the venue of his utter manifestation. Below Ignorance is the Inconscient, the field of total darkness and utter disunion. From Inconscient evolves Ignorance, which is seeking knowledge and broken power and straining after union. Now Ignorance will evolve into Knowledge and invincible Power and inalienable Unity. Its seeking after knowledge will be turned into puissant illumination, its broken power into sovereign Force, its straining after union into an accomplished harmony. "Life is the field of a divine manifestation not yet complete : here, in life, on earth, in the body, - *īhaiva*, as the Upanishads insist, - we have to unveil the Godhead; here we must make its transcendent greatness, light and sweetness real to our consciousness, here possess and, as far as may be, express it"¹¹.

We have said that the world of Mind, Life and Matter is an involution of the Supermind. Now involution is the precursor of Evolution, self-veiling is followed by self-revealing. Spirit sleeping and dormant in Matter asserts itself, consciousness in the lower involute aspires for a higher expression, and the derivations of the Supermind higher than Matter, namely Life and Mind, are manifested in it. The nîsus of evolution presses hard and Sri Aurobindo says that the time has come for the Supermind to manifest itself in Matter. With the Supermind manifest in the world, the secret power of its evolution will be overtly operative and will openly guide life in the world. The true origin

of the world is also its goal, even now it is secretly leading the world to its consummation. In the concluding chapter of "The Life Divine" published in the *Arya*, Sri Aurobindo wrote : "This light (The Supermind) is not something belonging only to another world and another plane of existence, it is secret in all the nescience of material Nature and the ignorance of Mind"¹². Now it is patent that when a higher quality emerges in a lower one, the latter undergoes a great change and behaves differently than when the former was not evolved. The response of the trunk of a tree, which is vitalised matter, to the woodcutter's axe is different from that of the inert matter of iron to the blacksmith's hammer. And the functioning of the human body is still more different from that of the tree because it is not only vitalised but also inhabited by Mind. When the Supermind is manifested, Matter will be purified of its dross and hard resistance, Life of its disturbed and senseless movement, Mind of its ignorance and imperfect potency. They will all receive and accept and express the divine light and law.

The Supermind has not yet overtly manifested itself in the world. The purpose of the Master's sadhana is to manifest the supramental Brahman by bringing down the Supermind from its high original plane of existence to the world of Mind, Life and Matter. Its two-fold object is to quicken the ascent of the Consciousness-Force secret in them and also the descent into them of the next higher evolute which is the Supermind. This simply means the manifestation of the Supermind in purified Matter, refined Life and illumined Mind in which it is already secretly working. When the descent is accomplished, the being of man and his threefold nature will be led by true knowledge and invincible energy. His life then will be a movement of unity expressing itself in diversity. Nothing will be abolished and it will be a life rich in relations but based on the intimate sense of oneness, because that is the very essence of the supramental consciousness. "...it is the very nature of the supramental experience that it can perpetuate the play of difference without forfeiting or in the least diminishing either the divine union or the infinite oneness"¹³.

The means of this transformation is a synthesis of Yoga which will enable man first to know his true being, then to realise all the diverse aspects of the Divine and also to gain mastery of the forces of life through a firm grasp of

the Supermind. The new Yoga accepts and absorbs in principle, if not in details, the essential elements of all the Yogas, integralises them into the sure foundation of a new development of the soul which is the possession of all the aspects of Brahman through the knowledge that he has of himself and then through its power, to build every lower derivation of that knowledge into its own pristine image. It synthetises knowledge of the Impersonal with the love of the personal Divine, adds to it the aim of converting our normal human nature into the divine nature and the mastery of the forces of the world and life with a view to using that mastery to do the Divine's Will in the world, crowning the whole movement by a victorious assault on the darkest citadel of present Nature, namely the physical, and bringing into its most secret recesses the purifying Force of the Supermind, even as Prometheus brought the fire from Heaven. And because the microcosm is really the macrocosm in miniature, because the worlds without are really the worlds within, this transformation will occur on a cosmic scale, even though it may start in one individual who makes himself fit to receive the Supermind even into his physical body. Those who will open themselves to the supramental influence will gradually become fit to hold it and thus become further centres of the transforming power's operation. In this way a society of supermen, who will be the leaders of evolution, will be established and will grow and common life in the world will be transformed because those who will live according to the supreme Light will themselves be transformed.

It needs to be mentioned here that man is not a complex of Mind, Life and Matter. Behind this frontal appearance is his true being which Sri Aurobindo calls the psyche. We have spoken of the self-individualisation of the Divine. This true individual is the real Self, the Unborn and Immutable Spirit of man. The Self is not involved in the world of Ignorance but sends down a ray as it were into it. This ray is the soul, which through a series of births and deaths reaches the human stage where it develops a physical, vital and mental human consciousness and a being of itself which is the psychic being. The psyche is immutable only in the sense that it does not change its basic spiritual nature, but not in the sense that it does not evolve. For it grows and evolves towards the Self through its various experiences in the world of Ignorance. It is the permanent stuff in man, his mind, life and body dissolving

after death. In its progression from life to life, the psychic supports the outer man's evolution from behind a veil, then at a particular stage it is able to openly guide human nature to a divine fulfilment. Sri Aurobindo has called the process psychicisation of our being and nature, and it is the psychicisation that the Yoga is intended to achieve first. Indeed the supramental transformation can take place only after man has fully accepted the guidance of the psyche in all his nature. "To merge the consciousness in the Divine and to keep the psychic being controlling and changing all the nature and keeping it turned to the Divine till the whole being can live in the Divine is the transformation we seek. There is further the supramentalisation, but this only carries the transformation to its own highest and largest possibilities – it does not alter its essential nature"¹⁴.

To the question when this transformation will take place, the obvious answer is that it cannot be said in our standards of time. For one thing, humanity itself is the medium of its evolution into super-humanity in the world. When the soul came down to the world of Ignorance, it did so not under compulsion but of conscious free choice. Freedom is the basis of creation and continues to be the motive force behind all progress and evolution. If man is not satisfied with his present existence of light covered by shadow, of pleasure baulked by pain and of life haunted by death, let him freely aspire after the life of Knowledge, Bliss and Immortality. That life is in the making "in the quarries of God" and is Nature's secret aim in the world. But still, as Vivekananda said, Yoga compresses 'one's evolution into a single life or a few years or even a few months of bodily existence'. We have said that Nature is in travail of the supramental life and Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is in essence a turning of Nature's tardy movement into a swift and conscious march towards the consummation; it is Nature's own Yoga done consciously and with deliberate aim. If man becomes the earnest sadhaka of this Yoga, it is beyond doubt that the realisation of this goal will be quickened. Sri Aurobindo says that the goal is decreed and inevitable. For though it is true that

Hard is it to persuade earth-nature's change;
Mortality bears ill the eternal's touch:
It fears the pure divine intolerance
Of that assault of ether and of fire;

It murmurs at its sorrowless happiness,
 Almost with hate repels the light it brings;
 It trembles at its naked power of Truth
 And the might and sweetness of its absolute Voice¹⁵.

Yet man is the chosen instrument of the new evolution and though his superficial consciousness may not know, deep within himself he is aspiring for it, indeed it is God in him that is aspiring, for the real Man is nothing but God come down to fulfil Himself on earth.

And how shall the end be in vain when God is guide?
 However man's mind may tire or fail his flesh,
 A will prevails cancelling his conscious choice:
 The goal recedes, a boundless vastness calls

... ..

An influx presses from the closed Beyond
 Forbidding to him rest and earthly ease,
 Till he has found himself he cannot pause.
 A Light there is that leads, a Power that aids;
 Unmarked, unfelt it sees in him and acts:
 Ignorant, he forms the All-conscient in his depths,
 Human, looks up to superhuman peaks:
 A borrower of Supernature's gold
 He paves his road to Immortality¹⁶.

If man chooses to pave his road to Immortality without leaving it to be done by ignorant Nature in her own good time, certainly the Divine will respond to his aspiration and the goal come nearer home. Let him pause and think and decide to become the Lord's instrument in the battle supreme against darkness and falsehood, pain and suffering, incapacity and death.

Meanwhile the very presence of the Master (and other spiritual mystics also) ought to make us supremely grateful to them, because it is they that hold together and preserve the worlds. The Mahabharata in a luminous line surcharged with high poetry and profound metaphysics says : *Lokā hi sarve tapasā dhriyante*, all the worlds are held together by spiritual energy (Adhyaya 101).

It is with reference to this doctrine which is not merely a theory that Krishna's exhortation regarding *Lokasamgraha* is to be understood. It is the seers and the saints who, as Sri Aurobindo says, "preserve the knowledge that preserves the world". Aldous Huxley strikes a similar note when he says that where there is no vision, the people perish, and if those that are the salt of the earth lose their savour, there is nothing to keep this earth disinfected, nothing to prevent it from falling into decay. The mystics are the channels through which the knowledge of reality filters down into our human universe of ignorance and illusion. A totally unmystical world would be a world totally blind and insane. The very presence of a mystic amongst us is wholesome and counterbalances the powers of destruction.

Sri Aurobindo is an undeniable proof, if any proof were needed, of the reality of the Bodhisattva ideal, the ideal that deliverance from Ignorance does not necessarily mean Nirvana or extinction of being, that it is a more spiritual aim to help others achieve the same felicity that one has attained for oneself. Indeed it is a far higher ideal than that of Nirvana. The Arhat seeks his own Nirvana. The Bodhisattva seeks that of others also, and though qualified for Nirvana, he sacrifices it to the idea of helping others attain it also. Precisely because of that Nirvana lies at his feet as it were, and for the Bodhisattva Samsara and nirvana are the same. The concept of Bodhisattva is not a concession made to the weak in spirit who cannot scale the heights of Nirvana by themselves but need the help of a God or a human Teacher. It is an intellectual expression of a real office and function in the scheme of the divine governance of the world. The Bodhisattva after having rent through the veil of Avidya, attains extinction of his unregenerate lower being. But that also enables him to achieve an "universalised individuality", an individuality which, free from the pranks of the separative ego-sense, is a centre of the play of the spirit. "The desire of personal salvation, however high its form, is an outcome of ego; it rests on the idea of our own individuality and its desire for its personal good or welfare, its longing for a release from suffering or its cry for the extinction of the trouble of becoming and makes that the supreme aim of our existence"¹⁷. On the other hand "Often we see this desire of personal salvation overcome by another attraction which also belongs to the higher turn of our nature and which indicates the essential character of the

action the liberated soul must pursue. It is that which is implied in the great legend of the Amitabha Buddha who turned away when his spirit was on the threshold of Nirvana and took the vow never to cross it while a single being remained in the sorrow and the Ignorance”¹⁸. Sri Aurobindo is a living example of a Bodhisattva, because in addition to helping to preserve the world, he is showing the path to suffering humanity, to countless people who are fallen and weak, maimed and weary and whose lost faith in themselves and their spiritual destiny are being restored by his magic influence.¹⁹ And on top of this, his real work is to help man evolve from a half-awake mental being into the fully awake supramental being, “to make earth the home of the wonderful and life beatitude’s kiss”. The most perfect symbolic expression of that life is the following piece of poetic prose : “As if honey could taste itself and all its drops together and all its drops could taste each other and each the whole honeycomb *as itself*, so should the end be with God and the soul of man and the universe”²⁰(*Italics mine*).

A world of relations in which each relata knows the others as forms of itself, a world of variety in which each variation is a note in a harmony, a world in which the body of man is aglow with the purity of the divine substance, his life vibrant with the power of the divine Force, his mind endowed with the vision of the Truth-Consciousness, is indeed the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, and life in it verily the Life Divine. Would that the Life Divine be our one aspiration, would that the Divine in his Grace respond to that aspiration, would that India (listen) to the august voice of the Master through whom she will speak to the world : Hearken unto me.

Notes and References

1. Sri Aurobindo : The Life Divine, SABCL, v.1, p.118
2. Messages of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother (Second Series), 1949, pp.12-13
3. Sri Aurobindo : The Synthesis of Yoga, 1948, pp.156-157
4. ” : Letters (Second Series), 1949, p.36
5. “Chit is a power not only of knowledge, but of expressive will, not only of receptive vision, but of formative representation; the two are indeed one power. For Chit is an action of Being, not of the Void. What it sees, that becomes. It sees itself beyond Space and Time; that becomes in the conditions of Space and Time.” *Isha Upanishad*, 1965, p.27

6. Sri Aurobindo : Collected Poems, SABCL, v.5, pp.62-63
7. ” : The Synthesis of Yoga, 1948, p.6
8. ” : Letters (Second Series), 1949, pp.73-74
9. ” : The Life Divine, SABCL, v.1, p.167
10. ” : The Synthesis of Yoga, 1948, p.263
11. ” : ” , 1948, p. 27
12. Arya, v.5, p.323
13. Sri Aurobindo : The Synthesis of Yoga, 1948, p.147
14. ” : Letters (Second Series), 1949, pp.46-47
15. ” : Savitri : A Legend and a Symbol, SABCL, v.28, Pt.1, Bk1 Canto 1, p.7
16. ” : ” ” ” , Bk3 Canto 4, p.339
17. ” : The Synthesis of Yoga, 1948, p.274
18. ” : ” , ” , p.275
19. Whether or not the Mahayana school, which preaches this ideal, gives the right interpretation to Buddha’s teachings is another question. All that we want to emphasise here is that the ideal itself is not merely a necessary metaphysical concept and convenient religious symbol but a fact of the dynamic spiritual consciousness. The Adhikarika Purusas of the Tantra may be remembered in this connexion.
20. Sri Aurobindo : Thoughts and Glimpses, pp.18-19

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Veda Vyasa's *Mahabharata* in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*

(Continued from the previous issue)

Prema Nanda Kumar

2. Re-reading the Mahabharata

When Sri Aurobindo returned to India in 1893, he was just twenty-one years old. He had little or no idea of Indian languages. He had been brought up as an alien to his mother-tongue Bengali. Even the culture he had imbibed as a teenager made him feel more at ease with Homer and Shakespeare. Only towards the end of his fourteen years' stay in England did he begin to make himself aware of his motherland's greatness. We have evidence of this in the unfinished study, 'The Harmony of Virtue' where Keshav Ganesh Desai waxes eloquent about Indian culture. A myth about Purush, the son of Prithvi is retold. Is it an imaginary one? Keshav assures his listeners: "It is an allegory conceived by Vallabh Swami, the Indian Epicurus, and revealed to me by him in a vision."¹

There are references to the ballads on Ram, Krishna, Arjun and Ravan sung by Purush but no reference to Vyasa yet. It is clear, however, that the call of the Puranas had already been heard by Sri Aurobindo in distant Cambridge.

Around this time when he was drawing closer to Indian culture, the lute of Saraswati seems to have twanged in his heart even as he prepared to return to his motherland:

"For in Sicilian olive-groves no more
Or seldom must my footprints now be seen,
Nor tread Athenian lanes, nor yet explore
Parnassus or thy voiceful shores, O Hippocrene.

Me from her lotus heaven Saraswati
Has called to regions of eternal snow
And Ganges pacing to the southern sea,
Ganges upon whose shores the flowers of Eden blow."²

When he returned to India and was employed in Baroda, Sri Aurobindo began a systematic study of Sanskrit works. There were inspirations. One of them was the novelist Bankim. "Bankim Chandra Chatterji by a Bengali" was the title of a series of seven essays he wrote for **Indu Prakash** under the penname of "Zero". Bankim Chandra's **Life of Krishna** and the importance he gave to the **Bhagavad Gita** were noted by him. Bankim was a Sanskrit scholar and his mind-boggling achievement as a creative writer was no doubt due to in-depth readings in the twin epics. At the same time, Sri Aurobindo was duly grateful to the eminent novelist for having written in Bengali and not sold himself to the tongue of the foreigner. Writers like Bankim Chandra and Madhusudhan Dutt had not only written in Bengali but also brought the riches of the Sanskrit classics into their language making it "the speech of Gods, a language unfading and indestructible." It is not surprising that now Sri Aurobindo himself went straight to the **Ramayana** and the **Mahabharata**. Indeed, they were to be the central force of his creative fire in all his writings though he would be writing in English most of the time.

Sri Aurobindo's early studies in the epics included translation and recreation. He translated some passages from the **Ramayana** and the **Mahabharata**. It is not surprising that one of his approaches to Vyasa was political. The beginning of his **Mahabharata** studies in Baroda coincided with his baptism in Indian politics, as we learn from his essays, "New Lamps for Old" in **Indu Prakash**.³ Naturally, he also chose passages from the epic for translation as part of his **Mahabharata** studies which had a direct relevance to the nationalist politics of which he was a key figure. Besides, Sri Aurobindo wrote exhaustive notes on some important words in the Udyoga Parva to give us an idea of Krishna as an ambassador who was genuinely interested in peace.⁴

The Sabha Parva was a natural attraction for Sri Aurobindo who wanted to tell his readers how India had at one time attained the very peaks of excellence in administration, polity, culture and literature. Just as 'Rama rajya'

is spoken of when dealing with the **Ramayana**, we get to see a ‘Dharma rajya’ about the condition of the land after the Pandavas were established on their own with Indraprastha as their capital:

“The nation as a father trusted him:
No hater had he in his whole realm’s bound,
By the sweet name of Enemyless renowned.
And through his gracious government upheld
By Bheema’s force and foreign battle quelled
By the two-handed might of great Arjoon;
Sahadev’s cultured equity and boon
Nokula’s courteous mood to all men shown,
The thriving provinces were void of fear;
Strife was forgotten ...”⁵

This was no doubt to underline the idea that Brahmatej is the superior Power, but in the matter of mundane affairs of the earth, one needed Kshatratej to make possible a heaven on earth. Unless India ceased to be a nation of weaklings bowing to foreign powers, how could it ever gain its proper and premier place in the comity of nations?

A free India was Sri Aurobindo’s goal. But it should be an India well-governed. What happens when the ruler has no proper advisers to govern the nation? Yudhistira tells Krishna:

“ ... And now though all my friends are one
To bid me forward, I even yet attend
From thy voice only certainty, O friend.
Some from affection lovingly suppress
Their friend’s worst fault and some from selfishness,
Speaking what most will please. Others conceal
Their own good with the name of commonweal.
Such counsel in his need a monarch hath.
But thou art pure of selfish purpose; wrath
And passion know thee not; and thou wilt tell
What shall be solely and supremely well.”⁶

From the Sabha Parva, Sri Aurobindo also chose the episode of the killing of Jarasandha by Bhima as if pointing out that the need of the hour was an accession of Kshatratej against the seemingly impregnable might of the British

in India. Sri Aurobindo also chose to translate the four cantos of Vidula Upakhyaana. Vyasa has written almost a fierce document full of idealism and wisdom; his Vidula is bold and strong, and knows what true love is. Her love is not “the love of a donkey”. Her words spoken to her son Sunjay, in Sri Aurobindo’s translation, seem to be directly addressing the children of Mother India:

“Out to battle, do thy man’s work, falter not in high attempt;
So a man is quit before his God and saved from self-contempt ...
Sunjoy, Sunjoy, waste not thou thy flame in smoke! Impetuous, dire,
Leap upon thy foes for havoc as a famished lion leaps,
Storming through thy vanquished victors till thou fall on slaughtered
heaps ...”⁷

The conclusion of Vyasa came in handy for proclaiming Sri Aurobindo’s message:

“... When a King has lost the fight
By his foemen whelmed and broken, let his well-wishers and friends,
Read to him this poem. All who need high strength for noble ends,
Let them read it daily; for the warrior hearing turns to flame,
Tramples down a hundred foemen and acquires a deathless name.
And the pregnant woman who shall hear it day by day
Bears a hero or a strong man dowered with strength to help or slay,
Or a soul of grandiose virtues, or a helper of the Light,
Or a glorious giver blazing with the spirit’s radiance bright.
But a daughter of high princes and a fighter’s wife shall bear
Splendid like a flame and swift and fortunate, strong to dare,
Unapproachable in battle and invincible in war,
Armed champion of the right, injustice’s scourge, some human star.”⁸

There were also other areas in Vyasa which clamoured for Sri Aurobindo’s immediate attention. For one who had been immersed in the myths and legends of Greece, the Indian epic was an overwhelming experience. He did find it overabundant, but realised that imbedded in them were immense poetic possibilities. When he wished to take them up, his brother Manmohan Ghose was not enthusiastic. Manmohan was himself a fine poet but he preferred the flora and fauna of the west where he had spent all his formative years. Dedicating his narrative poem, **Love and Death** to Manmohan, Sri Aurobindo

gave a lengthy defence of the Hindu legends. According to him the original **Mahabharata** probably had but 24,000 verses. Down the millennia there had been a lot of accretions. But one could always go behind them all and see the unadorned beauty of the original thought, incident and character. He said:

“To take with a reverent hand the old myths and cleanse them of soiling accretions, till they shine with some of the antique strength, simplicity and solemn depth of beautiful meaning, is an ambition which Hindu poets of today may and do worthily cherish.”⁹

Sri Aurobindo himself took up this task with enthusiasm even as he swiftly sought mastery over the oceanic surges of Vyasa narrative. Unlike his approach to the main story which was helping him widen his political consciousness, he brought a romantic flavour for the various legends he chose which were essentially tales of love. Nala was a prime choice. Following Arjuna’s passionate adventures with Chitrangada and Uloupie one could bring colour to these tales. Mere translation would not do! According to Sri Aurobindo, Vyasa is “the most masculine of writers”. Not for him “the love of ornament, emotionalism, mobile impressionability, the tyranny of imagination over the reason, excessive sensitiveness to form and outward beauty”, as he believed in rigid self-control. After naming some great poets like Sophocles, Dante and Wordsworth, Sri Aurobindo writes:

“But none of the great poets I have named is so singularly masculine, so deficient in femineity as Vyasa, none dominates so much by intellect and personality, yet satisfies so little the romantic imagination. Indeed no poet at all near the first rank has the same granite mind in which impressions are received with difficulty but once received are ineffaceable, the same bare energy and strength without violence and the same absolute empire of inspired intellect over the more showy faculties. In his austere self-restraint and economy of power he is indifferent to ornament for its own sake, to the pleasures of poetry as distinguished from its ardours, to little graces and indulgences of style.”¹⁰

Perhaps this is why we have preferred Bhasa and Kalidasa to reading the **Mahabharata**, though the latter-day poets and dramatists were only embroidering on what happened to be marvellous nuclei to create their **Karnabhara** or **Sakuntalam**. For himself, Sri Aurobindo found Vyasa’s poetry “an unfailing source of tonic and refreshment to the soul”. This critical appraisal led him

to retell the legends as the classical dramatists had done. Among the earliest attempts are three fragments, **The Tale of Nala**, **Chitrangada** and **Uloupie**. There is also the complete poem, **Love and Death**.

When Sri Aurobindo took up the legend of Nala, he must have planned a complete narrative poem. He had a grand tale to tell. Of kingdoms won and lost, of love’s labour gained, of transformations and tender human relationships. The tale of the ideal king Nala is recounted in the Vana Parva of the **Mahabharata**. One day a lovely swan strayed into the royal garden of Nala and he caught it. Apparently this was a unique swan. Assured by the swan that it would convey his love for Damayanti, Nala set it free. The swan flew to Kundinapura and spoke of Nala to the Vidarbhan Princess, Damayanti.

“As beautiful as the god of love Kandarpa
incarnated.
O ravishing lady,
if you were to marry him,
Your birth and beauty, slender-waisted one
would find fruition.
For we have seen gods,
and gandharvas and men,
Nagas and rakshasas,
but never have we seen one like Nala.
You are a jewel among girls,
he a paragon among men.
The best meeting the best is excellent.”¹¹

The marriage of Nala and Damayanti takes place despite the hurdles posed by gods like Indra, Vayu and Agni. The god Saniswara is incensed and sees to it that Nala loses all his wealth and kingdom in a dice game with his brother Pushkara. Nala and Damayanti get separated in a terrible forest. After many turns in the story, the steadfast love of Damayanti for Nala wins the day, he regains his kingdom and all is well. The legend calls for a full-scale epic and from the leisurely beginning of **The Tale of Nala** it is clear that such was Sri Aurobindo’s intention too. Unfortunately, perhaps due to the exigencies of his political involvement, the idea was abandoned. We have only the opening chord. And what a charming musical tone! Of a young king, taking a stroll in his estate, one who is already renowned as “punya sloka”. Such a pure

person that even uttering his name brings us good! Indeed an *uttama nayaka* in every way! He had fallen in love with Damayanti. One day he was unable to overcome the pangs of love for this princess whom he had not seen, and decided to take a walk in the garden close to the inner apartments of the palace. So moves Vyasa's introduction and Sri Aurobindo's poem opens:

"Nala, Nishada's king, paced by a stream
Which ran escaping from solitudes
To flow through gardens in a pleasant land.
Murmuring it came of the green souls of hills
And of the lawns and hamlets it had seen,
The brown-limbed peasants toiling in the sun,
And the tired bullocks in the thirsty fields."¹¹

Whereas in Vyasa the swan is introduced at once, Sri Aurobindo, with the typical romantic urge to paint Mother Nature, takes us away to a visual treat of a murmuring stream leaping down from the solitudes of the green-crested hills, and weaving in and out of the land populated by the rich and the poor, the sight of the tillers of the soil and the bullocks engaged in ploughing the fields. Obviously, the unspoken rhythms of the river are heard by Nala and he is able to visualise other sights and scenes which it has passed. The 'masculine' style of Vyasa has no patience with watching jasmines floating on the stream but the student of the Romantics will not ignore what appears clear in his mind's eye:

"This memory to the jasmine trees it sang
Which dropped their slow white-petalled kisses down
Upon its haste of curling waves...."

Not blossoms but "white-petalled kisses"! We have come far away from the stern Vyasa. Vyasa says that Nala had heard people who happened to be near him speak of Damayanti and so desired her. Sri Aurobindo's Nala comes to us as a love-lorn youth who is lost in thoughts of her and is "oblivious of the joy of world and kind". Vyasa states baldly that "Nala saw a few gold-winged swans that were strutting around in the garden and he caught one of them." Not so Sri Aurobindo:

"Then from some covert bosom's shrouded riches
A revelation came; for like a gleam
Of beauty from some purple-guarded breast

A passionate glint of lovely whiteness stole
Fluttering awhile, then fast towards him fled
Seeking his vision; and its glowing race
Splintered the sapphire with a silvery hue,
And soon a flame-bright flock of swans was seen
Flying like one ..."

If the granite mind of Vyasa sculpts unerasable syllables, the romantic poesy of Sri Aurobindo weaves an unforgettable scene. With the white swans "whirring softly" moving all over the royal garden, the diction becomes a riot of colour (turquoise, silver, white, gold) and unhurried movement. Nala must have caught the swan that had teased him "seeking his vision", for he says:

"For now thy heaven-born pride must learn to range
My gardens of the earth and haunt my streams,
And to my call consent. If thou resist
I will imprison thee in a golden cage
And bind thy beauty with a silver chain."

Vyasa's swan had been frightened by the speed with which Nala had caught it and begged him not to kill it (*hanthavyosmi na te rajan*) and that it would act to please him. Further it assures him that when Damayanti hears about him through the swan, she would decide not to marry anyone except him! Immediately Nala releases the swan and it flies towards Damayanti's land, Vidarbha. All this is over within three slokas.

For Sri Aurobindo, this is only a beginning for depicting Nala in love. Nala's swan is happy that the king is not going to harm it. It begins to wax poetic and says it is an *apsara*. Well, this is wonderful news for the romantic Nala! If the swan is an *apsara*, she better live in his palace, sing and dance.

"When flute and breathing lyre and timbrel call,
Adorning with thy golden rhythmic limbs
The crystalline mosaic of my floors."

So Nala continues to hold the swan in his hand. The wily bird suddenly nestles in his breast and gives a teasing message. She had divined the person with whom his heart was in love and had come to help him:

"Forced by thy musing in the sapphire noon
Out of the mountain's breast to thee I flew."

The poem breaks off here. Damayanti's name has not been uttered yet. What a dazzling particle of diamond-dust from what could have been a grand

edifice of romantic poesy! India had to sacrifice innumerable riches for gaining its political freedom. Certainly, one of them has been Sri Aurobindo's retelling of Nala's tale.

We have all loved Rabindranath Tagore's one-act play, **Chitra**. He has expanded in his own poetic manner the bare story of the Manipur Princess, Chitrangada, told by Vyasa in thirteen slokas in the Adi Parva. Only a bare outline, no more. If Tagore brought his dramatic technique to transform the 'manly' Chitrangada into a feminine girl hopelessly in love with the wandering ascetic Arjuna, Sri Aurobindo's narrative genius probably toyed with the idea of transcreating the thirteen slokas for limning the New Woman India needed to achieve its freedom. What we have in his **Chitrangada** might be yet another sparkling fragment or perhaps this was his elaboration of the last sloka of Vyasa in which Arjuna takes leave of Chitrangada. "After a son was born to her, Arjuna embraced the auspicious lady (parishvajya varaangnaam) and took leave of her and the King (Chitrasena) and went away to continue with his pilgrimage." In the course of his elaboration, the rest of the tale also is brought in. Unlike Tagore who brings in Madana and Vasantha, Sri Aurobindo does not introduce any new characters.

When the poem opens we find that Chitrangada is not too happy with the dawns that rise over Manipur. One day she gets up from the bed and stands, a little uncertain.

"Then Urjoon, felt his mighty clasp a void
Empty of her he loved and, through the grey
Unwilling darkness that disclosed her face,
Sought out Chitrangada. "Why dost thou stand
In the grey light, like one from joy cast down?
O thou whose bliss is sure. Leave that grey space,
Come hither."

Chitrangada answers him. It is all very well for him as he would soon find ladies to dally with. But she is a woman and her heart has been given to him alone! As for Arjuna, she indicates that in any case after his wanderings and enjoyment of the kingdom, he will have more adventures which would reach a climax in some major battlefield.

Arjuna asks her not to imagine things before they actually happen. It is here that we have an inkling of how Sri Aurobindo's retellings of the

Mahabharata legends would take a philosophic hue in the future and culminate in the splendid epic, **Savitri** which would explore all the yesterdays of man and the possibilities of all his tomorrows.

".....For God still keeps
Near to a paler world the hour ere dawn
And one who looks out from the happy, warm
And mortal limit of mankind that live
Enhoused, defended by companionship
With walls and limitations, is outdrawn
To dateless memories he cannot grasp
And infinite yearnings without form, until
The sense of an original vastness grows,
Empty of joyous detail, desolate,
In labour of a wide, unfinished world...."

This is an evolving world! Such twilights are better left for thinkers and ascetics to muse upon. She should rather welcome the sun.

"Friendly to mortals is the living sun's
Great brilliant light, friendly the cheerful noise
Of earth arising to her various tasks
And myriad hopes...."

Arjuna's gayatri in chaste English! Brave Chitrangada accepts her state, and the worth of a woman's passionate love, "even though they know / Pain for the end, yet, knowing, still must love." Arjuna demurs and says there is no fault in his love for her. It is a true passion and will not be forgotten. Sri Aurobindo's hero makes a lovely speech with every syllable ringing true:

"Has my clasp slackened or hast thou perceived
A waning passion in my kiss? Much more
My soul needs thee than on that fated day
When through Bengal of the enormous streams
With careless horse-hooves hurrying to the East
I came, a wandering prince, companioned only
By courage and my sword; nor knew such flowers
Were by the wayside waiting to be plucked
As these dark tresses and sweet body small
Of white Chitrangada...."

With the creative artist's freedom in his hands, Sri Aurobindo makes Chitrangada as the reigning queen of Manipur, when Arjuna comes there. As Chitrangada held by Arjuna reminisces her past, we are told that as the father lay dying he ordered his courtiers to guard his daughter from all alien interference. His last words spelt out the exceptions:

“....He sole,
Darling of Fate and Heaven, shall break through all
Despising danger's threat and spurning death,
To grasp this prize, whether Ixvacou's clan
Yield a new Rama or the Bhoja hear
And raven for her beauty, — Vrishny-born
Or else some lion's whelp of those who lair
In Hustina the proud, coveting two worlds,
Leaping from conquered earth to climb to Heaven.
Life's pride doubling with the soul's ethereal crown.”

So Chitrasena is very much aware of the Pandavas of Hastinapura who are trying to bring earth and heaven together, the advance-guard of future humanity! As desired by him, Chitrangada had ruled over the loving, if rugged hearts. Then Arjuna had come and the Manipureans, faithful to the word given to Chitrasena, had taken to arms. Nothing could stop Arjuna's chariot nor the rain of arrows from his bowstring. One remembers the battle in Sri Aurobindo's **Baji Prabhau**, as the lines move swiftly, the events panting through the ten-syllabled blank verse:¹²

“....Swift to arms
My warriors sprang, dismayed but faithful, swift
Around me grew a hedge of steel. Enraged,
Thy coursers shod with wind rushed foaming on
And in with crash and rumour stormed the car
To that wide stone-paved hall.”

There, Arjuna had seen Chitrangada on the throne. She had automatically stretched her hands towards him while the courtiers had dared Arjuna. His reply was defiant but not inimical. It is true he had had to show his killer-heroism on the way, but he had not come to war with Chitrangada's people:

“....Yet not for war
I sought this region nor by dearth equipped,

Inhospitable people who deny
The human bond, but as a man to men
Alone I came and without need of fear,
If fear indeed were mine to feel. Nor trumpets blared
My coming nor battalions steel enforced,
Who claimed but what the common bond allows.”

Sri Aurobindo's **Chitrangada** stops here. Yet another instance of his very deep immersion in the enormous ocean of Vyasa, coming up with romantic gems that sparkle with idealism and even a glimpse of philosophy. While reading the **Mahabharata** these examples of love between man and woman that transcended the mere flesh seem to have struck him with a special force. Were they but mere tales of love? Was there not a higher love that descended on such people making their passions a lesson for ideal living? The legend of Uloupie which is also part of Arjuna's pilgrimage in the Adi Parva, caught Sri Aurobindo's attention as a possible subject for a narrative poem. In Vyasa, the legends of Uloupie and Chitrangada come one after the other. Arjuna is dragged into the Patala beneath the ocean by the Naga princess Uloupie. He resides there for a while, marries her and has a son, Iravan. Such is the bare **Mahabharata** legend.

There is a possibility that Sri Aurobindo began a narrative poem on the twin love-adventures of Arjuna for Uloupie begins as “Canto I”. In Vyasa, Arjuna goes to Gangadwar, descends into the waters for a bath. There, the Naga princess Uloupie drags him down into the depths. Sri Aurobindo's poem too opens thus, creating a wondrous picture of a para-human existence, not unlike the scenario in which the god of the underworld, in Greek mythology is found:

Under the high and gloomy eastern hills
The portals of Patala are and there
The Bhogavathie with her sinuous waves
Rises, a river alien to the sun,
And often to its strange and gleaming sands
Uloupie came, weary of those dim shades
And great disastrous caverns neighbouring Hell,
Avid of sunlight.

Some more lines and the work stopped at the first paragraph as Uloupie waited for her dream-hero at Gangadwar. Sri Aurobindo continued with the legend of **Chitrangada** which comes behind the Uloupie episode in Vyasa.

Perhaps the pages of the Uloupie section are missing. Almost the same chain of narrative found in **Chitrangada** follows the first verse-paragraph of **Oloupie**. It is quite possible Sri Aurobindo took out this part and re-worked it into the present **Chitrangada**. But it is in **Oloupie** that the **Chitrangada** narrative gets concluded. Which version came earlier, is the question. But we need not wait for an answer, as both are Sri Aurobindo's tribute to Vyasa's granite genius and how one can extract streams and streams of rasas from just a verse or two of the **Mahabharata**.

After proceeding with more or less the same thought-streams in the conversation between Arjuna and Chitrangada, we find the day come at last for Arjuna's leaving. There is dignity in Chitrangada's silent farewell. Her only words "with her unshed tears" are addressed to the horses whom she herself yokes to Arjuna's chariot:

"You brought him here who now shall bear away,
O horses yoked to fate. How often yet
Will you deceive us shaking wide your manes
And trampling over women's hearts with hooves
Thunderous towards battle? Yet your breed perhaps
Shall bring him to my wrinkled age."

Thus Vyasa leaps for a moment into the future when Arjuna and Chitrangada would be meeting in the Asvamedha Parva. Arjuna comes and after a silent, meaningful kiss ascends the chariot which speeds away. Chitrangada stands watching the chariot's flag go up the crest of a hill and dipping below, having crossed it. "Then to her chamber slowly went alone." Marriages and separations, but love does not die. The remembering heart waits in the lonely hearth. An experience which would soon be part of Sri Aurobindo's life as well.

Sri Aurobindo's **Mahabharata** studies begun in Baroda became a life-long commitment. The many names in the epic became images to be meditated upon through decades. Even minor characters like Rishi Marcundeya and Rishi Mandavya came down to inhabit his poetic consciousness. Two undying tales of love conquering over death based on two legends from Vyasa's epic were also gifted by him to posterity as amulets of "God, Light, Freedom, Immortality".

(To be Continued)

Notes and References

- 1 SABCL, Vol 3, p. 32
- 2 'Envoi'
- 3 For a detailed study of Sri Aurobindo on this aspect of Vyasa see the author's article in Sri Aurobindo Circle, Forty-First Number.
- 4 "It will be seen from Krishna's attitude here as elsewhere that he was very far from being the engineer and subtle contriver of war into which later ideas have deformed him. That he came down to force on war and destroy the Kshatriya caste, whether to open India to the world or for other cause, is an idea that was not present to the mind of Vyasa. Later generations writing, when the pure Kshatriya caste had almost disappeared, attributed this motive for God's descent upon earth, just as a modern English Theosophist, perceiving British rule established in India, has added the corollary that he destroyed the Kshatriyas (five thousand years ago, according to her own belief) in order to make the line clear for the English. What Vyasa, on the other hand, makes us feel is that Krishna, though fixed to support justice at every cost, was earnestly desirous to support it by peaceful means if possible. His speech is an evident attempt to restrain the eagerness of the Matsyas and Panchalas who were bent on war as the only means of overthrowing the Kuru domination." SABCL, Vol. 3, pp.202-3
- 5 SABCL, vol. 8, p.35
- 6 Ibid., pp. 38-39
- 7 Ibid., pp. 64-5
- 8 Ibid., p. 74
- 9 Sri Aurobindo Circle, Thirtieth Number (1974), p. 69
- 10 SABCL, vol. 3, p. 147
- 11 All quotations from **The Story of Nala**, **Chitrangada** and **Uloupie** are from SABCL, vol.5
- 12 One remembers the battle in Sri Aurobindo's **Baji Prabhau** when Baji defended the Pass against the invading Muhammedan army.

Sri Aurobindo and Vedic Riks

Dr Sampadananda Mishra

(Continued from the previous issue)

Chandas – The Metrical Rhythm

Sri Aurobindo says the Chandas – “the poetic measures of the sacred mantras, – *anuṣṭubh*, *triṣṭubh*, *jagatī*, *gāyatrī*” etc. are treated “as symbolic of the rhythms in which the universal movement of things is cast.”³⁴

For the Rishis, metre or *Chandas* was not a lifeless formal construction but the reproduction of a great creative world rhythm. Sri Aurobindo believed like the Vedic Rishis that “the Spirit of creation framed all movements of the world by *chandas*, in certain fixed rhythms of the formative word, and it is because they are faithful to the cosmic metres that the basic world-movements unchangingly endure. A balanced harmony maintained by a system of subtle recurrences is the foundation of immortality in created things, and metrical movement is simply creative sound grown conscious of this secret of its own powers.”³⁵

A metre is generally regulated by several elements such as, the number of metrical lines, number of syllables and their arrangement or the number of syllabic instants, the arrangement of pauses etc. In the case of Sanskrit *Chandas* or metres, it is seen that the main principle governing the metres of the Vedas is measurement by the number of syllables. This also was extended to the classical Sanskrit metres. But the classical Sanskrit metres differ in many cases from those of the Vedic ones. In Vedic metres it is the number of syllables that only matters. But in classical Sanskrit metres the arrangement of syllables by short and long plays an important role. In Vedic Sanskrit, it is not necessary that all the *Gāyatrī Chandas* should have the same arrangement of syllables, but the number of syllables should be the same in all the quarters.

In classical Sanskrit, the metres regulated by the number of syllables (*Akṣaravṛttas*) are divided into three categories such as: *Samavṛttas* or me-

tres having the same number of syllables in each line with the same arrangement; *Ardhasamavṛttas* or metres where each alternate line is the same in arrangement of sounds; *Viṣamavṛttas* or metres having uneven stanzas with different arrangements. Based on the arrangement of syllables, a particular metre differs from another. So we have a large variety of metres. In the case of the above metres, if any quarter of a metre has one or two syllables less or more than the prescribed number, then the metre is considered to be defective. This is called *Chandobhaṅga* (or breaking the rules of the metre) and is not allowed by the prosodians. But in the case of Vedic metres, the absence or excess of one or two syllables in a quarter of any *Chanda* is neither considered to be a defect nor by this does a *Chanda* change into another. But to recognise the places where more or fewer syllables occur, the Vedic prosodians used some terms before the name of the *Chanda*. For example in a *Gāyatrī* metre, if one syllable is less in a quarter then it is called *Nicṛd Gāyatrī*, if two syllables are less then it is *Virāṭ Gāyatrī*; if one syllable is more it is called *Bhurik Gāyatrī*, if two syllables are more then it is *Svarāṭ Gāyatrī*. So is the case for other metres. The Vedic prosodians also have prescribed how to fill the metre by means of *Vyūha* (which ordinarily means breaking *sandhi* in case of *ya* and *va*). For example the first line of the famous *Gāyatrī Mantra* (*tat savitur vareṇyam*) has one syllable less. So to fill it one can break *ya* in *vareṇyam* into *i* and *a* or *i* and *ya* and instead of *vareṇyam* can chant *vareṇi-am* or *vareṇi-yam*. These are some cases where the Vedic metres are more flexible than that of the classical ones.

The seven major Chandas of the Veda are:

- | | | | |
|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|
| 1. <i>Gāyatrī</i> | (24 syllables) | 4. <i>Br̥hati</i> | (36 syllables) |
| 2. <i>Uṣṇik</i> | (28 syllables) | 5. <i>Pañkti</i> | (40 syllables) |
| 3. <i>Anuṣṭup</i> | (32 syllables) | 6. <i>Triṣṭup</i> | (44 syllables) |
| 7. <i>Jagatī</i> | (48 syllables) | | |

Vedic Symbolism

The *Rigveda* begins with an invocation to Agni. Here Agni has been addressed as “*hota*” – the priest, “*Kavikratu*” – whose will towards action is that of the seer, “*gopāṁ ṛtasya*” – the guardian of the Truth and so on and so forth. The Rishi here praises Agni with the aspiration that Agni accepts his adoration and reciprocates by looking to the Rishi’s spiritual good. Now “who is this god

Agni that the Vedic Rishi addresses him with such a language? What is the truth that he guards? What good does he bring to the invoker? Is it gold and horses and cattle that he brings or is it something that is divine?”

It is certainly not the sacrificial fire or any material flame or principle of physical heat and light that is capable of these functions. So there must be a mystic symbolism in these *Riks* to which “the fire, the sacrifice, the priest are only outward figures of a deeper teaching and yet figures which it was thought necessary to maintain and to hold constantly in front.”³⁶

Similarly there are many words like *ṛtam*, *dhī*, *śrāvas* etc., which are not only symbolic but they are the key words which provide clues to the true sense of the Vedic *Riks*. One such important word that has been used in the first hymn, is “*svam damam*”. The straightforward meaning of this word is “one’s own house”. When it is used for Agni, *Sāyaṇa* interprets it as “the fire-room” of the Vedic householder. But Sri Aurobindo after having examined many *Mantras* came to a point where he found that ‘*ṛtam*’ ‘*bṛhat*’ and ‘*svam damam*’ are similar in their expressive sense. Therefore he says that the Truth, the Vast, and Agni’s own home are identical. Agni is frequently spoken of as being born in the Truth, dwelling in the Wide or the Vast.

These not only give us an indication of the principal ideas of the Vedic Rishis but they also reveal the fact that the *Riks* of the *Veda* in their import have a double significance, one exoteric and the other esoteric. The symbols too have their own esoteric significance. The gods are not simply poetical personifications of some abstract ideas or functions of Nature, but representatives of the psychological states of consciousness experienced by the Rishis, ‘some essential puissance of the divine being’.

All these must not be mistaken as mere imagery. They have to be understood in their proper esoteric import. This esoteric sense can be discovered only by giving a consistent and straightforward meaning to the words and formulas employed by the Rishis. If this is not done then the true knowledge of the *Veda* cannot be grasped. And this is possible only by one who himself is a Rishi. All cannot enter into the secret chambers of the *Veda* and know the real Truth. So Rishi Vamadeva declares:

“All these are secret words that I have uttered to thee who knowest, O Agni, O Disposer, words of leading, words of seer knowledge that express their meaning to the seer; I have spoken them illumined in my words and my thinking.”

*etā viśvā viduṣe tubhyaṁ vegho nīthāni agne niṇyā vacāmsi
nivacanā kavaye kāvyāni aśaṁśisaṁ matibhirvipra ukthaiḥ.* ³⁷

In Sri Aurobindo’s words, “The words of the Veda could only be known in their true meaning by one who was himself a seer or mystic; from others the verses withheld their hidden knowledge.”³⁸

Indeed, the language of the Vedas is symbolic. The rich spiritual experiences and realisations of the Vedic Rishis have been recorded here through images and symbols. But the symbols can be interpreted at the spiritual, cosmic, psychological and physical levels. At the highest spiritual level, the Vedas reveal the highest spiritual truth, powers, and laws of the transcendent Reality. At the cosmic level, they reveal laws and processes of the occult or cosmic forces in the play of their interaction and harmony. At the psychological level, the Vedas reveal the manifestations and workings of these cosmic forces in the psychological being of the men. At the physical level, it reveals the deeper laws of the physical nature. It all shows that there is in this universe only one essential Law which repeats itself and works itself out differently at each level of the cosmos according to the energy and substance of that level. Sri Aurobindo explains this ancient conception in the following words: “...it is one Law and Truth acting in all, but very differently formulated according to the medium in which the work proceeds and its dominant principle. The same gods exist on all the planes and maintain the same essential laws, but with a different aspect and mode of working and to ever wider results.”³⁹

Another unique feature of the Vedic symbolism is that the symbols and images used here are not the outcome of a deliberate creation of the mind but a direct and spontaneous expression of a higher supramental consciousness and knowledge. The Mother explains this as follows:

“They used an imaged language. Some people say that it was because they wanted it to be an initiation which would be understood only by the initiates. But it could also be an absolutely spontaneous expression without a precise aim to veil things, but which could not be understood except by those who had the experience. For it is quite obviously something that is not mental, which came spontaneously—as though it sprang from the heart and the aspiration—which was the completely spontaneous expression of an experience or knowledge, and naturally, an expression which was poetic, which had its own rhythm, its own beauty, and could be accessible only to those who had an identical experi-

ence. So it was veiled of itself, there was no need to add a veil upon it. It is more than likely that it happened like that.

“When one has a true experience which is not the result of a preliminary thought constructing and obtaining the experience by a special effort, when it is a direct and spontaneous experience, an experience that comes from the very intensity of the aspiration, it is spontaneously formulated into words. When it is total and complete enough, it is formulated into words... which are not thought out, which are spontaneous, which come out spontaneously from the consciousness. Well, it is more than likely that the Vedas were like that. But only those who have had the experience, had the same state of consciousness, can understand what it means.

“There are those sentences which seem absolutely banal and ordinary, in which things seem to be said in an almost childish way, and which are written out or heard and then noted down, like that. Well, when read with an ordinary consciousness, they seem sometimes even altogether banal. But if one has the experience, one sees that there is a power of realisation and a truth of expression which give you the key to the experience itself.”⁴⁰

Sri Aurobindo was a Rishi of this stature who could see the real Truth of the Vedic *Mantras*. In the course of his interpretation of the *Veda* he offered his own luminous perception to dispel the obscurity in symbolism and clear any ambiguity in phrase.

Vedic Sacrifice

Sacrifice is the central principle of the Vedic Yoga. *vedā hi yajñāṛthamabhipravṛttāḥ*. But the Vedic sacrifice in all its aspects and details is purely symbolic. It is pre-eminently esoteric not exoteric, psychological and not ritualistic in its conception.

The Rishis had this knowledge that the only right path towards the evolutionary progress is mutual self-giving or sacrifice. So the path pursued by the Vedic seers was not a path of renunciation of life but a path of self-giving and surrender. In this path the life of body, vital and mind is not denied or rejected but offered as a sacrifice to the divine powers of the spirit. As a result, there is a gradual and integral expansion, fulfilment, perfection and divine participation of the whole being of man in the higher life and nature of the Spirit.

The Vedic ritual of the sacrifice is an expressive symbol of the inner psychological process of the Vedic Yoga. All the various parts of the Vedic sacri-

fice are within us – the fire, the altar, the offering, and the priest. The individual soul is the performer of the sacrifice, the heart is the altar, the Divine Will burning within the form of human aspiration for the Divine is the priest, and all the activities of the body, life, and mind are the oblations. The clear stream of the mental and intellectual light corresponds to the clarified butter or *ghṛta*. The offering, however, includes all the various states of consciousness. In fact, all the actions undertaken and performed in the pursuit of the truth are nothing but offerings. And the fruit of this sacrifice is the shower of grace in the form of light, peace, strength, truth, delight and immortality, the plenitude of divine fulfilment. Light in the mind, Energy in the vitality and Joy in emotions and sensations are the three bounties for which the Vedic sages prayed. These are the fruits of the Vedic sacrifices which the Vedic sages consistently hymned in the symbolic figure of the Cow, the Horse, the Wine, *go*, *aśva*, *soma*. In the symbolism of the Vedic mystics *go* and *aśva* represent the two aspects of the divine consciousness: light and energy or knowledge and force. And *soma* is the mystic wine which flows into the spiritually prepared, illumined and purified human vessel from the supreme Delight inherent in the one eternal Existence.

So for the Vedic mystics the outer ritual is only a symbol of the inner sacrifice of the human being to the gods who are outwardly symbolized as forces of Nature and inwardly as subjective powers of consciousness.

The following words of Sri Aurobindo explain very beautifully the psychological significance of the Vedic sacrifice: “The Vedic sacrifice is, psychologically, a symbol of cosmic and individual activity become self-conscious, enlightened and aware of its goal. The whole process of the universe is in its very nature a sacrifice, voluntary or involuntary. Self-fulfilment by self-immolation, to grow by giving is the universal law. That which refuses to give itself, is still the food of the cosmic Powers. ‘The eater eating is eaten’ is the formula, pregnant and terrible, in which the Upanishad sums up this aspect of the universe, and in another passage men are described as the cattle of the gods. It is only when the law is recognised and voluntarily accepted that this kingdom of death can be overpassed and by the works of sacrifice Immortality made possible and attained. All the powers and potentialities of the human life are offered up, in the symbol of a sacrifice, to the divine Life in the Cosmos.”⁴¹

These are some insights which help us to take an entirely new approach to the study of the Vedic *Riks*.

Conclusion

The individual seeking after Truth has to rise beyond the state subject to death and falsehood. He has to turn from the falsehood to the Truth. He has to turn from the darkness to the Light. He has to turn from death to Immortality. This is possible only by communing with the divine powers and thereby receiving their aid. And the way to call down this aid was the secret of the Vedic Rishis. That is why they sincerely prayed:

*asato mā sadgamaya
tamaso mā jyotirgamaya
mṛtyormā'mṛtaṁ gamaya*
Lead me from falsehood to the Truth
Lead me from darkness to the Light
Lead me from death to Immortality ⁴²

This was the core of the Vedic teaching and the greatest power of it lay in its application to the inner life of man. This is the reason for which the *Veda* is regarded to be the source of all later Indian philosophies, religions, and systems of Yoga etc. Whatever the Hindus have done, thought and said through these many thousands of years, and behind all we are and seek to be, there lies concealed, "the bedrock of our religions, the kernel of our thought, the explanation of our ethics and society, the summary of our civilisation, the rivet of our nationality, a small body of speech, *Veda*." ⁴³

Sri Aurobindo is of the strong opinion that all the religions of the world, whether it is Buddhism or Jainism or Christianity or Judaism or Sufism or Confucianism or Islam, have their root in the *Veda*. In his words - "There is no part of the world's spirituality, of the world's religion, of the world's thought which would be what it is today, if the *Veda* had not existed." ⁴⁴

To conclude we can summarise the Vedic experience in the following way: The core of the teaching of the *Veda* is fourfold. First, it says that there is a world of Truth, Light and Immortality higher and superior to the world of human existence and that man has to inwardly ascend into it and live in it. Second, man has to discover the path to this great world of Light, Truth and Immortality. Third, our life is a battle between the powers of Light and Truth and the Powers of Darkness and Falsehood. Man can establish Truth and Light within him and attain victory over Darkness and Falsehood by constantly invoking the Divine powers and manifesting them within him. The fourth and final teaching is the

supreme secret which reveals Reality as One. The *Veda* declares: *ekam sat or tad ekam*. Reality is one but spoken of as many by the learned ones *ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti*. In Sri Aurobindo's words: "the secret knowledge of the *Veda* is the seed which is evolved later on into the Vedanta. The thought around which all is centred is the seeking after Truth, Light, Immortality. There is a Truth deeper and higher than the truth of outward existence, a Light greater and higher than the light of human understanding which comes by revelation and inspiration, an immortality towards which the soul has to rise. We have to find our way to that, to get into touch with this Truth and Immortality, *sapanta ṛtam amṛtam*, to be born into the Truth, to grow in it, to ascend in spirit into the world of Truth and to live in it. To do so is to unite ourselves with the Godhead and to pass from mortality into immortality." ⁴⁵

The Vedic *Riks* have no essential and living meaning for the one who does not realise this Supreme Truth. On the other hand, the one who does realise this Truth comes close to the *Riks* and understands their true sense. Thus the *Rigveda* declares:

*yastanna veda kiṁ ṛcā kariṣyati
ya it tad vidusta ime sam āsate* ⁴⁶

Notes and References

- 34 The Secret of the Veda, SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 258
- 35 The Future Poetry, SABCL, Vol. 9, p. 19
- 36 The Secret of the Veda, SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 60
- 37 Rigveda, 4.3.16
- 38 Hymns to the Mystic Fire, SABCL, Vol. 11, p. 5
- 39 The Supramental Manifestation, SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 228
- 40 Complete Works of the Mother, Vol. 7, pp. 359-60
- 41 The Secret of the Veda, SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 266
- 42 Brihadaranyakopanishad, 1.3.28
- 43 Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research, 1977, Vol. 1. Part 1, p. 31
- 44 Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research, 1977, Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 31
- 45 Hymns to the Mystic Fire, SABCL, Vol. 11, pp. 16-17
- 46 Rigveda

The Path of Nachiketa: The journey

(Continued from the previous issue)

Alok Pandey

Nachiketa has been initiated into the mysteries of the Beyond. He has fulfilled the initial condition for any deeper knowledge. This condition or readiness is created when we willingly, gladly and consciously choose the Eternal over the transient pleasures, when we seek the Divine not just momentarily, in a moment of crisis, but pursue Him over everything else, even if it means the sacrifice of all that we hold dear and cherish here. Nachiketa is such an aspirant and his fire is lit, when the soul is ready to break through the coverings of the earth. This fire is the bridge-builder that will carry us from the mortal to the immortal state. This fire must be lit on all the planes of our consciousness, the triple realms of mind, life and body so that they, too, may share the liberty and truth of the Spirit that is at once the secret in this world as well as above it. This Spirit is the sole knower of Truth, of our being as well as of this world. But in this world, at least in its present state, the Spirit is covered within coats that conceal rather than reveal it. It is only when the fire of aspiration is lit in us that this truth begins to be revealed to man.

Since Nachiketa has in him this fire and has chosen wisely and rightly, he is fit to receive this higher knowledge. So does Yama go on to reveal something of this secret truth about the world and the Spirit that inhabits it, or at a more individual level the truth of relation between the soul and nature. We, in our ignorance, believe the body to be everything and the soul merely an abstraction or a vague impression in the mind. But the truth is otherwise. The body derives its true value from the soul that inhabits it. To our present ignorant view, we think that we have a soul, but when knowledge awakens, there is a grand reversal of vision and value. We realise that we are a soul and we have a body. The body is the house and the soul is the Master, the body is the instrument and the soul is the Lord that uses the instrument. The Upanishad

describes it through this simple but significantly symbolic image. It says this body is a vehicle, a chariot and the soul is the master of this chariot. Reason is the charioteer who steers the chariot amidst the world scenes and the mind itself is simply the reins. This distinction between the mind, *manah* or *manas* and reason, *buddhi* is an important one. For in the Indian psychology, the mind, as we know it, is primarily an instrument of perception that integrates the various sense inputs and adding up something from itself gives us the sense of the thing, that is to say, it is the rein that holds the steed of the senses together. These steeds are at once the senses and the vital force that flows through the nerves and feeds the body. But mind itself must then present this perception to the higher discriminative intellect in us which, having considered all the inputs must decide the right course of action. This right course is the path it must take for the soul's journey. Reason itself is seen here as an instrument of the soul, its slave and not its master, just as the senses must be obedient to this power of discrimination and not be its master.

This has many an important practical consequence. First of all, unlike our present mode of thinking, the body, the life force, the mind and the reason itself are meant to be moved by a soul-vision and not under the stress of the ego or the whip of desire as in our ordinary life. Secondly, these instruments of Nature are given to man to express the deeper truth of his soul and not for feeding his already fat ego. Thirdly and finally, there is a hierarchy of working of nature in our being that we need to respect. The senses must be subordinated to the life force and the life force itself to the mind. The mind in turn must learn to submit itself to the control of reason and reason in turn should be used for the higher purposes of taking our soul through the path of the right and the light. For the man who is led by his senses and the vital force or is driven by his perceptions is soon led astray. It is the higher discriminative intellect, that which truly marks our human state, that must govern the rest of the being and not vice versa. And this it can truly do only when reason itself obeys the directions and indications of the soul that is the true master. The implications of this seemingly simple and obvious truth are enormous, not only in the fields of spiritual pursuit and psychological understanding but also in education and even management. For just as an individual, the collectivities of mankind, a nation for instance, too, have a soul. And true national life flourishes only when it is governed by its soul-impetus and the

higher reason and not by the steeds of the senses and the blind life force that is ever busy creating massive engines for production of things for our bodily comfort or pleasure and the satiation of our cruder life parts. A nation or group life built around our sensory and vital appetites is foredoomed to failure whatever immediate success it may taste and gloat over. For the soul and not the body is the eternal reality.

But what is the path through which this chariot must move? Here we find another interesting thought. The objects of the senses are the path through which the chariot moves. This half a verse opens a widest door of possibilities. We are not told to shun the objects of the senses. We are rather being invited to go through life and world and not withdraw from it by shutting off all the senses one by one or extinguish them into some silence of nirvana. Rather this is the path, to go through all the events and outer circumstances of life by making conscious choices. As is our choice so is our path. We have neither to be overwhelmed with life and its myriad objects nor recoil from it out of fear or disgust but face it with the calm control of *buddhi* and the luminous gaze of the soul that is the sole knower within us even as the Spirit is the sole knower above us.

By way of emphasis, Yama, the teacher, further elucidates that he who is without this knowledge and fails to apply the mind rightly is soon led astray by his senses that carry him like wild horses across the abysses of disaster. But he who has the knowledge and applies the mind sooner or later masters the senses who then obey him like noble steeds. But what is this state of knowledge? Yama reveals that this knowledge is a state of purity, of calm control, a state of mindfulness, that is to say, when we are fully conscious and aware. This full awareness or mindfulness is not about merely being awake and attentive but about our minds being informed by a greater Light, the light of the Spirit from Above, leading to a state of fullness within. So also the purity spoken of here may sound strange when applied to knowledge. But here it is not referring to any mere moral or ethical purity but purity of thought and feelings, the purity that comes when our senses and the life force are in a state of calm control and not swayed by the intrusion of desires. Mere sense data is not enough to know the truth. Something else is needed. It is only in a state of calm that even the senses can reflect the form of things as they are. But when the mind is turbulent and nerves and senses in a state

of excitement then we do not see truth or have knowledge but only its shadows and broken and distorted reflections. Therefore the Upanishad contrasts it with a state without knowledge which is also a state of unconsciousness where the mind is unclean. He who is in the right condition of knowledge crosses the springs that lead him to a state from where return into the cycle of birth and rebirth is no more necessary. Others remain caught in the net of phenomenon and are led from one surface wave to another. In other words this knowledge is not the knowledge of surface forms and phenomenon but the deeper soul-vision, a truer seeing of the world and ourselves, into which we enter when our mind and senses are stilled and quietened. This is knowledge, the knowledge of truth, the truth of Self and the Truth of the world, when seen from the spiritual vantage point. Sri Aurobindo puts it aphoristically.....

“What the soul sees and has experienced, that it knows; the rest is appearance, prejudice and opinion.”¹

A truth simple and obvious, yet so difficult to practise for our normal sense-bound mentality that regards only the sense-data as final and rational analysis, based upon this data, the sole arbiter of truth. One needs to dive deep into one's soul, that is so much unreal to us now, carrying the fire of aspiration like Nachiketa. Then even Death becomes our teacher for we are ever ready to learn and know, fearless because free from all else that binds and stops us from truly knowing.

Here we may need to pause and consider two things. The first is the preoccupation of the Indian mind and thought with an inner mastery and self-control leading to a state of Self-knowledge. Second is its placing before man the goal of cutting off the cycle of birth and death and rebirth. Taken at its surface value, these goals seem to be leading us away from the world, if not initially, then eventually, as if that is the goal of our journey. But the next verse says something very interesting. It speaks of the goal, the end of the road as the highest seat of Vishnu. In other words the cutting off of the bonds of death and rebirth seems to be a stage towards the goal of identifying one's being and consciousness with Vishnu, the great Being who is asleep in the heart of creation as well as above it. He presides over it with his million energies, *ananta naag*, the great serpent of Time, who upholds this earth and uncoils itself by the secret power and presence of its Lord within it. It is Vishnu

who as the great Preserver holds the seed of Creation and releases it by the navel lotus or the cosmic consciousness through the Word of Brahma who presides over the cosmos. Thus seen, the cutting off of the cycle of birth and rebirth is not a shunning or a shirking away from the great cosmic labour but simply a refusal to be a helpless slave to phenomenon tied to this world-stake as a sacrificial animal. It means to rise above nature and the cycles of Time but not as an end in itself but as a passage towards a greater and truer living, by identifying with the Presence and the Power that lies secret in the heart of creation as well as above it, the seat of *Vishnu*. This goes with the rest of the thought and the general idea of the Upanishad that always seem to affirm life, though not the life of Ignorance and living in it as a helpless slave to Ignorance, ego and desire but a life that is diviner, truer and therefore also fuller. Such a life is only possible when we identify ourselves not with the surface waves of nature, not tossed and turned by the events and phenomena that surround our life, for these are merely clumsy transcripts of something deeper that eludes us, but with the vast upholding Consciousness that informs and governs it from within and above, *Brahman*, the Eternal, *Vishnu*, the Vast seated above the waters of life, above the ocean of time and space. Man, too, can become one with his being and live divinely, vastly, freely. This is the goal of our journey. This will be elaborated further in the next cycle. But meanwhile Yama summarises:

“Greater than the senses are the objects and greater than the objects is the mind. Greater than the mind is the faculty of knowledge and greater than that is the Great Self.”

There is a hierarchy of status, determined by the state of our consciousness. Indeed it is a hierarchy of consciousness as it is arranged of which forms and figures are mere representatives. The world lives by the Self and not vice versa as we believe in our Ignorance. But there is a still deeper secret than this Self-Realisation which is often the object of the path of knowledge. For, Yama continues:

“Greater than the Great Self is the Unmanifest and higher than that is the Purusha. He is the culmination and the goal of the journey.”

That is to say, the highest status of the Divine is not merely a silent witness Self impersonally supporting this creation but a yet another one that

actually manifests creation out of its womb. And beyond these is the Divine Being, the Infinite Personality of the Godhead with whom we must identify and thereby live even as He lives in this world, sharing His kingdom and His joy and His Glory as portions of his Being. This Great One is the secret Self of all creatures, so none is truly an abandoned one. And by a natural extension, the world is indeed one vast family, not just the world of men and animals but also the world of plants and even inanimate things, for all is indeed His manifestation and in all He, the Master dwells. It is this deeper though now occult truth that is the real basis of unity and not its mental shadow of brotherhood. Universal brotherhood is possible only when we have risen beyond the highest mind of knowledge and realised the Great Self within us and within all creatures.

But how are we to realise Him who is our goal? For He is finer than the finest, subtler than the subtlest and mortal vision cannot see Him. It is only the seers of Truth who behold Him and they have shown the path to man. What is that path? Yama concludes in a few simple yet profound sutras of contemplation, hints of the journey, the lines along which we must labour:

“One must restrain the speech (as indeed all outgoing movements of the mind) in his mind and the mind thus intuned must be focused on the Great Self and the Peace that flows from Him. This Growing Peace within is the sign of His Presence.

“But hard is the path, sharp as a razor’s edge (that is to say, there are many a pitfall and difficulty in this upward ascent, one needs to keep a constant vigil and a perfect inner and outer balance), therefore one must not stay asleep. Rather we must wake up before it is late and find those great ones who have traversed the path and learn of them and from them, the way they have gone.

“Having seen That which is the secret Support of all, That which is Eternal amidst transient things, who is higher even than the Great Self, then there comes deliverance from Death whose kingdom extends only over the transient and the perishable.”

What we are suggested in these few terse but powerful verses is an unwavering concentration of the mind and speech, indeed of the entire consciousness on the one true object of our existence - the Eternal, the Highest. ‘That’ which is beyond the ken of the senses and also of the mind,

That which the unaided mind cannot reach and from where speech returns baffled, as another Upanishad, the Kena, suggests. Next, a state of constant vigil against all that would pull one down and back to the ordinary poise of life, lost amidst appearances and tossed from one phenomenon to another. But since hard is the path and the journey long and difficult, even perilous, full of snares and deceptions, we are well advised by the Upanishada to seek out the wise ones and receive their help and guidance. For we have already been told in the previous cycle that this Self is not won by eloquence or brain power or much learning but by Grace, - ‘he whom the Self chooses....’. It is not our mental or vital or any other human power that can deliver us from the great bondage to Death and the snare of the senses that trap us in a net of ever-changing appearances, but the Grace of That which is beyond the senses and the mind. The wise ones show us the way to prepare ourselves for this Grace, they not only teach us the way but carry us with them on the great path of Immortality. This simple advice has held true through the ages, simple in substance but difficult in practice unless we can command a great sincerity and a one-pointed will, a deep humility and surrender to the Master who is ready to give us Self-knowledge even if he comes to us in the garb of the dread teacher Death. In other words, even when Death approaches us, can we with utter fearlessness and the intensity of aspiration that Nachiketa had, ask her to give us the secret of the Eternal of whom the world and death itself are a mask? Can we even in life, as also in death, make this one crucial choice above all else - the True, the Vast, the Eternal? If we can, then death itself will become our guide and darkness assist us in finding that shadowless Light which it hides, That which is the secret goal of our seeking behind all that we presently and ignorantly strive for and suffer and labour.

(To be Continued)

References

1. SABCL, Vol 17, p. 23

Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* : The Immortal Text On The Divine Truth

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Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* represents the spirit of man in ascending the higher realms of the divine Truth. It is a text of the immortal voice of man aspiring for the highest Truth realisable in human life. If the *Upanishads* laid the foundations of the immortal life on earth and the *Gita* propounded the *Karmayoga* to effectively make it a part of the worldly life, the *Life Divine* further established the transforming power of the Supermind to make the earth its home. It has fulfilled the prophetic vision of the *Upanishads* and the *Gita* in concretising the immortal Truth of the Divine Reality on the rugged surface of the earthly life surrounded by darkness. *The Life Divine* is the culminating point of the Indian mind in its evolutionary history from the primitive to the most enlightened forms of spiritual realisation.

What I will do in this essay is not to summarise the vast knowledge unfolded in the text, but to throw hints as to how one could wade through the labyrinth of the divine drama created and enacted in Sri Aurobindo's immortal text. Mine will not be a textual reading but an interpretation of the most important concepts dealt with in the text.

I. The Beginnings: The Human Aspiration

What could better characterise the divine life on earth than the fact that man is eternally aspiring for a higher life, a life sublime and truthful centred on the immortal truth—the truth of all truths—manifested in the immortal pages of the Upanishadic lore and the song divine of Lord Krishna. Sri Aurobindo is echoing the same song of the divine in the pages of the *The Life Divine*. It is an echo of “the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed Bliss, the sense of a secret immortality”¹. It is this impulse which has been “the earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts”².

Sri Aurobindo captures the true spirit of man when he says that man is ever aspirant for the immortal divine life on earth, for the Kingdom of Heaven on earth and for the attainment of the divine Truth in the fragile human mind. This human aspiration is everlasting and is ever undying because it is the most constitutive spiritual nature of man to go from the limited to the unlimited, from the finite to the infinite, from “untruth to truth, from darkness to light, from death to immortality”³. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“These persistent ideals of the race are at once the contradiction of its normal experience and the affirmation of higher and deeper experiences which are abnormal to humanity and only to be attained, in their organised entirety, by a revolutionary individual effort or an evolutionary general progression”⁴.

The spiritual ideals of the human race are far beyond the capacity for realisation of the present human race and, therefore, they appear to be abnormal to the human mind engrossed in the material world. But the fact of the matter is that it is the same human being who aspires for the higher experiences and tries to build up a strong sense of the divine life. It is the ordinary human mind which aspires “To know, possess and be the divine being in an animal and egoistic consciousness, to convert our twilit or obscure physical mentality into the plenary supramental illumination, to build peace and a self-existent bliss where there is only a stress of transitory satisfactions besieged by physical pain and emotional suffering...”⁵. Such being the human aspiration, it is difficult to deny that the human race aspires though its existence in history for the realisation of “the immortal life in a body subjected to death and constant mutation”.⁶

The aspiration for the higher life or the divine Truth cannot be considered a matter of routine existence of the world; it is to be considered part of the intelligent planning of the Nature, such that Nature has already prepared the ground for man’s spiritual evolution. Nature itself of which we humans are a part is already imbued with the spirit of evolutionary progress towards the Truth and Light. Such an optimism is written into the text of Nature, according to Sri Aurobindo. In his words:

“Not only, then, is the upward impulse of man towards the accordance of yet higher opposites rational in itself, but it is the only logical completion of a rule and an effort that seem to be a fundamental method of Nature and the very sense of her universal strivings.”⁷

Thus Nature is already loaded with an evolutionary design which is waiting to be further unfolded by the active co-operation of mankind in the onward journey of the Spirit already present in Nature. The upward movement of Nature from Matter to Life and Mind, already evident in the human nature, tends to corroborate the belief that there is still an upward climb “towards God, Light, Bliss, Freedom, Immortality”⁸ awaiting for us to execute.

Man, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the symbol of hope for the future, since he is the necessary instrument of Nature to realise the Godhood, the life divine. It is inevitable that man must aspire for the higher life, though it takes millennia to achieve even a fraction of it. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

“... so in man himself there is the same ascending series, the preparation, if nothing more, of a higher and divine life. The animal is a living laboratory in which Nature has, it is said, worked out man. Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious co-operation she wills to work out the superman, the god. Or shall we not say, rather, to manifest God?”⁹.

Thus man’s looking beyond his present state of existence is not a false hope or an empty dream. It is a living and thriving aspiration that makes man restless and perplexed. The light is waiting to be discovered beyond the veil of ignorance created by the human mind. “For it is likely that such is the next higher state of consciousness of which Mind is only a form and veil, and through the splendours of that light may lie the path of our progressive self-enlargement into whatever highest state is humanity’s ultimate resting place”¹⁰

II. Light Beyond Darkness: Tearing the Veil of the Mind

Man’s evolutionary journey towards the supreme Truth is not without its pitfalls, risks and groping in the dark. The path of evolution of the spirit in man is arduous and painful because the egoistic nature of man is a great hindrance to the attainment of the universal Godhead. Man at the present state of existence is steeped in ignorance, because his present nature is still in the circle of animal mentality which is grossly involved in the lower Nature. The present man is at best a mental being having the power of the intellect that can dissect things and events in the world. The world itself is the world of matter that is presented to the limited human mind. Therefore, the human mind is struggling to understand and master matter by various means. Thus mind

is opposed to matter in the present state of human existence. This leads to the duality of mind and matter and the multiplicity of minds and forms of matter. This is the lowest form of existence in the scale of evolution. Sri Aurobindo writes:

“But why this phenomenal and pragmatic division of an indivisible Existence? It is because Mind has to carry the principle of multiplicity to its extreme potential which can only be done by separateness and division. To do that it must, precipitating itself into Life to create gross forms for the Multiple, give to the universal principle of Being the appearance of a gross and material substance instead of a pure or subtle substance”.¹¹

Thus for Sri Aurobindo the mind is the principle of division and separation in the universe and it creates the phenomena of matter and life in their multiple forms. The whole material world in that sense is a projection of the mind, since it is the finite mind that creates the appearance of multiplicity.

Sri Aurobindo adheres to the Vedantic principle that Reality is one and that is Brahman which pervades the entire universe. In view of this it is logically true that the world of multiplicity cannot be real in the ultimate metaphysical sense. Matter itself can never be real because reality is of the nature of consciousness. In Sri Aurobindo's words:

“In a certain sense Matter is unreal and non-existent; that is to say, our present knowledge, idea and experience of Matter is not its truth, but merely a phenomenon of particular relation between our senses and the all-existence in which we move”.¹²

Our senses give us information only about the finite world that is presented to us in space and time. Hence we seem to be in the prison created by our mental categories and principles. The phenomenal world, for Sri Aurobindo as for Kant, is not the real world, but the world given to our sensibility and understanding¹³. It also follows from this that the real world is beyond the comprehension of the limited mind or reason. That reality is the knowable Brahman for Sri Aurobindo, while it is the unknowable Noumenon for Kant. What is distinctive about Sri Aurobindo's view is that the material world is only a veil through which we cannot see reality. But once the veil created by the mind is lifted, one can realise Brahman by direct knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo does not condemn the material world as an illusion (*maya*) in the sense Shankara does, but gives it only a secondary status in relation

to the reality of Brahman or the Sachchidananda. This being so, the world logically gets reduced to a secondary status by being declared to be a form of the ultimate reality. As Sri Aurobindo writes:

“We shall understand better if we go back at once to the original principle of things. Existence is in its activity a Conscious-Force which presents the workings of its force to its consciousness as forms of its own being... Substance or Matter, then, is only a form of Spirit”.¹⁴

Thus the mind-related universe of matter, space and time is only a partial reality and not the complete truth about reality. So we have to look beyond it to get back to the ultimate reality.

A separative consciousness pervades the mental world of man because of his constant interaction with a projected material world; it cannot relate itself to reality which lies beyond the ken of the limited mind. Mind creates the veil which screens off the Infinite and the eternal reality of Brahman. This is the Ignorance or the separative knowledge that makes the human mind the prisoner of a cosmic illusion. Man's constant endeavour is to tear the veil of *maya* or cosmic illusion and to penetrate the realm of the Infinite. Sri Aurobindo writes:

“A many-sided Ignorance striving to become an all-embracing Knowledge is the definition of the consciousness of man the mental being,- or, looking at it from another side, we may say equally that it is a limited separative awareness of things striving to become an integral consciousness and an integral Knowledge”.¹⁵

This many-sided ignorance is the cause of the human bondage in the world of multiple desires, failures and strivings limited to the world of material things. We are thus “ignorant of our timeless, of our superconscious, of our subliminal and subconscious selves”.¹⁶

III. Truth and Reality: The Transcendent and the Immanent

Sri Aurobindo builds up his metaphysical system around the concepts of Truth and Reality as an answer to the eternal quest in man to reach the highest state of existence. If man is ceaselessly trying to tear apart the veil of the mind and to catch a glimpse of the supreme reality and truth, then there must be a method of knowing reality beyond ignorance and also there must be reality in itself to be known. Thus epistemology and metaphysics go hand in hand

in Sri Aurobindo to account for the supreme knowledge of Brahman by crossing the boundaries of ignorance or inconscience. The human mind is epistemologically tied up with Brahman, though Brahman is the supreme reality transcendent to the human mind.

The metaphysics of Brahman, as Sri Aurobindo conceives it on the foundations of the Vedantic Knowledge, is monistic and integral in the sense that it establishes the reality of Brahman, the Sachchidananda. It is the one Reality which is Existence, Consciousness-Force and Bliss. “This primary, ultimate and eternal Existence, as seen by the Vedantins, is not merely bare existence, or a conscious existence whose consciousness is crude force or power; it is a conscious existence the very term of whose being, the very term of whose consciousness is bliss”.¹⁷ The absolute reality which the human mind is trying to grasp without success is the divine reality that appears in myriad forms but is ultimately one. The Vedantic monism that Sri Aurobindo espouses is integral in its nature because it encompasses all reality within itself, both immanent and transcendent.

Brahman, the Infinite Existence and the Conscious Being, is the one without a second and is the source of the cosmos of which our existence is a part. This Being of all beings is immanent in the cosmos and yet is transcendent to it. It is immanent being the all-pervading Reality that informs all existence, and yet is not exhausted by the cosmic reality itself. Brahman is transcendent to the cosmos because it is the source of the cosmos itself. But at the same time the cosmos is part of Brahman because Brahman chooses to manifest itself in the cosmos. Sri Aurobindo’s metaphysical integralism brings out the harmony between the immanent and transcendent by showing that the same Reality has two forms, the one pervading the cosmos and the one going beyond it. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

“If this indefinable, infinite, timeless, spaceless Existence is, it is necessarily a pure absolute. It cannot be summed up in any quantity or quantities, it cannot be composed of any quality or combination of qualities. It is not an aggregate of forms or a formal substratum of forms. If all forms, quantities, qualities were to disappear, this would remain”.¹⁸

Brahman being transcendent is logically not equivalent to its manifestations, though it is present in the manifestations themselves. The immanent Brahman is the same as the transcendent Brahman.

What Sri Aurobindo drives at is the metaphysical truth that there is an infinite substratum of reality that remains for ever even if everything else in the universe changes and is found to be relative, passing and ephemeral. This reality is the changeless Brahman, the presiding deity of the universe and the unmanifest source of the manifest. The manifest is already contained in the unmanifest and vice versa because Brahman is manifest in the universe and yet is the Unmanifest Substratum.

“..it is self-existent and does not depend for its being upon its manifestations. They represent it, but do not exhaust it; point to it, but do not reveal it. It is revealed only to itself within their forms”.¹⁹ Thus there is a process in which Brahman descends into the universe in space and time and becomes the immanent Brahman. But at the same time Brahman rises out of this universe in an ascending curve to reach out its pure form without the cosmic details. This descent-ascent movement takes place within the divine reality that appears to be true to the human mind. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

“For it exists already as an all-revealing and all-guiding Truth of things which watches over the world and attracts mortal man, first without the knowledge of his conscious mind, by the general march of Nature, but at last consciously by a progressive awakening and self-enlargement, to his divine ascension”.²⁰

This general ascent to the Divine Reality which characterises the human reality is a part of the cosmic plan of the Divine to realise itself in the cosmos by a process of ascent. There is no progress in the universe without the divine concurrence.

IV. The Ascent to the Divine Truth

The divine arrangement of the universe is, according to Sri Aurobindo, that of an ascent, of an unceasing progress towards the divinisation of the earth and thus of an evolutionary movement towards the highest manifestation of the Divine Truth. The ascent is the spiritual rebirth of the human race and the evolution is that of man to the superman. As Sri Aurobindo says:

“An upward evolutionary progress of the consciousness itself from grade to higher grade, an ascent, is the evident spiral line or emerging curve that, on this foundation, the evolution must describe. A taking up of what has already been evolved into each higher grade as it is reached and a transformation more

or less complete so as to admit of a total changed working of the whole being and nature, an integration, must be also part of the process, if the evolution is to be effective”.²¹

Such a process of integration as depicted here is the sign of the spiritual transformation that is initiated in the evolutionary process of the universe. This divinely arranged free movement of the Spirit from Matter to Life, then to Mind and Supermind is laid in the very being of the cosmic process. The higher the state of the being the greater is its nearness to the Being, the supreme Reality.

The spiritual evolution which Sri Aurobindo talks about is that of transformation and integration and not a process of a discontinuous development as the Western evolution doctrines²² generally suggest. In the spiritual evolution, the lower stage, Matter, for instance, is taken up and transformed at the higher stage which is that of Life. Similarly Life is transformed and integrated at the stage of Mind. The process goes on till Mind is taken by the Supermind and there is a total transformation of Matter, Life and Mind which characterise the human existence.

“But it must be observed that this ascent, this successive fixing in higher and higher principles, does not carry with it the abandonment of the lower grades, any more than a status of existence in the lower grades means the entire absence of the higher principles”.²³ Thus there is integration of the lower into the higher plane of existence and so the lower is no more the lower, it being a transformed part of the higher. Besides, the lower itself bears the imprint of the higher because in the absence of it the lower cannot aspire for the higher. For this reason, Matter has rudiments of Life in it; so the rudiments of Mind are already present in Life. This is called by Sri Aurobindo the involution of the Spirit in Matter, Life and Mind. He writes:

“In fact, life, mind, Supermind are present in the atom, are at work there, but invisible, occult, latent in a subconscious or apparently unconscious action of the Energy; there is an informing Spirit, but the outer force and figure of being, what we might call the formal or form existence as distinguished from the immanent or secretly governing consciousness, is lost in the physical action, is so absorbed into it as to be fixed in a stereotyped self-oblivion unaware of what it is and what it is doing”.²⁴

Since the Spirit is already working in Matter it becomes easy for Matter

to rise to the stage of the Mind and then to the higher stages of divine consciousness in the evolutionary process of transformation and integration.

Man’s ascent to the Divine Truth is marked by a progressive realisation of the Spirit which rises to the higher forms by virtue of the force of the inner consciousness. It is the law of Nature to give rise to the higher forms of existence and this itself is the Divine Law operating in the universe. Thus “The principle of the process of evolution is a foundation, from that foundation an ascent, in that ascent a reversal of consciousness and, from the greater height and wideness gained, an action of change and new integration of the whole nature”.²⁵ The principle of change and integration is embedded in Nature, so that the inner necessity of the law makes it inevitable that spiritual progression takes place in the universe. In this process man’s participation is equally necessitated because of the fact that man is the bearer of the Divine Truth. It is through man that the Divine Reality works to transform the entire existence into the vital play-field of the Divine Consciousness. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

“The old inconscient foundation itself will be made conscious in us by the inflow of light and awareness from above and its depths annexed to the heights of the spirit. An integral consciousness will become the basis of an entire harmonisation of life through the total transformation, unification, integration of the being and the nature”.²⁶

The integral consciousness is the key to the future development of mankind as a spiritually evolved race of supermen. The arrival of the new race of spiritualised beings is the motto of the evolutionary process of nature.

V. The Emergence of the Spiritual Man

The spiritualised race of supermen is the inevitable result of the evolutionary process written into the constitution of Nature and man. Sri Aurobindo views this process as the Divine Law of all existence. For him, it is not an arbitrary and fortuitous phenomenon; rather it is the law of divine necessity. If the preconditions of all existence are given in matter which is itself a form of the Spirit, then evolution from Matter to Life to Mind and Supermind is an inevitable process; it is the process that necessarily leads towards the highest manifestation of the Divine Spirit in man. It is man who evolves into the superman carrying forward the torch-light of Truth. Hence the future of the

evolution is the emergence of the spiritualised consciousness. Because “There is, then, evidently a spiritual consciousness which is other than the mental, and it testifies to the existence of a spiritual being in us which is other than our surface mental personality”.²⁷

Sri Aurobindo offers a new definition of spirituality in view of his theory of emergence of the spiritual consciousness as a radical form of consciousness. Spirituality results in a reversal of consciousness which is confined to the mental plane. Thus the mental consciousness is transcended by spiritual consciousness so that a new spiritual being emerges out of the mental being. Sri Aurobindo writes:

“Spirituality is in its essence an awakening to the inner reality of our being, to a spirit, self, soul which is other than our mind, life and body, an inner aspiration to know, to feel, to be that, to enter into contact with the greater Reality beyond and pervading the universe which inhabits also our own being, to be in communion with It and union with It, and a turning, a conversion, a transformation of our whole being as a result of the aspiration, the contact, the union, a growth or waking into a new becoming or new being, a new self, a new nature”.²⁸

Thus spirituality brings about a new and radical change in our inner being and awakens us to the new self which we become as a result of the transformation. Therefore spirituality is never synonymous with a mere adoption of a doctrine or being the camp-follower of a certain cult. It really means a transformation of the self with which we are born. It is really a spiritual rebirth.

In the spiritual realm, it is necessary to submit to the higher reality and be an instrument in the hands of the Divine Spirit. This is the acme of spiritual life that we leave our ego-consciousness and be part of the universal spirit. So, for Sri Aurobindo, the first requirement of spirituality is to posit “the existence of Spirit as something else than Mind and greater than Mind, spirituality as something other than mentality and the spiritual being therefore as something distinct from the mental being”.²⁹ The idea of spiritual consciousness is thus contingent on our acceptance of the Divine Reality as superior to our self or the ego. Our intellect must know the Divine Reality and be an instrument of that Reality. So, says Sri Aurobindo:

“If the supreme truth is a spiritual Reality, then the intellect of man needs

to know what is the nature of that original Truth and the principle of its relations to the rest of existence, to ourselves and the universe”.³⁰ But the intellect itself is limited and is incapable of reaching the highest Reality. For that reason, it needs the help of the supermind which transcends mind and the intellect.

VI. The Supermind

The human beings, in spite of their great achievements in the evolution of consciousness are not yet spiritually transformed. Sri Aurobindo envisages there is a wide gap between the human beings and the truly spiritual beings. A further step is needed and that is the intervention of the Supermind in the cosmic process. “The spiritual man has evolved, but not the supramental being who shall thenceforward be the leader of that Nature”.³¹ It “is because the principle of spirituality has yet to affirm itself in its own complete right and sovereignty”.³² A higher principle than the Mind called the Supermind must be appealed to for further development of the spiritual consciousness, because apart from the psychic and spiritual transformation, “there must take place as the crowning movement the ascent into the Supermind and the transforming descent of the supramental Consciousness into our entire being and nature”.³³

The Supermind is conceived by Sri Aurobindo as the principle of transformation; it is the principle that mediates between the Mind and the sovereign Divine Reality. It is the instrument of the Divine to transform the entire existence into the field of divine consciousness. Therefore, “Only the Supermind can thus descend without losing its full power of action; for its action is always intrinsic and automatic...its nature is a self-achieving Truth-Consciousness...”.³⁴

The Supermind has to descend into our earthly consciousness and transform it into the divine consciousness. But before it takes place, the human mind must ascend to the Supermind through the intermediary states of the spiritual consciousness without which the Mind cannot perceive the Supramental Reality. Sri Aurobindo writes:

“The transition to Supermind through Overmind is a passage from Nature as we know it into Supernature. It is by that very fact impossible for any effort of the mere Mind to achieve...”.³⁵ It is because the Mind is steeped in ignorance and so cannot tear the veil standing between itself and the Supermind. In such a situation all that is needed is the intervention of the Supermind and its descent into our consciousness.

The Supramental Consciousness is the Divine Reality seen from the perspective of the Mind. It is that which takes up the Mind and transforms it. Mind has to be awakened to this Truth-Consciousness so that the latter can take over our being and make it an instrument of divine transformation of the lower Nature. The Supermind makes the earthly consciousness its home and thus works on Nature's transmutation. Sri Aurobindo describes this process in the following words:

“A supramental change of the whole substance of the being and therefore necessarily of all its characters, powers, movements takes place when the involved Supermind in Nature emerges to meet and join with the supramental light and power descending from Supernature”.³⁶

This ascent and descent of the Supermind are the hallmark of the transformative consciousness which emerges from Nature and marches towards Supernature. The ultimate aim of Nature is to manifest the Divinity in its full form and change the gross existence of the material world into a conscious existence. The supramental principle is Sri Aurobindo's greatest discovery in metaphysics and thus the finest contribution to the realm of spiritual experience of the mankind. With the help of this principle, the human being “could climb into the gnosis and change into an embodied supramental and spiritual being. On this basis the principle of a divine life in terrestrial Nature would be manifested; even the world of ignorance and inconscience might discover its own submerged secret and begin to realise in each lower degree its divine significance”.³⁷ The future of mankind has much to do with the secret power of the Supermind and its transformational action on the universe.

VII. From Man to the Superman

The destiny of man lies in the future progress towards the supramental descent on earth. This was made the sole mission of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga which he established as the most suitable method to reach the divinised manhood. The passage from man to superman is the secret of the future history of mankind.

The superman, for Sri Aurobindo, is the gnostic being who overcomes his earthly nature and is able to spiritualise his entire being. The superman is the master of his own self and is capable of changing the nature of man as such. He does not command any physical power but wields the highest power of

the spiritual consciousness. Such is his capacity to widen his self that he identifies himself with all the cosmic as well as the supra-cosmic existence. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

“The supramental being in his cosmic consciousness seeing and feeling all as himself would act in that sense; he would act in a universal awareness and a harmony of his individual self with the total self, of his individual will with the total will, of his individual action with the total action”.³⁸

The superman, as the supramental being, embodies in himself the universal consciousness that defies boundaries of his ego. This unification of consciousness in him is the mark of the fact that the superman has become a universal man, though he remains chained to a single body. “Supramental nature sees everything from the standpoint of oneness and regards all things, even the greatest multiplicity and diversity, even what are to the mind the strongest contradictions, in the light of that oneness; its will, ideas, feelings, sense are made of the stuff of oneness, its actions proceed upon that basis”.³⁹ Thus the supermen constitute a new race of human beings.

The new race of supermen is not that of a biologically or physically a different race of beings. They are a new race because they carry a new consciousness. They constitute the race of Gnostic beings who are out to transform the mental life that has existed on earth for long. The spiritual life of the supermen will transform all the values and goals which mankind has so far pursued. “A Gnostic Supernature transcends all the values of our normal ignorant Nature; our standards and values are created by ignorance and therefore cannot determine the life of Supernature”.⁴⁰

VIII. The Way to Truth

Mankind at the present moment is in a deep crisis because of the fact that it has not yet overcome its mental limitations, though the Supramental Force is knocking at its door. Humanity is still at the cross-roads. It is groping for the new Light that is dimly shining at the horizon. What is of immense importance is that the Divine Consciousness is pushing mankind towards its inevitable destiny, that is, the realisation of the Divine Truth. There can be no doubt that man in his wisdom has realised the inevitable spiritual destiny of mankind. Sri Aurobindo has shown the way towards the realisation of the Divine Truth.

The Life Divine has opened the way to Truth by making divine life a distinct possibility and also by making man conscious of his own spiritual destiny. It has unveiled the luminous presence of the Divine Truth by removing the ignorance surrounding it. From behind the dark clouds of the ageless ignorance, the dawn of the New Age is beckoning us. That age is the age of the glorious Spiritual Light that is destined to shine bright given the fact that mankind is aspiring for this. As Sri Aurobindo declares:

“This new status would indeed be a reversal of the present law of human consciousness and life, for it would reverse the whole principle of the life of the Ignorance”.⁴¹

Once the reversal takes place, there will be full manifestation of the Divine Consciousness. “The gnostic manifestation of life would be more full and fruitful and its interest more vivid than the creative interest of the Ignorance; it would be a greater and happier constant miracle”.⁴² Towards the fulfilment of this divine destiny, Sri Aurobindo’s immortal text, *The Life Divine* is a great step.

Notes and References

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Sri Aurobindo and Uttarpara Speech

Trija Roy

[This English translation by Kalyan Mukhopadhyaya is an abridged version of a talk in Bengali delivered at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry on 30 May, 1989 on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of Sri Aurobindo's Uttarpara Speech. A few new facts have been added in this writing based on the 6th edition (1993) of the Uttarpara Speech. No reference has been given to the portions extracted from this speech, as the speech itself is the principal subject of discussion here. The author expresses his deep indebtedness to Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives, Pondicherry. This writing would not have been possible but for the records collected from various journals of that period, preserved in the Ashram Archives.]

The image of Sri Aurobindo that is being spread all over the world is that of one absorbed in reticent contemplation – solemn and silent. In his poem *Silence is all*, he spoke of the silence in which Supreme Power lies concealed. When we stand in front of his portrait, we are reminded of the lines of *Savitri*, his epic

In absolute Silence sleeps an absolute Power.

When Rabindranath went to see him for the last time at the seat of his second tapasya and pay obeisance to him, he did not forget Sri Aurobindo's days of tumultuous movements. If we look back with a deeper vision, it would be revealed today that the seeds of silence were there rooted even in those days of turmoil. If one is to realise the nature of work the future Rishi of Pondicherry was engaged in to meet the need of the hour, then we have to transcend the barrier of a few decades to reach the dawn of the twentieth century when the aspiration for freedom flared up like a raging fire. The fiery writings of Sri Aurobindo kindled many a soul with the flame of self-sacrifice. The Rishi of Silence was eloquent in his role of an orator in many philosophical

meets, in parks and fields surging with teeming multitude of people, spanning the country. Even in that limited span of time when he resorted to speeches as the medium of expression of his thoughts, he left his signature tune in his ideas and expressions. Today, in many cases, speeches have become valueless and irrelevant because they have become bereft of a sincerity of purpose. But in every movement of every country, speeches played a significant role in awakening the masses. Sri Aurobindo attributed due importance to speeches along with active work and silent service in the liberation movement of a country. “Is it not enough reward for the greatest services that we can do, if our names are recorded in History among those who helped by their work or their speech or better, or by the mute service of their sufferings to prepare the great and free India that will be?”¹

The compilation of Sri Aurobindo's speeches published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, contains 28 speeches spanning a decade (1899-1909) commencing with the social function at Baroda and ending with the Hooghly Provincial Conference.²

Sri Aurobindo did not assume the role of an orator even when he associated himself publicly with the revolutionary movement after coming to Bengal from Baroda. Dr Bhupendra Nath Dutta wrote “ During this time (1906 ?) Sri Aurobindo did not frequent public meetings, he would rather sit quietly in the few meetings he attended. The author did not see him lecturing in any of the meetings in Calcutta, although he heard later that Sri Aurobindo delivered speeches.”³

We learn from Sri Aurobindo's book ‘*On Himself*’ that his speeches in public gatherings commenced after the Medinipur Provincial Conference in 1907. He himself mentioned about his speech in a massive gathering at Surat. On his way back to Calcutta, he had to stop at many places as large crowds came to hear him.⁴ Many of the speeches are lost, or are awaiting to be unearthed by research workers in future.

He had to speak under such divergent circumstances that it was well nigh impossible to compile those. Incidentally, we are reminded of Nolini Kanta Gupta's words “ Sri Aurobindo used to sit alone in a corner here (the court room of Alipore sessions judge), we would go to him if someone of us had something to learn from him. One day we convened a general meeting and requested Sri Aurobindo to speak a few words to us in the very court room while the court

was in session; the proceedings were going on and so also was our meeting. Sri Aurobindo acceded to our request, the subject of his talk was Nationalism and the three modes.⁵

Many such subjects came up in his lectures which went beyond the limits of contemporary needs and remained as everlasting treasures for humanity. On June 27, 1909, at Howrah, Sri Aurobindo spoke about the right to form associations. In this speech, he said ‘The right of free speech ensures to the people the power which is the greatest means for self-development...’⁶ We shall find the seed of this development as a step towards advancement in the backdrop of his thoughts on future transformation.

Sri Aurobindo expressed his thoughts on the art of oratory in answer to many questions. The topics were varied: the source of the centre of speech, that speech is basically a thought process⁷, that this process becomes an obstacle if there is no control on one’s life of Sadhana, ‘Not to allow the impulse of speech to assert itself too much or say anything without reflection, but to speak always with a conscious control and only what is necessary and helpful.’⁸ Not only that, he spoke about the problems of speaking to the public. People do not generally care for ‘thought’, they are carried away by lively and fiery speeches. If one is to talk on some deep and profound aspect of thinking, then also the speech has to be diluted considerably and presented with passionate eloquence.⁹

We also come to know of his views on renowned orators. Sheridan, according to him, was a great orator, who did not have to think for his speech. On the other hand, every word that Burke uttered had a thought behind it, so despite being a great orator he could not impress others much.¹⁰ In our country, Bipin Chandra Pal, according to Sri Aurobindo, was a ‘magnificent orator’¹¹, but the defect, he felt, in Surendranath Banerjee’s oratory was verbosity and an excess of rhetoric over the strength of the topic, a defect he found in Gladstone’s speeches too, and that is the reason why such speeches ‘made it the glory of an hour instead of an abiding possession to humanity.’¹²

Such expressions made it clear what he considered a fruitful speech. Nolini Kanta Gupta heard Sri Aurobindo’s speech at Goldighi. He narrates his experience as follows : ‘His voice was mild but every word was clear and firm. The massive crowd under an open sky was quiet and speechless, there was pindrop silence.’¹³

Yet his speech was inspiring. The Mother said that Sri Aurobindo’s speeches inspired his countrymen to sacrifice their lives for the glory and liberation of the country. All such speeches of Sri Aurobindo would arouse any man to be engaged in struggle for the sake of his country.¹⁴ The experience of one person among his audience was that he was not eloquent like some other speakers, he spoke calmly in simple English; it seemed his words came out straight from his heart and not from the head, that is why its influence on the assembly was stupendous.¹⁵ Nolini Kanta Gupta has said something more : I remember all his speeches flowing effortlessly as if in a rhythmic harmony of music.¹⁶

Notwithstanding all these, the figure of Sri Aurobindo as an orator did not assume a significant prominence in the canvas of his multi-dimensional genius. He himself said that ‘He was not an orator and what he spoke was only in the hope that some of the things he might say would go to the hearts of his countrymen and that he might see some effect of his speeches in their action’.¹⁷

Although he spoke in English in various corners of India, he was apologetic ‘for being under the necessity of addressing a Bengali audience in a foreign tongue specially by one like himself who had developed his life for the Swadeshi movement’.¹⁸ Nolini Kanta Gupta said ‘I remember only those few words of him, that he felt regret and shame for not being able to speak in Bengali; his education and environment were such that he had to express himself in the foreign English language’.¹⁹

All these speeches were spoken extempore. Some of them were copied while they were being delivered and later published in journals, some were found in government records. Compilation of his speeches has been possible by making use of these sources.²⁰

Sri Aurobindo has spoken about a special day in his life which may throw some light on the source of his speeches. Lele once asked him to pause for a while after offering his salutation to the audience; then his words would flow from a source other than the mind. After his experience in Bombay on 19 January, 1908 all of his speeches, writings, thoughts and outer activities came ‘from the same source above the brain-mind’.²¹

At the outset of one of his speeches, Sri Aurobindo said that he did not know if he would be able to say all that he wanted to say and concluded the speech by saying ‘This is the word that has been put into my mouth to speak to you today. What I intended to speak has been put away from me, and beyond what is

given to me I have nothing to say'. This is the famous 'Uttarpara Speech' and is one of the three speeches of Sri Aurobindo, which, it can be said with certainty, in its printed version, received his unqualified approval.²² This speech was first published in '*The Bengalee*' on 1st June 1909; later Sri Aurobindo revised it thoroughly and got it published in the 19 June 1909 issue of the weekly '*Karmayogin*'. The speech was first published in a booklet form by Chandernagore Prabartak Publishing House in the year 1919. Since then there have been a number of editions of the booklet. It has also been translated into many languages.²³

Numerous accolades have been showered on this speech by various writers. Rishabchand termed it 'famous', Purani said 'historic', 'epoch-making'; according to Madhav Pandit it is 'inspired'. Srinivas Iyengar could not stop saying 'amazing', he found new words 'Messianic', 'Apocalyptic'. Why so much of amazement at this speech? Purani says in this speech lie 'in seed form some of the basic principles of yoga he evolved.'²⁴ Pramode Kumar Sen finds in it 'a definite direction in Sri Aurobindo's order of Sadhana'.²⁵ He termed this speech 'the central theme of Sri Aurobindo's life'.²⁶ According to him, the message contained in Uttarpara speech 'has controlled Sri Aurobindo's life completely'.²⁷ Amarendranath Chattopadhyay, the veteran revolutionist reminded us, 'those who would read this with due reverence would be able to understand Sri Aurobindo to some extent, they would appreciate why Sri Aurobindo gave up the allurements of leadership, his status in service, the glory of his education, all earthly comfort and pleasures, spent forty years of his life in reticent contemplation in Pondicherry and then gave up his life'.²⁸

The residents of Uttarpara had the privilege of listening to this extraordinary speech. Sri Aurobindo has mentioned about the reception given to him by them. Srinivas Iyengar, the famous biographer of Sri Aurobindo, termed the residents of Uttarpara "uniquely privileged to hear first the 'word' meant for the whole nation".²⁹ Although the oldest municipality in the combined province (subah) of Bengal-Bihar-Orissa was founded in Uttarpara,³⁰ the city's reputation was primarily built on its public library.³¹ It is on this library ground that Sri Aurobindo delivered the historic speech on Sunday, 30 May 1909. In commemoration of this event as also of his first visit here the previous year, marble plaques bearing appropriate inscriptions have been raised in the library compound.

Uttarpara has surfaced time and again in Sri Aurobindo's memory. '...the country must be covered with a network of new primary schools on national lines, such as the one which is now being projected at Uttarpara, – schools giving a primary literary education along with such technical instruction as will enable the students to earn a livelihood as small artisans.'³² 'The might of God is already revealed among us, its work is spreading over the country. Even in West Bengal it has begun its work in Uttarpara and Baruipur'.³³ 'A boat manned by some young revolutionaries of Uttarpara took him to Calcutta; there he boarded the *Dupleix* and reached Pondicherry on April 4, 1910.'³⁴

At the beginning of Uttarpara Speech, Sri Aurobindo said 'It was more than a year ago that I came here last'. However, the compound of Uttarpara Library found a mention in the journal *Bandematarām* '...never has it been delivered with such beauty of expression, such a passion of earnestness and pathos, such a sublimity of feeling as at Uttarpara on Sunday when he [Srijut Bepin Chunder Pal] addressed a meeting of the people in the compound of the Uttarpara Library.'³⁵ It is this Uttarpara Speech 'in which for the first time he spoke publicly of his yoga and his spiritual experiences.'³⁶

We have to depend mostly on the writings of Amarendranath Chattopadhyay to know about the background of this speech. He had a long time association with Sri Aurobindo. Let us hear his own words about this association. 'When I saw him for the first time, I was not only enchanted but I became stronger. I could straightaway realise that it is possible to be initiated merely by sight, neither a touch nor a mental communion is needed for this purpose'.³⁷ This enchantment lasted in him throughout his life. It was sometime after he met Sri Aurobindo that 'Amarendranath selected him as the representative from Uttarpara to the National Council of Bengal'.³⁸ He also took initiative in arranging Sri Aurobindo's visit to Uttarpara for the first time. It was he who escorted Sri Aurobindo when he came to Uttarpara for the second time to deliver his speech. Furthermore, 'he started publishing *Karmayogin*, a Bengali weekly, from Uttarpara from 8th Sravan, 1316 BS'.³⁹ Eleven long years after Sri Aurobindo left for Pondicherry, Amarendranath met him there in the garb of a sannyasi with matted hair. Amarendranath maintained connexion with Sri Aurobindo till he breathed his last. In later years, The Mother, too, maintained the relation.⁴⁰

Not much difference is there between what Amarendranath wrote and what

was reported by ‘*The Bengalee*’. The two points on which they differ are that according to ‘*The Bengalee*’, Babu Janakinath Mukherjee presided.⁴¹ Amarendranath wrote in ‘*Galpo Bharati*’ that Michhri Babu, alias Rajendranath, presided at the meeting.⁴² In some other context, he wrote ‘my grandfather Dwarakanath Chattopadhyay presided at this meeting.’⁴³ The name of Dwarakanath features in the list of persons present at the meeting according to ‘*The Bengalee*’. The other difference is that Amarendranath said that ‘Sri Aurobindo was the sole speaker in that meeting’,⁴⁴ whereas ‘*The Bengalee*’ reported that ‘two more persons spoke’.⁴⁵

The meeting started after recitation of a poem. Amarendranath writes ‘Harihar Mukhopadhyay recited a poem.’⁴⁶ However, Satyabrata Chattopadhyay, son of Amarendranath, wrote ‘Sri Aurobindo started delivering his famous lecture after Amarendranath recited a poem ‘Abahan’ (Welcome) written by himself’.⁴⁷

Now we come to know from the writings of Amarendranath the facts related to Sri Aurobindo’s coming to Uttarpara in connexion with the speech.

While Sri Aurobindo was putting up in the house of Krishna Kumar Mitra after his release from Alipore jail, Amarendranath went to him with the object of inviting him on behalf of ‘Dharma Rakshini Sabha’ of Uttarpara. On Sri Aurobindo accepting the invitation, Amarendranath escorted him to Uttarpara by train on the appointed day. Sri Aurobindo asked him why a ticket for the third class was not bought. On being told that the guest should not have a say in such matters, he smiled and said ‘Do as you please.’⁴⁸

We might recall what Sri Aurobindo wrote in *Karakahini*. ‘I remembered that while proceeding to Surat all of us travelled together in third class in order that the doctrine (socialism and equality between the rich and the poor) may be dutifully converted into reality.’⁴⁹

Amarendranath wrote ‘while escorting him in the train we found him very calm, he seemed to be engrossed in deep meditation. Seeing him in that absorbed state of mind, I did not disturb him by speaking to him...Almost all the passengers who were travelling by the same train got down at Uttarpara station to hear his speech.’⁵⁰

It was 3 pm then. Raja Pearymohan, his eldest son Michhri Babu, and the residents of Uttarpara were there to welcome him. With the bursting of bombs, Pearymohan felicitated Sri Aurobindo with a garland. Volunteers went on chant-

ing Bandemataram in a roaring voice. Sri Aurobindo was then taken to Surendranath Chattopadhyay’s house for a little rest. Then a procession escorted him ‘to the site of the meeting on the eastern side of the library ground around 5/5.30 pm. The procession was well planned and well organised so that everybody could catch a glimpse of him. Residents of Uttarpara decorated the roads of the town with flowers and foliage, housewives blew conch-shells to welcome him and showered flower petals on the roads traversed by him.’⁵¹

It is known from the report in ‘*The Bengalee*’ that the meeting started at 5.30pm. At the outset ‘Rajendranath, an ardent admirer of Sri Aurobindo, saluted him with a garland that stretched from his shoulder to his feet. As soon as he bowed down in obeisance, a number of conch-shells blew repeatedly and loud chanting of ‘Bandemataram’ rent the sky and the air in a way that would have shattered the heart of the enemy. Twenty bombs were exploded at the reception meeting.’⁵²

About the garlanding of Sri Aurobindo, ‘*The Bengalee*’ reported that a handkerchief with the map of India printed on it was attached to the garland. Rajendranath said that the map of Mother India was a sure sign of her embracing Sri Aurobindo with her two arms so that he could serve the motherland without fear or hesitation.’⁵³

It is relevant to state here that Rajendranath, known as Michhri Babu to the public, was the eldest son of Raja Pearymohan Mukhopadhyay. Amarendranath wrote ‘I hardly saw anybody as dedicated to the motherland as he was; in the freedom movement of the country he pledged his all, even his life. It was his association with Sri Aurobindo which brought some change in his character’.⁵⁴ Amarendranath wrote elsewhere ‘He (Michhri Babu) derived genuine pleasure in worshipping him as a deity and offered him fruits and other edibles. He also used to visit him quite frequently.’⁵⁵ Somebody took a string of flowers from the specially prepared garland that he had prepared for Sri Aurobindo. He became livid with rage and said ‘If someone took away the sacred thread from the idol of Lord Narayana in my house, I would not have been so much agitated as I am now.’⁵⁶ However, he calmed down after that portion of the garland was restored. Raghunandan Das wrote in a touching language the help Michhri Babu rendered to Sri Aurobindo when he left for Pondicherry —

‘Rajendramohan the Aurobindo – devotee
With great care

Sends one hundred rupees to the ship
For the voyage of Aurobindo.
It was his last offering to his deity.⁵⁷

As Sri Aurobindo stood up after Rajendranath garlanded him, a thunderous roar of Bandemataram by a ten thousand strong crowd greeted him. Absolute silence prevailed in the meeting ground at a single raising of the finger by the speaker.

Sri Aurobindo started his speech - 'it was like the murmuring sound coming out from Gangotri.'⁵⁸ 'No public address system was available at that time and Aurobindo's voice was very mild, available to about a hundred people. But the assembly of audience was absolutely silent in their all consuming urge to hear him. It was hard to know if the audience could hear what he said but a pindrop silence prevailed.'⁵⁹ It is difficult to perceive today how the ten thousand strong crowd kept their cool and maintained absolute silence.... there was no unrest even after the speech was over, everyone seemed to have been inspired by the ray of a new light.'⁶⁰ 'The Bengalee' wrote 'the silence prevailed even after Sri Aurobindo completed his speech. It was broken when the crowd in chorus sang Dwijendralal's 'Aabar tora manush haw' (Be man once more).⁶¹

The meeting was over around 8 pm. Babu Aurobindo left for Calcutta in a carriage late in the evening.⁶²

It is a matter of regret that no photograph of this meeting has been published for the public so far. The photograph of Sri Aurobindo that we see in connexion with this meeting at Uttarpara public library is in reality 'the photograph at a public reception given on 5 April, 1908 to Bepin Chandra Pal upon the latter's release from Buxar Jail.'⁶³

We shall no longer be able to hear the voice with this speech, but there remains the written version of it spread over eleven paragraphs approved by Sri Aurobindo. An apt realisation of the spiritual consciousness of the speech needs a personal and sustained study, but a few points can be brought in the ambit of our discussion.

In the second paragraph Sri Aurobindo has said 'one who always sat by my side and was associated in my work is a prisoner in Burma; another is in the north rotting in detention.' He did not disclose the names of these two persons. They were Shyamsunder Chakraborty and Subodh Chandra Mullick. They were

among the nine Bengalis sent to exile by the British Government on 16 Dec. 1908 in terms of the regulation no.3 of 1818'.⁶⁴

Subodh Chandra Mullick was a close friend and associate of Sri Aurobindo in his work. Sri Aurobindo stayed in his house during his tenure as the Principal, National College of Bengal, and also carried out the editorial work of the journal *Bandemataram* there. Subodh Chandra donated rupees one lakh for the National College, for which act of benevolence his countrymen used to spontaneously address him 'Raja'. Shyamsunder Chakraborty assisted Sri Aurobindo in his editorial work. Proficient in English, Shyamsunder picked up much of the style of Sri Aurobindo's writing.

A glimpse into Sri Aurobindo's leaning towards yogic sadhana can be found in a germinating stage in the Uttarpara speech. Here he revealed a unique chapter of his life arising out of his own experience of how a man, absorbed in work but with a soul afflicted by weakness can become powerful and at a time of crisis in life can hear a divine message in his inmost self and endeavours to dedicate himself towards the divine direction. There is the admission 'I was weak and could not accept the call'. And there is the realisation 'I knew that no human power could hush me, until that work was done no human power could stop God's instrument.'

Many a people have crossed dark tunnels, slippery paths and mute barriers by reading these portions of his speech. Who will say how many men would reach their goal in surefooted steps with absolute dependence on them! The gratitude abounding in myriad hearts bears testimony to this.

He has indicated how this power spreads itself in a weak receptacle. He spoke about the Sadhana mentioned in the Gita. The essence of his interpretation of the Gita which is famous all over the world appears in his speech. The essence of *Vasudeva Sarvamiti* (Vasudeva is present everywhere) is narrated here. Sometime after this speech, he spoke about the same thing in his original Bengali writing *Karakahini*. We derive added satisfaction when we read it alongside the speech. 'While doing so I would be engrossed in a feeling where the prison did not seem to be a prison. The high outer walls, the iron bars, the white walls of the prison cell, the trees with blue foliage bathed in sunlight, the commonplace objects no longer seemed to be inanimate, they appeared to be living with an all-encompassing consciousness. I had a feeling that God loved me, wanted to embrace me. Human beings, cattle, ants, birds were mov-

ing, flying, singing, talking – yet all these were manifestations of the play of nature, but deep within a great and pure yet dispassionate soul was there absorbed in blissful delight. Sometimes I felt that God was standing under the tree playing the flute of joy and extracting that bliss from within my heart.’⁶⁵ In this speech, he identifies this God as Vasudeva; ‘...I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in these darkened souls and misused bodies.’ He clarified by saying that such a vision of his occurred by looking ‘at the prisoners in the jail, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers...’ whom we call lesser people.

This experience of Sri Aurobindo has not been out of bounds of disbelief of our suspicious minds. Even those who had great respect for him were afflicted by doubt and hesitation. In 1925, someone wrote to him “In your Uttarpara speech you wrote ‘on seeing Narayana’. Is it an exaggeration made consciously or unconsciously or is it an attempt to influence the audience?”⁶⁶

While there is simplicity in such questions, he was sometimes attacked by sharp banter to which he occasionally retorted: That day I saw in ‘Indian Social Reformer’ of Poona that somebody taunted an easily understandable statement of mine thus, ‘there seems to be an intimate association with God in the prison’. I wonder of the vanity and smallness of men seeking glory and honour with meagre knowledge and little good qualities. Is the manifestation of God possible in the luxury apartments of the rich and in the cosy comfort of the bed of a selfish, pleasure-seeking man rather than in the prison cell, in thatched houses, hermitages and in the hearts of the suffering humanity? ...And it is in the solitary prison cell of a patriot of a fallen nation which is about to lift itself that close association with God is possible.’⁶⁷

Referring to similar experiences of Bepin Chandra Pal⁶⁸ and Krishna Kumar Mitra, he commented elsewhere: ‘Tauntings mean that such talks are fantasy of eccentric people or quackery of liars. Still what Aurobindobabu said has exactly been narrated by Krishna Kumar Mitra, a top ranking person of Brahmo Samaj. Even the vision of the merciful and omniscient in the figures of the judge and the jailor, which has been a subject of ridicule to many has been experienced by both of them.’⁶⁹

He had to face further questions if such experiences were to be made public at all. Sri Aurobindo wrote in a letter: Seeing often that yogic experiences lose their potentiality if made public, many yogins have made it a rule that they would never tell what happened inside themselves, till such time those became

things of the past or precipitated down so that nothing could cause any further decay. He wrote further that there is *ksaya* (decay) of the tapasya if yogic experiences are related to anyone but the guru, although he himself disclosed his own experience and that too at an open public meeting.⁷⁰

If we read Sri Aurobindo’s works, we would come to know that he had kept everything within himself, and it was only after his release from jail that for the first time he spoke at Uttarpara publicly about his spiritual experiences.⁷¹

In this context, we may recall a writing by Amarandranath Chattopadhyay. ‘The late Panchkari Bandopadhyay was then the editor of *Hitabadi*. After reading the speech he told me, I do not know why your Guru circulated such an unjust word because vision of God is to be kept secret as in the womb of the mother. I replied, My Guru writes shastras, he does not have to know them. In reply he said, yes indeed! Like Guru, like disciple.’⁷²

It is through Uttarpara Speech that Sri Aurobindo made it known under which command he revealed his inner realisations to the outer world. In a letter he wrote, even those who live an austere inner life, they also have to take a long time to get themselves involved with words and deeds of the outer world. ‘Outer speech belongs to the externalising mind – that is why it is so difficult to connect it with the inner life.’⁷³ This difficult task has been accomplished in Uttarpara Speech.

The most important part of the speech is about Sanatan Dharma. Sri Aurobindo said that he did not know properly about this, now he ‘realised what the Hindu religion meant.’ Day after day, God made him realise – in his mind, heart and body – the fundamental truth of the Hindu religion. He said firmly ‘the protection of the religion, the protection and upraising, before the world, of the Hindu religion, that is the work before us.’

We have to make our mind clear about this portion of the speech. We have to know if there is any difference between what he said in this speech and what he commented about Dharma in the later phase of his life, and his affirmations regarding it. This must be clear, because there is a tendency to use some portions of this speech in isolation to achieve some narrow objective. On the other hand, there are also instances of sidetracking the issue.

It is not possible in the limited scope of this discourse to deliberate on the comments on religion that Sri Aurobindo made during his lifetime. However, we may take note of a few representative portions. Sri Aurobindo wrote ‘All

religions have saved a number of souls, but none yet has been able to spiritualise mankind.⁷⁴ He said ‘There are two aspects of religion, true religion and religionism. True religion is spiritual religion, that which seeks to live in the spirit...’⁷⁵ He used the word ‘wider Hinduism’ in the same year that he delivered the speech. Not merely that, he found the foundation of the future religion of the world within Hindu religion. ‘...that wider Hinduism which is not a dogma or combination of dogmas but a law of life, which is not a social framework but the spirit of a past and future social evolution, which rejects nothing but insists on testing and experiencing everything and when tested and experienced, turning it to the soul’s use, in this Hinduism we find the basis of the future world-religion.’⁷⁶ Sri Aurobindo termed it Sanatan Dharma. He straightaway said ‘There are two Hinduisms; one which takes its stand on the kitchen and seeks its paradise by cleaning the body; another which seeks God, not through the cooking pot and the social convention, but in the soul... it is the Hinduism of Bhisma and Sri Krishna, of Shankara and Chaitanya, the Hinduism which exceeds Hindusthan, was from of old and will be for ever, because it grows eternally through the aeons.’⁷⁷

Because he could say this, he could become a lover of humanity even though he spoke of patriotism and nationalism. Let us be aware of what he wrote : ‘Our politicians were mostly incapable of viewing Mother in her entirety. Ranjit Singh or Guru Govind Singh could only see the Mother of Punjab, and not Bharatmata. Shivaji and Baji Rao could visualise only the Mother of the Hindus ‘instead of Bharatmata.’⁷⁸ This he wrote eight months after he delivered the Uttara para Speech. The Sanatan Dharma portion of the speech would give an indication to the reader of the path of integral yoga that in future he would show to humanity as the instrument to transcend the barriers of the mortal world. This would be evident if we are conscious of his role in the backdrop of that period of time and the noble dream that he nurtured in his heart for which he dedicated his life.

In this speech, Sri Aurobindo said ‘What is this religion which we call Sanatan, eternal? It is the Hindu religion only because the Hindu nation has kept it.’ This religion is ‘for the salvation of humanity.’ ‘That which we call the Hindu religion is really the eternal religion, because it is the universal religion which embraces all others’. This religion is ‘not so much to be believed as lived’. ‘This is the one religion that can triumph over materialism by including and anticipating the discoveries of science and the speculations of philosophy.’ ‘...which does

not separate life in any smallest detail from religion, which knows what immortality is and has utterly removed from us the reality of death.’

The subject of Sanatan Dharma is, indeed, the central theme of the speech. Recently in one publication, this speech has been printed with the title, ‘Sanatan Dharma’, with ‘Uttara para Speech’ printed below it.⁷⁹ It is perhaps not fair to take such liberty. The comment made in this regard in the publication of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, is apt. They said that while compiling the speeches, titles have been given according to the subject in all cases with the sole exception of this speech which is ‘too well known under that name for it to be changed’.⁸⁰ We have to remember that Sri Aurobindo mentioned Uttara para in connexion with the speech and gave this title while publishing it in *Karmayogin*.

A certain mood prevails in this speech from the beginning to the end which might ordinarily be perceived by the reader to be repetitive. But that precisely is the soul of the speech. This speech is not exactly according to the will of Sri Aurobindo, but is the *adesh* of God. ‘He has commanded me to speak’, ‘The thing I had in my mind He has thrown from it and what I speak is under an impulse and a compulsion’. God told him ‘you have only got some strength from me to speak a word to this nation which will help to raise it’.

Sri Aurobindo also said ‘I spoke once before with this force in me and I said... that nationalism is not politics but a religion, a creed, a faith.’ Following this reference, it can be said that that speech was delivered at a mammoth meeting arranged by Bombay National Union at Bombay’s Mahajan Wari on Sunday 19 January, 1908. Srinivas Iyengar has written about the spiritual experiences Sri Aurobindo had on the eve of these two lectures. After the experience of Nirvana at Baroda came the Bombay speech and Narayan Darshan occurred before Uttara para Speech.⁸¹ It is from Sri Aurobindo that we come to know of his second realisation which was that of the cosmic consciousness and of the Divine as all beings and all that is, which happened in the Alipore jail and of which he has spoken in his speech at Uttara para.⁸²

Because he had such experience and because he spoke from a state of such consciousness, his speech became radiant with the inherent truth and glowed with immeasurable richness in oration. We are inevitably reminded of a couple of lines from the epic Savitri :

‘His speech carries a light of inner truth’

‘The speech that voices the ineffable’

The ardour of a patriot became the spiritual path of yoga. We can hear Sri Aurobindo's prayer to God in this speech – 'If Thou art, then thou knowest my heart. Thou knowest that I do not ask for Mukti, I do not ask for anything which others ask for. I ask only for strength to uplift this nation, I ask only to be allowed to live and work for this people whom I love.'

'Give me Thy *Adesh*. I do not know what work to do or how to do it. Give me a message.'

He revealed the two messages that came to him through yoga and said 'This is the word that has been put in my mouth to speak to you..' What he spoke in Bombay after being endowed with some power came back to him with renewed strength in a different form in this speech.

'I can say that it is the Sanatan Dharma which for us is nationalism. The Hindu nation was born with the Sanatan Dharma, with it it moves and with it it grows... The Sanatan Dharma, that is nationalism. This is the message that I have to speak to you.'

Those who would read Uttarpara Speech keeping in mind what Sri Aurobindo meant by 'Religion', 'Sanatan' and 'Hindu', then these words spoken eight decades ago would present newer possibilities to humanity – a quest for the inner self of man by crossing the communal divides of religion and the role of India in bearing the onus of responsibility for human beings. Through thousands of uprisings and downfall, India has upheld this tradition and is certain to uphold it. In an hour of crisis he stood up, with Bengal as the centre, to remind India about that eternal role of hers. Let us once more see in retrospect the time, the place and the people when these noble words were uttered. It is a popular saying that the western bank of the Ganges is as holy as Benares. The district Hooghly is on the west bank of the Ganges. Sri Aurobindo had many connexions with this district. His ancestral house was at Konnagar, he attended the biggest political conference at Chinsurah before leaving Bengal, he stayed incognito for more than a month at Chandernagore – all these kept Hooghly associated with his life. Uttarpara lies on the southern fringe of this Hooghly district.

That great assembly was held on the eastern sector of Uttarpara Public Library ground on the bank of the Ganges. On one side was the flowing holy Bhagirathi, on the other side was the library, literally the temple of Goddess Saraswati. In between stood Sri Aurobindo on the sacred ground.⁸³ This Ganges flowing seaward figured in one of his poems while he was in Baroda, although he did not publish it at that time.

Hearken, Ganges, hearken, thou that sweetest
Golden to the sea
Hearken, Mother, to my voice,
From the feet of Hari with thy waters pure
thou leapest free,
waters colder-pure than ice.

Today he stood on the bank of the same Ganges, on the other bank was Dakshineswar. He wrote about that also in poetry much earlier.

Dukkhineswar, Dukkhineswar, wonderful
Predestined pile
Tell it to our sons unborn,
where the night was brooding darkest and the
curse was on the soil
Heaviest, God revealed the morn.

If this be the place, then what about the period of time when he made the speech?

Sri Aurobindo said 'Since 1907 we are living in a new era which is full of hope for India. Not only India, but the whole world will see sudden upheavals and revolutionary changes.'⁸⁴ Sri Aurobindo had been the receptacle chosen by God in that turbulent period of revolution. This also happens to be the time of a momentous change in his life. This was the intervening time between Aurobindo Ghosh, the revolutionary and Sri Aurobindo, the Rishi of Pondicherry. During his confinement, he wrote 'when I should enter into the field of work again, the former Aurobindo Ghosh as known earlier would not enter there, but a new man with a new character, new intellect, new life would come out of the Ashram at Alipore and take up a new assignment of work with a new mind.'⁸⁵ That new assignment became evident now. He spoke with India in the background, yet his vision stretched beyond the country into the future of humanity. During his confinement in Alipore jail, there was a fundamental change in his vision of life. In his own words '...his work became a part and result of it and besides far exceeded the service and liberation of the country and fixed itself in an aim, previously only glimpsed, which was world-wide in its bearing and concerned with the whole future of humanity'.⁸⁶

In the Bombay speech (19 January, 1908) he said God '...has a work for this great and ancient nation. Therefore he has been born again to do it, there-

fore he is revealing himself in you not that you may be like other nations, not that you may rise merely by human strength to trample under foot the weaker peoples, but because something must come out from you which is to save the whole world. That something is what the ancient Rishis knew and revealed, and that is to be known and revealed again today, it has to be revealed to the whole world..’⁸⁷

In the Uttarpara Speech, the enlivening message of the ancient Rishis resounded in Sri Aurobindo’s voice in a new form. That voice remained in his lifelong stream of messages. The words of Chittaranjan Das which astonished everybody in the court of law have become true; Sri Aurobindo’s words are being echoed and re-echoed not only in India, but across distant seas and lands. And so the revolutionary Aurobindo Ghosh occupies today a seat of reverence in the hearts of many a people in as many ways as a great yogi, a rishi, a guru and an avatar. But on that day at Uttarpara, in the person of the man just released from jail, the most dangerous man of British India, could anybody fathom the assurance he had given in the Bombay speech – that God has come again to accomplish his work (...he has been born again to do it..). There is at least one occurrence which bears testimony to this proclamation; one man among the audience uttered in reverence ‘It is Aurobindo who is my Narayana’.⁸⁸ The manifestation of Narayana in man was the lifelong sadhana and dream of Sri Aurobindo. Of him Rabindranath expressed his hope “India will speak through your voice to the world ‘Hearken unto me’.” This is Sri Aurobindo whose Uttarpara Speech remains a legacy for the people of the entire world. It remains there for the sadhana of those who repose their trust in Sanatan Dharma, so that the spiritual salvation of humanity in future can become a reality.

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The Mother Abides

Nolini Kanta Gupta

If it is a ‘pralaya’, even a ‘mahapralaya’, all is not lost, all is not washed away. Something remains, untouched, deathless, the divine part in you, the Mother’s part in you, the consciousness incarnate and articulate.

Indeed it was your soul that she salvaged out of the inconscience and established in you as a living reality. That was her first and primary task and She has fulfilled it. It was there always, true; but it was a far-off, very distant and almost inactive point of light, an unknown and an uncharted star not yet come into the ken of human measure and potency. She has brought it nearer home and established in our living and dynamic consciousness. She has buoyed it up from the unconscious depths, or brought it down from vague, ethereal, nebulous regions, gradually developed it and nourished it and given it a firm dwelling in our inner regions. She moulded it into a personality with a name and a form. If we do not recognise it often or always, it is because the outer shell of the senses has not yet been fully opened to it. But it is still there as our inner ruler and guide in spite of and through all obscurities and aberrations.

Exactly the next step, the second part of her work was to build around this soul, the inner being, a body, a material vehicle to express it. To give a concrete divine shape to this sole reality was her labour at this point. The soul was there, but a god has to come and inhabit it; this godhead, that is to say, a Power, a form of the Mother’s own personality has to be brought down and the soul integrated into it. Apparently it was left off at that point and not completed.

The purpose and aim being not an individual realisation or even a realisation in a few individuals, but an achievement of the human race which means a large or a significant part of it, the effort has had to be redirected to that end. The level of the human consciousness has to be lifted up to an extent that it might be capable of holding and embodying the inflatus that was coming into it for the change. Otherwise an individual representing the human level

and forming part of the material consciousness would not be able to do it. Not only the earth consciousness but the material constitution of the earth has to be transfigured. For the human body to pass through and complete the stages of transformation must have parallel echoes in other individuals – not necessarily the whole of humanity, but as I said, presumably a sizeable part of it. Otherwise the purpose of the change, a global, collective change will not be fulfilled. An isolated individual supramentalised body upon earth would be a freak of nature, a forced miracle as it were, an anomalous object in Nature, and a humanity even at its topmost rung would not find any relation or kinship with it.

So, the earth-nature has to be prepared for that end in view, first of all the earth-consciousness in the physical substance and then the raw substance itself. This has to be done as our immediate and urgent business of life.

I said the earth-consciousness was not quite ready yet for the final transformation of the Mother’s body, that is to say, the material substance of the body. Therefore it could not accommodate the incoming transforming force – and it broke: in breaking it must have broken through, through the hard dense outermost crust of matter – with what results, time will show.

As for us who survive, let us begin from the beginning. Let us start from a scratch as it were. We remember Mother’s own story, what she had done for herself when she came to Sri Aurobindo. She effaced altogether her old personality, her achievements and accomplishments, made a clean slate of her consciousness and laid herself at the feet of Sri Aurobindo like a new-born babe, innocent of the past. Let us also in the same way face the day with our baby-soul in front, for that little being is the Mother’s Presence in us, still aglow with her consciousness.

“ You know, I was very hesitant to read this to you.

In one way it is all right, but because...

In fact it is a mental and intellectual presentation of a phenomenon which goes beyond all intellectual and mental measure. This phenomenon is not only extra-intellectual, supramental but also supra-cosmic, the sense and bearing of which will be unveiled in the course of time.

Meanwhile, I think the best thing to do would be to remain quiet with a serene trust, with all the aspiration of our soul, our soul which is the concrete presence of the Mother Herself in us which we carry within us always¹.

Notes

1. This comment was made in French as it was a French class; the original in French is given below :

J'ai beaucoup hésité, n'est-ce pas, de vous lire ça.

D'un cote c'est bien, mais parce que...

En fait c'est une présentation mentale et intellectuelle d'un phénomène qui dépasse toute proportion mentale et intellectuelle. Ce phénomène est non seulement extra-intellectuel, supra-mental mais aussi supra-cosmique dont le sens et la portée se dévoilera au cours du temps.

En attendant je crois le mieux serait de rester tranquille avec une confiance seraine, avec toute l'aspiration de notre âme, l'âme qui est la présence concrète de Mère Elle-même en nous que nous portons toujours.

A Canadian Question

Question : It is written in '*A Practical Guide to Integral Yoga*'¹ :The physical nearness to the Mother is indispensable for the fullness of the sadhana on the physical plane. Transformation of the physical and external being is not possible otherwise.

My question is : How are we to interpret these words in the light of the Mother's recent passing? Does this mean that a full transformation is no longer possible to the aspirant? Or has discipleship on the material level in the path of the Integral Yoga come to an end?

Answer :

Obviously, the immediate programme of a physical transformation is postponed – not cancelled.

But what we have been given is not less of a miracle. Mother has prepared for us her new body in the inner world, in the subtle physical which is as living and tangible as her physical body even though not as concrete. In one of her last Notes², she refers to this new transformed body and she describes it as presented to her vision. That body she has built up in her long arduous labours, built up in a complete form and left with us and with humanity.

This new body of hers, prepared behind the material curtain, she sought to infuse into the material form, even press into it or force into it this new element; but Matter and man's physical nature were not yet ready: Earth still considered it as an intrusion, as something foreign. The material casing broke down in consequence - perhaps not broke down, rather broke through....

But it is still there living and glorious in its beauty and power and is still at work within us, and around us in the world, incessantly, towards the final consummation of its material embodiment.

What is expected of us is to see this golden Mother within us and try to become, as she always wanted, her golden children, within and without.

Sri Aurobindo speaks of an inner mind, an inner vital, an inner physical. ...The golden body, the new body, is formed out of an inner mind, an inner

vital and an inner physical, renewed and reshaped. We can show our love for her, requite the debt that we owe to her Grace by admitting her Presence into our physical being and allowing her to do the work she has undertaken to do.

For us now it is time to make amends for the lapses of the past – there were lapses, indeed, grievous lapses. So long her physical body was our protection; we did not suffer the full consequences of our Karma because her body acted as buffer: it broke the force of the impact of the karma and reduced its evil effects to a minimum. Her body bore our burden and relieved us of the misery otherwise due to us. Mankind, the world even, does not know the saving Grace that her material frame brought to them. They would have gone down to destruction and dissolution but for the presence of the Divine Body.

The world has survived, mankind has an assured future, that is the work done by her body. It aimed at a little more, to show us something of the concrete form of the future, but evidently that was not to be, because something from us also, from the world and mankind, some helping hand in the labour was needed – we remember her ringing words : *Si l'humanité consentait à être spiritualisée*³ – well, that is the minimum, that minimum was also not granted to her body. Her body was made so easily available to all without any trouble and effort on our part that we lost all sense of the precious things brought to us, brought to our very door. We did not how to make use of it and have the true benefit out of it. Many a time she did say something to us to that effect regretfully, we wasted a treasure like the pampered prodigal son.

It is regrettable but she has left no cause for our regret. She has left with us the true source of her protective power, her living consciousness concretised in the earth's atmosphere, in the personal atmosphere of each one of us. We have only to open our grateful eyes and see it. The ladder has been taken away, but she has come nearer to us and a little uplift will replace us within her arms.

Since we have no longer the support of her body on which we depended almost exclusively, we are compelled to seek the true support, the support of her consciousness, the inner reality – her inner presence, her living Person within – which her body represented, whose acquaintance we were not careful

enough to cultivate. Now we are thrown upon the only alternative available. The way will be arduous; we could have much more easily mounted up the ladder of consciousness with the aid of her body, almost playfully like children. Now a little bit of austerity will be needed to go on our own, the austerity will be needed to bring our external life and physical consciousness in line with her own consciousness, to prepare them, to make them ready. Her material body offered an unconditional help and protection, now all that will be conditional – conditional upon our willing co-operation, our happy and conscious collaboration – of course the Grace will be always there. Once she asked us point-blank, for the crisis was upon us – Are you ready? Almost unthinkingly, in a gesture of bravado and gallantry, many answered “yes, we are”. But we were not in fact.

The task then for us and for the world is to make ourselves ready, that is to say, make our physical being and consciousness free of the old reactions, instilling into them the consciousness that she is, with which she still embraces us – so that when the next call comes, although the call is always there, we may answer with truth on our lips – “We are ready”.

References :

1. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1970, p.179
2. Notes on the Way : Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, August 1972 (Notes on 25-3-72)
3. “If only mankind consented to be spiritualised”.

Twin Prayers

Lord, this morning Thou hast given me the assurance that Thou wouldst stay with us until Thy work is achieved, not only as a consciousness which guides and illumines but also as a dynamic Presence in action. In unmistakable terms Thou hast promised that all of Thyself would remain here and not leave the earth-atmosphere until earth is transformed. Grant that we may be worthy of this marvellous Presence and that henceforth everything in us be concentrated on the one will to be more and more perfectly consecrated to the fulfilment of Thy sublime Work.

The Mother's prayer to Sri Aurobindo – so beautiful, so poignant and so true – we, her children now turn round and readdress to Her own sweet self.

The new creation that the Mother embodied is not lost, it is not wiped out with the disappearance of the material body. It has been a true creation and is indelibly implanted in the earth-atmosphere and will remain there for eternity. And it is not merely a static structure, it is a living and growing entity. It is not in the earth's atmosphere a mere image or a lifeless picture transfixed there as on a canvas strip. It is living and growing – living and growing not only in itself and for itself, but making its habitat the atmosphere also live and grow in new dimensions, that is to say, transforming it in accordance with its own developing truth and reality. It is growing and characteristically growing downwards, that is to say, extending itself more and more towards an earthly manifestation or incarnation. It is like the ashwattha tree spoken of by the rishis of old that stands upside down, the roots upward and the branches spreading out downwards – indeed it is growing downward – drawing its life-sap from above. The physical embodiment, the materialisation of the inner formation will happen in course of time inevitably. It will touch the ground, the very ground of the earth and stand as its marvel-creation – through a process of calamities and catastrophes perhaps – which may indeed be minimised if circumstances permit and the Grace admits; but however the

process, the end is decreed, for the decree is that of the Divine and it is the destiny of earth-consciousness.

This is, however, the Mother's part of the work and she is doing it perfectly, on her side. But what about ourselves? What is our share of the work? For it is intended that we, her children, should be collaborators in her work, so that we too may be integrated into the Divine realisation. The Mother herself has indicated the line of service we can render to her in the communication I just read out to you:

...henceforth everything in us be concentrated on the one will to be more and more perfectly consecrated to the fulfillment of Thy sublime Work.

The situation has somewhat changed since then and has become more difficult. On the departure of Sri Aurobindo, sometime after, Mother gave us a message, an admonition, pointing us to the difficulty:

Pour suivre Sri Aurobindo dans la grande aventure de son yoga intégral, il fallait toujours être guerrier; mais maintenant qu'il nous a quitté physiquement, il faut être un héros.

To follow Sri Aurobindo in the great adventure of his integral yoga, one needed always to be a warrior; but now that he has physically left us, one needs to be a hero. (24-11-1952)

At present when the Mother too is no more there – apparently – we seem to be abandoned children, what are we to do or be? It is no longer sufficient to be a warrior, not sufficient even to be a hero. What should we be? Something greater than the hero. One must be a yogi. The yogi is one who has the Divine Consciousness or the Mother's Consciousness. If you find that it is not so easy for one to be a yogi, even if one tries sincerely, I suggest to you another alternative. It is to leap into another dimension: to be a child of the Mother, ...an ideal child of the Mother.

November 17, 1973

The Mother's body belonged to the old creation. It was meant to be the pedestal of the New Body. It served its purpose well. The New Body will come.

This is a test, how far we are faithful to Her, true to Her Consciousness.

The revival of the body would have meant revival of the old troubles in the body. The body troubles were eliminated so far as could be done while in the body – farther was not possible. For a new mutation, a new procedure was needed. "Death" was the first stage in that process.

Sweet Mother,

Your physical body belonged to the old creation because you wanted to be one with your children. You wanted this body to uphold the New Body you were building upon it, and it gave you the service you asked of it. You will come with your New Body.

Your children's, the world's call and aspiration, love and consecration are laid at your feet in gratitude.

Integrality

Matthijs Cornelissen

Introduction: integrality and the Purna Stotra

Integrality is an amazingly beautiful and powerful concept that, I think, is destined to play a major role in the next stage of the collective evolution of consciousness in which we all are involved. It is somewhat urgent to talk about integrality because "integral" is becoming a kind of fashion word and once words become more popular, they tend to be used more and more trivially. I have heard a reputed and influential scientist object to applying an integral approach to the relationship between science and religion because he took integrality to mean the same as amalgamation – for him "integrating science and religion" implied that they were considered to be one and the same thing. This seems to me to be a rather tragical misunderstanding of integrality. The concept of integrality in the names of the *Cultural Integration Fellowship* and the *California Institute for Integral Studies* (CIIS) was introduced with a very different purpose in mind. As far as I know, these names were coined to harmonise with Sri Aurobindo's use of the word integral in Integral Yoga. Sri Aurobindo uses integral here as a translation of the Sanskrit word *purna* and the word *purna* has a very beautiful and long history in India. Whenever the Upanishads are recited, it is a tradition to also recite the Purna Stotra:

Aum purnam adah.....

That is infinite. This is infinite.

Infinite comes from infinite.

Take infinite from infinite,
still infinite remains.

Aum. Peace! Peace! Peace!

It is a very short text in which the word *purna* occurs seven times. To translate *purna* is somewhat complex. In the context of the Purna Stotra you

cannot really translate it with “integrality”. In this context it is often translated with “the complete”, or “the infinite”. The stotra starts with, “That is infinite”, meaning, “The Divine is infinite.” “All This is infinite. This infinite comes from that infinite.” And then it starts with a kind of mighty mathematics of the infinite. It says, “If you take away the infinite from the infinite, you still have the infinite.” I think it is rather significant that whenever the Upanishads are recited, this Purna Stotra is used almost like a refrain. It realigns the listener to the infinite, and to effect that realignment is the very reason why the Upanishads are recited. The Purna Stotra is put in between other texts, to remind us that the real thing that matters is that completeness, that integrality, that totality that contains everything and that at the very same time is the inmost essence of everything. This ineffable totality exists in the aspect of *That*, which is totally beyond everything, and also in the aspect of *This*, the nitty-gritty of daily life. One cannot be without the other, for if you try, if you remove one from the other, still That One Infinite remains.

Integrality as epistemology

If one takes this concept of integrality seriously, then it turns upside down everything that we normally do and think. It is something extremely radical. If one really understands the concept of integrality, it gives a completely different perspective, a whole new understanding to life. The Western tradition in its basic approach, at least in the scientific sphere, is following just the opposite of an integral approach. It is rather significant that the scientific tradition has been basically reductionist, as reductionism is the direct opposite of integrality. What reductionism does, is to explain wholes out of their parts. And, interestingly, this seems to work, at least to some extent, within the technical and the physical realm, the fields which Western science is really good at. One can illustrate the difference between integrality and reductionism with very simple things. If a car, for example, is made out of parts, the construction of the car seems to be a completely technical matter, it entirely happens by physical processes. The parts are put together through processes that you can fully understand physically, whether they are executed by machines or by men. So it appears that you can explain a car completely in terms of physical processes. But after you have done that, and you have convinced yourself that the physical reality is a causally closed system, you

find that somewhere there is something seriously amiss. Because most of these parts would never have existed if the concept of the car had not been there first. You cannot have a steering wheel if you don’t have the concept of a car, you cannot have a brake if you don’t have a car—even a wheel hardly makes sense without a car. So obviously this physical, reductionist explanation from down up is somewhere incomplete. There remains something that can only be explained from the top down. The secret is that if you look at reality only in physical terms, you will never find what it is in the whole that goes beyond the sum of the parts, because that little extra ingredient is not physical. The mysterious extra that is there in a car besides the parts, is the *concept* of the car, the *design* of the whole and this design is not a physical thing; it is something mental.

This non-physical element is not only present in the creation of complex “things” — like a car made out of parts, or a cathedral made out of stones. It is also there in all kind of processes, like the very activity of science. Physics, for example, deals, supposedly, only with inanimate matter, but what we overlook in saying so, is that in its dealing with inanimate matter, physics itself is a mental activity. Physics is to a very large extent based on mathematics and there is nothing material about mathematics. Mathematics is a phenomenon of the mental plane; it is a mental play with mental rules and symbols. So when we say that physical sciences are reductionist, this itself is already a misconception. It is only because we completely identify with our mind that we don’t see it. When we think about the physical reality, that thinking as such is not a physical activity, but a mental activity; only, the mental aspect of it is hidden in ourselves. The fact remains that the total reality of a physicist looking at physical reality is not a purely physical phenomenon. It is something that is half mental, half physical, mental on the side of the subject, physical on the side of the object. So the physicist can pretend that he is working only with the physical reality, but that is only half the story.

Mainstream Western science holds that the physical reality is primary and that everything comes out of the physical reality, but that theory itself, science itself, is obviously not material, and neither is the reality as a whole. The Indian tradition has focused very much on the other side. And for the social sciences, in which the CIIS is specialised, the Indian approach is crucial, because for the social sciences the simplistic, physicalist, reductionist scheme does not

work at all. When we study physical processes, we can do that quite effectively from the level of our mind, perhaps simply because the mind is a type of consciousness quite far beyond the type of consciousness that is there in matter. But when we try to study the mental processes which are the subject of psychology, from within that very same level of the mind, we get into a mess, because we are not sufficiently detached from the level of consciousness that we are studying. Reductionism doesn't work in psychology because explaining the mind out of matter doesn't work. There remains a "hard problem" because there is something extra in mental consciousness that is simply not present in matter *as envisaged by science*. I think that the social sciences are slowly getting to the point where they realise that the materialistic and behaviourist scheme does not work. That much I think most people finally agree on – perhaps not yet most people, but at least an influential group realises this. But the post-modern schemes don't work either. Most of them are still horizontal and horizontal schemes don't work because one is still in the system itself so one gets into all kinds of self-referential loops that don't lead to resolution. Social constructionism which holds that whatever we say is socially determined, ends up with a self-defeating paradox. If even the theory of social constructionism is socially determined, the whole thing undermines itself, we cannot get at any solid truth anymore and "anything goes", as Feyernabend says. If constructionism would be the final word, there would be no safety against derailments of social pressure in perverse subcultures, or even society as a whole, as happened in Nazi Germany, or Stalinist Russia. Now, how do we get out of this swamp?

Just as physical stuff cannot study physical stuff, we need to be a few layers above a layer of reality before we can really study it. To study something "objectively", one has to rise out of the layer to which it belongs and look at it from the outside. Only then one can see safely, purely, concretely what exactly is happening. This is certainly true for our psychological processes. We cannot study them from the mind. We have to study them from a level of consciousness above the mind, or at least free from the mind. And that is exactly what the Indian tradition has done. The whole Indian tradition can be seen as a very systematic, rigorous attempt to develop methods of going beyond our mental consciousness. If you see it as a knowledge system, then you can see it as a system of methods to purify the *antahkarana*, the inner

instrument of knowledge. That is to say, one establishes first one's aim as an absolutely pure, unbiased view on reality. Then one realises that to get there involves a few definite steps. The first one is purification, not in a moral sense, but as a freeing of one's consciousness from lower physical and vital influences. The second one is a higher concentration, but the most important of them is dis-identification. One has to stop identifying oneself with the body. One has to stop identifying with one's emotions, one's desires, one's vital hang-ups. One has to stop identifying with one's mind, one's mental processes. One has to look even at one's own mental processes as an outsider, as from above. And then finally one has to dis-identify from the ego and even from the basic ego sense. In ordinary psychology, when people are asked to introspect on what is going on inside of them, there is always a conflict of interests, because they look with their mind at their vital or with their vital at their mind. They always look with some part of themselves at some other part. It is as if a judge is asked to judge a member of his own family. A judge or important civil servant cannot take up a job where there is a conflict of interests. As long as one identifies oneself with some part of oneself, one cannot look at one's inner processes objectively. It doesn't work, one has to get out of the whole thing before one can see it clearly.

These three steps, purification, concentration and dis-identification, need not be taken in this sequence. They go together, but all three are needed. It is a perfectly systematic and logical process to arrive at a state beyond the mind, from where one can study the psychological processes that go on in oneself (and others) in a pure and disinterested manner. This is the methodological part of integrality.

Towards perfect integrality: the evolution of consciousness

The question of integrality becomes even more interesting, I think, when one looks at it in the framework of an ongoing evolution of consciousness. According to Sri Aurobindo, over the last three thousand years or so, the Indian tradition has concentrated on methods to get out of the mental sphere directly into the Absolute. And it has shown that that is a definite possibility. It is difficult but it is not impossible. One can completely dis-identify from one's mental processes, from one's vital nature and so on, and kind of jump into a state of Samadhi or Nirvana, an absolute consciousness beyond everything

else. It is possible to throw out everything from one's mind and shoot off to that absolute state. But when one does that, there remains a gap between that state and one's daily life, so one has to come back and one is more or less where one was. There is no real integration. Sri Aurobindo says that the older Vedas followed a different road. The Vedic Rishis developed all the steps in between so that there was a completely conscious path from the bottom, right up to the top and an integration of the absolute with our life in the relativity. He explains that the breaking up of the possibility of integration was a historical necessity in order to develop the mental layer to its maximum potential, with which we are so familiar at the moment. The focus on the mind has been there very clearly in the West, but it has also been there in the Indian tradition. During the Indian Middle Ages, for example, there was a tremendous development of logical reasoning. The Indian philosophers of, say, the fifth to the twelfth century surpassed what has been done in the West in terms of absolutely strict, logical reasoning – logical reasoning followed through to an almost absurd degree. They were using the mind to its ultimate end. So in India too, there has been a movement away from intuition to the purely logical mind. Still, one could argue that in the West, this development has been carried through more completely and in more areas. In existentialism, for example, the exclusive belief in the individual mind dealing with the most outward aspects of reality led to a deep alienation, an uprooting of the individual from his/her social and metaphysical embeddedness, which is, as yet, rare in India.

According to Sri Aurobindo, this stress on the mind is a phase in a cycle that we have had to go through to get to the new re-integration, which is now becoming possible. We can now return to the level of intuitive unity with a much more developed mental instrumentation to express that intuitive truth. At least this is what Sri Aurobindo himself has done. He has not constructed speculative theories from bottom up, but he has gone to that higher consciousness and from there expressed the things that he saw, with a highly developed modern mind. He sees his work as the very first step towards a radical new stage in our collective evolution, what he calls the supramental stage. I will say a few words about Sri Aurobindo's idea of an ongoing evolution of consciousness, because it explains the fantastic way in which the concept of integrality comes back at many different levels, at many different scales.

When one starts with inanimate matter, and one tries to explain conscious-

ness, one doesn't get there. One gets stranded in what Chalmers called the "hard problem": how can consciousness arise out of an inanimate chemical process? There is a kind of unbridgeable gap. In the Indian tradition there is a similar problem. If you start with an absolute consciousness as the source of everything – the kind of absolute perfection the word *purna* addresses – how do you get to the nitty-gritty of ordinary life? When you start with the Divine consciousness, how do you get to our level of stupidity? From where can it have come? This has been *the* central question of Indian philosophy. How did we become so ignorant? It is similar to the Christian question where evil and the ego come from when God is good. Sri Aurobindo has an extremely neat explanation for it. He calls it a process of involution through *exclusive concentration*. He compares it to a boy who is reading a book. The boy is fully engrossed in reading and forgets everything else – who he is, his duties, what happens around him, everything. When one is fully engrossed – like we are now engrossed in this question of what is exclusive concentration – one forgets for the moment about Israel, the war, the traffic, one's family; all that disappears. Sri Aurobindo takes this exclusive concentration, which is clearly a capacity of consciousness, as the fundamental process responsible for the involution of the original, divine consciousness into its apparent opposite, matter. So what happens when one starts with the ultimate divine consciousness that comprehends everything? At first, there are no limitations – only pure vastness, infinity, light. Then it separates into a multitude of separate centres of consciousness, but each centre is still infinite and containing everything. Then these units start concentrating more. They start excluding other things. And they become more and more focused until in the end they are so focused that they become, for example, electrons which know only one thing, how to turn around a proton. It is an absolute, almost point-like concentration of the formative ability of consciousness. The only thing that still betrays the presence of consciousness at that level is the habit of form – the habit of turning around the nearest proton. Consciousness is here completely limited to one single, fully fixed expression, obeying the most basic laws of physics. In between the top layer of free, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent consciousness, and the fully determined, purely physical level, all the other, typical planes of consciousness are formed. The mental consciousness is still somewhat free; it can float, it can see things from above. The vital

consciousness is further involved. It cannot see things any more from above; it is bound to one point from where it interacts with others. On the lowest level there is the physical consciousness. Here consciousness is completely contained inside itself. There are physical interactions, of course, but only when different entities bump into each other. The consciousness cannot move out of its groove, cannot vary, cannot “play”. So here is the end of the process of involution, here consciousness has hidden itself completely and has turned into its apparent opposite, matter.

So from where originates the complex mixture of physical, vital and mental aspects of reality that make up our life on earth? For this one needs a re-emergence of consciousness. The fantastic thing is, that this re-emergence, this evolution, is not just the mirror image of the involution. There are many people who have said that the Divine consciousness first immerses itself in a ready-made physical body and then, through a process of yoga, emerges out of it. But it is not as simple as that, because our individual lives are part of an ongoing collective evolution of consciousness in Nature. And that collective evolution of consciousness is not an evolution *out of* matter, but it is an evolution *in* matter. On earth one sees a series of physical forms that express increasingly higher planes of consciousness. If you look at a bird, for example, which can fly, which can sing and so on, it is typically a vital creature, it is an expression of the life world. But it is not just a waft of *prana* (life force) in a sea of *prana*. It is a physical bird, who somehow manages to behave like *prana*. The evolution is thus not an evolution out of matter; it is a transformation of matter in the direction of ever-higher layers of consciousness. In this process, the evolving life-consciousness has first evoked appropriate new physical forms that can embody life: unicellulars, plants and finally ever more sophisticated animals. Again, when in the next stage the mind develops in animals, it does not just bring philosophy or mathematics into being. On earth, the mind is embodied, so, what come into being are humans, who can play with philosophy and mathematics while still living in a physical body. And we, as human beings, have all the previous types of consciousness still in us. On the vital plane we have our interactions. We have love, hate, exchanges of business and emotions; all that takes place horizontally. On the next, mental level, we have a consciousness that emancipates a little more. I can rise “in my mind” above myself and I can see that I am a human being

just like others are human beings. But I’m still looking from one point. I can see the world “objectively”, but in only one way at a time, and my ideas can still be in conflict with reality and the ideas of others. If the evolution is indeed a process by which a divine consciousness gradually re-emerges from matter, it is clear that our present human state cannot be the final stage of evolution. The human consciousness is obviously not yet the divine consciousness from which the whole thing began, far from it. So the question arises: is it possible to have an incarnate existence, an existence in a living physical body that has that non-divided, supra-mental perfection of consciousness?

In the Indian tradition the layer above the mind is described as the *vijnana*, the gnosis. Sri Aurobindo calls it the supramental. It is a consciousness in which there is differentiation, but not yet division. There are many diminished reflections of this type of consciousness in the mind. It is not impossible for us to get to a state where we are aware of the joy of variety and oneness at the same time. A fair number of people report, for example, having felt their essential oneness with nature, or, more rarely, an experience of oneness on a cosmic scale, with the creation as a whole. Others have it with people and know deep from within that we are one in our essence. Falling in love with someone is a still more limited, focused state that includes this sense of oneness with one very special other: while in love you enjoy the being of another person as your own. But all these are only remote and diminished shadows of what Sri Aurobindo means with the supramental consciousness. These experiences one can have on much lower, mental and vital planes of consciousness. What Sri Aurobindo envisages is a state in which the veil of ignorance is shed *entirely*. It is a state in which there is a genuine identity with the divine consciousness in its full glory, in its passive as well as its active aspect, in its individual, as well as its cosmic and transcendent form. He sees it, moreover, not only as a change in one’s essential identity, a change in whom one knows oneself to be in the essence of one’s being. He envisages a radical transformation of every part of one’s nature, mind, vital and even body, till in the end every part of one’s being is aware of its identity with the Divine. It is a state impossible for the mind to imagine, just as impossible in fact, as it must have been for the monkey to foresee the human mind.

In a very deep and absolute sense, one could say that integrality is thus only fully possible for a consciousness solidly established on the supramental plane. Only a supramental consciousness can really see the whole and all the

parts in their right place, understand everything in its true, original value and significance, and act in perfect harmony with the whole. I have no doubt that a supramental integrality, in thought as well as action, is the future of the human race. To the extent that we can pull that off, we will survive. It is also clear that it will take time till the real, supramental way of looking at things will establish itself in our collective consciousness. Till then, all we can work for are more or less liveable approximations in ourselves and in all the different fields of our collective life.

Integrality in practice

Integrality always involves a higher order reality that encompasses, enriches, and combines things from a lower level of reality. In mathematics, when one integrates a two-dimensional circle, one arrives at a three-dimensional sphere. In the realm of technology, a car, for example, is a higher order unity than the parts that it contains. It not only combines them all, but it allots them their specific place and function; it makes it understandable, and appreciable, why each part is exactly as it is, what its special qualities should be and what its specific role is in the whole. Philosophically, if one wants to find a truly integral view of reality, one needs a worldview that is not just a combination, let alone an amalgamation of a hundred similar or dissimilar scientific and spiritual approaches. One needs something that rises above all of them, something that is capable of holding them all up in a comprehensive, higher order vision. The foundations for such a higher order view can be found, according to Sri Aurobindo, in what he calls the “original Vedanta”, the most ancient Vedic view of reality which transcends and encompasses the many different, and often contradictory spiritual and materialist conceptualisations of reality that developed afterwards. Just as Hinduism is not itself a religion, but rather a complex social framework that supports and nurtures thousands of different religions, so also the Vedic view of the world provides a mental framework that can uphold, support and integrate many, if not all, ways of knowing the world, philosophical, scientific, religious, artistic, or whatever.

To our modern mind, it may sound counterintuitive that we would have to go back in time to find the proper philosophical foundation for the future. We are very much used to think in terms of linear or even logarithmic progress. But perhaps life is not that simple. The belief in progress itself is a recent

phenomenon. Throughout antiquity, and especially in Greece, civilisation was perceived as going downhill from a Golden age in the far past, and most Asian cultures have thought in terms of recurring cycles. Of course, these different views may not be as contradictory as they appear to be. A circle looks like a line when a small stretch of the circumference is seen in close-up. A spiral looks like a zigzag line from the side and as a circle when seen from the top. In actual fact, we know amazingly little about our own history. The last 3000 years or so are fairly well known, but we have not more than a vague and largely speculative idea about the 3000 years before that, and we know virtually nothing about the millions of years since the first hominids appeared. It is, moreover, quite likely that we give a completely wrong interpretation to the little that we do know.

The sophistication of the first recovered cities, the first pyramids in Egypt and especially the earliest preserved texts in Greek, Sanskrit and Tamil, belie the idea that earlier times were psychologically more primitive than our own. The most ancient texts, the Sanskrit Vedas and Puranas, mention explicitly that they were composed because an earlier, much greater wisdom was getting lost. They seem to consider their own text as a crutch that has become a necessity because people are becoming less and less truthful and intuitive. There is a long tradition in India that considers all technology a sign of weakness rather than a sign of strength. After all, if we can stand storm and rain, we don't need a house, if we are telepathic, or simply contented, we do not need a mobile. The tribals in South India even consider the building of a temple an insult to the deity. They reason that by building a separate house for God, you throw him out of your own house; by making an image of God, you alienate the God in your own heart. Perhaps we got into all this nitty-gritty of building houses, inventing electronics, speaking even, because we have lost the true word, the true knowledge. Perhaps we need all these artefacts only because we have lost the true consciousness. But even if this is true, or partially true, this still doesn't mean that technology is an aberration we have to throw away. Even if we have developed our fantastic mental and physical instrumentation out of weakness, we could still use it for larger, nobler ends, once we have recovered a higher state of consciousness and inner power.

It might well be that we have reached the end of the long and painful period in which the West has dominated with its, inherently ignorant, attempts at

building things up from the bottom. The time may have come to re-integrate this whole individualistic, mental development in the much wider ambit of the spirit. Perhaps, when one talks about the integration of East and West, it is not just that one needs to combine Western and Eastern ideas. The time may have come to find the appropriate place of the physical and mental development that the West has carried to its zenith, into the much wider, vaster and more beautiful framework of the Spirit. With the Spirit I don't mean, however, the exclusive spirituality of Theravada Buddhism or Mayavadin Advaita, but the much more comprehensive and life-affirming spirituality of which the Vedas and early Upanishads have given us the foundations.

Perhaps one has to go to the vast, cyclical idea of the *yugas* before one can really understand the next step in our collective evolution.

If we look only at the surface, then it appears rather dubious that collectively we would be ready to make the colossal jump needed to arrive at a higher consciousness. We are still predominantly physical beings – or rather mental beings completely engrossed in the physical reality – and we still believe in mental, technical solutions to our problems. But our problems are huge, and perhaps too huge for the mind to solve. So perhaps we have reached the stage where we will have to move beyond our present, mental level of consciousness, whether we like it or not.

The first sign of such a change might be that for more and more people, the presence of their soul would become a more concrete and influential force than their physical surrounding. In a way, this is the real turning point that has to take place—that one doesn't experience oneself anymore as a temporal, physical creature, but that one knows one's own eternity, one's own infinity. Perhaps we are reaching the point where a larger section of humanity will begin to develop a higher, spiritual consciousness and will see how the whole physical development takes place as a relatively small process within the perfect Oneness of the Spirit. This would have tremendous implications for every field of science, but especially for the social sciences and, of course, most of all for psychology. It would change, for example, the whole concept of motivation, which can then be seen as a reflection in the individual of the same basic forces and processes that are also at work in the much vaster movements of cosmic evolution of consciousness. It would change the concept of emotions, which can then be seen as different deformations of the original

ananda due to the many partial and limited identifications of the ego. It would completely change the principles of cognition, in which a primary *knowledge by identity* would become the key to our understanding of consciousness and knowledge. This would revolutionise science: if each individual centre of consciousness is in essence a centre of the absolute, omniscient, and omnipotent consciousness of the Divine, separated off from its source by not more than a process of exclusive concentration, then one might have, in principle, the possibility to reverse this process and recover these higher powers. There are quite good indications that the different processes of yoga can actually help us in that direction. It seems quite well within our range to know and influence things and other individuals from within, through an intimate identification with their centre of consciousness. It is something, which one can, at least in part, already experience. Obviously this could lead to possibilities for the inner sciences that could lead far beyond what we are now tinkering with in physical technology. But perhaps, even more important than all this, is the change it will bring in our picture of who we basically are. If more people begin to realise our essential Oneness with each other, with nature, with the Divine, we will have, finally, a realistic chance of peace, of harmony and a new *Satya Yuga*.

This is the very short outline of what I think the word integrality as used in the Purna Stotra and Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga basically means. It will require extensive inner development. So the question is how far we have reached individually and collectively. Whether this is something that will happen in the next ten years, hundred years, or thousand years – it is very difficult to say. But that this is the direction we are going collectively, I have no doubt.

Transcript of a talk given at the Cultural Integration Fellowship, San Francisco

Practices in Integral Yoga

Larry Seidlitz

(*Continued from the previous issue*)

Work

Dedicated work is a central aspect of the Integral Yoga. In Yoga, work is not to be done out of the usual motives—to receive monetary recompense and enjoy the pleasures it affords, to obtain power or position over others, for the pride it gives or to appear respectable or attractive to others, or even for the simple pleasure or joy we get from doing the work. Naturally, some or all of these factors may be there in the early stages of yogic practice, but they are to be gradually replaced by an attitude of doing the work as perfectly as possible as an offering to the Divine for the Divine's purpose and not for our own personal benefit. This occurs mainly as a gradual, inner change in attitude and consciousness, but these changes should have corollaries in the outer expression of the work too. For example, the usual motives should become less prominent in the choice of work. The choice should be determined more by an inner predilection or guidance rather than outer rewards. Here, our inner nature, qualities, abilities, tendencies may be helpful indicators. However, unless or until there is some reasonably clear inner indication that changing our type of work is required, it may be more useful in the beginning to focus on changing how we approach and do the work rather than changing the type of work itself.

A relatively simple discipline to help effect the change in attitude required is to make a conscious offering of the work each time we begin and complete it. This in itself may be difficult to get established as a regular practice at first, but once it does get established it becomes relatively easier to maintain it and increase its frequency. This discipline is useful because it gets the consciousness concentrated in the true attitude towards our work and activities, however briefly, whenever they are performed. It is relatively more difficult to maintain

this conscious awareness of offering while doing the work itself, because the consciousness naturally gets concentrated on the work and its execution. This is alright, and even to remember and think of the Divine with the outer consciousness during the work itself may interfere with its execution and diminish its quality. A continuous memory and concentration on the Divine during the work activity can gradually develop, but it generally does so as a result of a split in the consciousness between an inner part of the consciousness that maintains a conscious contact and memory of the Divine, and an outer part of the consciousness that is concentrated on and engaged in the work. This division between the developing inner consciousness in contact with the Divine and the outer consciousness focused on outer activity grows gradually with the overall sadhana, but it is directly supported by the repeated offering and dedication before and after the work is done.

The Mother once suggested a useful and powerful practice to heal the division between the inner consciousness focused on the Divine and all the activities of outer life. It consists essentially in imagining that she is there with us as we carry out our daily activities. For example, starting from the morning when we get out of bed and brush our teeth, we should imagine she is there with us as we brush. If we drive to work, we can imagine she is there with us as we drive. Whether we imagine her physical presence or her spiritual presence does not essentially matter. This practice can be especially useful when we are faced with a difficulty or a decision to make. We should try to do nothing that we would not do in front of the Mother. This imagined sense of the Mother being always with us reflects a fundamental truth, for indeed the Divine is always present.

Another important way to bring the spirit of sadhana into our work and activities is through the development of organisation, harmony, peace, and quiet concentration in all our activities. Just as cleanliness and order should be established in our home, it should be established in our physical work environment and activities. Our work tools, whether they be books and papers or wrenches and screw drivers, should be kept in order. Our relations with our superiors and subordinates should also be kept harmonious and peaceful. They should be viewed as superiors or subordinates only in the sense of their functional organisational relationship for the purposes of carrying out the work as efficiently as

possible, not in the sense of superiority or inferiority in essential worth or value. Like other persons, they should be treated as different expressions of the Divine having an underlying essential oneness with ourselves and with the Divine; therefore with respect and care. However, for the purposes of the work, we should relate to our supervisors and subordinates according to our responsibilities. Sometimes this may mean carrying out directions from our superiors that we disagree with for the sake of maintaining order and harmony in the work organisation. Similarly, it may mean being insistent or at times even severe with subordinates, though anger should be avoided and respect should be maintained. Tact, understanding, and interpersonal skill should be the hallmark in our dealings with both our superiors and subordinates. More generally, there should be developed a spirit of cooperation, harmony, and goodwill in relationships with co-workers. We should view the work enterprise with its various organisational structures and interpersonal relationships as a particular collective embodiment of the divine working towards a particular divine purpose, in which we play our part in the whole as best as we can. Naturally, dispersion in useless chatter or frivolous activity detracts from serious and quality work and concentrated sadhana. We should work in a quiet and concentrated way, whatever the behaviour of others. We should not be overly concerned with the misbehaviour of others, or try to coerce others to behave as we would like them to, unless it is our specific responsibility to do so. Our own example will be a more powerful instrument for influencing others than our pleadings or complaints.

Whereas the spirit of sadhana in work that has been described can be brought into whatever work we do, a specialised work done in offering for the growth and establishment of the collective Yoga can be a useful element of our karma yoga. I am referring here especially to voluntary service towards one or more of the various collective activities and enterprises associated with the Integral Yoga or aligned with its aims. These include the various Ashrams, centres, study groups, businesses, and other organisations that aim to express in outward form the spirit of the Yoga and the Divine. This type of volunteer work has several advantages. One is that if pursued without regard for monetary recompense, it provides a surer sign that this particular motive is not driving the activity. Monetary donations to such organisations represent further progress in

this direction. Second, it may more directly assist in the establishment of Yoga and its spirit in the collective consciousness of humanity. A third advantage is that it may put us into contact with other individuals consciously pursuing the Integral Yoga, from whom we may learn. A fourth advantage is that by being a part of a collective carrying out the spirit and work of the Yoga, we enter into a flow of the collective divine energy and activity and make ourselves an instrument in its larger work and aims. Of course, the main motive of such work should be our simple self-offering to the Divine.

Living within

In previous sections I have discussed how to introduce yogic practice into many of the activities of daily life. In this section I will discuss various aspects and ways of cultivating the general yogic poise of living within. In most people, the consciousness is projected outwards towards the world and its many varied activities, and it often becomes dispersed and fragmented as it confronts and deals with an unending stream of outer impacts. In Yoga, the consciousness must gradually relinquish this primarily outgoing movement and become concentrated and centred within, and focused on the Divine. Whereas a complete withdrawal from the world and its activities is as a rule prohibited in the Integral Yoga, a withdrawal from various outer activities and contacts that are unnecessary and tend to disperse the conscious and deflect it from its inner focus is often advisable. The ultimate aim is to be permanently centred in the inner consciousness in union with the Divine while also engaging in outer activities, but in the initial stages of Yoga, it is important to concentrate on establishing this inner poise from which we can act outwardly in the true way. Therefore, it is often useful to examine our outer activities and their effects on our consciousness, and withdraw ourselves from those which are unnecessary and harmful.

For example, parties or even social interactions with particular individuals that tend to lower and disperse the consciousness can often be usefully avoided. Other ways in which the consciousness may tend to get exteriorised and fragmented are through watching television, playing video games, and surfing the worldwide web. Social interactions and recreational outlets can often be usefully reduced, and when needed, they can take different forms more conducive to Yoga. In this connexion it may be noted that deeply listening to some forms

of music, especially classical forms and certain ‘new age’ music, can be a good way to go deeper within into the inner consciousness. Similarly, engaging in other creative arts such as writing prose or poetry, making handicrafts, drawing, painting, and sculpture, are also productive ways to use our free time to help awaken the inner consciousness.

A primary aim in the Yoga is to develop equality, more commonly referred to as equanimity, with regard to the various impacts and difficulties of life. The development of this attitude and inner poise is closely intertwined with the notion of living within. It is not possible to live within centred in the inner consciousness if we are constantly being thrown off balance by the shocks of life or upset whenever our personal preferences or vital desires do not pan out. Equality means to keep our inner centre and poise under all conditions. We should not lose it in excited and eager grasping at pleasure, nor in disturbance by unpleasant circumstances or events. It can and must be developed to the extent that we are both inwardly and outwardly unshaken by any outward occurrences, however wonderful or adverse they may seem. It does not mean, however, that we should not strive for what is right, or that failure and falsity are as good as success and truth. It does not mean that we should dull our senses to unpleasant things, or that we should not discriminate between things. What it does mean is that we should not become mentally or vitally upset by things that happen, that we should remain centred within and deal with outward circumstances, not out of desire or repulsion, anger or fear, but out of inner quietude, clear perception, and inner strength.

Naturally, an area in which this inner poise of equality gets most tested, and thus provides the amplest opportunity to develop it, is in our interpersonal contacts with others. In this context, equality means especially not to become upset, angry, disappointed, jealous, envious, fearful, or anxious by what other people may say or do. Instead, we should look at these things calmly and squarely, without “distortions created by personal feeling, and to try to understand what is behind them, why they happen, what is to be learnt from them, what is it in oneself which they are cast against and what inner profit or progress one can make out of them; it means self-mastery over the vital movements,—anger and sensitiveness and pride as well as desire and the rest,—not to let them get hold of the emotional being and disturb the inner peace, not to speak and act in the

rush and impulsion of these things, always to act and speak out of a calm inner poise of the spirit.” (*Letters on Yoga*, pp.661-662) Sri Aurobindo explains that it is not easy to achieve this poise and ability in any perfect measure, but that we should always try to establish and strengthen it.

Another way in which our equality is tested is through the various inner and outer difficulties we face in life and in sadhana. We should learn to remain quietly unmoved in the face of adverse events that happen, whether in the world at large, to those we are close to, or to ourselves. Such events can be taken as tests of our equality, and as opportunities to strengthen and extend it. We may have to live or work in circumstances which appear adverse, and which may seem to make sadhana and the development of inner peace and quietude impossible. Ultimately, however, inner peace and an inner union with the Divine are not dependent on outward conditions. Indeed, by remaining concentrated within in communion with the Divine, it is possible to become inwardly detached from and unaffected by even severe pain and the most deplorable conditions. Again, this does not mean that we must passively accept adverse conditions or events, that we should not try to change them for the better or to counteract them in appropriate ways. Indeed, sometimes this may be exactly what such things are “trying to tell us,” but this can be done more effectively if we act in a calm and deliberate manner, rather than as an emotional reaction to the circumstances.

What has been said for outer events and circumstances also pertains to inner events and circumstances. It is not helpful to become depressed or discouraged by even persistent mistakes, wrong movements, or what may appear as a lack of progress. Feelings of guilt, disgust, or self-directed anger only disturb the sadhana more. The inner change required in the Integral Yoga is extensive and difficult; it requires great patience and perseverance. The resistances of our nature to change, and the difficulties in changing, must be dealt with very coolly, with a clear perceptiveness and unruffled persistence that is neither shaken by temporary failures nor elated by momentary successes.

Sri Aurobindo has discussed three different approaches towards developing this inner equality: endurance, indifference, and submission. We can develop and extend our ability to endure the impacts of the world, whether these

assaults are mental and aimed against our cherished ideas and ideals, emotional and aimed against our feelings, vital and stimulating our instinctual reactions, or physical and affecting our sense of comfort. This way reposes on the will, and we train this capacity by consciously confronting and even welcoming adverse impacts, gradually increasing our capacity to bear them without reacting.

The second approach reposes on the intellect—we cultivate an intellectual indifference to the impacts of things, an attitude that refuses to be caught in the attractions or repulsions of the senses or the dualities of the outer mind and nature. We draw back from the petty joys and troubles of life and take less and less interest in them, as if they were children's games. We see that life is full of transient comings and goings, and learn to take interest instead in the deeper, abiding truth of the spirit. In this way, we detach ourselves more and more from the petty circumstances and events of the outer life.

The third approach leans on the emotional being, and has relations with the development of devotion. Here we develop a resignation to circumstances founded on a submission to the will of the Divine. We learn to accept adversities as an imposition of the Divine for the Divine's own purposes, whether for its universal will, or for our own personal growth. Indeed, often we find that we grow more through adversity than good fortune. By understanding and taking this viewpoint, we can learn to accept even the severest blows of life as coming from the Divine, as his hammer and chisel shaping our nature into a fit instrument and form for his habitation and use. Sri Aurobindo explains that the cultivation of any or all these approaches towards equality helps us to become conscious of a separation between the inner being which quietly bears, disengages from, or accepts the impacts of the world, and an outer part in which the customary reactions continue for a time to occur, but gradually lose their force and hold, and begin to reflect the poise of the inner being.

This development of equality to the impacts of the world and its difficulties supports the development of the inner witness consciousness which was one of the central objects of the discipline of concentration discussed earlier. Deep within, there is a part of us which is separate from our outer nature and unaffected by it. It is one of the principle aims of the Integral Yoga to take our poise in this inner purusha, and it is from that poise that we can hope not only to remain unaffected by the adversities of life, but to gradually change and trans-

form the outer nature itself so that it shall reflect the inner peace and harmony of the Divine. Our periods of concentration can focus on the cultivation and extension of this inner purusha consciousness, while all the adverse circumstances of our life can be used to further strengthen it so that we may not get dislodged from it under even the most extreme conditions. Just as in the periods of concentration, prayer or mantra can be useful to concentrate and quiet the consciousness, so too in the midst of difficulties these methods may be useful adjuncts. In successfully dealing with adversity, inner peace and quietness, and a quiet leaning on or an ardent call for the support of the Divine are the most effective remedies.

Faith, openness, and receptivity

In the preceding sections, I have focused primarily on practical things that we can do to establish and develop a regular discipline of sadhana. But it would be misleading to suggest that by personal effort alone we can achieve the far reaching aims of the Integral Yoga. What actually is required is a combination of personal effort and the Grace and Action of the Divine. The divine power, referred to in this Yoga as the Mother, is the real power in the Yoga and effects the transformation of the consciousness that the Yoga envisions. Our personal effort is required in part because the Divine Power works through it, and in part because the Divine asks for our consent to our own change. A sustained and intense personal effort is the sign of our consent and call to the Divine to effect this spiritual change and divinisation of our consciousness and life. But one of the most effective 'tricks' of the Yoga is to call on the Divine to help or to itself effect the necessary growth and change in our nature, rather than relying solely on our own efforts.

The effective use of this 'trick,' however, presupposes several conditions that must be laid as a foundation. First and foremost, there must be faith in the Divine and in the divine power. This faith comes essentially from a contact with our soul or psychic being, and is not dependent on outward signs or proofs. It may start with a "suspension of disbelief," that is, an openness to the possibility that the Divine exists, is concerned with our personal life and development, and is able and ready to act in and on us. This openness and beginning of faith may be sufficient to bring with it some experience of the Divine's presence, some

feeling of its peace, light, force, or delight which can further nurture the faith. It can then be further cultivated through prayer, aspiration, a persistent inner calling on the Divine for spiritual guidance and help.

Faith can also be supported by a growing intellectual or intuitive understanding of the spiritual principles underlying the Yoga, for example, of the idea that this world and that we ourselves are manifestations or partial expressions of the one Divine that is behind all things and who unites all in its infinite existence and consciousness. This principle cannot be proven scientifically, but it can be supported by compelling rational arguments which Sri Aurobindo and many others have provided us. Faith may also be supported by reading or listening to the accounts of those who have received help and support from the Divine in their life and spiritual practice. Actually, all of our efforts to come into inner contact with the Divine can help in the development of faith, as well as in the development of direct inner experience of the Divine, which can further strengthen and confirm our faith.

Together with faith is the need to become open and receptive to the divine power when it intervenes. This openness means to keep the consciousness turned towards the Divine, free from other movements, and expecting and able to receive what may come from the Divine. Confidence and trust in the Divine, an inner leaning on the Divine, help to keep our consciousness open and receptive. Also needed is plasticity in the consciousness, a flexibility and subtlety that can feel or perceive the action of the divine power when it comes, and distinguish its action from mental or vital movements. In contrast, rigidity in our mental viewpoints, in a sceptical or pessimistic outlook on our spiritual possibilities, can interfere with the more potent, swift, and incalculable action of the Grace. A subtlety of perception, awake to the subtle promptings of our soul, to inner indications of the thing to be done or not to be done, to sensations of a luminous peace, love, or protection, or to inner warnings associated with unease or discomfort in certain situations, may develop as adjuncts to this growing inner opening and receptivity to the divine power, and are useful signs of their presence and development.

Progress in the Yoga follows a winding and obscured path, difficult to understand, perceive, or predict, because it moves through the twists and turns of the ignorant lower nature towards the light and vastness of the Divine. While

the lower nature is still active and untransformed, it is difficult to perceive how and to what degree we are progressing. Change may be occurring in the inner parts of our nature which are unknown to the outer parts with which we identify, and may manifest outwardly only later, or rarely at particular moments, or in diluted or distorted ways. Therefore, it is necessary to persistently move forward on the path with faith—in the Divine's wisdom, love, and power—in spite of all delays, detours, or appearances of obstruction or incapacity. We must learn to always depend on the Divine, calling on its help and intervention. The knowledge and power of the Divine are omniscient and omnipotent, and if we resolutely put ourselves in its hands, surrender to its will and action, we can be sure of our successful navigation through all the trials and difficulties of the Yoga, to the supreme deliverance and transformation.

Spiritual Knowledge

Martha G Orton

In Sri Aurobindo's writings which relate to knowledge, he provides a detailed and comprehensive view of the mind, describing aspects and levels of mind and of consciousness itself. He also explores the nature of knowledge and ignorance, Vidya and Avidya, particularly in his major philosophical work *The Life Divine*, as he proceeds to explain the concept of true knowledge, also referred to as spiritual knowledge. This is the highest form of knowledge and is not attainable through the usual processes of the intellect. Instead, spiritual knowledge is the knowledge of spiritual realisation. The first part of this two-part article explores the meaning of spiritual knowledge as conceived by Sri Aurobindo. In the second part, which will appear in another issue, Sri Aurobindo's conceptualisation of the path of knowledge will be discussed.

Knowledge and the Mind

While human beings generally depend on the operations of the mind to obtain knowledge, Sri Aurobindo asserts that the mind and its processes are fraught with problems and limitations. He considers the mind to be not an instrument of knowledge, but rather of "analysis and synthesis."¹ The mind is our normal means of observation, thought, reasoning and cognition, the instrument on which we depend for obtaining and processing information about life and the world around us. It does this through a process of separation and analysis, which begins with observation. The fact that the senses themselves contain potential for error immediately introduces uncertainty as to the validity of mentally acquired knowledge, as do the natural limitations on gathering all relevant information needed to obtain a complete view. Moreover, human thought processes are impacted by preferences, desires, and preconceived notions, in addition to the input of information from the senses. The essence of the difficulty lies in the fact that the mind works through seeing things in parts and using its processes

of reasoning and synthesis to put things in appropriate relation to each other, thus attempting to make sense of its observations. Sri Aurobindo explains that this results in incomplete and inaccurate knowledge, in effect a "knowledge-ignorance," because the mind cannot see the true wholeness or essence of that which it seeks to know.

Sri Aurobindo regards the separative aspect of mind as a natural and logical consequence of the manner in which the human being developed, conceiving this in the context of the Vedic view of the oneness of the universe and the process of creation of the manifestation. In Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of this perspective, the separative aspect of mind developed as the individual being emerged from the unified consciousness which is its origin. In order to become further organised and develop effective capacities as an individual, ego came forth, facilitating a separate identity and forming a core for organising the various aspects of the individual being's nature. This resulted in the ignorance, ignorance being defined essentially as a separation from oneness. In this way the individual separated from its origin in the oneness of Sachchidananda. Mind, with its separative and partial knowledge, also derives from this separation. While mind is far removed from the highest reality of Sachchidananda, Sri Aurobindo tells us that there is a connection between mind and Sachchidananda. He writes: "The intermediate link exists. We call it the Supermind or the Truth-Consciousness, because it is a principle superior to mentality and exists, acts and proceeds in the fundamental truth and unity of things and not like the mind in their appearances and phenomenal divisions."² It is from the supermind that mind derived, or fell, and this occurred through the action of the individualised soul. Sri Aurobindo describes this as follows:

It proceeds from the individualised soul viewing everything from its own standpoint and excluding all others; it proceeds, that is to say, by an exclusive concentration of consciousness, an exclusive self-identification of the soul with a particular temporal and spatial action which is only a part of its own play of being; it starts from the soul's ignoring the fact that all others are also itself, all other action its own action and all other states of being and consciousness equally its own as well as the action of the one particular moment in Time and one particular standing-point in Space and the one particular form it presently occupies.³

Therefore it is from this process of separation that the mind derives its means of operation, dealing with things by conceiving of them in parts, rather than comprehending them in their wholeness and integrality and, as a necessary consequence, entering into error. Sri Aurobindo explains:

Mind in its essence is a consciousness which measures, limits, cuts out forms of things from the indivisible whole and contains them as if each were a separate integer. Even with what exists only as obvious parts and fractions, Mind establishes this fiction of its ordinary commerce that they are things with which it can deal separately and not merely as aspects of a whole. For, even when it knows that they are not things in themselves, it is obliged to deal with them as if they were things in themselves; otherwise it could not subject them to its own characteristic activity.⁴

The fragmented approach of the mind therefore is an obstacle to attaining an accurate view of things. Particularly if we acknowledge oneness as the reality of the universe, we must conclude that the dividing action of the mind opposes grasping reality and arriving at true knowledge. Sri Aurobindo asserts that it is this very quality of mind that results in ignorance, describing the problem of mind as its way of working: “That office [the role of mind] is to translate always infinity into the terms of the finite, to measure off, limit, depiece. Actually it does this in our consciousness to the exclusion of all true sense of the infinite; therefore Mind is the nodus of the great Ignorance, because it is that which originally divides and distributes....”⁵ Therefore the mind not only prevents our perceiving things completely as it separates things into parts in order to analyse and process its awareness of them, but it also prevents our consciousness from perceiving a real awareness of the infinite. In this way it binds us to our limited awareness of ourselves, others and the universe. The constrained and partial perception and understanding of the mind separates us from the reality of oneness and delight of existence. One might describe it as a bureaucrat, analysing, categorising, organising, filing bits of information, keeping us within the confined limits of its narrow bounds. In contrast, our inner being seeks to experience true knowledge, not a perception so limited that it can be regarded almost as a fiction, a human-created world within a real world. What is needed is the reality of the soul, the king, not that of his small-minded servant.

Self-Identification and Aspects of Mind

It is difficult for us to conceive a way of knowing apart from the use of the mind. We are usually identified with it and tend to think of it as completely integral to who we are. We also tend to be identified with our bodies. These two identifications merge into a sense of self, in the modern psychological meaning of the term, that is—who we think we are, consisting of our form, our thoughts, beliefs, and all else that comprises our sense of self. Yet Sri Aurobindo explains that this identification with the body increases and intensifies the problem of separation: “This ignorance is farther deepened for man by his self-identification with the body. To us mind seems to be determined by the body, because it is preoccupied with that and devoted to the physical workings which it uses for its conscious superficial action in this gross material world.”⁶ From this identification with the body, we deepen our involvement with our lives in matter, and separate ourselves further from the more comprehensive reality, which includes the life of the spirit. This consequently increases ignorance in separation. Sri Aurobindo explains the problem:

Our ordinary intellectual notions are a stumbling-block in the way of knowledge; for they are governed by the error of the senses and they found themselves on the notion that matter and body are the reality, that life and force are the reality, that passion and emotion, thought and sense are the reality; and with these things we identify ourselves, and because we identify ourselves with these things we cannot get back to the real self.⁷

Sri Aurobindo offers us a unique perspective on mind, not only through his conception of its limitations and his explanation of the origin of these, but also in the nature and types of mind which he has identified. For example Sri Aurobindo explains that our involvement with the body is supported by an aspect of mind, which he calls the physical mind. This is the consciousness that is focused on and expresses the needs and actions of the body. An aspect of this is the mechanical mind, in which thoughts become firmly implanted and repetitively express themselves. Closely associated with the physical mind is the vital mind, which is focused on the emotions and seeks fulfilment of the desires of the ego and the vital nature. Sri Aurobindo also distinguishes the sense mind and thought mind, two aspects of which we are most generally aware and through which we relate to the world. The sense mind is that of the perceptions of our senses,

to which the body responds and to which the thought mind subsequently translates, processes and determines reactions. The thought mind is the aspect which processes thoughts and ideas and has powers of dynamism and effectuation. It also works along with the pure intellect to acquire and synthesise information.

It is at the level of pure intellect that the human mind reaches its height of operation. While envisioning human development of knowledge far beyond that of the intellect, Sri Aurobindo does not at all disparage the development of the intellect and the powers of reason. Instead he asserts their importance in the development of the individual, regarding them as necessary for discrimination and intelligent action, for strengthening one's capacities for effective life in the world. He writes: "It is true that intellectual deliberation and right discrimination are an important part of the Yoga of knowledge; but their object is rather to remove a difficulty than to arrive at the final and positive result of this path."⁸ Sri Aurobindo describes the use of the intellect as reaching its highest capacity and being of effective use once one has purified the understanding by removing "sense-error and desire and old association and intellectual prejudgment."⁹ Only then is the intellect free to do its work of analysis and arrangement of conceptions.

Further appreciation of the mind and its powers are observed in Sri Aurobindo's description that when mind is transcended and viewed from the truth-consciousness, supermind, it can be seen for what it is, "really a subordinate action and instrumentation of the Truth-Consciousness."¹⁰ He also points out the positive and essential role it plays in life and explains that mind leads to error when overstepping its intended function:

So long as it is not separated in self-experience from the enveloping Master-Consciousness and does not try to set up house for itself, so long as it serves passively as an instrumentation and does not attempt to possess for its own benefit, Mind fulfils luminously its function which is in the Truth to hold forms apart from each other by a phenomenal, a purely formal delimitation of their activity behind which the governing universality of the being remains conscious and untouched. It has to receive the truth of things and distribute it according to the unerring perception of a supreme and universal Eye and Will. It has to uphold an individualisation of active consciousness, delight, force, substance which derives all its power, reality and joy from an inalienable universality

behind. It has to turn the multiplicity of the One into an apparent division by which relations are defined and held off against each other so as to meet again and join. It has to establish the delight of separation and contact in the midst of an eternal unity and intermixture.¹¹

This statement clearly describes mind in its proper role, fulfilling its true function, supporting effective life in the world as an instrument of supermind.

The Subliminal

Behind the mind, and reaching beyond it, is the subliminal being in the individual. This is the part of the being which provides access to that which is beyond the surface mind, including not only the subconscious, the deep unawakened part of the being which is the repository of unconscious thought, memory and atavistic influences from age-old human nature and the individual's culture, but also the superconscious, the higher reaches of consciousness. The subliminal opens the way to higher knowledge:

Behind, even in our terrestrial being, there is this other, subconscious or subliminal to us, which knows itself as more than the body and is capable of a less materialised action. To this we owe immediately most of the larger, deeper and more forceful dynamic action of our surface mind; this, when we become conscious of it or of its impress on us, is our first idea or our first realisation of a soul or inner being, Purusha.¹²

Nevertheless, this deeper part of the being "is still subject to the original act of ignorance by which the individualised soul regards everything from its own standpoint and can see the truth of things only as they present themselves to it from outside or else as they rise up to its view from its separate temporal and spatial consciousness, forms and results of past and present experience."¹³ What is required to transcend ignorance, Sri Aurobindo explains, is to pursue the path of knowledge by which mind itself is transcended and higher reaches of knowledge are attained, levels of knowledge which are not mere representations of the mind, but entirely new states of being. What is needed, therefore, is an evolution of consciousness.

Transcending the Mind

In recognising that mind derives from supermind, but is far removed from this high truth-consciousness, we find the key to its transcendence and the

solution to our ignorance. Finding our way from mind to supermind is the journey which Sri Aurobindo envisions and which he calls the path of knowledge. In the Integral Yoga, he conceives of three paths—knowledge, works and devotion—so integrally intertwined that they become a single path. All lead to the same goal of oneness with the Divine Consciousness and the transformation of human nature to a divine status of being. Each path contains the essence of the other so that both the paths of works and devotion contain knowledge, and the path of knowledge also includes works and love. In considering the path of knowledge, we can discover how Sri Aurobindo describes the progression from ignorance to knowledge. Sri Aurobindo alludes to both the process and the result in describing the action of the supermind in bringing true knowledge:

It is only when the veil is rent and the divided mind overpowered, silent and passive to a supramental action that mind itself gets back to the Truth of things. There we find a luminous mentality reflective, obedient and instrumental to the divine Real-Idea. There we perceive what the world really is; we know in every way ourselves in others and as others, others as ourselves and all as the universal and self-multiplied One. We lose the rigidly separate individual standpoint which is the source of all limitation and error.¹⁴

In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo describes transcending the mind and attaining supermind in the following lines:

Now mind is all and its uncertain ray,
Mind is the leader of the body and life,
Mind the thought-driven chariot of the soul
Carrying the luminous wanderer in the night
To vistas of a far uncertain dawn,
To the end of the Spirit's fathomless desire,
To its dream of absolute truth and utter bliss.
There are greater destinies mind cannot surmise
Fixed on the summit of the evolving Path
The Traveller now treads in the Ignorance,
Unaware of his next step, not knowing his goal.
Mind is not all his tireless climb can reach,
There is a fire on the apex of the worlds,
There is a house of the Eternal's light,

There is an infinite truth, an absolute power.
The Spirit's mightiness shall cast off its mask;
Its greatness shall be felt shaping the world's course:
It shall be seen in its own veiless beams,
A star rising from the Inconscient's night,
A sun climbing to Supernature's peak.¹⁵

The Reality of Consciousness

In order to grasp the meaning of knowledge in Sri Aurobindo's terms, it is relevant to consider his explanation of knowledge in relation to the reality of consciousness, as follows:

To know, we have always to dissolve the rigid constructions of the ignorant and self-willed intellect and look freely and flexibly at the facts of existence. Its fundamental fact is consciousness which is power, and we actually see that this power has three ways of operating. First, we find that there is a consciousness behind all, embracing all, within all, which is eternally, universally, absolutely aware of itself whether in unity or multiplicity or in both simultaneously or beyond both in its sheer absolute. This is the plenitude of the supreme divine self-knowledge; it is also the plenitude of the divine all-knowledge. Next, at the other pole of things, we see this consciousness dwelling upon apparent oppositions in itself, and the most extreme antinomy of all reaches its acme in what seems to us to be a complete nescience of itself, an effective, dynamic, creative Inconscience, though we know that this is merely a surface appearance and that the divine Knowledge works with a sovereign security and sureness within the operations of the Inconscient. Between these two oppositions and as a mediary term we see Consciousness working with a partial, limited self-awareness which is equally superficial, for behind it and acting through it is the divine All-Knowledge. Here in its intermediate status, it seems to be a standing compromise between the two opposites, between the supreme Consciousness and the Nescience, but may prove rather in a larger view of our data to be an incomplete emergence of the Knowledge to the surface. This compromise or imperfect emergence we call the Ignorance, from our own point of view, because ignorance is our own characteristic way of

the soul's self-withholding of complete self-knowledge. The origin of these three poises of the power of consciousness and their exact relation is what we have, if possible, to discover.¹⁶

Sri Aurobindo provides in this statement a concise summary of his perspective on reality and knowledge, emphasising that the fundamental reality is consciousness, and that ignorance is a partial emergence of this consciousness from a seemingly inconscient base that is yet instinct with an infallible working betraying a hidden consciousness within it. He sets before us the challenge humanity faces, living in the "intermediate status"¹⁷ of ignorance and seeking to attain knowledge. In order to meet the challenge, Sri Aurobindo assures us of the pervasiveness and power of consciousness which, in its action, mediates between knowledge and ignorance and facilitates our growth and progress.

In considering the characteristics of knowledge as described by Sri Aurobindo, that it consists of the truth and completeness of things and leads to oneness and unity, we can conclude that knowledge has an undeniable appeal for humanity which compels its pursuit as a motivating force. Furthermore, we can conclude that its pursuit represents the further emergence of knowledge out of ignorance beyond the point at which this emergence becomes self-conscious and willed.

Integrity of the Path

Although Sri Aurobindo writes of spiritual knowledge as different from the knowledge of the surface mind, characteristic of his integral vision, he does not make a firm distinction between higher and lower fields of knowledge:

...it is not a separation into disparate fields, sacred and profane, that is the heart of the difference, but the character of the consciousness behind the working. All is human knowledge that proceeds from the ordinary mental consciousness interested in the outside or upper layers of things, in process, in phenomena for their own sake or for the sake of some surface utility or mental or vital satisfaction of Desire or of the Intelligence. But the same activity of knowledge can become part of the Yoga if it proceeds from the spiritual or spiritualising consciousness which seeks and finds in all that it surveys or penetrates the presence of the timeless Eternal and the ways of manifestation of Eternal in Time.¹⁸

In fact Sri Aurobindo asserts that the two types of knowledge—the knowledge of life and the external world, and spiritual knowledge, the knowledge of "something behind life"¹⁹—merge into one:

There are two kinds of knowledge, that which seeks to understand the apparent phenomenon of existence externally, by an approach from outside, through the intellect,—this is the lower knowledge, the knowledge of the apparent world; secondly, the knowledge which seeks to know the truth of existence from within, in its source and reality, by spiritual realisation. Ordinarily, a sharp distinction is drawn between the two, and it is supposed that when we get to the higher knowledge, the God-knowledge, then the rest, the world-knowledge, becomes of no concern to us: but in reality they are two sides of one seeking. All knowledge is ultimately the knowledge of God, through himself, through Nature, through her works. Mankind has first to seek this knowledge through the external life; for until its mentality is sufficiently developed, spiritual knowledge is not really possible, and in proportion as it is developed, the possibilities of spiritual knowledge become richer and fuller.²⁰

Therefore all pursuit of knowledge can be considered as part of the path of knowledge. Intellectual pursuit is part of the preparation for the conscious pursuit of the spirit and can be regarded as helping to form the basis for spiritual knowledge. Seen in this way, all pursuit of knowledge and its accompanying mastery, is actually the seeking of the Divine, consciously or subconsciously. It begins with seeking to know the creation and workings of the Divine as we observe them in life and nature. This being so, humanity's pursuit of knowledge and mastery can be understood to take many forms and, yet, to be one thing, whether it appears as seeking basic knowledge of the physical world and the knowledge and skills needed to cope with life and the material existence, or whether it is expressed and acknowledged overtly by the surface mind as the conscious pursuit of spiritual knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo describes all pursuit of knowledge as leading us to the discovery of the Divine:

Science, art, philosophy, ethics, psychology, the knowledge of man and his past, action itself are means by which we arrive at the knowledge

of the workings of God through Nature and through life. At first it is the workings of life and forms of Nature which occupy us, but as we go deeper and deeper and get a complete view and experience, each of these lines brings us face to face with God.²¹

He explains, for example, that the study of science leads to the recognition of infinity, that art leads to the discovery of the spirit in the life of humanity through its exploration of beauty, and that psychology progresses from studying “mind and the soul in living beings to the perception of the one soul and one mind in all things and beings.”²² The conscious pursuit of the Divine, of higher knowledge, emerges through a process in the intellect in which a perception of the Divine develops and an understanding of the Divine’s role in the world, a sense that it is only through the Divine that all exists and that we live. Through this awareness, the individual seeks to focus one’s being on the Divine, to serve the Divine, and to express the Divine through one’s life, action and being. It is at this point that the individual’s spiritual life becomes increasingly active. Sri Aurobindo states, “It is here that Yoga steps in. It begins by using knowledge, emotion and action for the possession of the Divine. For Yoga is the conscious and perfect seeking of union with the Divine towards which all the rest was an ignorant and imperfect moving and seeking.”²³ Once the individual begins one’s conscious seeking of the Divine, the pursuit of knowledge takes a more apparent and complete spiritual character and, though the knowledge of the external world attained by the intellect is not disparaged or disregarded, the focus of the individual turns inward, seeking discovery of the inner being and the knowledge of spiritual realisation.

Spiritual Knowledge and Its Aim

When writing of spiritual knowledge, Sri Aurobindo identifies its aim: “The object of spiritual knowledge is the Supreme, the Divine, the Infinite, and the Absolute. This Supreme has its relations to our individual being and its relations to the universe and it transcends both the soul and the universe.”²⁴ In his conception of spiritual knowledge, Sri Aurobindo expands the meaning of knowledge to its highest and most comprehensive. For he does not only intend a comprehension of the Divine, which in itself would be a significant growth in consciousness, but an experience and an enduring realisation in actual union

with the Divine. Furthermore, this is understood to have completely transforming effects, in which the entire being is changed from its ordinary human status to the fulfilment of its innate divine potential. This progression in knowledge and consciousness moves from its initial stages of seeking knowledge and mastery of one’s self and the world to having knowledge of the Divine and a new level of mastery through that union and transformation. Sri Aurobindo describes the aim of knowledge as follows:

We must recognise that our primary aim in knowledge must be to realise our own supreme Self more than that Self in others or as the Lord of Nature or as the All; for that is the pressing need of the individual, to arrive at the highest truth of his own being, to set right its disorders, confusions, false identifications, to arrive at its right concentration and purity and to know and mount to its source. But we do this not in order to disappear into its source, but so that our whole existence and all the members of this inner kingdom may find their right basis, may live in our highest self, live for our highest self only and obey no other law than that which proceeds from our highest self and is given to our purified being without any falsification in the transmitting mentality. And if we do this rightly we shall discover that in finding this supreme Self we have found the one Self in all, the one Lord of our nature and of all Nature, the All of ourselves who is the All of the universe.²⁵

The realisation which Sri Aurobindo describes constitutes the fulfilment of humanity’s deep, inherent impulsion for knowledge and mastery, for with this higher knowledge, one not only knows one’s self and one’s world and lives in the truth of one’s being, but also lives in unity with the Divine and manifests the truth of the divine Reality in one’s life and action. In this state of spiritual knowledge, all the parts of one’s being are pure in their dedication to the Divine and have assumed their highest forms, necessarily existing in harmony within one’s self, with no internal conflict or disharmony in their coexistence and expression. Living in the realisation of true knowledge one is fully an instrument of the Divine, being one with the Divine, and one’s mastery and effectiveness in life and the world become an expression of that reality.

(To be Continued)

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Sri Aurobindo and the Hindu Muslim problem

(Continued from the previous issue)

Kittu Reddy

Withdrawal from active politics

Sri Aurobindo withdrew from active politics in 1910. But this did not mean, as it was then supposed, that he had retired into some height of spiritual experience devoid of any further interest in the world or in the fate of India. It could not mean that, for the very principle of his Yoga was not only to realise the Divine and attain to a complete spiritual consciousness, but also to take all life and all world activity into the scope of this spiritual consciousness and action and to base life on the Spirit and give it a spiritual meaning. Thus from this point of view, he made certain observations or comments on the events taking place in India. One of the events that took place in 1916 was the Lucknow Pact between the Congress party and the Muslim League.

This Pact stitched up in December 1916 was an agreement made by the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League and adopted by the Congress at its Lucknow session on December 29 and by the League on December 31, 1916. The pact dealt both with the structure of the government of India and with the relation of the Hindu and Muslim communities. Four-fifths of the provincial and central legislatures were to be elected on a broad franchise, and half the executive council members, including those of the central executive council, were to be Indians elected by the councils themselves. Except for the provision for the central executive, these proposals were largely embodied in the Government of India Act of 1919.

The Congress also agreed to separate electorates for Muslims in provincial council elections. Apparently this pact was meant to pave the way for Hindu-Muslim cooperation and unity. It was believed by the leaders of the Congress party that with this political adjustment, the two communities would work har-

moniously together. However, there are many others who are of the opinion that that this was a wrong step and was in fact the first step in creating a permanent division between the Hindus and Muslims. The later history of India amply proves this.

It is interesting to note that Mohammed Ali Jinnah, who was later to be the founder of Pakistan, opposed the idea of a separate electorate for the Muslims. In the words of Krishna Iyer: “He(Jinnah) opposed the Muslim League’s stand of favouring separate electorate for the Muslims and described it as a poisonous dose to divide the nation against itself. He collaborated with the Congress and actively worked against the Muslim communalists, calling them enemies of the nation. He had been much influenced by the speeches of Naoroji, Mehta and Gokhale whom he adored. Naoroji as Congress President had emphasised the need for a thorough union of all the people and pleaded with Hindus and Muslims to “sink or swim together.” “Without this union, all efforts will be in vain,” he added. Jinnah was in full agreement with this view. He deprecated the contrary separatist policy advocated by the League.”

We thus see that it was the Congress that in 1916 recognised the Muslims as a separate political entity. This may be called the second step in giving the Muslims and the Muslim League a distinct political identity which inevitably sought for more power. This only increased the alienation of the Hindus and Muslims leading ultimately to the formation of Pakistan.

Here is an extract from a letter written by Sri Aurobindo regarding this Pact.

What has created the Hindu-Muslim split was not Swadeshi, but the acceptance of the communal principle by the Congress, (here Tilak made his great blunder), and the further attempt by the Khilafat movement to conciliate them and bring them in on wrong lines. The recognition of that communal principle at Lucknow made them permanently a separate political entity in India which ought never to have happened; the Khilafat affair made that separate political entity an organised separate political power. It was not Boycott, National Education, Swaraj (our platform) which made this tremendous division, how could it? Tilak, whom the Kripalani

man blames along with me, was responsible for it not by that, but by his support of the Lucknow affair - for the rest, Gandhi did it with the help of his Ali brothers.

We shall now take up the Khilafat movement. However, before coming to that, let us take stock of the situation as it existed in 1920. It is evident that by this time the Hindu-Muslim problem had begun to take serious proportions. Aided and abetted by the British, the Muslim community was demanding more and more power for themselves at the cost of the Hindus and more importantly at the cost of the Indian nation. The concept of Indian nationhood was gradually receding from their mentality.

The question before the national leadership was to find a way to solve this acute problem.

There were two available options.

1. Since the Muslims were the minority community, it was felt by some that the best way to harmony was to give the Muslims whatever they asked for. This was the line that the Congress party led by Gandhi took.
2. The other approach was that we should stress on the Indian aspect rather than on the religious aspect. The Indian nation should be our first and only priority and all the rest could be dealt with under this umbrella. In other words let us be first, foremost and always Indians. This was the position taken by Sri Aurobindo.

We shall now see how the first position taken in regard to the Khilafat movement by Gandhi increased the differences between the Muslims and the rest of the nation.

The Khilafat movement

Shortly after the outbreak of the First World War, the Allies were loudly proclaiming their sympathy for smaller and weaker nations. Worried that Turkey might join the Germans in the War, the British government in order to win its support gave assurances of sympathetic treatment at the end of the war. The British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, declared on Jan. 5, 1918 that the Allies were “not fighting to deprive Turkey of the rich and renowned lands of Asia Minor and Thrace, which are predominantly Turkish in race”. And Presi-

dent Wilson too endorsed this view in his message to the American Congress. These specific assurances by leading statesmen of Allied countries led the Indian Muslims to believe that whatever happened in the war, the independence of Turkey and her territorial integrity so far at least as her Asiatic dominions were concerned would be maintained. But all these hopes were doomed to disappointment. After the end of the war, Thrace was presented to Greece, and the Asiatic portions of the Turkish Empire were put under the control of England and France in the guise of Mandates. While Turkey was dispossessed of her homelands, her ruler, the Sultan, was deprived of all real authority even in the remaining dominions as he was placed under the authority of a High Commission appointed by the Allied Powers who really ruled the country. The Muslims of India regarded this as a great betrayal on the part of the British; a storm of indignation broke out and seething with rage, they yearned for bold action. This was the beginning of the Pan-Islamic movement and it gathered force in 1919.

The All India Muslim League led by the brothers Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali launched an agitation for the Khilafat Movement and they got the full support of Gandhi. *In supporting the Khilafat Movement, Gandhi saw "an opportunity of uniting Hindus and Muslims as would not arise in another hundred years". Little did he realise that this movement would only strengthen the Pan-Islamic movement and weaken the national movement.*

On March 20, Gandhi recommended to the Congress that Non-Cooperation be adopted as the method to get the demands of the Khilafatists granted. He had also promised to get Swaraj in one year. In December 1920, the Congress at its Nagpur session unanimously accepted the recommendation. But right from the outset Gandhi made it clear that the Khilafat question was in his view more important and urgent than that of Swaraj. He wrote: "To the Musalmans, Swaraj means, as it must, India's ability to deal effectively with the Khilafat question.... It is impossible not to sympathise with this attitude.... I would gladly ask for postponement of Swaraj activity if thereby we could advance the interest of the Khilafat."

It is evident that this Khilafat Movement was a movement that had nothing to do with Indian Nationalism. It encouraged the Pan-Islamic sentiment and thus went against the very grain of Indian Nationalism. It accentuated the sentiments of the Muslims that they were Muslims first and Indians afterwards.

The Pan-Islamic sentiment behind the Khilafat Movement was clearly indicated by the mass migration of Muslims from India to Afghanistan. This planned movement, known as hijrat, started in Sindh and gradually spread to the North West Frontier Province. It was estimated that in August 1920, nearly 18,000 people were on their way to Afghanistan. But unfortunately for the Khilafat Movement, the Afghan government, which was inspired more by national than Pan-Islamic sentiment, forbade the admission of the Indian Muhajirs into Afghanistan. This was a severe blow to the Khilafat Movement. Soon, the British Government arrested the Ali brothers. The Hindu-Muslim alliance, founded as it was on a momentary hostility towards the British, could not endure for long. After the arrest of the Ali brothers, Gandhi seized upon an incident at Chauri Chaura, a remote village in U.P., to call off the movement. Then, Turkey herself took the fateful decision to abolish the institution of Khilafat in March 1924. Mustapha Kemal, whose nationalist forces deposed the Sultan in November 1922, proclaimed Turkey a republic a year later and finally abolished the office of the Caliph in early March 1924. The Khilafat Movement in India thus died a natural death; but it had encouraged and succeeded in strengthening the Indian Muslims' sense of separateness. This Turkish decision robbed the movement of its *raison d'être* and the Khilafat Movement came to an end with the Muslims sinking to a state of utter despondency and helplessness. But the movement mobilised the Muslims politically at the grass-root level for the first time, and this experience came in handy later during the subsequent Pakistan movement. Since the Khilafat Movement was launched for the advancement of an Islamic cause, it helped strengthen their Islamic sensibilities and orientation and quickened their communal consciousness. This sense of separateness finally led to the formation of Pakistan.

It will be of interest to note the role of the Ali brothers in the Khilafat Movement. The Ali brothers in their speeches emphasised the fact that the interests of the Indian Muslims lay more with the Muslims everywhere in the world, whether in Tripoli or Algeria, rather than with Hindus in India. When there were rumours that the Amir of Afghanistan might invade India, Mohamed Ali said: "If the Afghans invade India to wage holy war, the Indian Muslims are not only bound to join them but also to fight the Hindus if they refuse to cooperate with them." Gandhi also said: "I claim that with us both the Khilafat is the central fact; with Maulana Mohamed Ali because it is his religion, with me,

because in laying down my life for the Khilafat, I ensure the safety of the cow, that is my religion, from the knife of the Muslim.” It is thus evident that the Hindu-Muslim split had been fostered and encouraged by the policies of the Congress. It also signalled the beginning of the policy of appeasement of the Muslims by the Congress party.

This is what Sri Aurobindo had to say: “What has created the Hindu-Muslim split was not Swadeshi, but the acceptance of the communal principle by the Congress, (here Tilak made his great blunder), and the further attempt by the Khilafat movement to conciliate them and bring them in on wrong lines. The recognition of that communal principle at Lucknow made them permanently a separate political entity in India, which ought never to have happened; the Khilafat affair made that separate political entity an organised separate political power. It was not Swadeshi, Boycott, National Education, Swaraj (our platform) which made this tremendous division, how could it? Tilak ... was responsible for it not by that, but by his support of the Lucknow affair - for the rest, Gandhi did it with the help of his Ali brothers”.

We thus see that it was Gandhi by his action in respect of the Khilafat movement endorsed the view of Muslim leaders that they were Muslims first and Indians afterwards, that their interests were more bound up with the fate of the Muslim world outside India than that of India herself. This was the natural consequence of trying to appease the Muslims in the name of the minority community.

To conclude:

1. The partition of Bengal was the first step in creating politically the Hindu-Muslim divide.
2. The Minto-Morley Reforms were a clear and distinct step in increasing this division. It must be noted that the first two steps were taken by the British Government.
3. The acceptance of the communal principle by the Congress party was the next step in furthering the division. This time it was more serious as it was done from within - the Congress party itself. In the words of Sri Aurobindo: *“The recognition of that communal principle at Lucknow made them permanently a separate political entity in India, which ought never to have happened”*.

4. The Khilafat movement gave far greater power to the dividing forces and gave them permanence in the political landscape of India. Here again it was the Congress that was responsible in furthering the division. Was the formation the inevitable consequence of these actions? In the words of Sri Aurobindo: *“the Khilafat affair made that separate political entity an organised separate political power”*.

What are the lessons that we can learn from these?

Would it not have been better to completely ignore the Khilafat and concentrate on the Indian problem of getting freedom for India from the British rule?

Is it not evident that the more we try to appease any community within a nation, we are only encouraging divisive tendencies and thus inviting trouble?

Would it not be wise to look upon all Indians as Indians first and foremost? This does not mean that all other denomination whether of religion, region or sex need be suppressed; they can all exist and even seek for free expression and self-possession, but always within the larger unity – India. All these forces must subordinate themselves to the nation idea and concept- that is to say to the concept of India as the Motherland.

In the next article in the series, we will take up Hinduism in the light of Sri Aurobindo.

(To be Continued)

The Theme Of Urvashi In The Indian Renaissance:

Madhusudan Datta, Rabindranath Tagore , Sri Aurobindo

(*Continued from the previous issue*)

Ranajit Sarkar

Madhusudan Datta (1824-1875)

One of the most impatient souls that “Young Bengal” produced was Madhusudan, a rebel in life and in literature. He was born with a tremendous vitality and an inborn creative imagination which he never disciplined. Had he disciplined his power he would have been a much greater poet. Nevertheless it was he who modernised Bengali poetry and made the stream of poetry flow towards the future.

Born in the new rich bourgeoisie he passed the first years of his life in his native village and went to the village school. Then at the age of thirteen he entered the Hindu College which was then seething with ideas from the West. These ideas he imbibed fully - ideas of intellectual revolt and freedom from orthodoxy and ideas too of Romanticism and of the romantic poetry. These, joined with a strong self-confidence, an unbounded passion and energy formed his mind. And quite early in his life he knew what he wanted to be: a great poet. And for the sake of poetry he was prepared to make great sacrifices. In 1842 he wrote to a friend, “Perhaps you think I am very cruel, because I want to leave my parents. Ah! my dear! I know that, and I feel for it. But ‘to follow Poetry’, (says A. Pope), ‘one must leave father and mother!’¹⁹

The world of Romantic Dream : Love and Liberty

But it was not Bengali poetry which he was thinking of. His ambition was to be an English poet, to be one of the great spirits he loved and admired,

Shakespeare, Milton and the Romantics. And in order to fulfil his heart’s desire, he was prepared to reject everything else he cherished. He sighed, “for Albion’s distant shore,/ Its valley green, its mountains high...”, like the European Romantics did for India, China, Arabia and other exotic countries. In England, (“as if she were my native land”), he thought, he would get the full opportunity to deploy his poetic gifts. And if he failed he would die happily:

... To cross the vast Atlantic wave

For glory, or, a nameless grave.²⁰

He wrote to his friend, “Oh! how should I like to see you write my ‘Life’ if I happen to be a great poet - which I am almost sure I shall be, if I can go to England.”²¹

And to be a poet, to go to England and woo the English Muse he had to be free - free from his duty as a son, free from his duty to the society in which he was born. When his father decided to marry him in the orthodox fashion he found that his freedom was in danger and his dreams were about to be shattered. Had he disciplined his rebellious spirit he would have dared his father, but he took the path of escape and embraced Christianity in order to save his dream. His conversion, which had great consequences for his further progress, was not an act of religious faith at all. It was the strongest protection he could get against the pressures of family and society. And perhaps, he thought, it would help him to realise his dream of crossing the Atlantic wave. He wrote in the hymn he composed to be sung publicly at his baptism,

I’ve broken affection’s tenderest ties

For my blest Saviour’s sake-

But the more private truth was expressed in his letter to his friend on learning that his father had arranged his marriage: “At the expiration of three months from hence I am to be married; dreadful thoughts... You know my desire for leaving this country is too firmly rooted to be removed. The sun may forget to rise, but I cannot remove it from my heart. Depend upon it - in the course of a year or two more, I must either be in England or cease ‘to be’ at all;...”²² And before three months elapsed he became a Christian. But his dream of going to England was not to be fulfilled till after he had abandoned English poetry, and had created the new Bengali poetry and had practically abandoned all literary activity.

His conversion brought in his life sorrow and solitude. “Alas! I am alone,” he wrote to this friend.²³ But he continued his studies, learned several languages and read the European and the Indian classics in the original. He did not let any adversity damp his spirit. He did not lose his self-confidence. His conversion had also a notable influence on his conception of love. He had refused to be bound to a girl chosen by his father because it was contrary to the idea of love he had imbibed from the Romantics. Now he was free to choose his partner, and also to leave her.²⁴

He continued to write in English. Besides shorter lyrics, he wrote a long poetic romance, *The Captive Ladie*, based on the historical legends of the Rajputs. Before 1858 he had written nothing in Bengali. He had recognised that ancient India possessed an inexhaustible treasure of legends and philosophies which could be used by men of genius to create poetry, but he had not recognised that Bengali or any other modern Indian language had the power to be the vehicle of the new poetry. “Volumes could be written”, he said, “on the glories of old India - volumes could be written on achievement in love and war of her heroic sons and lotus-eyed daughters. She is indeed an exhaustless mine for the Poet, the Romanticist, the Historian, the Philosopher.”²⁵ But as he had thought that the culture of the Anglo-Saxon would civilise India, so he had thought that the language of the Anglo-Saxon would be the victory-chariot of his poetic glory.

He started writing in Bengali at the age of 34. His English poetry had not bought him the glory he had hoped for. The first works in Bengali were prose plays. He modernised the Bengali theatre. The success and appreciation of the plays inspired him to handle the Bengali metre. If a new poetry was to be created, there was needed a metre, free and plastic enough to bear the burden of the new spirit. He had also to create a new poetic language. What he did was threefold: he created a new epic verse-form freeing poetry from the monotony of the rigid rhymed couplets; he introduced a new style, much nobler in conception and tone, richer in colour and imagination than modern India had yet seen; and he created a new language for poetry, as a few years later Bankim did for prose, blending the nobility and grandeur of Sanskrit with the sweetness and musicality of Bengali. This was indeed a revolution, and Madhusudan was fully aware of its far-reaching implication. The words he wrote to his friend and critic Rajnarayan Basu may seem boastful, but seen

retrospectively they were hardly exaggerated. About his first poem in the new blank verse he wrote, “I began the poem in a joke, and I see I have actually done something that ought to give our national poetry a good lift, at any rate that will teach the future poets of Bengal to write in a strain very different from that of the man of Krishnagar²⁶ - the father of a very vile school of poetry, though himself a man of elegant genius.”²⁷ The spirit of rebellion finally recognised its field of action. He decided to fight against the past, not to destroy only but to create something new. “I have a brave heart”, he declared in the same letter, “and mean to fight my battle bravely. I would sooner reform the poetry of my country than wear the imperial diadem of all the Russians.” He admitted that he had “a great contempt for Bengali” but it became a noble cause, a divine duty. He returned from his deluded quest to the treasures of his mother-tongue.²⁸

Although he tried to write epics his genius was fundamentally lyrical; it was full of youth and fire, full of passion. But the deeper subtleties, the mystical depths, and the luminous heights, and the all-pervasiveness of the poetic soul, the poet’s “I” were still to come.

During a short period of five years he gave a new direction to drama, and created a new poetic language. In 1862 he finally left for England, not to become a poet, but to study law. He stayed five years in Europe, and the only poetic work he did was to introduce the Petrarchan sonnet in Bengali.

He sounded the call of romanticism and of individualistic and subjective approach to poetry. He re-valued the ancient literary tradition, infused a new spirit inspired and influenced by the great Sanskrit poets, Valmiki and Kalidasa, as well as the Western poets, Homer, Virgil, Milton, Petrarch, and the Romantics. More than in the real value of his works, it is in his rebellious power to eliminate the dross of the past and to create a new rhythm, a new language and a new poetic mentality, that the greatness of Madhusudan lies.

In his poetic world man stands at the centre. Madhusudan takes much of his material from the ancient legends of gods and heroes, but the supernatural and the miraculous, even when retained, become the symbol of the human. The main thrust of his poetry is with the mind of man, the feelings and actions of man, man’s love, man’s freedom and man’s heroism. The theme of Urvashi in his poetry has also to be seen from this human and romantic context.

His most important work on this theme is a poetic epistle. Supposedly written by Urvashi to Pururavas, contained in the collection *Birangana*, “Wives of Heroes”. There are also two sonnets: “Ūrvaśī” and “Purūrābā”.

The epistles remind the reader of Ovid’s *Heroides*. But apart from the very outer fact that both are letters written by women to their lovers, there is nothing common between the two works. In a letter he wrote about them, “...within the last few weeks, I have been scribbling the thing to be called *Birānganā* i.e. Heroic Epistles from the most noted Puranic women to their lovers or lords”,²⁹ had planned to write twenty-one but only eleven were ever completed. This was his last work before he left India.

In the new verse-form, the Bengali blank verse, these were his most successful creations. Here he retold in the new form and technique some ancient Indian myths.

Hellenism was a powerful force in the romantic movement. The conflict between “classicism” and “romanticism” did not consist in rejecting the ancient classical poets; it was rather a revolt against the 18th century rationalism and the rigidity of poetic form and imagination, and against the spirit of self-sufficiency. Romanticism attempted to create a world-view large enough to accommodate all contraries, to accept the totality of man and his world.

Madhusudan’s revolt was thus not against the Sanskrit poetry but against the Sanskritist pedantry,³⁰ and against the Bengali classicist followers of Bharatachandra, “our Pope,” who has

Made Poetry a mere mechanical art
And every warbler has his tune by heart!”³¹

In order to create a new poetry he turned towards the West for stylistic and rhythmical form and for ideas, especially such ideas as could be pitched against the traditional Indian ideas. For his language and subject he turned towards the Indian past. He wanted to fashion his poetic imagination and sharpen his sensibility with the help of both the literatures. There were two strains in his poetry; but unfortunately, his impatience, his restlessness, his lack of discipline did not allow him to blend the two strains harmoniously.

He found the romantic sensibility not only in the Western Classics and the Western Romantics but also in Kalidasa and Valmiki, and in the Vaishnava poets. In his first play there were “some paraphrases from Kalidasa”.³² But in his last play, *Mâyākānan* too we find many influences of Kalidasa.³³

In a letter³⁴ he admitted his “partiality to Kalidasa” which, he said was responsible for “the erotic character of some of the allusions.” He also wrote in the same letter that he was not a Sanskritist but, “I know enough to read Kalidasa, and that, I think, is quite enough for me.”

His conception of love, which is the central motif of Urvashi’s Epistle, was derived both from the Romantics and from Kalidasa, but he did not attain to the mystical-psychical depths of the Romantics nor to the subtle suggestiveness of Kalidasa.

In Madhusudan’s poetry love is the most pervasive sentiment. And love is most intensely expressed by his women characters. In the Bengal Renaissance from its very inception, the uplift of the condition of women had been a prominent feature. And it is significant that Madhusudan dedicated *Birangana* to the great champion of women’s liberation, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, whom he admired, “I look upon him in many respects as the first man among us.”³⁵

We must now briefly study Madhusudan’s vision of love and of women-in-love to be able to understand his Urvashi.

In his vision of love the romantic conception has met the *kāvya*-conception. Like the Romantics he speaks, in his early English poems, of “Love’s idolatry”, “Love’s golden pilgrimage”³⁶; he dreams of distant love and of his “fond sweet blue-eyed maid” far from whom he has been exiled by Fate “in a distant clime”.³⁷ This is a sentimental emotional love removed from the reality of life: a youthful dream. It is love unattainable. The poet takes delight in the separation; he can in this way fill his dream-world with love-longings. But there is a touch of unreality in all this:

My thoughts, my dreams, are all of thee,
Though absent still thou seemest near;
Thine image everywhere I see -
Thy voice in every gale I hear.³⁸

It is still a youthful dream, nonetheless this “devotion to something afar” makes the present life appear to be a prison. Love and liberty are related concepts in Madhusudan’s world-vision. Most of his women-in-love want to break their bondage and be free. Often he used the image of the bird in the cage for the woman-in-love. Radha in one of his poems says:

Braj is a prison in which I am held captive;
The She-bird (*śārikā*) is fretful at the thought of the flowery woods
And Radha at the thought of Krishna.³⁹

And Tara, wife of Soma's teacher Brihaspati, enamoured of Soma, writes that she is like a pet bird in a cage.⁴⁰

Madhusudan too felt like a captive bird. He wanted to go away to the distant clime of Albion,

Oft like a sad imprisoned bird I sigh

To leave this land, though mine own land it be; ...

For I have dreamed of climes more bright and free...⁴¹

This symbol of the imprisoned bird links him with most of his women characters who are bound by duty, religion, custom, fear and shame. The most living characters in his poems are the women. Love thus becomes a symbol of his own personal endeavour to liberate himself.

With the Bengali poems his conception of love became more mature and more real by losing much of the romantic airiness, for he had encountered the strong attitude of the Sanskrit poets who did not divide love in two separate compartments - physical and emotional.

In his long poem, *Meghnadbadh* he describes in the erotic *kāvya*-style the love of Indra and his wife Indrani. He does not eschew suggestions of physical love:

Holding eagerly the lotus-hand of Indrani

the great Indra entered the bed-chamber –

place delightful. Chitralekha, Urvashi, Menaka, Rambha,

hastily returned to their own rooms.⁴²

Such erotic descriptions were due to his partiality for Kalidasa. The romantic love was thus made bolder and more true to life. It was also this physical aspect that became the concrete symbol of his search for freedom. The strong force of love incites a woman to break her bondages and fly to liberty. Radha says,

One who is in love

goes to the beloved -

Who can transgress the law of king Kama?⁴³

Women-in-love are not passive; they do not sigh and wait; they act. Radha says, Love calls me; 'Why shouldn't I cut loose the knot of shame?'⁴⁴ And Surpanakha, in love with Lakshmana, writes in her Epistle,

Do the women-in-love fear ever

to sacrifice, O you with lovely locks of hair,

family, honour, wealth, for love's sake?⁴⁵

They are not afraid to incur the censure of society; they are ready to abandon everything, and go out in search of love, as

a river in search of the sea

wanders from land to land

in ceaseless flow...⁴⁶

And this search is to give oneself entirely to the lover, like the river that pours itself into the sea; to give, body and mind, *kāya-mana*, as the night-lily gives herself body and mind to the moon.⁴⁷

Tara writes to Soma:

I shall go wherever you go; do whatever you do;

offer my body and mind at your lovely feet.⁴⁸

Love-in-separation, *viraha*, gave him the scope for the romantic idea of the far-off love mingled with the undertones and suggestions of the more real physical love. This, too, made it possible for Madhusudan to depict the undaunted passion of love, rebellious to accepted norms of life and society. In a sonnet he wrote that love-in-separation had been the mainspring of the poem in the collections *Brajānganā* and *Birānganā*:

As I roved in Braj with the herald, Imagination,

I heard the wailing of the cowherd girl

(a damsel distraught in *viraha*, separated from Shyam)

after that my pen wrote the letters of *viraha*

in the name of epic heroines to their heroic lovers.⁴⁹

This love has both a physical and a mental dimension. But he also accepts the dharmic dimension of the earlier poets. *Kāma* (erotic love) is an all-pervasive force, but it has to be purified by *dharma*. All men and women, Madhusudan made one of his dramatic characters say, were targets of love: "This vast world is the hunting-ground of Kama, the hunter. Taking his bow and arrows he roams about unwearied in search of men and women, as if they were couples of antelopes. Who is there, on this earth, so self-controlled, that can elude his arrows' flight?"⁵⁰

In one of his plays, *Padmāvatī*, Madhusudan Indianised the Greek myth of Paris. Narada desires to give the golden lotus of Parvati to the most beautiful of the three goddesses: Shachi, Indra's wife; Muraja, Kubera's wife and Rati, Kama's wife. The king Indranila is asked to make the choice; and like Paris who chose Aphrodite, Indranila chooses Rati as the most beautiful of the three

and gives her the lotus. Both Shachi and Muraja become angry. Shachi says, “O wicked mortal, infatuated by love, *kāma*, you have disdained virtue, *dharma*.”⁵¹ The drama has a happy end; the three goddesses are reconciled. And in the end Narada grants the king Indranila a life of *dharma*.

Kama without *dharma* is sinful. In a vision of hell, influenced by Dante, we come across a scene in which men are fighting with women, biting and tearing each other to pieces. And about one couple locked in that vicious fight the poet says,

Forsaking *dharma* the two stubbornly
gratified their sex-hunger. Alas,
they drowned shame in the waters of *a-dharma*; -
such is now their punishment in hell.⁵²

Madhusudan’s view of love, like that of the Romantics, made him a servant of love. “Who does not know that, in this world, poets are the slaves of love?”⁵³ He was a worshipper of love, youth and beauty. His heroines are beautiful young women. Like Ronsard⁵⁴ he too said,

Youth, the season of sweetness,
time will devastate it soon,
drink then, in time, earnestly, love’s honey-dew.⁵⁵

Madhusudan’s women are forward and modern to express their love: Urvashi writes to Pururavas giving passionate utterance to her love-longings. He often mentions Urvashi in his works. She is the most enchanting of all the heavenly nymphs. The apsaras are as they have been depicted in the epic-Puranic and classical Sanskrit literature. They are skilful dancers and singers, lovely and graceful. Urvashi is the prettiest of all. Along with other nymphs, Chitrlekha, Mishrakeshi, Ghritachi and Rambha, we almost always find her mentioned. She, with her beauty, steals even the hearts of seers, *Ūrvaśī, rūpe ṛṣi-manoharā*.⁵⁶ She is in the heaven like the crescent of the moon without its blemishes, *Ūrvaśī kalankahinā śaśikalā dive*.⁵⁷

In the poet’s world of imagination and myth Urvashi is one of the most meaningful and suggestive symbols of perfect beauty, youth and love’s enchantment. Two of the most expressive stories about Urvashi in earlier literature were her meeting in heaven with Arjuna, and her love of Pururavas. Madhusudan celebrated both these. He evoked the first in a sonnet, “*Ūrvaśī*”:

As the heart of the snow on the white summits
melts not, touched by love-fire, when the sunlight kisses her,
so, disdaining Kama’s shafts the warrior saw,
as he woke, in his sleeping chamber, Urvashi -
(like a golden idol in a nightly dream).
“Tell me, Lady, tell this slave of yours,”
the hero asked, greeting her, sweetly, “pray,
what brings you here, at this ungodly hour?”
Drunk with love’s wine, Urvashi replied,
“Love-stricken am I, your slave, O Lord,
As the Moonlight when she sees the Lake’s beauty,
drops on his breast, I come. Take me
on your lap. May I, touching your lips with mine
shudder like the Moonlight, in ecstasy.”⁵⁸

This is a new kind of poetry - not only in its form, but, above all, in the point of view, and the perspective that Madhusudan introduces in India’s poetical tradition. The mythical narration that moved in the past is here stilled. All is present. From a given vantage point the poet looks at the flow of the story, and suddenly he catches a moment which crystallises in one present event, the whole story - the past and the future become shadows and memories, making this moment hold the totality of the narrative time. The poet speaks to people who, like himself, know the story. What he presents is a symbol illumined by the lustre of his imagination. The object is not narration, or description, the object is to make the reader “see” the essence of a narration or the essence of a description.

Urvashi’s apparition is the centre of the poet’s visualisation. Arjuna serves only as the necessary background. The poet’s intention was not to glorify Arjuna, as the Epic does. Indeed, Arjuna remains unmoved, undisturbed by erotic feelings; but that is not the point of interest. The light of imagination falls on Urvashi, the beautiful nymph. The *Mahabharata* portrays her at length describing her ornaments and her beauty as the heroine comes to meet her lover. Here there is nothing of those outward trappings. The main thing is the apparition of beauty, Urvashi, who offers herself to the man she loves. The sense of apparition or a vision seen in dream is suggested by the line: *kanakputali yena niśār svapane* - like a golden idol in a nightly dream.

Urvashi is passionate and vibrant with life. She is the throbbing Moonlight that plunges down to the Lake. Arjuna is passive, like the snow, like the lake, he does not respond. His passivity makes, by contrast, her love all the more intense, dynamic and full of fire and movement. The sonnet “Purûrabâ”⁵⁹ gives another picture of Urvashi: there is no movement and no passion; she is in swoon, motionless. Madhusudan evokes there her physical beauty. Pururavas sees her, but the vision is that of the poet. The whole poem is an apostrophe addressed by the poet to Pururavas.

In this poem the poet grasps a moment from Kalidasa’s play: the moment after Pururavas, vanquishing the demon Keshin, has rescued Urvashi. She lies still and unconscious.⁶⁰ In the first five lines the poet tells the king that by his valour he has defeated the demon and has got the treasure of love the whole world yearns for. Then he “shows” to the king Urvashi lying unconscious:

There, you can now see, on the hill-top
wrapped, O king, in a cloud of stupor
the moon. Do you know who she is? Ask, at once,
her friend who sits by her, she will answer you.
You have seen, I know, lotuses in the lake Manasa,
you have seen the full moon in an autumn night,
you have hunted long-horned gazelles in the woods; -
know that these are nothing beside her. Urvashi, there she is.
Like a golden idol, she lies in a swoon.

Here there is *static* beauty; in the other sonnet was *dynamic* love. In Sanskrit poetry beauty has often been compared to lightning that has become motionless. Motion and rhythm have their beauty, but when beauty is fleeting the mind cannot grasp it. Poetic imagination seizes and perpetuates motion in a motionless eternal instant which makes it possible for the beholder to perceive beauty’s perfection.

“Urvashi to Pururavas”: an Epistle

Both these sonnets are among his last poems. They crystallise his vision of Urvashi. However his most important poem in the Urvashi-theme is Urvashi’s Epistle to Pururavas. It is a poem of 103 lines. In an introductory argument in prose the poet says, “At one time King Pururavas of the Lunar

Dynasty rescued Urvashi from the grip of the demon Keshin. Urvashi, enamoured of his handsomeness and grace wrote to him the following letter. The readers will be able to know all about this incident if they read the play *Vikramorvashi* written by the poet Kalidasa.”

The source-material is from Kalidasa and on the whole the Kalidasian sensibility is at work: there is a great sympathy with the woman’s feelings. In this respect Madhusudan is a Kalidasian. This sympathy was also strengthened in the poems of *Birangana* by the influence of Ovid from whom he got the idea of these heroic epistles. A sweet tenderness, a lyricism, a depth of feeling and a love passionate and human, mark the tone and style of these poems. As regards the versification, there is the freedom and the harmonic pattern of the blank verse which Madhusudan introduced in Bengali, and of which he was a master-craftsman. The epic tone which he tried in his long poem, *Meghnadbadh*, was not congenial to his lyric temperament, and he had often to sustain the illusion of epic grandeur by means of empty rhetoric. These shorter poems have a more sustained style and a more direct tone. The best passages of the longer poem, we must admit, have the same qualities, the same lyrical imaginativeness and the same suavity. But they are embedded in long passages in which the poetry gets lost in words and rhetoric. The poems of *Birangana* are artistically more authentic.

Urvashi’s letter is one of the most felicitous of these poems. The poem opens with a line which, by its directness and simplicity, throws the reader at once in the very centre of the theme: *svargacyuta âji, râjâ, taba hetu âmi* “ Fallen from heaven am I, O king, for your sake.”

The prologue of the third act of Kalidasa’s play tells us the reason of her fall, This incident is most important for the further progress of the dramatic action. Madhusudan grasps the psychological significance of this moment. Urvashi now stands alone, between heaven and earth; she has lost her divine prerogatives but has no human rights yet. This opening line symbolises the mental state of all women-in-love who, because of their love, are forced to abandon family, society, religion, riches and security. Love is the cause. When Urvashi says “for your sake” she really means “because I love you”. It is the same mental state as that of Radha in love with Krishna. The woman has lost her security and her status, but she is not sure yet of what is in store for her. Will the King accept her? She has no fear. No strong emotions are

uttered. We feel that all emotions are held in abeyance. Urvashi's future depends on the reply to her letter.

After the first line, Urvashi describes the incident which led to her fall. Here, Madhusudan follows Kalidasa quite closely; he paraphrases and translates. The incident is still vivid. Last night the play "*Lakshmi's Wedding*" was staged in heaven. Urvashi played the part of Lakshmi, and Menaka, the part of Varuni. When Varuni asks, "Tell me towards whom flies your heart?" Urvashi forgets that she is playing a part and answers with the words of her own mind, "Towards king Pururavas." The gods laugh. But Bharata, the director of the play is furious. He curses her. Urvashi continues her letter:

Listen, O king, what I said
yesterday in the assembly of the gods, aloud,—
that I shall repeat... why be ashamed:
I shall repeat that to you to-day.

She thus tells the king of her love. Madhusudan has departed here from his source. Kalidasa makes it quite clear, at the very first meeting of the king and the nymph, that they have fallen in love. Then in the second act Urvashi descends on earth with her friend Chitrlekha. She meets the king. Their mutual love is expressed. The curse-scene follows.

Kalidasa's Urvashi knew, after the curse, that she was loved by Pururavas. But Madhusudan's Urvashi does not know, at this point, whether the king loves her or not. This ignorance on her part of the feelings of the king makes the letter psychologically more poignant and gives a greater poetic intensity.

She speaks of the ardour and constancy of her love. Her mind, she says metaphorically, is "like a river that rushes towards the ocean unceasingly..." This shows the impetuosity of her love that is not restrained by anything, not even by her divine status. But her mind is not fickle, it is also "like the sunflower that gazes unblinking at the sun's splendour."

Love is impetuous and free, but *dharma* should not be transgressed; love should therefore be free from moral lapse, mutability and inconstancy.

Urvashi is a woman-in-love, and it is only in love that she can live. She would rather die if she had no love. Even though she has all the emotional make-up of an earthly woman yet mythically she is a nymph, an immortal goddess. She cannot die if she is spurned by the king. I am immortal, she says, but if you spurn me I shall renounce all delight of life and practise austerities

in some terrible forest. But if you love me,

I shall fly to the refuge that you are,
as the bird flies to the thicket

when the cage is broken. What is heaven worth without you?

Love is greater than heaven. The life that hinders the free fulfilment of love is a prison, a cage: an idea and an image dear to Madhusudan.

The next movement is a flash-back. Urvashi evokes the memories of their first meeting, her fright and her swoon; she evokes also his valour and heroism, and his handsomeness. When she had regained consciousness she had heard what he said to her friend Chitrlekha. This is a close translation of Kalidasa's verse put in Pururavas' mouth describing Urvashi regaining her consciousness.⁶¹ Urvashi also refers to another verse.⁶² These words are like a magic spell and they revive her: "You stole the heart of the heavenly girl easily, O king of men!"

Urvashi said earlier that heaven without him had no joy for her. Now there is a clear antithesis between the heavenly and the earthly: the heavenly girl, *surabâlâ*, and the earthly king, *nararâjâ*. In prowess, king Pururavas is greater than Indra, the wielder of the thunderbolt; and in physical beauty he surpasses the god of love himself. It is therefore but natural that his valour and beauty will win the heart of the heavenly girl. Women, heavenly or earthly, seek in man outer beauty and inner virtue, *rûpaguna*.⁶³ *rûpa-gunâdthinâ narakul, naraśrestha, ki bhava ki dibe* - (II. 75-6). "Women are ensnared by beauty and virtue, O greatest of men, be it in heaven or on the earth."

Urvashi loves Pururavas. She is a slave of love. But what does this love signify? Is it only a "devotion to something afar"? The sense of distance is there and the charm of the far-off. Urvashi is that far-off ideal of beauty. But Madhusudan, like the bold ancient poets, is not content with the ideal love. Love is both physical and mental. He makes use of the Puranic idea of people practising austerities to attain the heaven of pleasure and sensuous satisfaction, the ideal of *svargabhoga*, heavenly enjoyment. Urvashi who is the highest object of desire offers herself to those who reach heaven.

She is the divine hetaera. To others she gives the nectar of her youth, but now she is in love: "I have put on sale my body and mind, O king, come and buy both these in the mart of love." (II, 81-82) The courtesan sells only her

body. But like Vasantasena⁶⁴ she is now in love; she is a woman and nothing more. For Madhusudan, we have seen, in the fulfilment of love there is no dichotomy between body and mind, *kâyamanah*; it is the union of the whole with the whole.

Madhusudan, rationalist, romantic and agnostic, was also a hedonist; he loved this world. He sang the love of this world. Myths were for him symbols he could exploit for communicating his vision. A woman-in-love sacrifices everything. And what could be more than heaven? Urvashi does not hesitate to sacrifice even that. She desires to come down to the earth; she wants to be the slave of love. If there is love earth becomes more desirable than heaven and slavery to love more desirable than loveless freedom.

She suffers for love - love of a human. There is no way of leaving heaven to join the lover on the earth. Bharata's curse comes to her as a blessing:

Poison is the antidote to poison, I've heard people say.
I was dying, O king, scorched in love's poison,
therefore the sage, probably taking pity on me, prescribed
the poison of curse. (II. 86-89)

She is not bound to heaven any longer. The fulfilment of love depends on Pururavas alone. Urvashi is not sure whether the love is mutual. If the king too loves her she will give herself entirely to him and merge in him; she will leave heaven and come down to the earth like the rain that falls on the sea leaving the shelter of the clouds 'to unite gleefully with the blue waters'.

This self-giving and desire for union is the closing note of her lovelorn heart. We have said that she is not sure of Pururavas' response to her love. But there is hope. And she reads in nature signs of her success. Madhusudan here uses Puranic associations as psychological symbols; to the modern mind the supernatural is accepted as signs and symbols of man's natural hopes and fears. Urvashi continues:

I wrote this letter in the Nandana park, sitting on the bank
of the heavenly Ganga. I have, Lord, worshipped humbly
the Wishing Tree, expressing my heart's desire.
A full-blown flower, O king, fell on my head
And Ganga, Shiva's beloved, with her wave-voice
whispered in my ears, "You will get the fruit of your desire."
(II. 94-99)

What she sees in the falling of the flower, and hears in the sound of the waves, is the voice of her own desire. But this is more than wishful thinking; the association with the wishing tree, *kalpataru*, and Ganga, the sacred river, suggests holiness, purity, *dharma*.

A pure love, a dharmic love, cannot remain unfulfilled.

Urvashi then says that her friend Chitrlekha will take the letter. She herself will wait eagerly for the reply.

Here ends the poem. It is a poem of love, love-in-separation. But, as in his Radha-poems, so in this epistle, Madhusudan suggests that separation cannot be eternal. When there is true love the meeting of the lovers is inevitable. His vision of love was constant - when minds were true the lovers would meet. He would certainly agree with Shakespeare,

Let me not to the marriage of true minds,
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.⁶⁵

Madhusudan, as a poet of love, explored the woman's heart. In all the three poems Pururavas is almost absent; he has become a shadow, Urvashi appears luminously. She tends to become universal, not the beloved of one mortal, but the dream of beauty and love of all men in love.

In the vision of the next poet we are going to study, Pururavas has altogether vanished. The last traces of the epic-narrative elements disappear - elements of classicism which linger in Madhusudan disappear to make place for the purely subjective and the triumph of the romantic spirit.

Notes and References

- 19 Letter to Gaurdas Basak, 25th Nov. 1842, in. Rachanabali, Part 2, Calcutta 1973, p. 5.
- 20 "Extemporaneous Song", *ibid.*, Part 2, p. 287.
- 21 Letter to Gaurdas Basak, 25th Nov. 1842, *ibid.*, Part 2, p. 283.
- 22 To the same, 27th Nov. 1842, *ibid.*, Part 2, p. 285.
- 23 To the same, *ibid.*, Part 2, p. 287.
- 24 In 1848 he married an Anglo-Indian girl in Madras, divorced her in 1865, and married the following year a French girl.
- 25 "The Anglo-Saxon and the Hindu", Rachanabali, Part 2, p. 253.

- 26 Bharatchandra, the 18th century Bengali poet .
- 27 Letter to Rajnarayan Basu, Rachanabali, Part 2, p. 305.
- 28 Read the beautiful sonnet “Bangabhâshâ”, in, Rachanabali, Part 1, p. 367.
- 29 Letter to Rajnarayan Basu, 29th Aug. 1861, Rachanabali, Part 2, p. 333.
- 30 In the play Mâyâkânana (IV.3) he makes fun of those who pretend to know Sanskrit poetry. One character is made to say, “Sir, your lamentation reminds me of a verse in Ghatakarpara’s Naicâdha-carita: tasmin nadau katicid abalâ-viprayuktaḥ saḥ kâmi, nîtvâ mâsân kanaka-balaya-bhramûa-rikta-prakârya - the commentary of Kolâhala Bhallînâtha on this verse is superb.” Anyone can see that the speaker is presented as an ignoramus who mixes up everything, misquotes the famous lines of Kalidasa’s Meghadûta and attributes them to Ghatakarpara, and the name of the commentator is also deformed.
- 31 Letter to Keshab Gangopadhyay, Rachanabali, Part 2, p. 314.
- 32 Sukumar Sen, History of Bengali Literature, New Delhi 1960. p. 216.
- 33 Ajay, the prince of Sindhu, meets Indumati, a kshatriya princess disguised as a merchant’s daughter. Indumati’s friend asks Ajay how he can marry a vaishya girl. Ajay replies, “When king Dushmanta (Dushyanta) saw Shakuntala at the hermitage of the sage Kanva, it was his heart that told him who she was: “This excellent woman fostered by the sage is certainly not a Brahmana-girl.” My heart tells me likewise that your friend is not a merchant’s daughter.” Mâyâkânana, (I.1)
- 34 Letter to Rajnarayan Basu, Rachanabali, Part 2, p. 311.
- 35 To the same, *ibid.*, p. 334.
- 36 The Upsori, Rachanabali, Part 2, pp. 38-39.
- 37 Rachanabali, Part 2, p. 2. Also, “I loved a maid, a blue-eyed maid, As fair a maid as e’er can be, O!” p. 18
- 38 “Lines”, *ibid.*, p. 30.
- 39 Brajangana, No. 13.
- 40 “Somer prati Târâ”, Birangana, lines 137ff.
- 41 Rachanabali, Part 2, p. 8.
- 42 Meghnadbadh, V, lines 97-100.
- 43 Brajangana, No. 10.
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 “Lakshmaneri prati Sûrpanakhâ”, Birangana, lines 76-77.
- 46 Brajangana, No. 10.
- 47 *Ibid.*, No. 6.
- 48 “Somer prati Târâ”, Birangana, lines 142-3.
- 49 “Upakram”, Chaturdashpadi, No. 1.
- 50 Sharmishtha, II.1.
- 51 Padmavati, Pt. 1, I.1. In this play the three goddesses seem to symbolise the three

objects-of-life (trivarga). Kubera and Kama are the gods of artha and kâma respectively according to Indian mythology. Indra is not particularly associated with dharma, - Yama is the lord of dharma, dharma-râja, but as the king of the gods Indra upholds Law. And Sachi’s words clearly denote that she is for dharma.

- 52 Meghnadbadh, VIII, lines 479-481.
- 53 Caturdashpadi, No.14.
- 54 Vivez, si m’en croyez, n’attendez à demain:
Cueillez dès aujourd’hui les roses de la vie.
Sonnets pour Hélène, II, XLIII.
- 55 Brajangana, No. 10.
- 56 Tilottamasambhab, II, line 56.
- 57 “Arjuner prati Draupadi”, Birangana, VI. line 9.
- 58 Caturdashpadi, No. 60.
- 59 *Ibid.*, No. 74.
- 60 Kalidasa, Vikramorvaśîya, 4.12ff.
- 61 Lines 50-56. Cp. Vikramorvaśîya I. 7.
- 62 Vikramorvaśîya I. 6.
- 63 Madhusudan subscribes to the ancient idea that kâma should be guided and purified by dharma.
- 64 The heroine of Shudraka’s play Mricchakatikâ, “The Little Clay Cart”.
- 65 Sonnet, No. 96.

(To be Continued)

The National Value of Art

Pabitra Kumar Roy

I

Man, for Sri Aurobindo, is always the traveller of the cycles of society and his road is forward. This thesis holds no less in the domain of man's aesthetic adventures. As elsewhere, he gathers in his material from the minds and lives of his fellow-men around him and makes the most of the experience of humanity's past ages, and does not confine himself in a narrow mentality. The dialectic of individual and humanity is a characteristic of the logic of the evolutionary process. At one pole of man's being, he is a variation of human individual, and yet belonging to his race and class types. He has his *svadharma*, according to which man resembles some, and differs from others. Society is formed on the ground of human affinity. Social affinity enriches the individuals, and his enrichment, in turn, enriches the society. For Sri Aurobindo, in modern times, society is the nation. By enriching the national life, the individual helps the total life of humanity. But it should not be understood that he holds that one's nationality is one's exhaustive identity. Rather, "if by a part of himself he belongs to the nation, by another he exceeds it and belongs to humanity."¹ (*HC*, p. 81). Man's societal self-limitation and subjection to his environment and group is hardly the last credential of a man's existence. He shares something of the infinity, complexity and free variation of the Self manifested in the world, and thus has a necessary tendency of expansion and transcendence of his environmental affinities. The individual lives in humanity as well as humanity in the individual. The point is that nation is a temporary necessity. This view of nation and nationality we have to keep in view when we discuss Sri Aurobindo's ideas concerning the national value of art.

Sri Aurobindo greatly admired the so-called Bengal school of painting. We have to take into account the story of this school of painting in order to get at the idea of the national value of art. This school was inspired by E.B. Havell and Sister Nivedita. Havell was a historian of Indian art, sculpture and painting, and he saw India's past, present and future as one. When Ananda

Coomaraswamy's *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* was published, Nivedita hailed it as a masterpiece. Her own essays published under the title *Civic and National Ideas* spelt the principle of nationality and dwelt on the function of art in shaping nationality. She laid it down that art must be followed for the remaking of the motherland. Nivedita's master, Swami Vivekananda himself, held that man cannot be truly religious who has not the faculty of feeling the beauty and grandeur of Art. Non-appreciation of Art is crass ignorance. However, the point is that in course of their writings, Havell, Sir John Woodroffe, Sister Nivedita and Coomaraswamy directed the attention of the people towards the aesthetic tradition of India. It was in point of *Indianness* that the works of the artists of the Bengal school were discussed. Coomaraswamy looked upon the painters of the Bengal school as a phase of the national reawakening. The subjects, he said, were taken from Indian history, romance and epic, and from the mythology and religious literature and legends, as well as from the life of the legends, and from the life of the people around them. Their significance lay in their distinctive Indianness. Their work was full of refinement and subtlety in colour, and of a deep love of all things Indian. As a matter of fact the work of these artists became popular as part of the then national movement.

It was Havell who proclaimed Abanindranath Tagore as a painter in the Indian tradition, but the fact remains that he never wholly belonged to any exclusive tradition. He is hailed as the reviver of Indian art, whereas, in fact, he never wanted to rediscover anything with any specific effort. He had studied the canons of aesthetics, had written on *sadanga*, and Indian iconography, had even pleaded for the Indian ideal, yet in his own creations he did not adhere to them. In a word, in spite of his immense enthusiasm and regard for Indian aesthetic ideal, he never adopted the mode of expression peculiar to Indian painting or sculpture. He followed the ideal neither of any nation nor of any time. He had been guided by his own individual taste. He has created nothing in the Indian traditional line. The contemporary critics of Abanindranath were not far from truth that his paintings were not Indian, neither in essence nor in execution.

But what makes a man a painter of nationality? Nivedita has referred to Tagore's picture of Bhāratmātā as an achievement lying amongst the higher reaches of artistic achievements. It was a picture of an idea that moved the nationalists of the day. True it was that Tagore asked his disciples to infuse *bhāva* (idea or feeling) in the picture, but what exactly he implied by the word

bhàva he never explained. What we can safely say is that Nivedita's enthusiasm for Bhàratmàtà was more for the ideal behind the painting rather than its pictorial qualities. Her book *The Cradle Tales of Hindustan* came to be illustrated by Tagore and his more nationalist disciple, Nandalal Bose. Bose was among others whom Nivedita arranged to send to study the murals at Ajanta caves. This was a decisive turn of events, and it has had a lasting influence on the art of such painters as Nandalal Bose, since for a considerable period the elements of pictoriality and ideality vied with each other in his art. When Nivedita wrote an eloquent piece on Bose's picture of Sati, the profuse employment of moral and philosophical terms cannot be missed. She writes, "We see before us a woman, beautiful indeed, and adorned like a bride, with her whole mind set on the moment of triumph, yet without the slightest consciousness of her own glory. The form is pure *sattwa*, without one particle of *rajas*, as the Indian thinkers might express it" (*C.N.I.* p. 117).

There is some truth in the point that the Bengal School could be compared with the Pre-Raphaelite movement. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, as it was called, included such poets, who were painters nonetheless, as William Morris, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Christina Rossetti. The Brotherhood had John Ruskin, the art critic as its friend and patron. The Pre-Raphaelites were opposed to High Renaissance, and admired the direct unsophisticated imagination of early Italian and Flemish Art. The movement had begun in 1848, and was marked by its challenge to academic art. Poetry of the English Romantics was one of the sources of inspiration for the Pre-Raphaelite group of painters.

Likewise, literature and painting were brought under a unified focus by the Bengal School. One of the centres of gravity was the presence of Rabindranath Tagore, and Abanindranath was the poet's nephew. Apart from that, Abanindranath was already a man of letters even before he emerged as a painter. He illustrated his uncle's poems. His reading was extensive, and this can be seen from his lectures and writings on art. A poet's emotion, and an artist's manner of looking at the world, a blending as well as a tension between the two, had given shape to Abanindranath's genius. There is a swing of mind between word and picture in all his writings. They are all pictures born of the cadence of words. Like the symphony of words in his writings, symphony of colours is the chief attraction of his paintings. Whatever suggestion of form we catch remains concealed behind a veil of colour. Style is the point about his literary as well as pictorial composition: how he tells in the one and how he shows in the other.

During his stint with the Government College of Art at Calcutta, he saw to it that his pupils studied the Indian epics, the *Bible*, the *Shàhnamah*, the *Purànas* and the mythic lore. His syllabus of studies included a day's reading of the sacred texts. It was his theory that the mind of the artist in the making must be filled with things dynamic, for pictures come not out of the fingers, but out of the head. That is where pictures come from, as Edward Burne-Jones used to say. Abanindranath's movement was based on the belief that Indian art contains within itself infinite sources and materials, and stores within its womb inexhaustible seeds to grow into newer blossoms and richer fragrance to perfume a new manner of living.

Abanindranath wrote a monograph in Bengali on the so-called six limbs of Indian painting. It is an interpretative and explanatory piece of writing on a *Kārikā* quoted by Jashodhara in his *Jayamangalā* commentary on the *Kāmasutra*. The monograph was translated into French and English, and had a wide readership. Abanindranath explained the six limbs, *rupabheda*, *pramāna*, *bhàva*, *lāvanya*, *sàdrsya* and *varnikābhanga* in a free manner. It was more an exercise in hermeneutics than a scholastic presentation of an ancient text. His manner of presentation and explanation invited bitter criticism from conservative circles led by A.K. Maitreya, but it failed to attract the attention of such persons as Rabindranath and Sri Aurobindo. The former had written an essay in Bengali, called "Chabir anga" (limbs of painting). The *angas*, the six limbs together constitute the necessary and sufficient conditions for a painting to be *citra* proper. Lacking in either of the six, said Maitreya, there would occur *citrābhāsa*, a fall from the ideal standard. Having dismissed Ajanta murals from the status of *citra*, Maitreya does say examples of 'Indian' *citra* are no longer in extant anywhere, the concept or the idea of it has to be construed from ancient texts and descriptions. Maitreya's diatribe against the manifesto of the Bengal School is not without its lessons. Can we talk about painting wholly in terms of concepts, without extensive examples? Does not painting have a history, depending on such factors as ideology, availability of medium, changes political and religious, and in the wake of the nationalist movement, it tended towards essentialism of a sort. It is an open-ended concept, and cannot have been defined once and for all, unless one were prepared to embrace anachronism. How can one account for creativity, if no modulation were permitted?

The nationality of art was not the issue with Abanindranath, even if it could have been so with some of his followers. He has not created anything in the Indian traditional line. What he sought was to effect a fusion of western and

oriental techniques and evolved a new style in painting. The problem of absorbing the western technique without detriment to their own art-tradition has been a serious one to the modern artists, not only in India but also in China and Japan. The success with which Abanindranath solved it is perhaps unique in the history of modern oriental art. His early training in Western technique helped him with the pre-eminence of the qualities of texture, atmosphere and colour symphony. He exploited these with masterly ease when he approached oriental art, which is different in its kind as well as quality. In his paintings the oriental body received a western garb and the latter in its turn influenced the structure of the body. This was a unique achievement, and it should be pointless to ask if it was Indian. His paintings were a new type of work belonging to a new age. He brought about an aesthetic reawakening, and never intended a revival *simpliciter*.

II

Let us return to Sri Aurobindo who evaluated the contributions of the Bengal School for its “renewed message” in the midst of an atmosphere which he found “raw and chill, thick with the crude mists of a false education and a meager and imitative culture” (*F.P. Appendix I, p. 278*).

What does he mean by “Indianness” or for that matter, nationalism in art? Sri Aurobindo takes note of Abanindranath’s point about the correspondences between Indian and Chinese canons of art, and speaks at times in such dualities as European art and the art of Asia, “the artistic conventions, aims and traditions of Asia.” (*NVA, 1970 reprint, p. 19*). Yet as per his evolutionary philosophy, he puts it in clear enough terms that Asia’s future development will unite these two streams of art in one deep and great flood of artistic self-expression perfecting the aesthetic evolution of humanity.

When Sri Aurobindo speaks of “national art” or “the Indian tendency” of art, he does not use the phrases in the canonical sense. In one sense “national art” has had, as in Greece, Italy and India, to illustrate or adorn the thoughts or the temples and instruments of the national religion. This had been the case because it was in religion that man’s spiritual aspirations centred themselves. But spirituality, for him is a wider thing. A civilisation, Indian, Asiatic or European, he proposes, must be looked at in its initiating, supporting, durable central motives. The abiding principle of Indian culture, according to him, is spirituality. Indian culture, he argues, recognises the spirit as the truth of our being and our life as a growth and evolution of the spirit. The spirit is “the

secret highest Self of all.” It sees man as a soul and power of this being. The significance of life and the aim of human existence, according to Indian thinking, is the progressive growth of the finite consciousness of man towards the Self, in a word, his growth into spiritual consciousness. This ideal inspiration or this spiritual vision of Self has been the fundamental idea of Indian culture and civilisational activities. Arts have been considered as instruments of the spirit’s culture. “Indian painting, sculpture and architecture did not refuse service to the aesthetic satisfaction and interpretation of the social, civic and individual life of the human being; but ... their highest work was reserved for the greatest spiritual side of the culture, and throughout we see them seized and suffused with the brooding stress of the Indian mind on ... the spiritual, the Infinite” (*FIC, p. 169*). Hence the aesthetic was made one of the main gates of man’s approach to the Spirit. For a right understanding of Indian culture, art, too, has to be judged in this light. This is what Sri Aurobindo lays down in an answer to rationalistic criticism of Indian ideals.

In his scheme of thought the aesthetic side of a people’s culture is of the highest importance. It demands almost as much carefulness of appreciation as philosophy, religion and central formative ideas of which art and literature are conscious expressions in significant aesthetic forms. In this context, Sri Aurobindo’s concept of art becomes pertinent. Art can express eternal truth, it is not limited to the expression of form and appearance. “A man”, says he, “using a simple combination of lines, an unpretentious harmony of colours, can raise this apparently insignificant medium to suggest absolute and profound truths with a perfection which language labours with difficulty to reach. What Nature is, what God is, what man is can be triumphantly revealed in stone or on canvas” (*NVA, p. 19*). This is what Sri Aurobindo means by the “spiritual utility of art”.

How can art fulfil such a high office? By “inward vision of the relation and truth of things” (*NVA, p. 22*) is Sri Aurobindo’s answer. This is, according to him, what characterised the art of India in the past. European art, as he sees the matter, satisfies the physical requirements of the aesthetic sense, the laws of formal beauty, the emotional demand of humanity, the portrayal of life and outward reality. But art for its perfection has to reach beyond the European achievements and express inner spiritual truth, the deeper and not the obvious reality of things. The Indian tendency, as he says, seeks to bring body, heart, and mind into touch with the spirit. And the spirit is that in which all the rest of human being reposes, towards which it returns and the final self-revelation

of which is the goal of humanity. The spirit, then, is what the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (3.6) had designated as *ānanda*. If the artist has the spiritual vision, he can see it and suggest “the joy of God in the world” (*NVA*, p.18). Such is the glory and greatness of “the hands of the master of plastic Art,” (*NVA*, p.20). One would recall Browning’s lines describing music in “*Abt Voglar*”:

“But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,
Existent behind all laws, that made them and, lo, they are!
And I know not if, save in this, such gifts be allowed to man,
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound but a star.”

III

Sri Aurobindo was closely associated with the National Council of Education in Kolkata. He found that under the British system we were cut off by a mercenary and soulless education from our ancient roots of culture and tradition. Our ancients attached great value to music, art and poetry. The age long tradition of culture and training of the aesthetic perceptions had come to be curbed by imperious insistence. Life was deprived of its meaning.

The problem of cultural alienation and identity crisis had pained our elders in an acute manner. They longed for a discovery of India, and in that they were serious in their intent. In this context, the great novelist and thinker of consequence, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya, deserves a worthy consideration. In many of his writings he deplored the poverty of aesthetic taste amongst the members of the English educated Bengali middle class. He proposed a concept of culture in terms of a three-fold flowering of the human personality. What he meant was the cultivation all the three *vr̥ttis*, as he termed it, namely, the physical (*shāririki*), the intellectual (*jñānārjani*), and the aesthetic (*cittarānjani*) and held that it would bring about the perfection of life. As for his concern and awareness for the plastic arts, one would look for the episode of *tasbir*, miniature portrait paintings on ivory in *Chandrashekhara*. The sense of alienation from “the national manner of art” (Nivedita’s phrase) finds an outburst full of pathos in *Sitaram*. We are made to stand before the Udayagiri and Lalitgiri caves in Orissa and keep wondering at the sculptural marvels. Alienated from the creative sources of national art, we cannot but keep asking, who had carved these beauteous forms, were they one of us? Turning our eyes to the defaced and broken pieces of sculptures and images

buried in sand, Bankimchandra makes us realise our present state of cultural affairs: we too have become, like those relics, partial and dismembered. He had a discerning eye for his contemporary taste in painting. Ravi Varma’s paintings in oil on epic and Puranic themes had begun to be popular with the Bengali landlords. In *Vishayrksha* (The Poison Tree) Bankimchandra describes the bed chamber of the heroine, Suryamukhi. There are paintings in her room, and they are said to be done by an Indian painter who had learnt the art of oil painting from an Englishman. Of the paintings Bankimchandra chooses to describe, there is one depicting Shakuntala turning her back for a longing, lingering look at Dushyanta under the pretext of removing a thorn from her feet. Her companions, Anasuya and Priamvada smile amused. There can be no doubt that the description is an oblique reference to Ravi Varma’s painting on the same theme. It was Theodore Jenson who taught the technique of oil to Ravi Varma. The said painting is housed in Sri Chitralayam in Thiruvananthapuram, and it is reproduced in *Ravi Varma* by Krishna Chaitanya (Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1960, plate 3).

Ravi Varma’s oleographs filled a vacuum; though evaluated by the standards appropriate for a “national manner of art” they faced disastrous criticism. Swami Vivekananda did not conceal his distaste for Ravi Varma’s paintings. Nivedita refers to the popular reprint of Shakuntala writing a letter. This painting was later reproduced in a postage stamp by the Government of India. Nivedita commented on the painting in scathing language: “in modern India an erroneous conception of fashion has gone far to play havoc with the taste of the people. In a country in which that posture is held to be ill-bred, every home contains a picture of a young woman lying full length on the floor and writing a letter on a lotus-leaf! As if a sight that would outrage decorum in actuality could be beautiful in imagination” (op. cit. p. 82). One can argue if a work of art is a fit object of moral consideration. That is another matter. But Nivedita’s logic pertains to what she had called the national manner of art. Even though it may be the case that the aesthetic evaluation of Ravi Varma is a difficult task, yet some of the questions that are raised in the context are worth pondering over. What form should the union of European and Asiatic art traditions take? “Shall the Indian Padmini be succeeded by the Greek Helen?” is a question that comes from Nivedita. More disturbing is Abanindranath’s uncomfortable observation: “Shall Shakuntalā be stanced in the manner of Venus de Milo?” One confronts violent oscillation from phenomenal popularity to general condemnation in the aesthetic evaluation of Ravi Varma, the painter of “national” themes. Vincent Smith was one of the

earliest writers to note this contradiction. Coomaraswamy found Ravi Varma's paintings theatrical, lacking in imagination and Indian feeling in the treatment of sacred and epic themes. We need not take sides at the moment. It will be worth our while to consider that academic work of Ravi Varma's type is more akin to prose. Its danger is obviousness in narration, and it is not the highest category of creative work. In it, one would vainly look for a pervasive overtone of silent poetry that breathes life in the works of the masters of the Bengal school. As Nivedita has rightly pointed out that errors of the academic painter of Indian themes proceed from a false ideal of correctness which leads us to be untrue to our own feeling. Education is necessary for true discrimination, and mistakes in taste are dangerous to moral dignity. Art is cathartic, a means of *cittasuddhi* for Sri Aurobindo, and what is expected of it is a sense of the impersonal lifting the human form out of the realm of the merely physical and suffusing it with spiritual meaning. What is needed is a training and heightening of sense perception, a culture of the eye. And this training required to qualify the judgment in art is not less stern and difficult than that for logic. Such has been Nivedita's stated view.

It should be recalled that both Nivedita and Sri Aurobindo wrote for, and as one of, an imperialised people. What they meant by national art was not a relapse into the tradition, dead and past, or to hark back to old ways. In saying that an Indian painting, if it is to be really Indian and really great, must appeal to the Indian heart in an Indian way, they did not mean that we have nothing to learn from the West in matters of art. "There is such a thing as a national *manner* in art", said Nivedita, "and India needs only to add the technical knowledge of Europe to this manner of her own" (op. cit., p. 68). India has had great epochs of art creation, an evolution, almost unbroken and marked by periodic enthusiasm. An age of nationality will have to resume into its hands the power of each and all of these epochs. The key to new conquests lay, Nivedita argued, in taking up rightly our connexion with the past. For the man who has no inheritance has no future. If the modern Indian artist knows where he himself stands in relation to his past, this may itself prove an emancipation.

All this is not empty rhetoric, behind it lies a great insight. By national art Nivedita, and the masters of the Bengal School, meant a reconciling and revealing power of the future art in India. Art in modern times has become a language through which great minds can express their outlook on the world. It is one of the modes of poetry, said Nivedita, and as poetry, modern Indian

art is open to all inspiration, wherever, and however it may be born. The traditional arts are characterised an unendurable sameness, ridden by convention, lacking elements of newness, and the power to create, or striking out a new style. In India the arts were the prerogative of certain castes. They produced habit, and habit, through heightened skills, tended to limit imagination. What is expected of the modern Indian artist is vastness and imagination. If he produces high art, it will be charged with spiritual intensity, with intellectual and emotional revelation. It then requires the deepest and finest kind of education. The man who has not entered into the whole culture of his epoch can hardly create a supreme expression of that culture.

(To be Continued)

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