

Śraddhā

*A Quarterly devoted to an exposition of the teachings of
The Mother and Sri Aurobindo*

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Contents

On the Mother	Sri Aurobindo	7
On Herself	Mother	10
The Divine Mother and the Triple Status of the Supermind	Debashish Banerji	14
The Path of Nachiketa	Alok Pandey	32
Sanskrit : A Journey from Mantra to Freedom	Sampadananda Mishra	38
VedaVyasa's <i>Mahabharata</i> in Sri Aurobindo's <i>Savitri</i>	Prema Nanda Kumar	47
On 'The Life Divine' Of Sri Aurobindo	Sarnath Basu	62
The Nature of Faith		
In the Light of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga Psychology	A S Dalal	70
Spiritual Knowledge	Martha S G Orton	77
Karma In History : An Evolutionary Perspective	M S Srinivasan	88
Indian Culture and Hinduism	Kittu Reddy	105
Sri Aurobindo and Chandernagore	Trija Ray	117
A New System of National Education : Agenda For Change	Sachidananda Mohanty	137
The Theme of Urvashi in The Indian Renaissance : Madhusudan Datta, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo	Ranajit Sarkar	142
The National Value of Art	Pabitra Roy	159
“Sadhak Nolinida— The Wayfarer of the Sunlit Path”	Manoj Dasgupta	171
Jugal Kishore Mukherjee (1925-2009)	R Ranganath	182

श्रद्धां भवति ज्ञानम्

Śraddhāvāṁl labhate jñanam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

Editorial

When one thinks that all has been said about Her, in truth nothing really has been said, for She is the Immeasurable, who yet has consented to be taken into captivity, the Unknowable, who yet has manifested Herself in myriad fragments of knowledge, the Absolute, who yet has entered into intimate relations with us through the mystery of her Love and Grace. Who can ever unveil the secret of Her unfathomable mysteries or lay hold of Her in entirety unless She, in Her deep compassion for Her children, chooses to put upon Herself the ties that will bind us to Her for all time to come? Only Her own words and those of the Master and the Lord can give us some faint glimpse of Her infinite riches. On the occasion of The Mother's Jayanti, we, Her children, we, too, would like to lay our humble offering at Her lotus feet.

O Thou, Supreme Divine, Omnipotent and ever Blissful,
Mystery Ineffable, greater than whom none exists,

How shall these lips profane sing of Thy glories
Unless Thou, O Mother of Radiances, Word Supreme,
Thyself descend on this jewelled centre of speech
And 'awaken revelation's mystic cry'?

Leap into our inmost depths and with sharp force
These knots intricate of life, untie
Set free the living warm waters of Thy Divine Love
That they may wash anew our entire being.

A spark of Thy eternal Consciousness, light
In these dark half-conscious cells of clay,
With tongues of fire relume all corners that refuse Thy Light
And make this body a tabernacle for Thy undying Glory.

13 January was the 120th birth anniversary of Nolini Kanta Gupta, the *manasputra* of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, about

whom Sri Aurobindo is reported to have commented once 'If Nolini is not doing my yoga, then who is?' We have here an article by Manoj Dasgupta giving a very humane sidelight into the life of sadhak Nolinida. The past couple of months also witnessed the passing away of two of the Mother's most beloved children – Jugal Kishore Mukherjee and Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, universally loved as our dear 'Dada'. We have no doubt that after living a full and active life at the service of the Mother, they have ultimately found a resting place at Her lotus feet.

We are particularly grateful to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust for permission to reproduce the photograph of the Mother and the few lines of *Savitri* appended below, the extracts taken from the book '*The Mother*' by Sri Aurobindo, the passages quoted from the book '*The Supreme : conversations with The Mother*' as recorded by Mona Sarkar and the objective of the monthly journal *The Arya* as laid out on the verso of its title page. Our grateful thanks to Dhanavanti Nagda once again for graciously allowing us to reproduce yet another of her exquisite painting '*Pranam*' on the cover of the journal. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are reproduced here with acknowledgements and thanks to the Trustees.

Sri Aurobindo On The Mother

The One whom we adore as the Mother is the divine Conscious Force that dominates all existence, one and yet so many-sided that to follow her movement is impossible even for the quickest mind and for the freest and most vast intelligence. The Mother is the consciousness and force of the Supreme and far above all she creates. But something of her ways can be seen and felt through her embodiments and the more seizable because more defined and limited temperament and action of the goddess forms in whom she consents to be manifest to her creatures.....

The Mother not only governs all from above but she descends into this lesser triple universe. Impersonally, all things here, even the movements of the Ignorance, are herself in veiled power and her creations in diminished substance, her Nature-body and Nature-force, and they exist because, moved by the mysterious fiat of the Supreme to work out something that was there in the possibilities of the Infinite, she has consented to the great sacrifice and has put on like a mask the soul and forms of the Ignorance. But personally too she has stooped to descend here into the Darkness that she may lead it to the Light, into the Falsehood and Error that she may convert it to the Truth, into this Death that she may turn it to godlike Life, into this world-pain and its obstinate sorrow and suffering that she may end it in the transforming ecstasy of her sublime Ananda. In her deep and great love for her children she has consented to put on herself the cloak of this obscurity, condescended to bear the attacks and torturing influences of the powers of the Darkness and the Falsehood, borne to pass through the portals of the birth that is a death, taken upon herself the pangs and sorrows and sufferings of the creation, since

it seemed that thus alone could it be lifted to the Light and Joy and Truth and eternal Life. This is the great sacrifice called sometimes the sacrifice of the Purusha, but much more deeply the holocaust of Prakriti, the sacrifice of the Divine Mother.....

But be on your guard and do not try to understand and judge the Divine Mother by your little earthly mind that loves to subject even the things that are beyond it to its own norms and standards, its narrow reasonings and erring impressions, its bottomless aggressive ignorance and its petty self-confident knowledge. The human mind shut in the prison of its half-lit obscurity cannot follow the many-sided freedom of the steps of the Divine Shakti.....

Open rather your soul to her and be content to feel her with the psychic nature and see her with the psychic vision that alone make a straight response to the Truth. Then the Mother herself will enlighten by their psychic elements your mind and heart and life and physical consciousness and reveal to them too her ways and her nature.....

The supramental change is a thing decreed and inevitable in the evolution of the earth-consciousness....But that the change may arrive, take form and endure, there is needed the call from below with a will to recognise and not deny the Light when it comes, and there is needed the sanction of the Supreme from above. The power that mediates between the sanction and the call is the presence and power of the Divine Mother. The Mother's power and not any human endeavour and tapasya can alone rend the lid and tear the covering and shape the vessel and bring down into this world of obscurity and falsehood and death and suffering Truth and Light and Life divine and the immortal's Ananda.....

There is one divine Force which acts in the universe and in the individual and is also beyond the individual and the universe. The Mother stands for all these, but she is working here in the body to bring down something not yet expressed in this material world so as to transform life here – it is so that you should regard her as the Divine Shakti working here for that purpose.....

The Mother's consciousness is the divine Consciousness and the Light that comes from it is the light of the divine Truth, the Force that she brings down is the force of the divine Truth. One who receives and accepts and lives in the Mother's light, will begin to see the truth on all the planes, the mental, the vital, the physical. He will reject all that is undivine, - the undivine is the falsehood, the ignorance the error of the dark forces; the undivine is all that is obscure and unwilling to accept the divine truth and its light and force. The undivine, therefore, is all that is unwilling to accept the light and force of the Mother. That is why I am ...telling you to....remain always in contact with the Mother's light and force, then only can you grow into the divine Truth.....

Whatever one gets from the Mother, comes from myself also – there is no difference.....

The Mother and myself stand for the same Power in two forms.....

Mother and I are one but in two bodies.....

There is one force only, the Mother's force – or, if you like to put it like that, the Mother is Sri Aurobindo's Force.

Mother On Herself

There is only one thing of which I am absolutely sure, and that is *who I am*. Sri Aurobindo also knew it and declared it. Even the doubts of the whole of humanity would change nothing to this fact.....

...You have no idea that the whole world, the entire universe bows down to me, imploring me in an act of adoration to serve me. You do not know who I am, who has descended in the ignorance among you, who has consented to be human, to take up a physical body among you all. You have no idea of who is there before you. Well, even the gods whom you revere so much, perform tapasya in order to have a glimpse of me. It is for me and through me that the whole Universe exists and it vibrates in my consciousness. It is through me that all living beings and inanimate things and all that you see in the Manifestation, acts and progresses. There is nothing that is not within me. I am the Cause. It is in me that all things disappear. Everything, everything is expressed in me and aspires to take refuge in me. Those who know me a little give their entire lives to find me.

...I am above the whole Manifestation.....

My child... my gaze explores beyond all things, beyond all existence, beyond all known realities, and leads towards that inexhaustible vastness where Truth remains inexplicable, where nothing is formulated, yet everything emanates from there. It is the source and the origin of all terrestrial or ultra-terrestrial existences, even beyond the manifestation, - something that cannot be expressed; yet it is the essence of an experience that has been lived.....

This gaze is the gaze of the Supreme, united by an interdependence, in a fusion, with the Consciousness which reflects the Beauty and Ananda of existence without deforming it. From this look emanates the joy of existence, the power of manifestation of the Eternal Truth, the divine Compassion, the

love of perfect Union, the Benevolence without limit, as well as the wrath of God.

This look of the divine consciousness in which love pours itself in an unending flow to save the world by an infinite compassion towards men and creatures without distinction, in a self-oblivion which leads by waves of immortal joys, radiating the symbols of the Infinite which go back to the Origin, this look born on the borders of two marvellously astonishing worlds, between the Unknown and the Invisible, lives in the powerful light of the suns which shine within, in the deep caves. It sees beyond the worlds and these common things, communes with the powers that built the worlds and enters into the depths where secretly the aspiration is born, because this look has broken the hidden seals.

These eyes are like illumined mirrors seized by an unfathomable delight and love pouring in an interminable flow. This vision climbs back to the high summits where the spirit soars in the joy and harmony of the heavens of the Eternal Truth. The spirit of Beauty expresses itself in these eyes. This gaze full of divine compassion absorbs all the sufferings, pain and miseries of men and the creatures of this ruthless Nature dominated by the anti-divine forces, and renders them pleasant, loving, habitable, without which this world would be a veritable hell.....

My gaze which passes beyond, penetrates and sees into the very depth of things, brooks no obstruction or barrier; it sees the atoms and molecules in their detailed functioning. This gaze that extends till Infinity, projects Eternity in its vision, contemplates Immortality in its sight. This infallible look descends by a silent contact and awakens the secret power which resides in the depths of the inconscience of the being which sleeps in eternity.....if you can concentrate deeply into my eyes, then you will get all that you want to know, all that you want to comprehend, all that you want to realise...You can have all that you aspire for, all that you need. You can see the whole world in my eyes: the whole universe unfolds in my eyes, all that is beautiful in nature as well as in the heavens. And you will not need to go here and there looking for the so-called attractions and revelations of this world. All is in me, and all expresses itself through me. Take the trouble to find me there (*Mother points to the heart*) and you will see everything, everything through my eyes.

My child, I am the Unknown that is unseizable, yet I consent to be seized; I am the Unknowable, yet men pretend to know me. I am the Infinite but I am constrained to limit myself in a physical body by time and space. I am the Eternal who has submitted itself to be bound in evolution. I am Immortality which awakes in its innumerable aspects that perish, in order to climb back towards the One, and which has consented to a birth, in order to suffer the terrestrial consequences. I am the Nihil where everything disappears; the Inconscience that denies my presence, yet each atom of this mass of ignorance palpitates with my consciousness. I am the Mystery - the great paradox which has begun to unveil the innate secrets of this divine manifestation in the terrestrial and cosmic evolution. By the fact of this immense descent of the Supramental upon earth, we foresee the gradual dissolution of the duality, the contradictions and many other things which trouble ordinary men.

My child, I am the Cause, the great Creatrix from whom everything emanates. All that you can conceive of is created from me, by me and for me it exists. Nothing is which is not in me. You understand, it will take you hundreds of births to understand what I am. And yet I reveal myself to my devotees who love me; and still I shall remain unseizable.....

My child, I do not reveal myself, neither do I declare nor show what I am. But I am the All-Powerful who has descended here below in a human body of flesh and bone, into the ignorance and inconscience, into a surrounding where no one recognises me, because nobody can, in order to raise up the world, the creatures and man towards a new level of this creation..... Give yourself entirely to me.....

...My child, I am the One - the Permanent who is ever awake; I was, I am and I shall be; nothing can surpass me, yet the self renews itself at each moment to discover and again surpass the Permanent that exists in itself. It is a game, an enigma for those who want to know. It is not to be understood and known; but it is a fact that faith alone can find. As I am in Him and He is in Me in a permanent way up there, there is no difference; but for the terrestrial manifestation, we have chosen to be divided in two separate physical bodies here below, to help one another in the terrestrial evolution. It was the only way to hasten the evolution. We are the One and the Unique, the Essence of all that exists, that marches forward towards the truth of Existence. ...Look

straight into my eyes and follow the road that is being traced before you. It is a visible trajectory, an infallible guide. Be conscious.

...Wherever I have looked, I have planted an aspiration of the Transforming Force, I have sent a vibration of the Divine Consciousness, I have transmitted the power of an Eternal Joy, I have enveloped these beings and things with an Immutable Love. Wherever I have looked, everywhere, whatsoever I have seen or this gaze has fallen upon, wherever my eyes have glanced, or have grazed the unfathomable horizons, or caught a picturesque moment, or traversed the skies, the stars and the suns, or directed a concentration of the consciousness towards all that is gathered by this Eternal Look, I have sent a state, a substance of the Supramental Consciousness, that which does not perish but works incessantly to change the contents of these elements to the New Consciousness. This look is filled with Love, Light, Grace and Divine Compassion.

The above passages have been taken from the book *The Supreme : Conversations with the Mother* as recorded by Mona Sarkar.

The Divine Mother and the Triple Status of the Supermind

Debashish Banerji

To talk about the triple status of the Supermind sounds like something very esoteric and very distant – chapters of *The Life Divine* that people usually pass over or glance at without much concern, and usually the idea that is propagated is that things like Supermind are too far from us, we should not even think about them. They do not warrant thought. We should make ourselves silent and proceed as best as we can, and may be we will catch a glimpse by the Grace, of what the Supermind is or can do or is here to do.

Well, Sri Aurobindo wrote this substantial tome - which he once called humorously “a fat elephant”, and a lot in this book has to do with the Supermind. Now he wrote it evidently because he wanted us to read it, and wanted us to read it because he wanted us to form an idea, however adequate or inadequate it may be, so that we might develop some sort of an aspiration towards what his central work has been. And aspiration, as we know, is one of the two central powers of Sri Aurobindo’s yoga. As you are no doubt aware, Sri Aurobindo begins *The Mother* by enumerating the two sole powers of his yoga; and these are – Aspiration and Grace.

But Aspiration in itself can be either vague, nebulous, diffuse, or it can be something which is fine-tuned. We all start with a vague aspiration. Everybody in this world has some kind of an aspiration. Aspiration, one may say even, is the essence of humanity. But the aspiration of most people remains vague for their entire life. They do not form any clarity about where they want to go. Of course with the action of Grace, Aspiration clarifies, but the works of Sri Aurobindo are meant to give us a finer tuning to our aspiration. And as the

aspiration grows in precision, so too the Grace can act with greater precision on us and bring us closer to a realisation which opens more and more of that Truth to us. So with this preamble, I would like to move on to the relevance of what Sri Aurobindo had to write about it in *The Life Divine* and *The Mother*.

In *The Life Divine*, the first book begins with a few general subjects, general aspects of the spiritual life, like The Human Aspiration, The Two Negations, Reality Omnipresent, the Destiny of the Individual, Man in the Universe, the Ego and the Dualities. Then Sri Aurobindo lays down his methodology in a very important chapter called The Methods of Vedantic Knowledge. After this he launches upon a number of chapters that talk about what Sri Aurobindo elsewhere has called “The Ladder of Existence” - from top down. Looked at from above, this “ladder” can be divided into two halves – Vidya and Avidya or the Knowledge and the Ignorance. The Vidya itself can be broken into Sachchidananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss) and Vijnana or Supermind and the Avidya into Matter, Life and Mind. So there are triple principles above and triple principles below and a link principle – that Sri Aurobindo calls the Supermind - in between. Now this breakdown of the ladder of existence is something that was unclear in Indian philosophical systems almost from the time of the cycle of philosophy in India which one might say begins from the post-Upanishadic period, from the time of the Buddha – an intellectual cycle of the understanding of the spiritual truths of the Vedanta. Sri Aurobindo explores this range of existence in detail and introduces here a key term, whose significance had been lost in post-Buddhist Indian philosophy and this term is “Supermind.”

So to begin looking at this spectrum of the manifestation, Sri Aurobindo starts with the traditional Indian understanding of Knowledge as Sachchidananda or Being, Consciousness, and Bliss. These form the next Chapters in the book - the Pure Existence, which talks about Sat, Conscious Force – which is Chit, Delight of Existence – which he breaks into two chapters, The Problem and The Solution. I will not go into detail on the explanation of the problem and the solution here, because that will take us beyond the scope of today’s talk, but what I wish to draw out here is that having talked about these three principles of the Knowledge, he launches into five chapters – which he names variously, The Divine Maya, The Supermind as Creator, The Supreme Truth Conscious-

ness, The Triple Status of the Supermind and The Divine Soul – and these five chapters give us five ways of understanding what Sri Aurobindo calls the Supermind. Thus a considerable part of Book I of *The Life Divine* goes into the description of this plane of consciousness called Supermind. Then he continues to talk about Mind and Supermind where he establishes the link between the mental principle and the supramental principle, then chapters on Life, Soul and Matter. And these are the chapters that talk about the Avidya or the Ignorance.

Now, this long description that I just gave was meant to point to the importance of the chapters on Supermind – that there are the five chapters that he lays out with considerable eloquence and comprehensiveness on this consciousness called Supermind. May be there is little of it that can really seep into us and have any kind of lasting depth or clarity at this stage of our existence. But he has gone to great lengths to bring this experience of his own to us in words, so that we may connect with it with our aspiration.

Now, the other reason why he has gone into this great effort is that the knowledge of this consciousness called the Supermind is something that was lost to us. In our understanding of the spiritual life from the time of the philosophic cycle in India, we have had a different kind of approach to the Spirit. This approach to the spirit may be based on the Vedanta. In various ways all Indian philosophies including Buddhism, which calls itself non-Vedic, can be seen as basing itself in some way on the Vedanta; and if we try to look at what the Vedanta is positing, we will see that the Vedanta’s central truth is that of the spirit as a unitary reality and as infinite at the same time. The Infinite One - this is the essence of the Vedanta and it is a very inviting definition of Reality. The infinite One, because ‘one’ seems to be the essence of finiteness and yet ‘infinity’, if it is to be fundamental and not just a fragmentation of a unity into infinite particles, must be something that can never be contained within any container, however large that may be. So this combination - paradoxical - of a fundamental unity and a fundamental infinity is the basis of the truth of the Vedanta. We have to understand how it is brought together but in this particular case, the understanding of the truth as the one and the infinite has been laid out by the philosophers in India as a kind of duality – a duality which looks above at the Sachchidananda and says that that is the One, and looks down at our existence and says that that is the infinite fragmentation. There is a fragmented

reality here – a reality in which separateness is the essential existence. And there is a unitary reality above – a reality in which there is One – reality that is undifferentiated. An undifferentiated Unity above, a separative fundamental infinity below.

Now the Vedanta is very clear about the unity of all things and unity is what we move to intentionally in our human existence. Mind itself gropes for unity and carries within it an intention of unity. It is impossible for mind to rest until it can assert something of a fundamental unity in existence. This is what makes even Science look for a Unified Field Theory. So what is that fundamental unity which Vedanta classifies as Advaita – the one without a second? We know that the Advaita that is most popularly understood in India today is the Advaita of Śankara, which asserts that Sachchidananda is Brahman, is true and the world, 'Jagat' here, is the fragmented reality, is false. Therefore, the reality of the world is denied as something illusory, something which does not have any kind of substantiality except in the false experience which somehow we have been given to experience through the mysterious agency of Maya- an illusion-making magician - within the unitary reality of Sachchidananda. If we can escape from this prison of Maya we will experience Reality as it truly is – one, undifferentiated, without name and form, without any particularity, specificity or fragmentation. So this is the One without a second that we are asked to approach.

Now the Veda had a different approach; it gave us a process by which to understand the difference between the One and the infinite particles or fragments of the One. And this process is that of the Purusha-Medha Yajna: the sacrifice of the Purusha. By sacrifice the Purusha has become this world. This is the idea of the Veda. And this sacrifice is seen as that of the One Being, Purusha, the One Being there is, who for some mysterious reason has fragmented himself, has broken himself up, broken himself into pieces, and these fragments, infinite fragments of That One (*Tad Ekam*) are separate realities – that are here in this Ignorance. Thus, the Ignorance is the sacrificed body of the Supreme Person. We ourselves are the limbs of that sacrificed body of the Supreme which is why we experience separateness. This is the dichotomy between Vidya and Avidya as far as the Veda is concerned.

Now what unites these separated portions? Are we doomed to this kind of

existence for all time? Is this the eternal condition of existence here? And it would seem according to the philosophies of India that developed after Buddha – post-Buddhist philosophies of India – that yes, the condition which we experience here is an eternal one – one of eternal fragmentation and separateness. Avidya is an eternal condition of the world, of Jagat, while Vidya is an eternal condition of Sachchidananda. Now, Sri Aurobindo is not satisfied with this idea and contests it with these five chapters on the Supermind. Because he is saying to us that this is not true – that between this One undifferentiated reality above and this separative fragmentation below there is a link Principle – a link principle which is the creative poise of the Sachchidananda, that creates Time and Space as the canvas on which the flowering of the manifestation of divine consciousness can take place, in which Sachchidananda can be deployed and find a certain representation – a representation which is changing, not fixed because evolving, and therefore whatever the condition of Ignorance or Avidya that we may see here is also a temporary condition governed by the movements of the Supermind. Supermind is the power, is the Divine Maya. The Maya which remains unclassifiable by Śankara, is in fact the Divine Power which causes – is the causal power behind - the unfoldment of the separative consciousness here towards its own reality of the Supermind. So this is Sri Aurobindo's view of the link principle.

Now to come to the "triple status of the Supermind," this, according to Sri Aurobindo, is what allows the Supermind to link the above and the below, the Vidya and the Avidya. We may ask, what is this triple status of the Supermind? To understand this we have to first look at the Vedantic idea of Sachchidananda and of Supermind as a link principle as Sri Aurobindo describes it. The Sachchidananda is one unitary undifferentiated Being, which is Self-Conscious and possesses Infinite Delight as its intrinsic nature. Now this is the fundamental reality that is. Actually even this fundamental reality as Being is a kind of representation because whatever is completely infinite cannot but be beyond Being and Non-Being. Therefore something indescribable, something completely and infinitely unmanifest, something that can never know even itself and therefore is called by the Vedanta as the Unknowable, is the origin of this but in that origin is a mystery – a mystery which moves towards self-knowledge and that self-knowledge is represented to itself first and solely as the Sachchidananda –

Sachchidananda as Being, Being as infinite consciousness and because it is infinite, conscious Being, experienceable to itself and to anything within it. Moreover, since it has infinity as its intrinsic property, its limits are always exceeded by whatever scope of experience it can lay to itself and this freedom, this absolute freedom, is the basis of its intrinsic property of delight. Therefore Delight, Consciousness, and Being, infinite Reality turned in upon itself, with no need of manifestation, undifferentiated is the reality of Sacchidananda.

Now Sri Aurobindo points out in his introduction to the *Philosophy of the Upanishads* that even to take that first step out of the Unthinkable Reality beyond Being and Non-Being and to become Being is an inexorable movement towards the manifestation. It cannot but now take the successive steps logically towards manifesting itself because the One Being self-conscious turns its consciousness upon itself and it turns its consciousness upon itself in an act of concentration, whose other name is Tapas, it broods upon its own possibilities and as a result these possibilities start Becoming. They start being called out into manifestation. They become deployed in a certain form and that representative form is the manifest reality.

Now in essence, Sachchidananda could have created something by itself and perhaps it does. A creation by Sachchidananda without the Supermind is something that the Mother was asked about. “Is it possible to think about a creation by Sachchidananda without the Supermind?” And to paraphrase the Mother, if you were to be in this instant in a certain location and at a certain point in time and the next instant in a completely different location in another form, scale and time and jumped from space-time to space-time without any coherence to your experience - this would be the kind of experience you would have of a creation by Sachchidananda without the Supermind. Supermind is an organ, which Sachchidananda deploys – it is the knowledge of Sachchidananda, which is also the Will of Sachchidananda, what Sri Aurobindo calls the Knowledge-Will, that gives a systematic form to the exploration of Being by Consciousness. The self-consciousness of being is explored in a systematic graded (space) and phased (time) form through the agency of Supermind and this is done in a variety of ways and perhaps in two major ways - one is a creation in the Supermind, which is an eternal supramental creation, always present, always perfect, in the Vidya but evolving more and more powers of

Divinity because it is an exploration as well. And the other – the kind of experience that we have, which is a plunge into the Ignorance because by doing so Supermind makes a point zero beginning – a zero beginning of all things which is an absence of the Divine, is the best systematic exploration of what is the Divine. Therefore, in this creation that we call the ignorant creation, the beginning of the explorations of Being by Supermind takes place through the positing of an existence without consciousness, which is Matter. Within it there is more and more consciousness that becomes manifest through phases, through graded steps, in time and space, causing an evolution that brings us to our peculiar and rather unhappy condition— a being between two worlds and being conscious of that fact. We are caught between the Ignorance and the Knowledge, struggling to find stability and cannot belong to either pole. So this is the basis of the human experience which Sri Aurobindo calls “divine discontent”, which makes man what he is.

Now given this much, let us go back to the triple status of the Supermind. What is this triplicity which makes the Supermind the link principle? Sri Aurobindo in his chapter called the “Triple Status of the Supermind” enumerates these three to be the Transcendent, the Universal and the Individual. These are the three poises of the Supermind and let me read how Sri Aurobindo describes this and shows us the difference between our kind of experience of Reality and the Supermind’s experience of Reality in as much as this triple poise of the Supermind goes.

He says—*“We, human beings, are phenomenally a particular form of consciousness, subject to Time and Space, and can only be, in our surface consciousness which is all we know of ourselves, one thing at a time, one formation, one poise of being, one aggregate of experience; and that one thing is for us the truth of ourselves which we acknowledge; all the rest is either not true or no longer true, because it has disappeared into the past out of our ken, or not yet true, because it is waiting in the future and not yet in our ken. But the Divine Consciousness is not so particularised, nor so limited; it can be many things at a time and take more than one enduring poise even for all time. We find that in the principle of Supermind itself it has three such general poises or sessions of its world-founding consciousness. The first founds the inalienable unity of things, the second*

modifies that unity so as to support the manifestation of the Many in One and One in Many; the third further modifies it so as to support the evolution of a diversified individuality which, by the action of Ignorance, becomes in us at a lower level the illusion of the separate ego.” [SABCL, Volume: 18-19, The Life Divine, p. 145]

So these are the three statuses of the Supermind. Within the Supermind there is something which is very close to the undifferentiated unity of the Sachchidananda. But whereas in Sachchidananda this unity is turned in upon Itself and therefore unmanifest, in Supermind this same unity is a self-extension, a self-extension in Space that becomes an evolution in Time in the second and third statuses of Supermind.

In the second status of Supermind there is a projection out of the undifferentiated unity into a kind of universal containment – a containment in which the possibilities of this Supreme Reality are then made into varied multifarious realities that are all various forms and functions of the Supermind. Therefore the Supermind becomes the Many and the continent of the Many, which is what we might call Universal Consciousness. Within the self-extended consciousness is a universal presence to each reality in that consciousness – what one might call a Jivatman - Jivatman outside of the reality of Time, but positioning itself behind every form that the universe carries in itself.

And the third status of the Supermind, is one in which these varied possibilities become the individualised recipients of the totality of the Supramental Reality - in other words Supermind enters into each of its constituents - becomes immanent in them. This entry of the Transcendent Mystery into each of its constituents causes Sri Aurobindo to remark that the human individual is greater than the entire universe, because in each individual the Transcendent dwells. That is, not only are we portions of or fragments of a Universal Reality but inside each of us there is that which exceeds the universe, which is the Transcendent. And therefore that, which can actually even change the dimensions of the Universe, has that power. Therefore, these are the three realities that are simultaneously experienced in the Supermind.

This, we see, is the experience of the Divine Consciousness. But when we come to our human reality, we experience life through the fragmented lenses of

our individuality in the Ignorance, what might be called the illusion of the ego. So the ego, as a separative consciousness, causes us to experience an individual truth of the world – an experience of Each of the Many – that have lost their connection with the All and with the One, where the All is the Universal Reality and the One is the undifferentiated reality or the self-extension of the Supermind as a unitive consciousness. In the Supermind this never happens. In the Supermind, these three realities co-exist and partake of each other’s nature. The absolute unity of all three is felt by everything. Within that unity is also felt that operation of unity as a universal consciousness and as a form-and-function-creating consciousness in each constituent of that universe. And within that same unity and same universal reality each constituent experiences itself as the totality of that reality— the total supramental consciousness. This becomes the basis of the play that is the dynamic reality of supramental existence, the supramental manifestation - manifestation in the Supermind.

Now this kind of a triple status co-existing is something that Sri Aurobindo envisages as the inevitable destination of this ignorant world, that we are here as individual realities because we contain in ourselves the transcendent Reality. We are hedged around by that universal reality and not only surrounded but behind us that universal reality is creating an individual form or Eidolon and we are connected with a transcendent reality above us, and this triple form of existence is something that we are to experience, not merely individually but together as the condition of a world – a world-condition and therefore this kind of a world is what our world is moving towards - the supramental manifestation is this kind of a world.

Now to come to this sort of realisation or understanding is to completely change our view of the understanding promoted by the post-Buddhistic philosophies I spoke about earlier, where we either have to deny as illusory our experience of fragmented reality or we have to accept it as something which will always remain divided, ignorant, unhappy. Sri Aurobindo is contesting this view by telling us in these chapters that there is an evolution that is going to take us out of this into the Supermind. In the chapter on the “Triple Status of the Supermind” he shows us clearly how these three statuses relate to the major post-Buddhistic Vedantic philosophies and why in each of these philosophies there is a certain partiality that divides them against each other.

The Veda tells us that the truth is one, but the seers see it differently. An ecumenical or universalist religion is also vociferous in pointing out that the sages have said all different kinds of things but actually they have said the same thing. Nevertheless, the disciples of the sages are fighting all the time and this is our reality even today. The fact is that most of these sages have not said the same thing and this is what Sri Aurobindo is making very clear. The sages have not said the same thing because each one has had a partial realisation of the Divine Consciousness and when we talk about the triple status of the Supermind, we see clearly that the three major schools of Vedanta are at odds with each other regarding this very fact of what Vedanta means.

Firstly, there is Advaita which is Śāṅkara's school and that affirms the Transcendental undifferentiated unity of all things but cannot affirm any qualified unity – i.e. the universal Reality where the Saguna Brahman is manifesting, nor can it affirm any reality to the individual or to Time. Therefore all these things must be unreal to it. Sri Aurobindo says that the first status of the Supermind – the status which is the self-extension of unity in space is something which gives us that experience. If that becomes reflected in the mental consciousness we have the sense that that alone is true, everything else is false. Similarly if there is an experience of the second status of the Supermind which is that of the universal reality in which One Consciousness is modulating itself into the Many and that falls on the stillness of our mental consciousness then we believe that that alone is true, everything else is false. The third one is one where we see the Individual Reality as distinct from the Supreme Reality – a dualism which is only and always going to remain so and bridgeable only through relationship, and that relationship between the Individual and the Divine becomes the basis of an experience of Divine Love that unites or does not unite, but brings closer to a unity between the individual and the Divine.

Now the three main branches of the Vedanta of course, are Advaita, Viśiṣṭadvaita and Dvaita. Advaita is the Absolute Non-Dualistic philosophy of Śāṅkara, Viśiṣṭadvaita, the Qualified Non-Dualism of a Ramanuja, and Dvaita of course, the Dualistic philosophy of a number of thinkers but perhaps most sophisticated of these is Sri Chaitanya who posits an Unthinkable Unity-in-Difference. Both together co-exist. There is a difference due to relationship and a unity at the same time but we cannot think of it because it is beyond

logic. So at the mental level, these three kinds or forms of experience are each exclusive and radically different. They don't combine. But in the Supermind they are not exclusive, they are all present at the same time which is what allows us to have an integral realisation of the Transcendent, the Universal and the Individual poises of the Divine.

We may see this in Sri Aurobindo's own life and in the Yoga he went through himself. We might see that his first realisation – the realisation of the Nirvana, was an opening to the Transcendent, an opening to something like what the Buddha or Śāṅkara is telling us – the One alone exists and the Many become unreal. And only something which is Beyond and completely indescribable is sensed as a permanent Reality. But Sri Aurobindo lived in this consciousness and did not accept it as final. He tells us that between his having this particular realisation and his entry into Alipore Jail he had some other experiences or realisations. And the main one that he talks about is that of the Universal Brahman with its two sides – the Passive and the Active side.

The passive side of the Universal Brahman realisation is that of a Universal Being that is present behind all things, silent. And the active side of the same realisation is of the Shakti of that Being that has become and moves everything in this Universe. Everything is a formation of that particular power here. Yet, even this experience does not give any reality to the Individual as a separate Divine Being. This is what Sri Aurobindo was to have at the Alipore Jail, where he experienced Vasudeva as immanent in all things, Sri Krishna as the Divine Reality – the Transcendent Puruṣottama present inside every being. So this completed for him the three experiences or the three realisations that constitute the triple status of the Supermind. He did not have these simultaneously at this stage; he had them one after the other but they were an expansion of realisation, not excluding each other. So there was a kind of a synthesis of the three.

Now, in Sri Aurobindo's case having had these experiences he was to discover the Supermind where these three realisations co-exist, but now having come to this point he saw his mission as being that of bringing the supramental consciousness here and manifesting it as a possibility for the earth consciousness so that all human beings could partake of this manifestation, and this realisation of three simultaneously coexisting statuses be the basis of the world

that we inhabit. Now Sri Aurobindo attempted this in Pondicherry for ten years in a variety of ways, as he says, barking up many trees and finding a dead end in every case until the coming of the Mother.

And it is only after the coming of the Mother that the supramental yoga took a new turn and Sri Aurobindo was to say that if it was left to him he would have perhaps been able to give this yoga to a handful of ten disciples but with the coming of the Mother it had become a world possibility. Now this is a very enigmatic statement and we have to ask why this is the case; and why Sri Aurobindo has always pointed to the Mother as the source for opening this supramental realisation to us all. Now, the only place Sri Aurobindo gives us some hint about this is in the little book *The Mother*. Here he tells us that the Mother's consciousness is the Divine Consciousness. And that she is here, in this lower triple world as a kind of delegate from her own true reality. And in a way this is exactly what Sri Aurobindo tells us also in *Savitri*. Savitri in Sri Aurobindo's epic is also exactly this - the Supramental Reality that has cast a ray of itself into this world to supramentalise it. And therefore the Mother comes, as he says, with the Divine Consciousness, and the Divine Consciousness is not the human turning divine but a consciousness that progressively manifests its divinity. And this progressive manifestation of its divinity is what is going to bring us closer and closer to itself and manifest more and more of itself the more we are ready to receive it. From the very beginning this consciousness carries in itself the triple status of the Supermind and this is what Sri Aurobindo is telling us in the book *The Mother* - that the Mother's consciousness is at once Transcendent, Universal and Individual - that this triple status is present in Her as her normal functioning.

I read this part from Chapter VI—

“There are three ways of being of the Mother of which you can become aware when you enter into touch of oneness with the conscious force that upholds us and the Universe. Transcendent, the original supreme Shakti, she stands above the worlds and links the creation to the ever-unmanifest mystery of the supreme. Universal, the cosmic Mahashakti, she creates all these beings and contains and enters, supports and conducts all these million processes and forces. Individual, she embodies the power of these two vaster ways

of her existence, makes them living and near to us and mediates between the human personality and the divine Nature.”

So this is the Mother and Sri Aurobindo is telling us in no uncertain terms who the Person is that we know as the Mother.

As he says again in *The Mother*:

“The one whom we adore as the Mother is the divine conscious force that dominates all existence, One and yet so many-sided that to follow her movement is impossible even for the quickest mind and for the freest and most vast intelligence. The Mother is the consciousness and Force of the supreme and far above all she creates, but something of her ways can be seen and felt through her embodiments and the more seizable because more defined and limited temperament and action of the goddess forms in whom she consents to be manifest to her creatures.”

And towards the end of the book he reiterates –

“...Be on your guard and do not try to understand and judge the Divine Mother by your little earthly mind that loves to subject even the things that are beyond it to its own norms and standards, its narrow reasoning and erring impressions, its bottomless aggressive ignorance and its petty self-confident knowledge. The human mind shut in the prison of its half-lit obscurity cannot follow the many-sided freedom of the steps of the Divine Shakti. The rapidity and complexity of her vision and action outrun its stumbling comprehension; the measures of her movement are not its measures. Bewildered by the swift alterations of her many different personalities, her making of rhythms and her breaking of rhythms, her accelerations of speed and her retardations, her varied ways of dealing with the problem of one and of another, her taking up and dropping now of this line and now of that one and her gathering of them together, it will not recognise the way of the supreme power when it is circling and sweeping upwards through the maze of the Ignorance to the supernal light. Open rather your soul to her and be content to feel her with the psychic nature and see her with the psychic vision that alone makes a straight response to the Truth. Then

the Mother herself will enlighten by their psychic elements your mind and heart and life and physical consciousness and reveal to them too her ways and her nature.”

So here Sri Aurobindo is pointing out to us that the ways of the Mother are completely beyond our ignorant understanding, but that we have something in us that can open to her and that is the psychic being.

Now, the psychic being is that portion in us which is Her immanent portion inside the individual. It is indeed the Mother’s own individual existence in the Universe. In the Gita it is described as *Paraprakritir Jivabhuta* or the individual-becoming of the Supreme Nature. The Supreme Mother has become individualised as the psychic being in each of her creatures and therefore it is through the psychic being and psychic being alone that we can approach her, that is the individual dimension that is given to us.

We may say that for integral Yoga there is one true root of integrality and that is the Supermind, but there is a delegate of that integrality inside us - an immanent integral power - and that is the psychic being. The psychic being can unite our subliminal consciousness, our inner mental, inner vital and subtle physical consciousness because as he says there, it is through the psychic and the Mother’s enlightening through their respective psychic elements, that your mind and heart and life and your physical consciousness can be enlightened.

So this becomes the method and mode by which the Mother can work on us, because our psychic being is indeed in tune with her, but the Mother herself is not just our psychic being, she has not just entered into us to leave us in ignorance with the psychic being that is so deeply hidden in us that we can hardly find an access to it by ourselves. This is exactly where the whole miracle and magic and wonder of the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother comes in and the tremendous opportunity and Grace that is given to us by the fact that the supramental yoga is not an abstract impersonal yoga to be followed out by individuals left to themselves but that the Divine Consciousness and Shakti have brought it here and are present here to give it to us, that the Mother is here and that the Mother is not merely that psychic being hidden in us, but has come externally in an unveiled form so that we may relate to her and in that relating connect with the three statuses of the Supermind and find that she can open that experience up for us.

We as individuals can make some inadequate individual efforts. We can read these words and think of the three statuses of the Supermind, we can be inspired by Sri Aurobindo’s own successive realisations. But to have these realisations ourselves – it is next to impossible, because the co-ordination of these experiences, as Sri Aurobindo points out, is so complex because it is not just an individual coordination, the supermental reality that is evolving in earth nature is One Being. The whole of the earth is one Being and we are the diversified elements of that Being that are being led through this evolution and this leading is a coordinated process, a harmonious process that only the Divine Consciousness knows and therefore it is not through any kind of principled yoga in which we determine beforehand what it is that we will follow as a routine, that we can do this yoga. It is only through a progressive surrender to that supramental source that is embodied and present to us as the Mother that we can become aware of how she is leading the creation individual by individual and totally at the same time. She is leading the Universe and every individual in it at once by her Knowledge-Will, which is a triple simultaneous knowledge through the triple status of the Supermind.

So in Chapter VI of *The Mother*, Sri Aurobindo says - “*The Mother not only governs all from above but she descends into this lesser triple universe. Impersonally all things here, even the movements of the Ignorance, are herself in veiled power and her creations in diminished substance, her nature body and nature force and they exist because moved by the mysterious fiat of the supreme to work something that was there in the possibilities of the infinite, she has consented to the great sacrifice and has put on like a mask the soul and forms of the ignorance.* (In other words, us.) *But personally too she has stooped to descend here into the Darkness that she may lead it to the Light, into the Falsehood and Error that she may convert it to the Truth, into this Death that she may turn it to godlike Life, into this world-pain and its obstinate sorrow and suffering that she may end it in the transforming ecstasy of her sublime Ananda. In her deep and great love for her children she has consented to put on herself the cloak of this obscurity, condescended to bear the attacks and torturing influences of the powers of the Darkness and the Falsehood, borne to pass through the portals of the birth that is a death, taken upon*

herself the pangs and sorrows and sufferings of the creation, since it seemed that thus alone could it be lifted to the Light and Joy and Truth and eternal Life.”

So this is what the Divine Mother understands much better than we can understand. As Sri Aurobindo puts it – “*Since it seemed that thus alone....*” Perhaps if we were more receptive, as the Mother said in the case of Sri Aurobindo’s passing, it may not have been necessary for Her to subject herself to the torturing influences of the Falsehood and the Ignorance. She could have led us from above. But we are subject and easily vulnerable to the influence of the Falsehood and the Ignorance, too helpless under their yoke and it is only by coming down and being in our midst that this supramental realisation is possible because it is only She who can become human, put on the garb of the human and yet remain divine and draw us from that poise into the supramental creation.

That is why we return to Sri Aurobindo’s revised understanding of the Vedic holocaust of the Purusha, of the sacrifice of the purusha who becomes the fragmentary universe. In the above-quoted paragraph, he continues to assert this understanding, “*This is the great sacrifice called sometimes the sacrifice of the Purusha, but much more deeply the holocaust of Prakriti, the sacrifice of the Divine Mother.*” So this is what the whole work of the Mother is, this is what she has come to do. This is where she is and the supreme opportunity that has been offered to us is that she has embodied herself in an individual form to lead us individually and through the cosmos towards the Supermind.

I would like to conclude by pointing out some instances of how the Mother works in these three statuses and how she has been present and is present to us through these three ways of her being. We know that Sri Aurobindo has said that the Mother by her gaze connects people to their psychic beings and by her touch brings the psychic being into the surface consciousness, brings it into the human surface. And that is the individual way of working. We have been given the supreme opportunity of making a relationship with the individualised form of the Mother – that she is not physically present now, makes no difference here. She is as present to us in relationship in a personal form as she ever was, perhaps more present today because she is present in a supramental body right now. And we can relate to that and that will draw us, bring the psychic being

forward which is the first necessity of this yoga, the psychic transformation.

She also has always been working in a universal way, not only drawing individuals through an individual action, but drawing them as parts of a universal leading through her many powers and personality. Of course, Chapter VI of this book, *The Mother*, is all about the four primary personalities of the Mother that are active in the universe and how their harmonious action will bring us to a point that we will recognise the unitary reality of the divine Mother, whom we know as the Mother. But each of the powers and personalities of the Divine Mother has its specific mode of action and each of these can approach the same situation in a completely different manner. In the Mother’s own life she has told us how the powers and personalities that she has emanated have constantly been at work in this world, but how these could work at odds with one another in the lower planes and create a resultant chaos or destruction by themselves. In the Ignorance, Avidya, this is indeed what happens. But the Supramental Source of all these aspects can harmonise their actions by containing the Knowledge of their perfect deployment and it is this central co-ordinating power - the Aditi consciousness - that the Mother has embodied, which selects the specific mode of action at any time and place, resulting in a harmonious cosmic working.

And finally the Mother in her Transcendent being is constantly in contact with the Unmanifest Mystery of the Supreme and it is the fiat of the Supreme that she gives birth to, she is actually the Virgin who gives birth to the Child of God in time and therefore I would like to end by reading a passage describing the Mother’s supramental action or transcendental action and it is the transcendental action of the Mother which is ultimately that which brings the Supermind here to the earth consciousness. This is why Sri Aurobindo, when he left his body, said to the Mother that it is She to whom it was given to bring about the supramental manifestation on earth. And the Mother’s description of what happened on the 29th of February in 1956 is a clear statement of that transcendental action and this is what I will read —

“This evening the Divine Presence, concrete and material, was there present amongst you. I had a form of living gold, bigger than the universe and I was facing a huge and massive golden door, which separated the world from the Divine.

As I looked at the door, I knew and willed, in a single movement of consciousness, that 'the time has come', and lifting with both hands a mighty golden hammer I struck one blow, one single blow on the door and the door was shattered to pieces.

Then the Supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow.”(CWM, Vol.13, p.52)

And she says later, commenting on this “What happened on February 29th, 1956 is not so much a vision or an experience but something done. During the evening meditation in the playground I went up into the Supermind and saw that something needed to be done, and did it. It is interesting to note that the words- ‘The time has come’ which express what I simultaneously knew and willed, when I found myself in front of the massive door on whose other side was the world, were heard by me in English, not in French. It was as if Sri Aurobindo had spoken them.”

The fiat of the Supreme, spoken in the language of the Supreme and executed by the Shakti of the Supreme, in a moment that embodied the Knowledge-Will of the Supreme. This was the Mother’s transcendental action, her golden Mahakali action, of which Sri Aurobindo has said – *“Therefore with her is the victorious force of the Divine and it is by grace of her fire and passion and speed if the great achievement can be done now rather than hereafter.”*

(This is the transcript of a talk given a few years ago at the Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry)

The Path of Nachiketa

(Continued from the previous issue)

Alok Pandey

Nachiketa has chosen and chosen wisely. He has preferred the eternal over the transient, the immortal over the death-bound, and by that choice he has become a fit candidate for the lesson of immortality. He has been further initiated into some very first steps upon the great journey. He has been advised self-restraint, a restraint of speech and a restraint of the mind. This self-restraint is not a moral or an ethical restraint done by the mind and for social or religious purposes. Such restraint, though, is not without its value but the spiritual restraint is something much higher and intrinsically superior. It is at once a restraint and an offering, an offering of the outgoing power into its inner source. This prepares the consciousness to climb step by step from its outward dispersion towards an increasing inward orientation. It is of the nature of an in-gathering, an in-gathering of the energy of speech in the mind and of the mind into the Self and further on till the very Highest is attained. The path is long since human nature is normally not attuned to this inner movement. Most of the time it is outwardly oriented. Therefore, the next advice is not to lose time on the way, to arise and awake and taking help from those who have travelled far upon the path, to move forward with vigilance so that one does not slide back. From the sense-bound mind one must draw inward to That which is the secret Source of all things.

Now Yama goes on to explain the chief difficulty. Our being is outward gazing and flows through the senses onto the world and the objects of the senses. This is its natural course. To find the Self one has to follow the reverse movement, of going within. This cannot happen so long as man is attached to surface things and superficial pleasures. He must make a choice once and for all, the choice that all candidates for immortality are called upon to make,

the choice between the merely pleasant and that which is good. The merely pleasant keeps us tied to transient objects and partial perishable fruits offered by time to weaker souls. But the true good for man can only come about when he has discovered his own substance of immortality, his own diviner status of being, his deeper inmost power of the Self. What That is, now Yama goes on to describe - the true object of our seeking, finding which can grant us the immortality that we are in our deepest essence of being. We cannot find immortality so long as we are caught up in the pursuit of transient objects that come and please the senses awhile and then vanish without leaving a trace. In the passing they only leave a trail of grief and unhappiness. But having found That which is Immortal and Eternal, one is freed from grief and suffering since one is then no more deluded by the coming or going of things.

Nachiketa has been told what is the self that he must renounce who seeks Immortality; it is this sense-bound, desire-driven self that is ever absorbed and thereby lost in transient objects. Now Yama reveals to him something of the Self that he is seeking and must find if he wishes and aspires for Immortality. The true object of our seeking is that Self which is the secret knower of all things, it holds the key to the intrinsic and essential knowledge of all that presents itself to us as form and name; through It all can be known, even the most mundane experiences. Indeed it is always the case even in our ordinary life, it is the knowledge and the power of the Self that extends into nature and gives it the capacity to know and understand, to feel and experience the joy of life but the senses and the mind take them to be their own knowledge and power and confuse the little for the whole. They try to usurp it for their small purposes and transient satisfactions and thereby fall into error and become subject to grief. But once we have found the Self, then we do not feel even the need of these poor substitutes for we have found their Eternal Source. Therefore having found That which is the beginning and end of all things, That from which both our outer world and the inner worlds are born and into which they eventually cease, one is freed from all grief since one knows that all is the play of the One Self that has thrown Itself into many forms and yet remains untouched and unalloyed. This Self is not some neutral abstraction as the mind may envisage it to be. It is not some Nihil or Void

but the very Source and Substance of all sweetness that is born here and passes under the arches of Time. Having found It we too share this Sweetness that is its intrinsic nature and therefore shrink not from anything since in all things, however bitter and ugly or dark and repellent to our mind and senses, we can meet this Self and Sweetness, Beauty, Light and Bliss. This is the Self we must seek, the Self that is the Source of all Knowledge and Joy, that is forever full of Peace and Calm yet upholds the cosmic whorl in its palm.

This Self that is Eternal and Immortal stands in the depths of the heart of the creature. There He stands as the origin and base of all creation, He who by His power of *Tapas* has set the many systems of worlds and energies into motion, yet stands above them. He was there before the elements were born and He will be there even if all disappeared. He is not only above and behind but has entered into the elements as their secret base and support. He is there behind all things not only as Knowledge but also as Power. It is His Shakti, His Force that has entered into creation as its secret hidden Power. To the gods She stands revealed as the Mother Aditi, the Undivided Consciousness that the bright and luminous ones who are overseers of creation and the Lords of Time can perceive as their Origin and Cause. She is there, in the heart of each separate seeming object and ties this whole creation with Her luminous unbroken thread of Consciousness. This is the Self we must seek, a Self of supreme Knowledge, Power and Bliss, and not some blank void or a vague mental abstraction.

Nay He is yet closer. He has hidden Himself within the folds of nature as a child in the womb. Through love and worship, through a constant offering and sacrifice of all our waking life, of all that we do and are to that immortal Fire, the Divine Will, hidden in our depths can we find the object of our seeking. It is this inmost Fire that can open for us the doors to Immortality, if we turn to It with devotion and humility and turn our entire life into a ceaseless sacrifice to this Divine Will and Glory within us. This is what we must seek, for all Light and Glory is born of Him and to Him returns and all the gods who are none else but powers and aspects of the Supreme are established in Him and obey His Will alone. It is He who has established these gods and the cosmic powers in their fixed place and order and assigned to them their function in

the great cosmic rhythm. None can pass beyond Him since He is the very Highest, the supreme goal of our seeking, the Supreme.

One may pause and reflect here - what is this immortality that Nachiketa is seeking and what is this Self which Yama is revealing to him here? Normally when we speak of immortality we understand by the word the indefinite survival of our physical sheath or else the indefinite prolongation of our psychological personality. But there is a third and most essential immortality without which it is idle to even dream of the other two, even if that were possible one day. It is the immortality of our soul, the immortality of the Eternal Self, the immortality of the bi-une Divine Presence that is behind each element of creation and is hidden in the very heart of the creature. Were we to go inward through an in-gathering of our energies by turning them constantly towards the Eternal, by sacrificing all to the very Highest Supreme, through worship of Him amidst all this multiplicity of life, we shall find Him and Her standing at the apex and the origin of all things, *where the elements mingle* and begin to emerge out of the immensity of the Infinite. It is the Undivided Consciousness whose very nature is Oneness, Knowledge, Power, Bliss. It knows all things that are born in time and perish with it - the Knower within. It is the secret eater of Sweetness who drinks all experience of life and turns it to honey. Our outer mind may describe this experience or that event and happening as pleasant and pain and keep tossing from one to the other in an endless cycle but this inmost Divine Reality extracts out of it Delight and Sweetness. Drinking thus or rather thus transforming all experience to delight, it helps the individual soul grow in strength and love, power and light, peace and wideness, through every experience. Therefore, when we find that Divine Self within us in Its Integrality then we are done with grief and freed from suffering and shrink from nothing however unpleasant or painful it may seem to our ego-self. When we are identified with this state of consciousness of immortality that comes by identifying with the Divine Presence within us and in the world, then we are truly free from all delusion and every mask, including the most terrible of all masks, that is Death. We move in the field of Death but without fear since we are conscious of our immortal state, we move amidst transient things but free from anxiety for we are always in secure possession

of That which is their eternal and perennial Source. Even if the whole world or the system of worlds were to vanish before our very eyes we would still remain untouched and what is more, we can recreate the universe since it is with the Knowledge and the Power of the Divine Self that these countless worlds and their constituting elements are built and into this Self they pass. He has woven this stupendous world as a garb around His vast and luminous body of Bliss. Were we to pick up any single thread of this complex raiment called the universe and follow it to the end we shall touch something of His Being if not His totality. This is the grand vision that Yama is unfolding before Nachiketa the aspirant for Immortality.

Now he gives us a central key in a few terse verses packed with great power and force. This great wide world and all its different seemings are woven with One Consciousness and held together in a single plan. The divisions that arise in our understanding between this world and the other, between this object and another, between this person and that other are nothing but a practical arrangement created by the perception of our senses and the application of the divided mental consciousness upon this data. It is like a broken mirror that breaks a single image and then tries to rearrange each fragment without a knowledge of the whole picture. But to get the whole picture one has to go beyond the broken reflection to the Reality that it represents. In other words one has to pass beyond the state of division to a state of Oneness. It is this passage that also marks for the aspiring soul the passage from a state of death to a state of immortality. Our mind must turn towards That which never really varies, That which is forever the same amidst all these ever changing appearances, That which is the changeless, ageless, deathless, the immutable Truth behind these mutable things.

This Immutable element, this immortal Self in us is the Purusha, the Being that we must first discover. We do not have to go very far somewhere outside to do that. He is within us, seated at the central point of our nature-self as its Lord. He is the Lord not only of this present mutable formation of our personality in this life that we cling to as our self but also of other formations in other lives. It is He who wore these different guises, bore these other forms and names and more that are yet to come in the future. No bigger than the

thumb of man, he is like a blazing fire without smoke, the pure flame, that is the Lord of all things that appear in time before us, *isano bhutabhavyasya*. This is what we must seek and this discover, the *ungusthamatra purusha* seated in the centre of our being. Having discovered this deathless flame, one shrinks not from anything.

It is this One Spirit that has branched Itself into this manifold creation as water raining on the mountain tops runs down and differentiates into many streams but all the time is linked to its high and difficult origin on the mountain peak and even owes its body and its very existence to that perennial source, it runs where it sees, determining its course by an inner seeing. Even though it flows down and mingles with the many elements and takes on many hues and colours and forms and appearances and is known by many a name, yet within it, it retains its pure substance. So also the soul of the thinker that is man, remains untouched and pure even as it pours itself into many a channel and mould, once it has known God, for then it finds Him everywhere, behind every mask of appearance, behind every event and circumstance.

Such a one has fulfilled his birth, for he has discovered in himself that seed of light that can vanquish all darkness, *Gautama*.

(To be continued)

Sanskrit: A Journey from Mantra to Freedom

Sampadananda Mishra

Introduction

Any language can be released from its inertia and elevated into Mantric language. It all depends upon the users of the language: how and for what purpose the language is being used. But in the case of Sanskrit it has been designed from its very inception as a Mantric language. The language is so flawlessly structured that any one who comes into contact with it feels a greater force behind its words. The musical and rhythmic beauty of this language, its power of expression, the purity and vibration of its sounds, the eternal relationship between its words and senses, all these have made Sanskrit a wonderful language which, like a Mantra, has the power to uplift and illumine and enlighten.

The ideal of a spiritual or Mantric language is to reproduce as faithfully as possible, within the limitations of human consciousness, the vibratory rhythm or sound values of an experience in a pregnant utterance. Every experience produces a vibration or sound in our consciousness which contains the holistic essence of that experience. A Mantric language is to reproduce these vibrations or sounds as perfectly as possible. It is in this sense that Sanskrit has the power of Mantra and is a Mantric language.

Sanskrit has the maximum number of words for the Divine and more precise terms for defining consciousness and meditative experiences. It has a great power to elevate human consciousness to sublime heights. The thought contents expressed through this language are capable of taking to greater heights, widening and heightening the consciousness of the one who uses it consciously. Thus, it is a language that is ideally suited to describe and govern the nature of phenomena from the spiritual level to the physical. In a higher sense it is not just

a language but a conscious Force, a revelation, a living mode of power, by itself formative and creative. The *Rishis* of ancient time were minutely discerning in their observations, and were highly conscious in the matter of using the language. They did not use the language just for the purpose of communication, they used it as a tool for discovering the true nature of themselves and all that they saw in and around them. They used the language to communicate truth. Herein lies the sacredness of a language. The language that helps to discover the nature of everything, that helps to discover the sacredness of life, is a sacred language. It is in this sense that Sanskrit is a sacred language. This language was consciously used by its users for the purpose of discovering the sacredness of life and it has tremendous potentiality to help in that discovery of the sacredness of life, the truths of existence. It is a Force functioning on many levels of consciousness, ever purifying, ever formative and creative. It not only tells us or makes us feel that we are potentially Divine but also helps us in manifesting that and leading us from the level of man-Human to the man-Divine. In this way Sanskrit has immense power to make the Divine Life possible upon the earth. This is the sole purpose of a Mantra: to bring in the transformation. It is in this sense that Sanskrit is a Mantric language. This is the language that attunes us to the cosmic creative vibration which is capable of bringing the real change. This is the language which tells us in numerous ways that all is Divine.

In a deeper sense Mantra is the original form of language. This is the language from which all other languages derive. In a Mantric language, the sound and the sense correspond. There is an eternal relationship between sound and sense. A deeper analysis of Sanskrit shows that in this language each and every word is conscious of its own history; each word itself can explain why it stands for a particular idea or object; here to name means to know the nature of the thing and to touch its essence. So every articulate sound here has an object, a purpose, a meaning, and there is a non-detachable relationship between sound and sense. This is the very nature of a Mantra and it is in this sense that Sanskrit is a Mantric language.

Sanskrit in its original form was the first and the earliest vibration, pure and transparent. It was, rather, a close and true transcription of the experience of

the Supreme. It was the most direct sound-formation of the manifesting God-head. In its purity and flexibility, in its wealth and depth of signification and in its adaptability and application, this was close to the goddess of Speech herself. It was greatly fluid and richly subtle. It was pliable and flexible; its words were vehicles of life power, creative and correctly expressive. It carried with it the purity and warmth of the original experience; there was perfect and complete intimacy between the language and the content of the language. Thus, Sanskrit was ‘based on the true and perfect relation of sound (*Vak*) and sense (*Artha*)’. “Everyone of its vowels and consonants”, observes Sri Aurobindo, “has a particular and inalienable force which exists by the nature of things and not by development or human choice; these are the fundamental sounds which lie at the basis of the Tantric *bijamantras* and constitute the efficacy of the mantra itself. Every vowel and every consonant in the original language had certain primary meanings which arose out of” some “essential Shakti or force, and were the basis of other derivative meanings.” (Sri Aurobindo, *SABCL*, Vol. 11, p. 449)

A Mantric language develops in an organic manner from its seed-sounds or the basic sounds which are its prime Mantras. The seed-sounds produce primitive root-sounds; from the primitive roots are produced secondary root-sounds and root-words; from the secondary roots the tertiary roots are formed. The process goes on in this manner and language flowers from one state to another. As such, Mantric language can be understood in terms of its prime root-meaning. It is always etymologically decipherable. In other words, it is theoretically possible to explain the meaning of the words in Sanskrit according to the combined sense of the relative letters, syllables and roots. Therefore, the meaning of any word in this language is not derived by chance or from any convention but from its own depth, the system of root-sounds, sound-ideas. It is because of this transparency of the system of root-sounds and clear semantics that Sanskrit has the efficacy of Mantra and has the ability to discover its own history. A proper investigation of Sanskrit words shows that in Sanskrit a word is not a conventional symbol for an idea, but itself the parent and the creator of ideas. This lucid system of formation of words from the root-sounds follows a natural process and is one of the important factors that makes Sanskrit an ever creative language, a Mantra. These root-sounds do not possess rigid meanings;

they are like prime numbers from which complex equations can be evolved, but into which they are always resolvable.

Thus, we find that Sanskrit which has been evolved and perfected in the Vedas and Upanishads, is a living and conscious Force, an entity that has directly come from the highest source, and is capable of conveying infinitely more than what the surface sense of language seems to indicate. It is not any man-made invention or mere tool for communication, but a revelation. It is much more than a mere meaning or a sound or a sound devoid of deeper sense other than that attributed by convention. It is a language that has been constructed in harmonious relation with the very truths of existence. This is the real purpose of all Mantras. And it is in this sense that Sanskrit is a Mantric language.

A Mantra, as I have mentioned earlier, is an expression of a deepest spiritual reality or truth. This expression is possible, as Sri Aurobindo says, "...when three highest intensities of poetic speech meet and become indissolubly one..." These three highest intensities, according to Sri Aurobindo are:

- a. A highest intensity of rhythmic movement.
- b. A highest intensity of verbal form and thought-substance, of style.
- c. A highest intensity of the soul's vision.

A little familiarity with the vast Sanskrit literature, especially with the Vedas and Upanishads, reveals that this is the language in which there is a unison or fusion of these three elements. This language has achieved a certain highest level of perfection in which this unison has become possible. This unity of the rhythm and movement, style and substance, and the vision is the characteristic power of a Mantra or highest level of poetic expression. Sanskrit, by the power of its perfection, has achieved this level and is a perfect Mantric language. The very construction of the language is in harmony with the universal truths of existence.

What is a Mantra?

What is a Mantra? How does it come about or get formulated? Who creates Mantra? Where can we find the Mantras? Is it that only some

specific sounds can be used as Mantra or any sound or any word can be used as Mantra? How does it work and under what condition? Who can use a Mantra? We need to know the answers to all these questions before we go deep into the understanding of the power of a Mantra

A Mantra, as Sri Aurobindo's puts it, "is a word of power and light that comes from the overmind inspiration or from some very high plane of Intuition." (*The Future Poetry, SABCL, Vol. 9, p.369*). A Mantra is thus an inspired and intuitive and rhythmic utterance, a revealed seeing. It comes out of the "realisation... of some inmost truth of God and self and man and Nature and cosmos and life and thing and thought and experience and deed." (*The Future Poetry, SABCL, Vol. 9, p. 199*) In another significant passage Sri Aurobindo says that the *Mantra* "is a direct and most heightened... rhythmic Word which embodies an intuitive and revelatory inspiration and ensouls the mind with the sight and the presence of the very self, the inmost reality of things and with its truth and with the divine soul-forms of it, the Godheads which are born from the living Truth. Or, let us say, it is a supreme rhythmic language which seizes hold upon all that is finite and brings into each the light and voice of its own infinite." (*The Future Poetry, SABCL, Vol. 9, p. 200*).

So we understand that Mantra is created by one who comes into direct contact with a deeper truth of life or spirit. Therefore the one to whom a Mantra is revealed is known as a Rishi. A Rishi is not the composer of a Mantra but a seer (*drashta*) of an eternal truth and an impersonal knowledge. He has the inner sight to see the Mantra. Therefore the Rishi sings *yadrigeva dadrishe tadrgucyate*, 'I speak the way I have seen' (*Rigveda, 5.44.6*). He is also known as the hearer of the Truth (*satyashruta*). He possesses a supernatural faculty of hearing. To his inner audience the divine word comes vibrating out of the Infinite. To him the Mantra comes as a spontaneous and inspired expression of an inner experience of the light, power and rhythm of a truth. So according to Sri Aurobindo, Mantra "is a word of power born out of the secret depths of our being where it has been brooded upon by a deeper consciousness than the mental, framed in the heart and not constructed by the intellect, held in the mind, again concentrated on by the waking mental consciousness and thrown out silently or vocally – the silent word is perhaps held to be more potent than

the spoken – precisely for the work of creation.” (Sri Aurobindo, *SABCL*, Vol.12, p.169).

What is the Power of a Mantra?

Every Mantra contains in its vibrations a certain power. The very etymology of the word Mantra reveals that it serves as an instrument to elevate the Mind, an instrument which helps the mind to contemplate and plunge into the oceanic depth of silence. The word Mantra is derived from the root sound ‘*man*’ which means to think, to contemplate or meditate on, to perceive, to understand or comprehend. The sound *tra* at the end of the word Mantra is a suffix added in the sense of instrumentality. So, Mantra, as per its etymology, is an instrument of or a means for contemplation, meditation, comprehension, perception and of thought. Mantra, in fact, unites the mind with the pure sound. And this union of the mind with the pure sound is considered by the Vedic and Tantric tradition as the highest kind of Yoga. It is in this state that mind becomes free from all its activities and gets absorbed in the silence (the unmanifest speech) which is the source of all sounds. This sense of a Mantra is also inherent in the word Mantra itself. For this, the root-sense of the two components (*man* and *tra*) of the word Mantra has to be taken into consideration. The sound *man* refers to all the activities of the mind and ultimately the Mind itself. The second syllable is drawn from the root-sound *traī* meaning to ‘protect’ or to ‘free from’. Therefore, the word Mantra can also mean that which makes one free from the vagaries of the mind.

The journey from Mantra to freedom is an incredible experience. By the use of the Mantra, mind expands, deepens and widens and eventually plunges into the essence of the truths of cosmic existence. On its journey, the mind comes to understand much about the essence of the vibration of things. This results in the realisation of the truths of existence.

Writing on the power of Mantra Sri Aurobindo says: “The Mantra can not only create new subjective states in ourselves, alter our psychical being, reveal knowledge and faculties we did not before possess, can not only produce similar results in other minds than that of the user, but can produce vibrations in the mental and vital atmosphere which result in effects, in actions and even in the

production of material forms on the physical plane.” (Sri Aurobindo, *SABCL*, Vol.12, pp.169-70).

We have numerous examples from the ancient scriptures like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas and others about how Mantras could produce material forms on the physical plane. Take, for example, the type of weapons used by the hero warriors of those times. Those weapons were of two types: *yantrikastras* or *mantrikastras*. Swords, spears etc. are described as *yantrikastras*. But the *mantrikastras* were created at the time of need only by invoking those through Mantras. *Mantrikastras* were different *shaktis* or forces and they get materialised only when they are called for by the person possessing them. Those *shaktis* can take any shape or form as desired by the invoker. The one who was in possession of greater *shaktis* was considered to the greatest hero. When we utter a word in our day to day life it creates an image before us. For example, if someone says tree, it creates the image of a tree in the mind of the listeners. It shows that even the common language has the capacity to raise before our eyes the image of a thing. The mantras, on the other hand are much more powerful than the common speech. A mantra, for instance, can not only raise the image of a tree but actually manifest the tree itself. There are many deeper aspects of the power of Mantra but my purpose here is not to deal with that but to create this awareness that there is a language which has attained such level of perfection that it works like Mantra whenever used consciously or with awareness. This awareness leads to freedom. Coming into contact with Sanskrit in any form is meditation. A simple recitation of Sanskrit text tunes the body, mind and senses to a finer frequency. Like music it brings the mind into a beautiful flow. As I have mentioned earlier it combines its perfection of sound with inspired truth to create a living experience of spiritual awakening, a sense of being eternal. This is the true significance of a divine language. One comes in contact with this and there is a shift or rise in the consciousness. It is in this sense that Sanskrit like a Mantra has the power to illumine and enlighten and widen the consciousness.

To conclude, I have no better choice but to quote Dr. Vyas Houston, Director, American Sanskrit Institute, USA, who has very beautifully described Sanskrit as a language that is designed for bringing true happiness and freedom.

“The discovery, development and refinement of Sanskrit must have taken place over millennia. Although Sanskrit along with its great power to elevate human consciousness to sublime heights, is often attributed to a divine source, we can also hypothesise that its properties were discoveries that took place as a result of human beings actively and intensively engaging in the discovery of their own divine nature. The most significant question that must have arisen to the ancients was how to continue optimising the human instrument, the body and mind, as a vehicle for the expansion of awareness and happiness. Knowing that the operation of the instrument depends entirely on the language with which it is programmed, they worked on the refinement of language software. They scrutinised and experimented with the vocal instrument and the structure of the mouth and then selected only those sounds which had the greatest clarity, purity and power of resonance. They then organised these sounds in such a way that they could mutually enhance and brighten one another, and build upon each other’s resonance. They explored the factor of breath in creating sound, and discovered that by minimising the breath with certain sounds and maximising it with others, the language would induce in the instrument a state of relaxed alertness that could keep it operating efficiently and tirelessly for long periods of time, while expanding and building prana-energy. And as they did this, they became happier.

“Furthermore, by coordinating the factors of purity of sound, enhanced resonance and breath, there also developed an awareness of the entire body as a resonating chamber through which sound could be transmitted. With increased vibratory power, the concept of the body as solid matter gradually became replaced by one of the body as the centre of an energy field. In the process of transmitting sound energy, they observed subtle

changes in the field and found they could expand it by following the sound waves. They had discovered that language has the capacity to convert the body and mind into pure energy. They began to feel joy.

“It was further discovered that certain combinations of sounds would enhance the expansion of the field more than others, and this was experimented with, until sound combinations which could bring about this effect universally were revealed. Their joy expanded. These particular combinations became useful words for describing as well as feeling the state of consciousness they induced. In this way the breadth and depth of all that exists was explored. They looked and listened and experienced changes in the energy field, to see how the language could be further refined, what new distinctions could be made. Eventually, they fathomed creation and found their own identity at the very source of it all. Their bliss was boundless. When they spoke with one another in this language they established love and harmony.” (*Sanskrit, A Sacred Model of Language, Devavani, p.42, published by American Sanskrit Institute, New York*)

We come to the amazing conclusion that Sanskrit has immense potentiality not only to establish unity, love and harmony but also to make us realise the sacredness of life. The very structure of the language is perfect and each and every sound of it is sacred. The most fascinating thing that one experiences in Sanskrit is that here all three, the sound, the word and the meaning, become one. They arise out of the deeper truths of life and the Reality and not only reveal but lead us in turn to realise these truths. The language then becomes universal. It has its own inherent strength and existence and it is no more just a convention or a convenience. It becomes a fit vehicle not only for communication but for transformation as well. It is not just a language. It is a self-existent truth and power, a Mantra.

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

(Continued from the previous issue)

Prema Nanda Kumar

3. Love and Death

Having come under the spell of Vyasa's *Mahabharata*, Sri Aurobindo worked tirelessly at translations and recreations of the legends in the epic that caught his imagination. Unfortunately, he could never complete chosen tasks because of his busy schedule as a Professor. He had also to help the Gaikwad of Baroda with his despatches now and then. There was his political journalism which demanded a good deal of time. The one narrative inspired by the *Mahabharata* of the Baroda period that escaped such truncated fate was Love and Death.

Quite early in the epic of Vyasa, almost at the opening of the *Adi Parva* occurs the legend of Ruru and Pramadvarya. Though very young, Sri Aurobindo had already had to face the death of his affectionate father under tragic circumstances. He returned to India in 1893 only to be told that he would not see again Krishnadhan Ghose in the physical. Death is a final parting and there seems no answer, no remedy to this experience. Sri Aurobindo was fully aware of the hopes that Dr. Ghose had for his "Auro" to come back to India and perform great things. Only this knowledge must have kept him on with his chosen field of work in Baroda: teaching, reading, writing.

This was also the time when the young Sri Aurobindo was becoming aware of the social world in which man usually finds his fulfilment. He was not married as yet, but romantic thoughts may not have been far from his vision. How does love affect a person? How does it change him? Sri Aurobindo did not find filmy romance in the *Mahabharata*. But there were great love stories hidden in the granite style of Vyasa. The love that the men and women pro-

fessed in the epic must have been very deep indeed as they were prepared to sacrifice everything for the sake of love. So, it was certainly more than a simplistic, mutual attraction between the sexes. Love also was as great a mystery as death and appeared to be as final when a Damayanti or a Savitri decides to marry young men they have met. So what is love and what is death? What is Kama and what concept rises before us the forbidding figure of Yama?

With the entire *Mahabharata* before him, this close juxtaposition of love and death in the legends of Pramadvarya and Savitri drew Sri Aurobindo to them. Both of them dealt with the finality of death. There is, of course, plenty about this aspect of human experience in the epic. Veda Vyasa seeks answers and finds none, as we find in the legend of Gauthami which opens the *Anushasana Parva*. The old Brahmin lady Gauthami's son was bitten by a snake and died. A hunter who had watched this happen caught the snake and brought it to her: "Mother, how would you like me to kill it?" She told him that since the snake's death was not going to restore her son to life, there was no point in killing it. The snake wriggling in the hunter's noose said that it was but the instrument of Death (*Mrityu*) and should not be blamed. There was an argument between the hunter and the snake when Death came upon the scene and told them that he was impelled by Time (*Kala*) to order the snake to bite Gauthami's son. It was then the turn of Time to come and make a submission:

"Kala said, 'Neither Mrityu, nor this serpent, nor I, O fowler, am guilty of the death of any creature. We are merely the immediate exciting causes of the event. O Arjunaka, the Karma of this child formed the exciting cause of our action in this matter. There was no other cause by which this child came by its death. It was killed as a result of its own Karma. It has met with death as the result of its Karma in the past. Its Karma has been the cause of its destruction. We all are subject to the influence of our respective Karma. Karma is an aid to salvation even as sons are, and Karma also is an indicator of virtue and vice in man. We urge one another even as acts urge one another. As men make from a lump of clay whatever they wish to make, even so do men attain to various results determined by Karma. As light and shadow are related to each other, so are men related to Karma through their own actions.'"¹

Vyasa's seeking the origins of this irretraceable event in one's life had a

deep impact on Sri Aurobindo. Here was Gauthami who was grown old and full of calm and hence she could accept death as inevitable. But how about young people who just cannot acknowledge its presence with equanimity? There are many examples of this kind in the *Mahabharata* which did not escape Sri Aurobindo's attention. Two pairs seem to have caught his particular notice and made him go deeper into the problem of love and death. One was that of Ruru and Pramadvarya, the other Satyavan and Savitri.

Of his reaction to the former we have a letter from him dated 4th July, 1933. The questioner is Amal Kiran who is learning to write blank verse and wants to know how Sri Aurobindo wrote *Love and Death*: “the first falling of the seed of the idea, the growth and maturing of it, the influences assimilated from other poets, the mood and atmosphere you used to find most congenial and productive, the experience and the frequency of the afflatus, the pace at which you composed, the evolution of that multifarious, many-echoed yet perfectly original style and of a blank verse whose art is the most unfailing and, except for one too close repetition of the mannerism of the double ‘but’, the most unobtrusively conscious that I have seen.”²

Sri Aurobindo does not curb his questioner's exuberance and replies to him without striking out any question as irrelevant. Ah, the patience of the Master!

“The poem itself was written in a white heat of inspiration during 14 days of continuous writing – in the mornings, of course, for I had to attend office the rest of the day and saw friends in the evening. I never wrote anything with such ease and rapidity before or after. Your other questions I can't very well answer – I have lived ten lives since then and don't remember. I don't think there was any falling of the seed of the idea or growth and maturing of it; it just came, — from my reading about the story of Ruru in the *Mahabharata*; I thought, ‘Well, here's a subject’, and the rest burst out of itself.”³

So how did this story of Ruru sound to Sri Aurobindo as he opened the *Adi Parva*? He may not even have waited to read other stories that follow, for this happens to be the very first tale. The *Adi Parva* has first the ‘*anukramanika*’, a summary of the saga regarding the Pandava-Kaurava internecine war. Presently a brief look at the destruction of the demon Puloma by Sage Chyavana. Now we enter the eighth canto. A brief, diamond-hard tale of a young man's intrepid love for his betrothed.

Sage Bhrigu had a son Chyavana who married Sukanya and was blessed with a son Pramati. Pramati fell in love with an apsara, Ghritachi. Their son was Ruru. In his time there was a famous scholar-tapasvi, Sthulakesa (*tapo-vidyaa-samanvitah*) who was engaged in doing good to all living beings (*sarva bhuta hite ratah*). It so happened that the gandharva Viswavasu and the apsara Menaka were together for a while and a daughter was born of this union. Menaka left the babe on the banks of a river close to Sthulakesa's asrama. She had no pity or shame (*nirdaya nirapatrapa*) in doing this. We do know that she had done such a deed earlier also, when she abandoned the new born Śakuntala near the hermitage of Rishi Kanva.

Rishi Sthulakesa found the little babe and brought it up with great love. He performed the rituals of naming and called her Pramadvarya (*pramadaam varaa*, best among beautiful women). Time passed and Pramadvarya grew up into a beautiful and well-mannered girl. Ruru met her in the hermitage of her father and fell in love with her. He conveyed his feelings to his father, Pramati. Pramati was happy and went to Sthulakesa and requested Pramadvarya's hand on behalf of his son. Sthulakesa was delighted and the wedding was fixed for the day when the Uttara Phalguni star would be in the ascendant (*agre nakshatre bhagadaivate*).

Meanwhile Pramadvarya who had gone out to play with her friends stamped upon a snake by accident. It had been in her way and she had not noticed it. It bit her and she fell down dead. All the denizens of the ashram came there to see the beautiful girl who now lay motionless. Overcome by shock Ruru went away from that place. A nameless anger and frustration gripped his heart.

“And the girl of slender waist lying on the ground like one asleep—being overcome with the poison of the snake— once more became more beautiful than in life. And her foster-father and the other holy ascetics who were there, all saw her lying motionless upon the ground with the splendour of a lotus. And then there came many noted Brahmanas filled with compassion, and they sat around her. And Swastyatreya, Mahajana, Kushika, Sankhamekhala, Uddalaka, Katha, and Sweta of great renown, Bharadwaja, Kaunakutsya, Arshtishena, Gautama, Pramati, and Pramati's son Ruru, and other inhabitants of the forest, came there. And when they saw that maiden lying dead on the ground over-

come with the poison of the reptile that had bitten her, they all wept filled with compassion. But Ruru, mortified beyond measure, retired from the scene.”⁴

All alone by himself, Ruru gave away to his sorrow, bewailing the loss of his dearest love. He cried aloud that if he had been good in every way, Pramadvarya should be restored to life. Now came a messenger of the gods (*devaduta*) who told him that death was final. However, there was a way out to bring the girl back to life. This could be done if Ruru would part with half of his life-span. Ruru agreed with alacrity.”

Sauti said, ‘Then the king of Gandharvas (the father of Pramadvarya) and the celestial messenger, both of excellent qualities, went to the god Dharma (the Judge of the dead) and addressed him, saying, ‘If it be thy will, O Dharmaraja, let the amiable Pramadvarya, the betrothed wife of Ruru, now lying dead, rise up with a moiety of Ruru’s life.’ And Dharmaraja answered, ‘O messenger of the gods, if it be thy wish, let Pramadvarya, the betrothed wife of Ruru, rise up endued with a moiety of Ruru’s life.’

Sauti continued, ‘And when Dharmaraja had said so, that maiden of superior complexion, Pramadvarya, endued with a moiety of Ruru’s life, rose as from her slumber. This bestowal by Ruru of a moiety of his own span of life to resuscitate his bride afterwards led, as it would be seen, to a curtailment of Ruru’s life.”⁵

Ruru and Pramadvarya were married. They became the happy parents of Sunaka.

Such is the brief tale of Ruru and Pramadvarya. It has no frills, no descriptions nor any philosophy. Yet, the keen eyes of Sri Aurobindo had seen that this was like the line drawings of Leonardo da Vinci. The filling up and completing the portrait must come later. Vyasa had given a line drawing. It was now for Sri Aurobindo to complete the portrait, taking into account the hints given in the turn of phrases and movement of the story.

When Sri Aurobindo read the story of Ruru’s sacrifice, he was already familiar with several poems on this theme in other languages. Greek gave him the legend of Alcestis as a drama by Euripides. King Admetus could escape death if someone else would exchange their earthly life with him. Only his wife Alcestis was willing to do so and she was rescued from Hades by Heracles.

There was the Italian classic, *The Divine Comedy* in which Dante travels through hell. Nearer Sri Aurobindo’s time was a contemporary Stephen Phillips (1864-1915) whom he admired very much and also admitted being influenced by him:

“I read *Marpessa* and *Christ in Hades* before they were published and as I was just in the stage of formation then – at the age of 17 – they made a powerful impression which lasted until it was worked out in *Love and Death*.”⁶

One can understand the outer transformation effected immediately on the upakhyana of Vyasa by Phillips as far as the blank verse and the scenarios were concerned. Here is an Athenian ghost come to the infernal regions speaking in *Christ in Hades*:

“God was so lavish to us once, but here
He hath repented, jealous of his beams.
Just as a widower, that dreaming holds
His dead wife in his arms, not wondering,
So natural it appears ; then starting up
With trivial words, or even with a jest,
Realises all the uncoloured dawn.
And near his head the young bird in the leaves
Stirring ; not less, not otherwise do we
Want in this colourless country the warm
earth.”

In *Marpessa* we find the heroine speaking of a loving couple growing old together:

But we shall sit with luminous holy smiles,
Endeared by many griefs, by many a jest,
And custom sweet of living side by side ;
And full of memories not unkindly glance
Upon each other. Last, we shall descend
Into the natural ground — not without tears —
One must go first, ah god ! one must go first ;
After so long one blow for both were good ;
Still like old friends, glad to have met, and leave
Behind a wholesome memory on the earth.”

Indeed such was the atmosphere full of western classics for Sri Aurobindo and his brother Manmohan Ghose and their friends in England that our Master had to apologise to his brother for making this revolutionary turn towards the classics of the east. Manmohan Ghose may have taken it to be an enthusiasm that would fade sooner than later. But it turned out that Vyasa and Valmiki had become a total inspiration for Sri Aurobindo. It remained so till 1950 when he was dictating *Savitri* as he prepared to enter Mahasamadhi.

Sri Aurobindo's letter to Manmohan Ghose dedicating *Love and Death* is a very important document for our studies in classical Sanskrit literature. He referred to the stories in the epics as secular legends, unlike the Puranic retellings that came later. Here the story was important. Religion as such had no hold over the movement of the story. But spiritual yearning was part of the Hindu psyche and love itself was seen as more than a physical emotion. The comparatist in Sri Aurobindo blazes forth when he places Greek and Indian legends on a critical balance:

"The difference between the Greek and Hindu temperaments was that one was vital, the other supra-vital; the one physical, the other metaphysical; the one sentient of sunlight as its natural atmosphere and the bound of its joyous activity, the other regarding it as a golden veil which hid from it beautiful and wonderful things for which it panted. The Greek aimed at limit and finite perfection, because he felt vividly all our bounded existence; the Hindu mind, ranging into the infinite tended to the enormous and moved habitually in the sublime."⁷

It is obvious from this passage and others directly associated with *Love and Death* that Sri Aurobindo's *Mahabharata* studies were no superficial enthusiasm. He had become a disciple of Vyasa for life. He does feel that the Ruru-Pramadvura tale is "a bald and puerile narrative without force, beauty or insight". But he does not dismiss it. There must be here more than meets the eye! Ruru was a descendent of Bhrigu, "the most august and venerable name in Vedic literature"; Parasurama, the destroyer of Kshatriya clans, would be born in his dynasty. Hence Sri Aurobindo felt that this tale conveyed "the most significant and powerful in idea of our legends". A bare idea!

"Yet what an idea it supplies! How deep and searching is that thought of

half the living man's life demanded as the inexorable price for the restoration of his dead! How it seems to knock at the very doors of human destiny, and give us a gust of air from worlds beyond our own suggesting illimitable and unfathomable thoughts of our potentialities and limitations."⁸

Though Sri Aurobindo was thus captivated by the idea and the background of rishihood and battle heroism of the Bhrighu clan, he did not want to write in the traditional style of an Indian epic or narrative, a *khanda-kavya*. Nor did he wish to hijack the tale away from the *Mahabharata* and give Ruru and Pramadvura a local habitation and name in Greece. Sri Aurobindo had returned to India in 1893 and taken up his Sanskrit studies not long after. Within five years he sends Manmohan Ghose this insightful letter-dedication:

"The true subject of Hindu epic is always a struggle between two ideal forces universal and opposing, while the human and divine actors, the Supreme Triad excepted, are pawns moved to and fro by immense world-impulses which they express but cannot consciously guide. It is perhaps the Olympian ideal in life struggling with the Titanic ideal, and then we have a *Ramaian*. Or it maybe the imperial ideal in government and society marshalling the forces of order, self-subjection, self-effacement, justice, equality, against the aristocratic ideal, with self-will, violence, independence, self-assertion, feudal loyalty, the sway of the sword and the right of the stronger at its back; this is the key of the *Mahabharata*."⁹

One breathless sentence summarising the entire epic of Vyasa! Further on he refers to the ideas that move the tales of Nala and Damayanti, Savitri and Satyavan. "Similarly, in this story of Ruru and Priyumvada the great spirits who preside over Love and Death, Cama and Yama, are the real actors and give its name to the poem." The love of Ruru and Pramadvura is ideal love, "that perfect *Idea* of itself of which every existing love is a partial and not quite successful manifestation." Perhaps this is the reason of silences regarding the demonstration of human love in the *Mahabharata* tale.

Would it be possible to fill in the gaps of romance in action? Not very easy, for giving the local colour by a "liberal peppering of Sanscrit words" could submerge the ideal. Sri Aurobindo had decided to rein in this tendency and so used very few mythological allusions. The name of Pramadvura is changed to

Priyumvada which is easier to pronounce for the English reader. So we have in *Love and Death* a narrative which is not overwhelmingly Greek like the unfinished epic, *Ilion*. It is a charming romance full of beautiful visuals on the earth. In Yama's world, however, it is sombre and draws from both the Hindu concept of Patala and the Greek Hades.

Sri Aurobindo's plan was to fill in the gaps in the original tale. Ruru obviously loved Priyumvada very deeply but in Vyasa they seem to have met but once before she died. When Ruru is shocked by Priyumvada's sudden death in Vyasa, he cries out:

“Alas! The delicate fair one that increaseth my affliction lieth upon the bare ground. What can be more deplorable to us, her friends? If I have been charitable, if I have performed acts of penance, if I have ever revered my superiors, let the merit of these arts restore to life my beloved one! If from my birth I have been controlling my passions, adhered to my vows, let the fair Pramadvarya rise from the ground.”¹⁰

Sri Aurobindo manages to explain this deep love in human terms by introducing Ruru and Priyumvada as already married. The classical style of beginning at the beginnings (as it is in Vyasa's upakhyana) now gives place to our plunging *in medias res*. The two newlyweds have been happy in each other and the virgin nature of ancient times is a perfect background:

“Fresh-cheeked and dew-eyed white Priyumvada

Opened her budded heart of crimson bloom

To love, to Ruru; Ruru, a happy flood

Of passion round a lotus dancing thrilled,

Blinded with his soul's waves Priyumvada.

To him the earth was a bed for this sole flower,

To her all the world was filled with his embrace.”

So like a marble statue from ancient Greece. Except, perhaps, for the phrase “soul's waves”. That is typical diction from the Indian view which raises physical love into the metaphysical arena.

We proceed with a pleasing picturisation of nature which is a rarity in Vyasa. Probably the one context in which Vyasa gives himself away to a leisurely depiction of nature is when Dhritarashtra, Pandu and Vidura were born.

‘Upon the birth of those three children, Kurujangala, Kurukshetra, and the Kurus grew in prosperity. The earth began to yield abundant harvest, and the crops also were of good flavour. And the clouds began to pour rain in season and trees became full of fruits and flowers. And the draught cattle were all happy and the birds and other animals rejoiced exceedingly. And the flowers became fragrant and the fruits became sweet; the cities and towns became filled with merchants, artisans, traders and artists of every description. And the people became brave, learned, honest and happy. And there were no robbers then, nor anybody who was sinful. And it seemed that the golden age had come upon every part of the kingdom.”¹¹

The epic usually deals only with the eternal verities of life, as in its telling of the story of Ruru and Pramadvarya. With Sri Aurobindo it is a complete picture of darkness at noon, made darker by dramatic irony. Ruru is so happy that he hails the sun above as he returns home:

“ ‘O father Sun,’

He cried, ‘how good it is to live, to love!

Surely our joy shall never end, nor we

Grow old, but like bright rivers or pure winds

Sweetly continue, or revive with flowers,

Or live at least as long as senseless trees.”

Will she be angry because he is late? Even as he imagines how he would soothe her and they will have a charming time together, she is seen waiting and then she hears his footsteps that springs “a sudden smile of exquisite delight” on her face. The next moment she is bitten by a snake and the dread moment is on us. Unlike Vyasa's heroine, Priyumvada says a few words of sad farewell. Ruru is speechless with shock while the body of the girl is borne away by the ladies of the forest. In Vyasa Ruru had been told of the mishap and come to the spot, seen her and gone out to make the brief statement, “if from my birth I have been controlling my passions, adhered to my vows, let the fair Pramadvarya rise from the ground.” But the few words must have been packed with tremendous passion, anger and frustration, for immediately a messenger of the gods comes to help him in his distress.

Sri Aurobindo provides a considerable stretch of time between Priyumvada's death and her resurrection. Grief-stricken Ruru wanders aimlessly for several months and his very silence makes the gods afraid. Drawing from the Hindu heritage of legends, Ruru's anger is directed at an Aswaththa tree by Agni. By now he had read enough of the great rishis of the past and the conservation of spiritual energy by them through the fire of tapasya. Ruru belonged to this spiritual race. Remembrance of the lovely days with Priyumvada feeds Ruru's anger and frustration as he keeps wandering till he meets Kama.

There is a matter-of-fact swiftness in Vyasa which brings the exchange of life to a happy conclusion. In contrast, *Love and Death* produces a detailed conversation between Kama and Ruru on the nature of love. Ruru would prove his constancy to the ideal and if the gods of the nether world drive a hard bargain, he was prepared to meet it:

“But if by strength is possible, of body
Or mind, battle of spirit of moving speech,
Sweet speech that makes even cruelty grow kind.
Or yearning melody – for I have heard
That when Saraswathi in heaven her harp
Has smitten, the cruel sweetness terrible
Coils taking no denial through the soul.
And tears burst from the hearts of Gods – then I,
Making great music, or with perfect words,
Will strive, or staying him with desperate hands
Match human strength 'gainst formidable Death.
But if with price, ah God! What easier!”

The truth is brought to him that of all godheads Yama alone cannot be made to yield by gifts. It is only life for life! Kama warns Ruru that in case he would offer his own life for Priyumvada's he must remember the heavy price. Life is so precious, however brief! But Ruru couldn't care less. Nothing like having an equal term of life for a loving couple!

“For we shall live not fearing death, nor feel
As others yearning over the loved at night
When the lamp flickers, sudden chills of dread
Terrible; nor at short absence agonise,

Wrestling with mad imagination. Us
Serenely when the darkening shadow comes,
One common sob shall end and soul clasp soul,
Leaving the body in a long dim kiss.”

Shades of *Marpessa*! Kama gives Ruru a divine flower. The flower helps him board a boat that conveys him across the Ganges and into the depths of the ocean where the native air is chill. For Ruru, however, “terrible strong love / Was like a fiery finger in his breast / Pointing him on”. Unlike Vyasa's Ruru, we have the hero himself adventure into the unknown nether regions. He comes to a dais which reminds us of the Miltonic sublime as our poet showers classical names:

“...and round it coiled
Python and Naga monstrous, Joruthcaru
Tuxuc and Vasuki himself, immense,
Magic Carcotaca all flecked with fire;
And many other prone destroying shapes
Coiled.”

The Naga Mahapudma holds up the throne of Death:

“Yama, the strong pure Hades sad and subtle,
Dharma, who keeps the laws of old untouched,
Critanta, who ends all things and at last
Himself shall end.”

The introductions show how close Sri Aurobindo is to the *Mahabharata* world. When Ruru is firm on giving up a portion of his life to get back Priyumvada, Yama who is also compassionate makes a last attempt by showing him “the glory he would renounce.” There is a video-like presentation of what he would be missing by agreeing to part with life. Ruru overcomes this last temptation. Ah, he has heard the “burdened river with human anguish wail”. Leave Priyumvada in that chilled darkness and himself enjoy the bright sunshine of the world above?

“Then with a sudden fury gathering
His soul he hurled out of it half its life,
And fell, like lightning, prone. Triumphant rose
The Shadow chill and deepened giant night.”

Crossing the Boithorini river for the mystic times twelve, Ruru finds his wan wife, “pallid, listless, bare”. Her dire guardians who keep dead souls from returning to earth by any means are now forced to withdraw by Ruru “burning with the admitted God”. As the tension is broken, Ruru also falls into a swoon. The next moment he wakes up on green earth with Priyumvada beside him. She too is awake and “their souls embraced”. There is laughter, there are tears. It is sheer Ananda.

“Clinging with all her limbs to him, ‘O love,
The green green world! The warm sunlight!’ and ceased,
Finding no words; but the earth breathed round them,
Glad of her children, and the koil’s voice
Persisted in the morning of the world.”

This re-finding of each other by a loving couple is a recurrent motif in Vyasa’s epic. Sri Aurobindo himself would be returning to yet another triumph of love over death presented by Vyasa. But in that incident, there is no barter. It is love’s total victory over death. That would be the *Pativratopakhyaṇa* in the *Vana Parva* of the *Mahabharata*.

The story of Savitri and Satyavan would be in Sri Aurobindo’s creative forge for more than half a century. In the meantime, Vyasa’s epic continued to give him guidance in his life. In the Alipore prison, the Bhagavad Gita was very much with him and the Gita means Krishna, Arjuna, Vyasa, the Kurukshetra. Obviously Sri Aurobindo never cared to study works in isolation and so studying the Gita meant studying the Durga Stotra by Arjuna prior to the commencement of Kurukshetra hostilities. Krishna says: utter a prayer to Durga before proceeding to fight. As Krishna reins in the horses, Arjuna gets down, stands with hands folded and recites a memorable, 13-verse, Durga Stotra:

“*Namaste simhasenaani arye mandaravasini
Kumari Kali Kapali Kapile Krishnapingale*”.

There were other occasions too when Durga was invoked in the Mahabharata to be assured of success. When we open the *Virata Parva* we have a magnificent Durga Stotra. The five Pandavas and Draupadi will have to spend one whole year incognito in the Virata city. Not an easy proposition. Yudhistira ever based on Dharma knows that the grace of the Divine Mother can grant one’s

wishes if they are for a dharmic cause. Automatically he turns to Durga and prays silently, *asthuvan manasaa deveem durgaam tribhuvaneswareem*:

“And while Yudhishtira was on his way to the delightful city of Virata, he began to praise mentally the Divine Durga, the Supreme Goddess of the Universe, born in the womb of Yasoda, and fond of the boons bestowed on her by Narayana, sprung from the race of cowherd Nanda, and the giver of prosperity, the enhancer (of the glory) of (the worshipper’s) family, the terrifier of Kansa, and the destroyer of *Asuras*,—and saluted the Goddess—her who ascended the skies when dashed (by Kansa) on a stony platform, who is the sister of Vasudeva, one who is always decked in celestial garlands and attired in celestial robes,—who is armed with scimitar and shield, and always rescues the worshipper sunk in sin, like a cow in the mire, who in the hours of distress calls upon that eternal giver of blessings for relieving him of their burdens.”¹²

He then leads his brothers and wife to utter a splendid prayer to Durga: “And because thou rescuest people from difficulties whether when they are afflicted in the wilderness or sinking in the great ocean, it is for this that thou art called *Durga* by all. Thou art the sole refuge of men when attacked by robbers or while afflicted in crossing streams and seas or in wilderness and; forests. Those men that remember thee are never prostrated, O great Goddess.”¹³

After one year’s incarceration at Alipore prison, Sri Aurobindo had become free. The British Government was frustrated at this turn to the Alipore trial and spread its octopus-Secret Service for a chance to get Sri Aurobindo jailed again. Sri Aurobindo decided to go into self-exile and we all know of the incognito life and uncertainties galore before he reached Pondicherry. Even in the French Enclave the British Intelligence kept a close watch. But Sri Aurobindo knew he would be safe as the Pandavas and Draupadi were at Virata city. For, had he not turned to Durga as they had, and published a mighty Durga Stotra in the 1909 Vijaya Dasami issue of Dharma?

“Mother Durga! Slay the enemy within, then root out all obstacles outside. May the noble heroic mighty Indian race, supreme in love and unity, truth and strength, arts and letters, force and knowledge ever dwell in its holy woodlands, its fertile fields, under its sky-scraping hills, along the banks of its pure-streaming rivers. This is our prayer at the feet of the Mother. Make thyself manifest.

Mother Durga! Enter our bodies in thy Yogic strength. We shall become thy instruments, thy sword slaying all evil, thy lamp dispelling all ignorance. Fulfil this yearning of thy young children, O Mother. Be the master and drive thy instrument, wield thy sword and slay the evil, hold up the lamp and spread the light of knowledge. Make thyself manifest.”

(To be continued)

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- i *Anusasana Parva*, Canto One, verses 70-75, Translated by Kisari Mohan Ganguli
- ii SABCL, volume 26, p. 266
- iii Ibid., p. 267
- iv *Adi Parva*, canto 8, verses 22-27, Translated by Kisari Mohan Ganguli
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- vi SABCL, volume 26, p. 267
- vii SABCL, volume 27, p. 151
- viii Ibid., p. 153
- ix Ibid., pp. 153-154
- x *Adi Parva*, canto 9, verses 4-5
- xi Ibid., canto 108, verses 1-3, Translated by Kisari Mohan Ganguli
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On ‘*The Life Divine*’ Of Sri Aurobindo

Sarnath Basu

Ere we begin reflecting on Sri Aurobindo’s magnum opus ‘*The Life Divine*’, it may be necessary to refresh ourselves with some historical information about its publication. Sri Aurobindo suffered one year in jail as an under trial prisoner in Alipore Bomb case. He regularly studied the Gita, the Upanishads and practised yoga in the jail. He had divine vision well within the precincts of the prison-cell when he came to know that he was not to pursue politics. Indeed God ordained a special task in which he had to engage himself. Thereafter on being freed from the jail he went to Pondicherry in 1910 and intensely practised yoga. In the jail he had the vision of omnipresence of God (*Vāsudevah Sarvam*) and his yoga sadhana at Pondicherry was indeed an uninterrupted chain of that realisation. The first historic meeting of The Mother and Paul Richard with Sri Aurobindo took place on March 29, 1914. The Mother had Sri Krishna’s vision in the person of Sri Aurobindo. Indeed Paul Richard in his very first meeting with Sri Aurobindo in 1910 was profoundly moved by observing his unfathomable knowledge in all aspects of the Eastern and Western literature, culture, religion, yoga etc. After his second meeting he placed before Sri Aurobindo the proposal to publish a monthly journal with a view to bringing about a synthesis of the Eastern and Western philosophy and culture. Sri Aurobindo agreed to his proposal that resulted in the publication of the first issue of the philosophical review with the name ‘*ARYA*’ on August 15, 1914.

The purpose and nature of publication of this journal were indicated by the editors (Sri Aurobindo Ghose - Paul & Mirra Richard) on the reverse side in the front page of the first issue, as follows:

The “ARYA” is a Review of pure philosophy.

The object which it has set before itself is twofold:-

1. A systematic study of the highest problems of existence;

2. The formation of a vast Synthesis of knowledge, harmonising the diverse religious traditions of humanity occidental as well as

oriental. Its method will be that of a realism, at once rational and transcendental, - a realism consisting in the unification of intellectual and scientific disciplines with those of intuitive experience.

This Review will also serve as an organ for the various groups and societies founded on its inspiration.

The Review will publish: -

Synthetic studies in speculative Philosophy.

Translations and commentaries of ancient texts.

Studies in Comparative Religion.

Practical methods of inner culture and self development.

The leader article of the first issue of the journal was '*The Life Divine*'. In every month following thereafter, subsequent articles on this came out as leader articles of the journal. The journal also included articles in serial by Sri Aurobindo on '*The Secret of the Veda*' '*Isha Upanishad*' and '*The Synthesis of Yoga*'. It leaves us with a sense of wondrous amazement as to how it was possible for an individual to contribute a series of articles at the same time on so many abstruse subjects.

Immediately before publication of the journal, Sri Aurobindo wrote a letter to Sri Motilal Roy at Chandernagore on June 1914, which is very significant in the context of any discussion on the book '*The Life Divine*'. He wrote in the letter, "In this Review my theory on the Veda will appear ... and a book of Vedantic philosophy (not Shankara's but Vedic Vedanta) giving the Upanishadic foundations of my theory of the ideal life towards which humanity must move. You will see so far as my share is concerned, it will be the intellectual side of my work for the world." It does not appear difficult for us to understand that the book referred to in the letter as 'the book of Vedantic philosophy' is indeed '*The Life Divine*'. Therefore it appears from the letter that the book alluded to indeed is a book on Vedanta; but the 'Vedanta' here means 'Vedic Vedanta'. Acharya Shankara while commenting on the '*Brahma Sutra*' as codified by Vedavyasa states that the purpose of the Sutras (aphorisms) was to string together the sentences of the Vedanta meaning thereby the Upanishads (*Vedanta Vakyakusumagrathnathrtvat Sutrana*). So it is clear that the intention of both Vedavyasa and Shankara was to explicate the purport of the Upanishads. There is hardly any place for the Vedas in their Vedanta philosophy. But '*The Life Divine*' was not based on the Upanishads alone. The mighty great tree i.e. the Vedas in its entirety is its main foundation. The *ARYA* came out every month till January 1921. Later

the published articles were culled, enlarged, edited, and added with 12 (twelve) new chapters, the book was published entitled '*The Life Divine*' in Volume I & Volume II in the year 1939 and 1940 respectively. Thereafter the book was also published as a single compendium comprising both the volumes.

Every chapter of the book has its beginning enriched with passages, original Sanskrit texts rendered into English by Sri Aurobindo himself, from the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Purana and the Gita etc. We find that he has quoted as many as 43 (forty-three) passages from the Rig Veda alone, 6 (six) from the Atharva Veda, besides a large number of citations from major and minor Upanishads. There is hardly any scope of doubt about the uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo's yoga-sadhana but we can fairly understand from the quoted passages as prelude to every chapter that his yoga-sadhana was not delinked from the rich tradition of the sadhana of the ancient Rishis. He compared the realisations he had attained through his yoga-sadhana with those stated in the Gita, the Upanishads, the Vedas and only after testifying, corroborating and validating each and every bit of such realisations, he provided an 'intellectual' [to put in his own words] interpretation in the book. Judging from this point of view '*The Life Divine*', of course, is a book on the Vedanta philosophy; and we can take the liberty of naming it 'Vedic Vedanta Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo'. Here another important point should be mentioned. As early as 1914 he had stated in the above mentioned letter that he founded his theory of ideal life, viz. the Life Divine, on the truths of the Veda and the Upanishads. In the quiet recluse of Pondicherry, as ordained by God, he engaged himself in yoga-sadhana for transformation of human life into divine life. The goal of his sadhana was not personal realisation or redemption of his self alone. It was to accelerate the process of evolution and firmly establish the divine consciousness in the terrestrial plane thereby transforming the humanity in the status of the Divine Superhumanity (as opposed to the Nietzschean Superhumanity) or Gnostic Being. Thus we find that this magnum opus '*The Life Divine*' has not been reduced merely to a book of theoretical dissertations. In some of the concluding chapters of the book Sri Aurobindo has also laid down the ways and means how to attain to the divine life.

The book begins by asserting the eternal human yearning. Throughout the ages man eagerly pursued his quest to ascertain the supreme Truth. But many agnostics, sceptics and atheists through their philosophies tried to prove the futility of such pursuit. But Sri Aurobindo has held this human pursuit in high esteem. Metaphysical or Philosophical enquires are true, because through

intense practice of yoga we may visualise the subtlest truths by way of transcendental realisations. Our ancient Rishis were eloquent and variedly echoed (subsequently transcribed) their inmost realisations in the Vedas and in the Upanishads. A question may arise – indeed the Upanishads, at places, have specified that this phenomenal world was created out of *Asat* (Non-existence); so the phenomenal world has no real existence. Buddha himself declares that the supreme goal of human life is to attain *Nirvana* when everything is dissolved into nothingness. Thus the contention that the final goal of humanity is to attain divine life on earth – does not stand to reason. Against such objection Sri Aurobindo asserts that the expression *Asat* as it occurs in the Upanishads truly means the Supreme Being or the Highest Transcendent, which is beyond the reach of our mind and speech. Indeed this state is a reality. From It the phenomenal world emerges, is sustained and in It finally dissolves. As regards Buddha, Sri Aurobindo states that *Nirvāna* never means dissolution in nothingness. It means realisation of eternal peace and bliss within. Therefore Buddha advised on peace, fraternity, compassion etc. In his book ‘*The Life Divine*’ Sri Aurobindo quotes at many places the assertion of Taittiriya Upanishad - *Satyam Jnanam Anantam Brahma* (Brahman is Truth, Knowledge and Infinity). It is because Brahman is infinite, It exists everywhere. So Sri Aurobindo does not subscribe to the Mayavadin theory of Advaita philosophy that propounds Brahman alone is the reality, and everything else – this world of manifoldness – is unreal. He contends that if this phenomenal world is unreal then Brahman, the substratum on which it is superimposed, becomes unreal. So we must admit that as Brahman is real, so Its manifold manifestation is also real. Being and its becoming are equally true. *Nirvana*, according to Sri Aurobindo, is dissolution of the Ego. It is a state of realisation experienced while practising yoga. As a Yogi transcends this state he realises that the supreme Truth abides in each and every individual being.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the Brahman-consciousness has involved Itself in the Inconscient matter. He has analysed at length how these states are viewed by modern science and tries to establish that consciousness-force is very much active in the realm of matter. This theory of involution occupies a very significant place in Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy. He states that in modern science only one aspect viz., the evolution, has been highlighted. But the other aspect, the involution, has to be accepted *ipso facto*. Should the truth about evolution be valid it is equally true of involution. It needs to be accepted. It

is because *Prāna* (Life-energy) stays encased and involved in *Jada* that through the process of evolution it manifests in the substratum of *Jada*. Again as *Manas* stays involved in *Prāna*, so does it manifest in *Prāna* activated by the laws of Nature. In this way *Jada* has evolved into living beings, and the living beings have further evolved into beings with *Manas*. Thus has arrived the species - the mental man. But with the existence of the species - the mental man, the evolutionary process of Nature has not ceased. Man has the potential of evolving into higher and higher states of consciousness. And man has to consciously move forward in that direction. Indeed that is the intention of the evolutionary process of the Nature. The fullest manifestation and firm establishment of the divinity which is the final goal, is indeed the end of the evolutionary process.

Having accepted the theory of *Ātman* as proclaimed in the Upanishads, Sri Aurobindo states that deep within our body, *Prāna* and *Manas* exists another *Purusha*. He has named it *Chaitya Purusha* (Psychic entity). It has two tendencies – one is outward and the other is inward. The outward tendency keeps one engrossed and busy in desires, aspirations, in mundane activities of the external world. But its inward tendency makes him seek light, truth, knowledge and the infinity that lies ahead. When man’s inmost mind encased deep within the recess engages him in enquiring about the self, through his quest and sadhana he realises his *Ātmā* or the spiritual self. Sri Aurobindo has named this process of ascending from the plane of ordinary mental consciousness to the plane of spiritual self by man as spiritual evolution. But this is not the end. The ascent to the plane of supramental consciousness and descent from it shall follow thereafter. To highlight this point we quote from Sri Aurobindo’s ‘*The Life Divine*’, “For the mental man has not been Nature’s last effort or highest reach, - ...she has pointed man to a yet higher and more difficult level, inspired him with the ideal of a spiritual living, begun the evolution in him of a spiritual being. The spiritual man is her supreme supernormal effort of human creation; for, having evolved the mental creator, thinker, sage, prophet of an ideal, the self-controlled, self-disciplined, harmonised mental being, she has tried to go higher and deeper within and call out into the front the soul and the inner mind and heart, call down from above the forces of the spiritual mind and higher mind and overmind and create under their light and by their influence the spiritual sage, seer, prophet, God-lover, Yogin, gnostic, Sufi, mystic.”(p 721, 5th Ed). But what is the full implication of the contention of this passage we shall now briefly try to explain.

To discuss about the spiritual evolution and the ascent to and descent from the supramental consciousness, it is necessary for us to know certain things. Why at all has Sri Aurobindo talked about the supramental consciousness? The answer is easy to find. In the Vedas and the Upanishads there are references to the state of *Brāhmichetanā* (the Creative Conscious Will of the Brahman). Sri Aurobindo himself attained to that plane through his sadhana. Therefore with a view to establishing the quintessence of his realisation - the ideal of Divine life towards which humanity must move, he discussed about it in details variedly on several occasions in his book '*The Life Divine*'.

In the Upanishads we find two aspects of Brahman. One is the transcendent; the other is the immanent that pervades the universe. The latter aspect of Brahman is Its infinite strength, knowledge and will that creates, sustains and dissolves the phenomenal world. It is verily called as *Chit-tapas* in the Vedas. Sri Aurobindo names this *Paramā Prakriti* (Super Nature), the second aspect of Brahman, as 'Supermind'. And this Supermind as a part of divine play lies deeply ingrained and involved in the *Manas*, *Prāna* and *Jada* and even in nescience. Again in a disciplined way this Consciousness-force helps *Jada*, *Prāna* and *Manas* manifest into successive ascending planes through the process of evolution. The other name of this divine Consciousness-Will of the Brahman is 'Real Idea'. Again it is also named as *Rita-Chit* (Truth-Consciousness). It has been described in the Atharva Veda as *Satyam Ritam Brihat*. The word '*Rita*' carries an implied sense of being 'disciplined', and also of 'rhythm'. It is because the seed of the entire creation that lies in the Brahman is manifested by the Supermind in a disciplined and rhythmic pattern that this supramental consciousness-force has been called '*Rita-Chit*'. Any creation succeeds an idea or a piece of imagination. The Supermind being the efficient cause behind the creation of this universe, it is called 'Real Idea'. In the Sanskrit language these words, viz. '*Rita-Chit*', '*Satyam*', '*Jnanam*', '*Anantam*', '*Brihat*' etc. are so potentially meaningful that by repeated recitations of them (maintaining correct pronunciations) shall our senses be able to get a glimpse of what Sri Aurobindo means by. 'Supermind'.

Now let us briefly deal with the role of Supermind in evolving human life into divine life. According to Sri Aurobindo attainment of this divine life is dependent on a triple transformation of our nature. At the first stage an aspirant has to undertake sadhana to raise upwards fully his psychic entity that lies behind the outer mind. Only when one is capable of completely reversing the

movements of our out-going mind and settle it within, then alone will he be able to proceed with his sadhana. Our mind illumined with the inner light can achieve the state of profound quietude which will permanently settle within us. In such a state our inner psychic entity becomes supreme and reigns over our mind. This is what Sri Aurobindo calls the '*psychic transformation*'.

The need for spiritual transformation shall arise thereafter. We have earlier discussed about spiritual evolution. It is an evolution of mental man into the Spiritual being. Spiritual transformation is essentially related with this evolution. When *Citta* (basic mental consciousness) enlightened by the Equiposed, Effulgent Self shall become totally merged in the Self, then will it realise - 'I am indeed that Omnipotent Self', and shall usher in the *spiritual transformation*. Our *ātma-jyoti* (the light within our Self) so lighted up through this transformation shall descend to our lower self to light it up as well, but shall fail to conquer it thoroughly. For achieving this there is need for the third transformation - the *supramental transformation*.

For attaining the final supramental transformation our mind shall have to ascend step by step four planes or steps of consciousness. The first step is - *Higher Mind*, the second - *Illumined Mind*, the third - *Intuition* and finally it shall have to rise to the fourth plane of *Overmind*. The ultimate goal i.e. the *supramental truth-consciousness* shall lie just ahead, but is not yet achieved. This fourth plane of *Overmind* has been described as '*Hiranmaya Pātrena*' in the Isha Upanishad, in the words of Sri Aurobindo - '*golden lid*'. Only after the vital and mental man is evolved thoroughly through these four steps shall he become eligible for supramental transformation.

Then and then only through the intense sadhana the aspirant attains the *Brāhmi sattā* or supramental consciousness. But even ascent to this state of supramental consciousness is not the final state according to Sri Aurobindo's yoga-sadhana. His sadhana or philosophy specifies the *divine life* on Earth as the ultimate goal. On ascending to the state of supramental consciousness by tearing apart the state of Overmind, our supramental consciousness shall be required to descend to counter our lower propensities. Overmind is incapable of conquering our lower prakriti fully because it also belongs to the lower hemisphere. Sri Aurobindo has specified the following four entities that comprise the *Aparārdha* (Lower hemisphere) - Matter, Life, Psyche (soul) and the Mind; while the Pure Existence (Sat), Consciousness-force (Chit), Bliss (Ananda) and Supermind comprise the *Parārdha* (Higher hemisphere). The details have been described in the twenty-seventh chapter entitled '*The*

Sevenfold Chord of Being of the book. Supramental consciousness is verily the bridge between these two hemispheres. The Supreme or *Ādyā Shakti* of Brahman is verily the supramental consciousness. The Swetaswatara Upanishad has said '*Parasaya Shaktirvividhaiva Shrutyate Svabhabiki Jnanavalakriya Ca* (6/8). What a wonderful translation of the above sloka has been made by Sri Aurobindo in his book '*The Life Divine*' - 'Supreme too is his Shakti and manifold the natural working of her knowledge and her force.' (p.322. 5th Ed.). A Rishi alone comprehends the realised truth of another Rishi enabling him thus to translate so brilliantly. Perhaps, Sri Aurobindo having realised the sublimity and greatness of the *Parā Shakti* [Supreme energy] has retained the original word '*Shakti*', of the mantra without taking liberty to translate it. This invincible, illimitable power of Brahman is indeed the *Chit-Shakti* – the supramental consciousness. Thus by the descent of this supramental consciousness alone, man's physical, vital, mental and psychic being shall forsake their long association with the forms of the phenomenal world and be able to attain *divya sattā* (Divine Status). Victory will be complete. By this last supramental transformation *Man* shall be evolved into *Gnostic Being* and he shall live *in the Divine*. The human society shall be transformed into *Gnostic society*. With the advent of the Supramental Man on Earth, all conflicts, inertia, suffering, diseases and death shall be completely banished from his world. Very briefly stated this is the quintessence of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga and his *Vedic Vedanta philosophy* as explicated in his book '*The Life Divine*'

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The Nature of Faith In the Light of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga Psychology

A S Dalal

*Faith is a thing that precedes knowledge, not comes after knowledge. It is a glimpse of a truth which the mind has not yet seized as knowledge.*¹ Sri Aurobindo

*Until we know the Truth (not mentally but by experience, by change of consciousness) we need the soul's faith to sustain us and hold on to the Truth—but when we live in the knowledge, this faith is changed into knowledge.*² Sri Aurobindo

*Faith is spontaneous knowledge in the psychic.*³ The Mother

*Reason gives me no basis for this faith, thou murmurest. Fool! if it did, faith would not be needed or demanded of thee.*⁴ Sri Aurobindo

The key concept for understanding the nature of faith from the viewpoint of Sri Aurobindo's yoga psychology is that of the psychic being. The psychic being (Greek, *psukhē*, soul) is the *innermost* being in the multi-layered constitution of the human individual; the composite of the mind, the vital being (impulses, desires, feelings, the "heart") and the body constitutes the *outermost* layer. The psychic being is the eternal *self* of the individual, the true "I", which evolves from life to life through the experiences of its perishable instrumental outer being of the mind, the vital and the body which make up the *ego* and with which the psychic identifies itself until it discovers its true nature.

Faith, whether it be faith in oneself, one's ideal, a spiritual Master or the Divine, emanates from the psychic being and manifests itself in different parts of the outer or surface being—the mind, the heart and the bodily consciousness.

“Blind Faith”

Faith is intuitive and *direct* knowledge possessed by the psychic being; it is not based on knowledge arrived at indirectly by the mind through inference. Nor is it based on experience. It is “a certitude without any proof.”⁵ Therefore the reasoning mind looks upon faith as blind. But as Sri Aurobindo remarks:

“The phrase [“blind faith”] has no real meaning. I suppose they mean they will not believe without proof—but the conclusion formed after proof is not faith, it is knowledge or it is a mental opinion. Faith is something which one has before proof or knowledge and it helps you to arrive at knowledge or experience. There is no proof that God exists, but if I have faith in God, then I can arrive at the experience of the Divine.”⁶

“Faith does not depend upon experience; it is something that is there before experience. When one starts the yoga, it is not usually on the strength of experience, but on the strength of faith. It is so not only in yoga and the spiritual life, but in ordinary life also. All men of action, discoverers, inventors, creators of knowledge proceed by faith and, until the proof is made or the thing done, they go on in spite of disappointment, failure, disproof, denial because of something in them that tells them that this is the truth, the thing that must be followed and done. Ramakrishna even went so far as to say, when asked whether blind faith was not wrong, that blind faith was the only kind to have, for faith is either blind or it is not faith but something else—reasoned inference, proved conviction or ascertained knowledge.

Faith is the soul’s witness to something not yet manifested, achieved or realised, but which yet the Knower within us, even in the absence of all indications, feels to be true or supremely worth following or achieving. This thing within us can last even when there is no fixed belief in the mind, even when the vital struggles and revolts and refuses. Who is there that practises the yoga and has not his periods, long periods of disappointment and failure and disbelief and darkness? But there is something that sustains him and even goes on in spite of himself, because it feels that what it followed after was yet true and it more than feels, it knows.”⁷

Everyone Endowed with Faith

Since faith is innate in the psychic being, everyone possesses faith in some degree. As the Mother said in replying to a student:

“One always has a tiny element of faith within oneself, whether it be faith in what one’s parents have said or in the books one has studied. After all, all your education is based upon a faith of this kind. Those who have educated you have told you certain things. You had no means of checking, because you were too young and had no experience. But you have faith in what they told you and you go forward on that faith. So everyone has a tiny bit of faith...”⁸

Faith, Belief, and Doubt

Faith is a function of the soul, whereas belief pertains to the mind. Mental belief is subject to doubt; it can falter or fail. The soul’s faith, on the other hand, persists in spite of mental doubts; faith may be temporarily eclipsed, but is never permanently extinguished. The faith of the soul and doubts of the mind can and often do co-exist.

As Sri Aurobindo states:

“Faith in the heart is the obscure and often distorted reflection of a hidden knowledge. The believer is often more plagued by doubt than the most inveterate sceptic. He persists because there is something subconscious in him which knows. That tolerates both his blind faith and twilit doubts and drives towards the revelation of that which it knows.”⁹

(The term “subconscious” in the above-quoted passage is used in its general sense of what is *deeper* than the conscious mind, not in its strict sense of what is *below* the conscious mind.)

“... faith in the spiritual sense is not a mental belief which can waver and change. It can wear that form in the mind, but that belief is not the faith itself, it is only its external form. Just as the body, the external form, can change but the spirit remains the same, so it is here. Faith is a certitude in the soul which does not depend on reasoning, on this or that mental idea, on circumstances, on this or that passing condition of the mind or the vital or the body. It may be hidden, eclipsed, may even seem to be quenched, but it reappears again after the storm or the eclipse; it is seen burning still in the soul when one has thought that it was extinguished for ever. The mind may be a shifting sea of doubts and yet that faith may be there within and, if so, it will keep even the doubt-racked mind in the way so that it goes on in spite of itself towards its destined goal. Faith is a spiritual certitude of the spiritual, the divine,

the soul's ideal, something that clings to that even when it is not fulfilled in life, even when the immediate facts or the persistent circumstances seem to deny it. This is a common experience in the life of the human being; if it were not so, man would be the plaything of a changing mind or a sport of circumstances".¹⁰

Hallmarks of the Soul's Faith

Two most salient characteristics of the faith of the soul may be noted. First, as just stated, the soul's faith is persistent; it may be eclipsed for a while by mental doubts or disappointments of the vital being, but reappears when the mental or vital clouds are dispersed.

"What I mean by the central faith is a faith in the soul or the central being behind, a faith which is there even when the mind doubts and the vital despairs and the physical wants to collapse, and after the attack is over reappears and pushes on the path again. It may be strong and bright, it may be pale and in appearance weak, but if it persists each time in going on, it is the real thing".¹¹

Secondly, as the soul's faith is an intuitive perception, it does not depend on proofs and, therefore, in itself is unshakable.

"The perception of the exterior consciousness may deny the perception of the psychic. But the psychic has the true knowledge, an intuitive instinctive knowledge. It says, "I know; I cannot give reasons, but I know." For its knowledge is not mental, based on experience or proved true. It does not believe after proofs are given: faith is the movement of the soul whose knowledge is spontaneous and direct. Even if the whole world denies and brings forward a thousand proofs to the contrary, still it knows by an inner knowledge, a direct perception that can stand against everything, a perception by identity. ... Faith in itself is always unshakable—that is its very nature, for otherwise it is not faith at all. But it may happen that the mind or the vital or the physical does not follow the psychic movement. A man can come to a Yogi and have a sudden faith that this person will lead him to his goal. He does not know whether the person has knowledge or not. He feels a psychic shock and knows that he has met his master. He does not believe after long mental consideration or seeing many miracles. And this is the only kind of faith worthwhile. You will always miss your destiny if you start arguing".¹²

Significance of the Central Faith

Stating the significance of the central faith in an individual's life, Sri Aurobindo writes:

"The perfect faith is an assent of the whole being to the truth seen by it or offered to its acceptance, and its central working is a faith of the soul in its own will to be and attain and become and its idea of self and things and its knowledge, of which the belief of the intellect, the heart's consent and the desire of the life mind to possess and realise are the outward figures. This soul faith, in some form of itself, is indispensable to the action of the being and without it man cannot move a single pace in life, much less take any step forward to a yet unrealised perfection. It is so central and essential a thing that the Gita can justly say of it that whatever is a man's *Śraddha*^{**}, that he is, *yo yacchraddhah sa eva saḥ*, and, it may be added, whatever he has the faith to see as possible in himself and strive for, that he can create and become".¹³

Integral Faith

As stated previously, faith is spontaneous knowledge existing in the psychic being.

"You can also bring it into your mental, your vital and your physical; and then you have an integral faith—a faith which can really move mountains".¹⁴

"To be sure of having an unshakable faith, one must have it in every part of the being".¹⁵

Referring to Coué's method of auto-suggestion for healing diseases, the Mother states:

"He [Coué] knew some secret of this power and utilised it with considerable effect; but he called it imagination and his method gave the faith he called up too mental a form. Mental faith is not sufficient; it must be completed and enforced by a vital and even a physical faith, a faith of the body. If you can create in yourself an integral force of this kind in all your being, then nothing can resist it; but you must reach down to the most subconscious, you must fix the faith in the very cells of the body".¹⁶

Faith — an Influence of the Spirit

In the following passage, Sri Aurobindo sums up the deepest dynamics of faith:

“This *śraddha*—the English word faith is inadequate to express it—is in reality an influence from the supreme Spirit and its light a message from our supramental being which is calling the lower nature to rise out of its petty present to a great self-becoming and self-exceeding. And that which receives the influence and answers to the call is not so much the intellect, the heart or the life mind, but the inner soul which better knows the truth of its own destiny and mission. The circumstances that provoke our first entry into the path are not the real index of the thing that is at work in us. There the intellect, the heart, or the desires of the life mind may take a prominent place, or even more fortuitous accidents and outward incentives; but if these are all, then there can be no surety of our fidelity to the call and our enduring perseverance in the Yoga. The intellect may abandon the idea that attracted it, the heart weary or fail us, the desire of the life mind turn to other objectives. But outward circumstances are only a cover for the real workings of the spirit, and if it is the spirit that has been touched, the inward soul that has received the call, the *śraddha* will remain firm and resist all attempts to defeat or slay it. It is not that the doubts of the intellect may not assail, the heart waver, the disappointed desire of the life mind sink down exhausted on the wayside. That is almost inevitable at times, perhaps often, especially with us, sons of an age of intellectuality and scepticism and a materialistic denial of spiritual truth which has not yet lifted its painted clouds from the face of the sun of a greater reality and is still opposed to the light of spiritual intuition and inmost experience. There will very possibly be many of those trying obscurations of which even the Vedic Rishis so often complained, “long exiles from the light”, and these may be so thick, the night on the soul may be so black that faith may seem utterly to have left us. But through it all the spirit within will be keeping its unseen hold and the soul will return with a new strength to its assurance which was only eclipsed and not extinguished, because extinguished it cannot be when once the inner self has known and made its resolution. The Divine holds our hand through all and if he seems to let us fall, it is only to raise us higher. This saving return we shall experience so often that the denials of doubt will become eventually impossible and, when once the foundation of equality is firmly established and still more when the sun of the gnosis has risen, doubt itself will pass away because its cause and utility have ended”.¹⁷

References

References are from the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (1970-73) (hereafter SABCL) and the Collected Works of the Mother (1972-1987) (hereafter CWM). See (a) and (b) below for titles of the volumes referred to in this article. All volumes have been published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

(a) SABCL

Vol. Title

17 *The Hour of God and Other Writings*

21 *The Synthesis of Yoga—Parts Three and Four*

23 *Letters on Yoga—Parts Two and Three*

(b) CWM

3 *Questions and Answers*

6 *Questions and Answers 1954*

14 *Words of the Mother*

17 *More Answers from the Mother*

1. SABCL 23:576
2. *Ibid.*
3. CWM 14:82
4. SABCL 17:110
5. CWM 6:121
6. SABCL 23:572
7. *Ibid.* 572-73
8. CWM 6:394
9. SABCL 17:40
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11. *Ibid.* 575-76
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13. SABCL 21:743
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15. CWM 17:125
16. CWM 3:36
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** *saṅkalpa, vyavasaya*

Spiritual Knowledge

(Continued from the previous issue)

Martha S G Orton

The Path of Knowledge

Sri Aurobindo writes of a path of knowledge in which human beings progress from living in the superficial consciousness of the surface mind to living in the truth-consciousness, the supermind, and then may even evolve beyond to the planes of Sachchidananda. This yoga of knowledge has as its object the realisation of the Self, the knowledge of the Divine. He describes a series of stages, not firm in their distinctness, but merging one into another, in which characteristics or experiences of one may be encountered in another, as one progresses and the stages of realisation advance in the evolution of consciousness.

The conscious pursuit of the path begins at the level of the surface mind, when an opening to higher consciousness becomes recognised in some way. The individual has some sense of that which is beyond oneself and seeks to know it better, experience it more fully. This opening is developed further by the process of going within, directing one's consciousness towards the inner being, coming into contact with the psychic being, the soul within. As the psychic being comes forward and influences the outer being more and more fully, the individual lives in the complete consciousness of living for the Divine, in preference to other aims in life, and all the parts of the being become directed towards the Divine. The spiritualisation of the being opens the way to other levels of consciousness beyond the mind, which are more than levels of knowledge, but actually new, higher states of being. These involve bringing the individual progressively closer to the Divine, living increasingly in the truth and reality of existence, gradually transforming the entire nature of the being as the consciousness grows. Among these realisations is that of the cosmic consciousness, in which the individual transcends the ego and all sense of separation, and

experiences the oneness of the universe. The levels of consciousness which Sri Aurobindo identifies in the progression of transcending the mind are the higher mind, illumined mind, intuition, overmind and supermind. [These are explained and discussed in detail in *The Life Divine*, as well as in other works by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.] The fulfilment of the path of knowledge is the realisation of the Divine, full and complete union with the Divine and the transformation of the being. Sri Aurobindo also describes a progression through supermind to the planes of Sachchidananda, the original existence-consciousness-bliss.

Looking Inward

The process of seeking knowledge which Sri Aurobindo proposes consists of first looking inward and seeking to know one's self. He considers this to be an essential beginning and states: "*Self-knowledge of all kinds is on the straight path to the knowledge of the real Self.... To this turning of the eye inward psychological self-observation and analysis is a great and effective introduction.*"¹ This looking inward helps the individual to come to know oneself and can, in time, also help to develop an inner vision by which one comes to possess and realise that which is beyond oneself. One may come to experience a revelation of the Self, the Divine. Sri Aurobindo describes the knowledge which the spiritual seeker pursues and alludes to internal aspects of the process as follows:

*The status of knowledge, then, which Yoga envisages is not merely an intellectual conception or clear discrimination of the truth, nor is it an enlightened psychological experience of the modes of our being. It is a "realisation," in the full sense of the word; it is the making real to ourselves and in ourselves of the Self, the transcendent and universal Divine, and it is the subsequent impossibility of viewing the modes of being except in the light of that Self and in their true aspect as its flux of becoming under the psychological and physical conditions of our world-existence. This realisation consists of three successive movements, internal vision, complete internal experience and identity.*²

The realisation which Sri Aurobindo describes is possible because of the involution of the Divine in matter. He explains that the Divine is inherent within

all the manifestation, involved in it, and therefore is destined to emerge from it. Within the human being, this Divine presence is the psychic entity, “a spark of the Divine”³ around which develops an individualised psychic being. It is this psychic being that the individual discovers through going within and seeking the centre of one’s being, and it is the influence of the psychic being on the outer nature which facilitates the spiritualisation of the individual, enabling the growth of consciousness to the higher levels of spiritual knowledge.

Purification, Concentration and Renunciation

The path of knowledge also engages the individual in three specific processes through which one undergoes change and which facilitate progress: purification, concentration and renunciation. Sri Aurobindo explains the importance of purification of the mind in enabling the being’s progress: “*The object of purification is to make the whole mental being a clear mirror in which the divine reality can be reflected, a clear vessel and an unobstructing channel into which the divine presence and through which the divine influence can be poured, a subtilised stuff which the divine nature can take possession of, new-shape and use to divine issues.*”⁴

The mind and its understanding achieve their most perfect and effective state when purified from three sources of influence: the impact of desire on thought, the influence of the sense-mind, and within the understanding itself, an inequality “*of the will to know*” resulting in “*partiality and attachment.*”⁵ These three can cause distortions in the understanding and impair its purity as an instrument at the service of our aspiration for knowledge. The solution which Sri Aurobindo advises for the first problem is the development of mastery of the vital nature and the consequent elimination of false emotions. For the second, the solution is to silence the sense-mind and separate the understanding from it. To solve the third, the problem which derives from the understanding itself: “*The remedy lies in a perfect equality of the mind, in the cultivation of an entire intellectual rectitude and in the perfection of mental disinterestedness.*”⁶ Each of these approaches to purifying the understanding involves an aspect of significant self-discipline, working to not merely control, but master, the mind. In this way, the purification of the mind is a step on the way to the larger spiritual mastery which the individual seeks. Sri Aurobindo tells us that

the result of a purified understanding will be to make it “*a perfectly flexible, entire and faultless instrument of intellectual thought and being free from the inferior sources of obstruction and distortion ... capable of as true and complete a perception of the truths of the Self and the universe as the intellect can attain.*”⁷ In this way, through purification, the mind can become an effective instrument.

Sri Aurobindo also writes about the value of concentration to discipline the mind and help it to access and become the instrument of higher knowledge. He emphasises a specific type of concentration, which is not simply to focus the mind clearly on one thing or another, but is the “*removal of the thought from all distracting activities of the mind and that concentration of it on the idea of the One by which the soul rises out of the phenomenal into the one Reality.*”⁸ He describes concentration as having three powers by which it is effective: the capacity “*to know not things, but the one Thing-in-itself*”; the ability to acquire understanding, knowledge and things beyond ourselves; and the ability to effect change within ourselves, such as transforming fearfulness into strength.⁹ The capacities of concentration can be seen as representing a considerable degree of mastery in human terms and as enabling increased control in one’s life and circumstances. Necessarily, concentration works in concert with purification, so that the pursuit of knowledge, and the mastery which accompanies it, are directed towards realisation of the Divine, not towards earthly power and self-interested gains. Concentration serves the pursuit of spiritual knowledge by reining in the wandering mind and focusing the thought and will on the divine reality which is the object of knowledge, and it also breaks down the barrier between the surface mind and the truth behind it.

To purification and concentration Sri Aurobindo adds renunciation. By renunciation he does not intend renunciation of life and the world or renunciation of material goods, or any of the other forms of renunciation usually associated with asceticism and the spiritual life. Instead, it is renunciation in its purest and most effective meaning—the renunciation of all attachment. Without attachment the individual can more readily reject all that is part of the falsehood, all that does not serve the pursuit of one’s higher purpose. Without being attached to objects, people, personal power, or any of the other things human beings usually seek, one is free to consecrate one’s life to seeking the Divine, offering

oneself to the Divine and, inherent in this process, attaining true knowledge through spiritual fulfilment. This is the process of giving up the ego, attachment and desire to attain the Self. The individual is free to unite with the Divine in the full knowledge of the Divine, which is only possible through identification, and necessarily involves transcending ego and its associated problems of attachment and desire.

Silencing the Mind

Sri Aurobindo writes not only of purifying the understanding, but also of silencing the mind. He cautions us not to attach too much importance to the value of the understanding. He writes: *“In order that the understanding may not interfere with our attainment to real knowledge, we have to reach to that something more and cultivate a power exceedingly difficult for the active intellectual thinker and distasteful to his proclivities, the power of intellectual passivity.”*¹⁰ Therefore, although the individual may have effectively attained some level of mastery of his nature through the discipline of purification of the various parts of one’s being, there is much more to be achieved, more to be mastered in the pursuit of true knowledge. Sri Aurobindo explains: *“In the first place we have seen that intellectual thought is in itself inadequate and is not the highest thinking; the highest is that which comes through the intuitive mind and from the supramental faculty.”*¹¹ He further explains that, with the intellectual mind active and also the influence of our lower mind, intuition cannot enter our consciousness without being subject to distortion. Part of the solution is *“to effect the same separation between the intuitive and intellectual elements of our thought as we have already effected between the understanding and the sense-mind.”*¹² Because this is a complex and difficult task, Sri Aurobindo describes the following method:

The remedy is to train first the intellect to recognise the true intuition, to distinguish it from the false and then to accustom it, when it arrives at an intellectual perception or conclusion, to attach no final value to it, but rather look upward, refer all to the divine principle and wait in as complete a silence as it can command for the light from above. In this way it is possible to transmute a great part of our

*intellectual thinking into the luminous truth-conscious vision, — the ideal would be a complete transition, — or at least to increase greatly the frequency, purity and conscious force of the ideal knowledge working behind the intellect. The latter must learn to be subject and passive to the ideal faculty.*¹³

Recognising that mental passivity seems to some a denial of the mind and therefore of the capacity for knowledge, Sri Aurobindo emphasises that the contrary is actually the case. It is only through silencing the mind and accessing that which is beyond it, that human beings come to attain true knowledge:

*Only when the mind is thus entirely still, like clear, motionless and level water, in a perfect purity and peace of the whole being and the soul transcends thought, can the Self which exceeds and originates all activities and becomings, the Silence from which all words are born, the Absolute of which all relativities are partial reflections manifest itself in the pure essence of our being. In a complete silence only is the Silence heard; in a pure peace only is its Being revealed. Therefore to us the name of That is the Silence and the Peace.*¹⁴

The following lines from *Savitri* also describe the significance of silencing the mind:

*This Light comes not by struggle or by thought;
In the mind’s silence the Transcendent acts
And the hushed heart hears the unuttered Word.*¹⁵

The Witness Consciousness

Throughout the Integral Yoga, in each of the three paths Sri Aurobindo describes—the paths of knowledge, works and devotion, which he explains actually merge and become one, the triune path—he writes of the necessity of transcending human nature in order to live freely in truth. This necessity derives from the weight of inconscience on our natures and the attraction of the lower movements of the mental, vital, and physical elements of our being, all of which have potential to impede our spiritual advance. In order to move beyond the knowledge-ignorance and achieve spiritual knowledge, one needs to aban-

don identification with the body, the vital and its emotions, the surface mind and intellect, and the ego. The aim is to create a separation between the true inner self, the soul, and the outer nature, thus enabling identification with one's true self and the growth of this identification through the progress of spiritual knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo writes of the disparity between the inner being and nature as the problem of soul and nature, Purusha and Prakriti. He explains that it is only when the soul is truly master of nature that they exist in their right relation. In that state, Prakriti gives all her action and energy to do the bidding of the Purusha, and they are united in a harmonious higher working. In the individual, Sri Aurobindo explains that cultivating a sense of equality within the being and detachment from the workings of our lower nature helps us to transcend it and then to make all parts of the being subject to the soul. The equality which is to be sought involves detachment from ego, desire and the associated emotions and also from the intellect and its superficial knowledge. It leads to peace within the being and freedom from the pull of life and the lower nature. The detachment which Sri Aurobindo describes results in true equality within the being and the development of the witness consciousness, the mental Purusha within the individual. From the witness poise, one can observe the movements of thought and emotion, see them more truly, and therefore live and act more truly as well.

Offering

The concept of offering oneself integrally to the Divine, all of one's self, life, knowledge, works and devotion, is an essential component of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. Through the progressive integral offering of one's entire being, the individual evolves in consciousness and grows towards unity with the Divine. While this may appear to be more a part of the paths of devotion or works, it is also just as much part of the path of knowledge. In the path of knowledge, the individual offers one's knowledge, such as it is, and one's aspiration for knowledge. This then becomes an offering of works and of love as the three merge into one. In this way offering becomes a progressive self-giving which grows to encompass all of one's being. It inherently includes the aspiration to unite with the divine origin. Through the process of offering, inti-

macy with the Divine increases and a growth of consciousness occurs, leading to the progressive realisation of spiritual knowledge. Because the Divine is involved in life and matter, having made the initial sacrifice in offering itself through the descent of divine consciousness into matter, the evolution of consciousness and the human response of offering are made possible. In essence, the Divine involution enables the human evolution. It is through offering, or "sacrifice," as Sri Aurobindo often refers to it, that the individual grows closer to the Divine by receiving more of the Divine Force, until the Divine Shakti eventually takes up the work of the yoga for the individual.

For the practice of the Integral Yoga, it is helpful to understand that any and all sacrifice, conscious or unconscious, fully sincere or mixed or partial, leads ultimately to unity with the Divine, the fulfilment of the quest for spiritual knowledge. Even sacrifices offered to others or to any aspect of the Divine become offerings to the one Divine Presence because of its omnipresence. Nevertheless the progression from involuntary to voluntary sacrifice, concomitant with the growth of consciousness, is important. Once the offering becomes voluntary, spiritual growth both deepens and accelerates, even voluntary mental offerings that are somewhat superficial and mechanical create a more conscious connexion with the Divine.

The Action of the Supermind

The evolution of consciousness is made possible by the involvement of the Divine in matter. This enables the divine element in the individual, the psychic being, to open the whole being to the influence of the Divine. It is through the awakening of the psychic being that the individual seeks to discover and unite with the Divine, and it is through this action that the individual calls to the Divine and becomes receptive to the Divine's response and its descent of consciousness and force. Through the offering of one's life, knowledge, will, works, and devotion, the bond between the Divine and the individual increases and the Shakti gradually takes up the work of the yoga and showers Her force upon the individual. The result is a descent of the higher consciousness into the individual.

Through this process, higher levels of mind, new levels of consciousness,

become possible, those which Sri Aurobindo identifies as the higher mind, illumined mind, intuition, overmind and supermind. The supramental consciousness is instrumental in the growth of consciousness and, through its intermediary consciousness, the overmind, descends into human life with transforming effect. It is through its action that higher levels of consciousness are possible and it is to this level of consciousness, the supermind, that seekers may arrive through the path of knowledge. Sri Aurobindo describes supermind and compares and contrasts it with mind as follows:

Supermind is spiritual consciousness acting as a self-luminous knowledge, will, sense, aesthesis, energy, self-creative and unveiling power of its own delight and being. Mind is the action of the same powers, but limited and only very indirectly and partially illumined. Supermind lives in unity though it plays with diversity; mind lives in a separative action of diversity, though it may open to unity. Mind is not only capable of ignorance, but, because it acts always partially and by limitation, it works characteristically as a power of ignorance: it may even and it does forget itself in a complete inconstancy, or nescience, awaken from it to the ignorance of a partial knowledge and move from the ignorance towards a complete knowledge, — that is its natural action in the human being, — but it can never have by itself a complete knowledge. Supermind is incapable of real ignorance; even if it puts full knowledge behind it in the limitation of a particular working, yet all its working refers back to what it has put behind it and all is instinct with self-illumination; even if it involves itself in material nescience, it yet does there accurately the works of a perfect will and knowledge.¹⁶

Therefore supermind can act in life and matter, undiluted and undiminished by the inherent nescience, and effect change there. It is to supermind, this high state of knowledge and being, that the path of knowledge leads.

The Culmination of the Path of Knowledge

The path of knowledge culminates in the fulfilment of the quest for knowledge, for it results in knowledge of the Divine and union with the Divine. It also results in the divinisation of the being, the transformation of the being by the realisation of the divine consciousness. Sri Aurobindo de-

scribes this as follows:

First, the end of Yoga of Knowledge is God-possession, it is to possess God and be possessed by him through consciousness, through identification, through reflection of the divine Reality. But not merely in some abstraction away from our present existence, but here also; therefore to possess the Divine in himself, the Divine in the world, the Divine within, the Divine in all things and all beings. It is to possess oneness with God and through that to possess also oneness with the universal....

Secondly, it is to put on the divine being and the divine nature. And since God is Sachchidananda, it is to raise our being into the divine being, our consciousness into the divine consciousness, our energy into the divine energy, our delight of existence into the divine delight of being. And it is not only to lift ourselves into this higher consciousness, but to widen into it in all our being, because it is to be found on all the planes of our existence and in all our members, so that our mental, vital, physical existence shall become full of the divine nature.¹⁷

Therefore we see that the knowledge and mastery which Sri Aurobindo intends is far different from that which we generally conceive. It consists of knowledge not attained through the use of the intellect, reason and familiar cognitive processes, but rather through transcending the mind and also human nature. This occurs through an extensive integral spiritual process which involves all the parts of the being and incorporates them in the growth of consciousness and the actual transformation of the individual.

Conclusion

Sri Aurobindo views true knowledge as spiritual knowledge and as not attainable by mental processes. However, consistent with the integral nature of his vision, Sri Aurobindo describes all knowledge, including knowledge of the external world by the surface consciousness, as ultimately leading to higher, spiritual knowledge. He explains that the mind is replete with problems and limitations, which prevent it from being a true instrument of knowledge, and proceeds to explain how we can progress beyond these and attain spiritual knowledge. In doing so, Sri Aurobindo describes the processes of purification, concentration and renunciation that help to make the individual more receptive to the influence of the Divine, both through the emergence of the psychic being

within and through the descent of consciousness and force into the being. Other processes which aid the growth of spiritual knowledge include living within in the consciousness of the inner being, developing equality, mastering one's lower nature, developing the witness consciousness, and silencing the mind. The offering of one's knowledge, along with one's works and love, increases the bond between the individual and the Divine, and opens the being to the Divine and his Shakti. As the receptivity and sincerity of the being increase, the Divine Force takes up the work of transformation of the being. The path of knowledge culminates in knowledge of the Divine, a union by identity, and the integral and complete transformation of the being from its human to its divine nature.

(Concluded)

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KARMA IN HISTORY: AN EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE

M.S. Srinivasan

Karma, not scientific and technological progress, is the factor in human life that produces welfare and happiness or alternatively misery and sorrow.

Arnold Toynbee

The Indian theory of karma is a central concept of Indian philosophy. This theory articulates an important aspect of the cosmic order which governs the world. The law of karma has an individual as well as a historical or collective dimension. While the individual aspect has been expounded with clarity by able exponents of Indian philosophy, the historical dimensions of karma have not been given as much attention by scholars and thinkers in Indian philosophy. This article explores the historical and evolutionary dimension of karma in the light of Sri Aurobindo's thought.

Karma and Ethics

The law of karma is one of the most misunderstood concepts, especially in the West, but also in the land in which it is born. In the popular mind, the law of karma is conceived as the inexorable law of Fate and as a system of punishment and reward for sin and virtue. Even in the more enlightened religious minds, it is viewed as a system of moral justice which enforces the consequences of our action with an almost mathematical precision, like for example, as it is said in the Bible "Those who take the sword perish by the sword".

The major defect of this conception of the law of karma is that it gives the impression that the only purpose of the cosmic law or evolution is to enforce ethics or moral justice or the ethical development. But the cosmic law is not

a moralist. Nature is not a moral teacher. The evolutionary aim of Nature in man is not moralising the human race but Growth, total development of the human organism. Ethics is only one stage or aspect of this growth, because the ethical being is only one part of our being. The development of the intellectual, practical, aesthetic and spiritual being is also part of the integral development of the human soul. The pre-human stages of cosmic evolution was infra-ethical and the future course of evolution in which human being will be called upon to rise beyond the present mental consciousness to his spiritual being, may probably be supra-ethical. And if the integral development of the human being is the highest aim of human evolution then ethical development can only be part of the aim. The purpose of a great cosmic law as the law of karma cannot be solely ethical growth through a system of reward and punishment. The wisdom or the law which governs the world cannot be a petty moralist. We need a deeper and a broader understanding of the law of karma and its significance for human progress.

Hence comes the importance of Sri Aurobindo's original insights into the law of karma. According to Sri Aurobindo, there are three aspects to the law of karma: first is the law of consequences; second is the element of education or learning through experience; third is the aspect of evolution and progress. All these three aspects apply not only to the individual but also to a collectivity like a civilisation, nation or the organisation.

The Law of Consequences

The first aspect of Karma is the law of consequences. Every action has its consequences in our inner being and outer life. Our present inner or outer condition is the result or consequence of our past inner and outer actions. And our future condition will be the consequence of our present action. There is nothing fatalistic here. The theory of karma says we forge our fate by our own action and, if we will, we can change or neutralise our past fate and shape our future destiny by our present actions.

What are the factors, which determine the nature of the consequences? It depends on the nature and quality of the energy released by our action. Here comes the element of justice in the law of karma. But it is not a moral justice but at once a pragmatic and spiritual justice. The nature of energy released may be material, pragmatic, intellectual, emotional, ethical, aesthetic

or spiritual. Depending on the nature of energy, there are consequences in the corresponding level of the human being and his life.

We are brought here to a major flaw in the popular conceptions of karma which wants the ethical man to be rewarded with material prosperity and the unethical man to be punished with poverty. But there is no true justice in such a conception of karma. There is no reason why an ethical man, who is lazy and inefficient in the material life, should be rewarded with material prosperity or someone who is efficient, hardworking and innovative in the material life be punished with poverty for his unethical action. The ethical and moral energy released by a saintly man, if it is sincere and disinterested, has its positive consequences for his ethical and inner being in terms of greater ethical development and inner happiness which comes from a truly virtuous life. If he is inefficient and incapable in dealing with material life, he will be poor and low in his outer life. Similarly energies of efficiency, productivity, hard work, innovation, released by the pragmatic man have its positive consequences in his material and economic life in terms of material prosperity and success. If he is unethical, it has its negative consequences for his inner being in terms of loss of inner peace or sinking into evil, darkness and falsehood. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

“This is the ordinary disposition of things in Nature and, if justice be demanded of her, this surely is justice that the energy and capacity put forward should have in its own kind its fitting response from her. The prize of the race is assigned by her to the swift, the victory in battle to the brave and strong and skilful, the rewards of knowledge to the capable intellect and the earnest seeker: these things she will not give to the good man who is sluggish or weak or skillless or stupid merely because he is righteous or respectable; if he covets these other powers of life, he must qualify for them and put forward the right kind of energy. If Nature did otherwise she could well be accused of injustice;”(1)

This is one aspect or principle of the law of karma which applies to every activity and energy of the individual and collective organism in all the levels of their being— physical, vital, intellectual, volitional, ethical, aesthetic and spiritual. An individual or the collectivity like a Nation or civilisation reaps the karmic reward according to the nature, quality or creativity of karma or

capacity displayed in any line or level of energy or activity and the contribution it makes to human progress on that line or level of activity. Contribution to the material or outer progress of humanity brings corresponding karmic rewards in the physical, economic, social or political life of the human organism, irrespective of the ethical quality of the act. Similarly, creative contribution to the inner development of humanity in the intellectual, ethical, aesthetic and spiritual dimensions brings corresponding rewards in the cultural life of the organism in philosophy, religion, art and literature. But the individual or group which achieves cultural greatness, need not necessarily be successful in its outer life, if it does not develop the capacities to survive and prosper in outer life.

We can see this happening in the life of civilisations. The modern western civilisation displayed great intellectual rectitude and creativity in scientific and pragmatic mind and made substantial contribution to the material progress of humanity. It also brought some ennobling and progressive ideals like liberty, equality, fraternity, humanism, democracy and progress to the outer life of man. For this contribution, modern western civilisation was rewarded with prosperity, power, progress, expansion and dominion in the material, economic and political life. But the nations of the modern west also indulged in unethical practices like colonial exploitation, slave trade, racism and savage destruction of some of the native people and cultures. But Nature did not punish these nations for their unethical practices with any immediate material failure. On the other hand there are ancient cultures like India and Greece which displayed great creativity in the intellectual, ethical, aesthetic and spiritual fields and helped in establishing in the human consciousness these greater ideals and values which are essential for the inner and higher evolution of humanity. For this contribution, Nature rewarded these civilisations with cultural richness and greatness. But these nobler civilisations were not always successful in the outer material life. Ancient Greece, which provided most of the governing ideals of the west, was destroyed by barbarian invasion. Ancient India, which was the source of true spirituality for the whole world, was subjected to two long, painful and humiliating foreign invasions and conquests.

The Truth Behind the Popular Conception

This is the general or core process of the law of karma, which is not entirely mathematical or ethical but based on the nature of the energy released in action. However there is a minor or secondary truth behind the popular conceptions of karma which equates ethics with material benefits.

The impact of our actions on the external environment may rebound upon us with material results. For example trust and goodwill generated by the ethical and charitable actions of an individual or an organisation, may lead in the long run to favourable material or financial results. And conversely loss of goodwill and trust generated by persistent unethical practices may have adverse material consequences for the organisation. Modern business is beginning to realise this fact very concretely in its dealing with the customer. In our present intensely competitive business environment in which the customer has a multitude of choice, unethical practices lead to almost immediate loss of the customer and honest and straight dealings help retain the customer. Similarly, aggressive and violently selfish actions trampling over others may induce intense antagonistic reaction in others which may one day fall upon the aggressor with disastrous material consequences. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

“It can be often observed that when a self-assertive vital egoism goes on trampling on its way without restraint or scruple all that opposes its will or desire, it raises a mass of reactions against itself, reactions of hatred, antagonism, unease in men which may have their result now or hereafter, and still more formidable adverse reactions in universal Nature. It is as if the patience of Nature, her willingness to be used were exhausted; the very forces that the ego of the strong vital man seized and bent to its purpose rebel and turn against him, those that he had trampled on rise up and receive power for his downfall: the insolent vital force of Man strikes against the throne of Necessity and is dashed to pieces or the lame foot of Punishment reaches at last the successful offender”(2)

We can see this sometimes happening to aggressive civilisations, like for example the Assyrian kingdom. As the American historian Robert Burns and his co-authors describe graphically the nature of this violent military civilisation:

“The Assyrians were predominantly a nation of warriors because of the special condition of their environment...The exigencies of the war determined the whole character of the Assyrian system....The more they conquered the more they felt they have to conquer...Every success excited ambition and riveted the chains of militarism more firmly than ever....But swords and spears and engines of war were not their only instruments of combat. As much as anything else the Assyrians depended upon frightfulness as a means of overcoming their enemies. Upon soldiers captured in battle, and sometimes upon non-combatants as well, they inflicted unspeakable cruelties. It is clear why the Assyrians were the most hated of all the nations of antiquity.”

Commenting further, the American historians add that when a civilisation takes such a violent stance “Disaster is inevitable” and describes the tragic fate of this once powerful Assyrian kingdom:

“Seldom has the decline of an empire been so complete as was that of Assyria. In spite of its magnificent armaments and its wholesale destruction of its foes, Assyria’s period of imperial splendour lasted little more than a century. Nation after nation conspired against the Assyrians and finally accomplished their downfall. Their enemies took frightful vengeance. The whole land was so thoroughly sacked and the people so completely enslaved or exterminated that it has been difficult to trace any subsequent Assyrian influence upon history. The power and security which military strength was supposed to provide proved a mockery in the end.”(3)

So a direct link or connexion between ethics and material consequences can sometimes happen under certain circumstances. But such forms of simple and poetic justice do not always happen because they are not the main or the predominant process of the Law. They belong to a minor or secondary line of cause and effects. As Sri Aurobindo concludes:

“But the promotion of this minor line of causes and results to the status of an invariable absolute law or the whole cosmic rule of action of a supreme Being is not valid; they belong to a middle region between the inmost or supreme Truth of things and the impartiality of material Nature.”(4)

Quality of Karma

The next question we have to address is what are the factors which determine the quality of karma. We have briefly touched upon this subject

earlier. Let us now examine this qualitative dimension of Karma in greater detail.

For a right understanding of this aspect of karma, we need a broader classification than the narrowly moralistic division of actions into good and bad or ethical and unethical. We may use the more qualitatively indicative words, positive and negative. The actions of truth, sincerity, charity, compassion, beneficence, service, love, kindness, generosity and helpfulness are undoubtedly part of positive action. But the word positive includes also the actions of knowledge, creativity, discovery and innovation which bring something new; actions of efficiency, productivity and organisation which minimise waste or help in better utilisation of available resources and add to the variety and richness of life; actions of courage, strength and force which can defeat, conquer or destroy anti-evolutionary forces, like for example, Nazism or which leads to an effective and successful handling of a challenge, crisis or danger; actions of initiative, enterprise and adaptation which lead to effective management of the changing environment or to the right utilisation of opportunities; actions of implementation and execution which can give a material and vital form to a mental, moral or spiritual idea, vision and values; and finally action of self-knowledge, self-mastery or self-realisation and such other activities which leads to the psychological and spiritual development of the individual or the collectivity. All these and many others which lead to the inner and outer progress of humanity are also positive karma and bring positive karmic consequences.

Similarly negative karma includes not only unethical actions like wanton and selfish violence, exploitation, dishonesty and deceit, cruelty, oppression or injustice; it also includes laziness, inertia, cowardice, unwillingness to change, stupidity, ignorance, lack of initiative, courage or quickness of mind or will in seizing opportunities. We may say in the popular language that Law of Karma “punishes” negative karma and “rewards” positive karma. But in our broader classification of the positive and negative actions, Law of Karma “punishes” not only unethical actions or “sin” but also laziness, cowardice and incompetence with material poverty, failure or humiliation, even if the *karmi* or the actor is a good, noble or saintly person. As we have indicated earlier, if goodness of the ethical man is true, sincere and disinterested he will reap the reward for his noble action in his inner being in terms of moral and spiritual

development, and inner peace, happiness and fulfilment. However, if he is materially inefficient and incompetent, Nature will not reward him with material prosperity for his virtues. Similarly, we may say that Law of karma “rewards” not only virtue but also efficiency, productivity, courage, strength and competence with wealth, power and success in the outer life even if the *karmi* or the actor is unethical. If he is persistently unethical, he will reap its negative consequences in his inner being in terms of lowering or darkening of his consciousness and the loss of inner happiness. He may not necessarily be punished with material poverty or failure for his unethical action, though, as we have already discussed, such things or results may also happen. Whatever we have said here applies not only to individuals but also to groups like nations or civilisations.

The karma of civilisations or groups is always mixed, forging positive karma in some line of activities and negative karma in other lines. Some of the positive and negative karmas may neutralise each other. And the resulting karmic balance and its consequences are too complex, difficult and subtle to predict by our limited and ignorant mind. For example some of the modern western civilisations like the British Empire or America have forged positive karma for their contribution to the material, economic and technological progress of humanity, for establishing the ideal of individual liberty and democracy, and for standing against and defeating the evil of Hitler and Nazism. But they have also accumulated much negative karma through colonial exploitation, racism, destruction of native people and cultures and other dubious intervention, mechanisations and manipulations. The net karmic consequences of these mixed actions are complex and difficult to pinpoint precisely.

The British empire lost its superpower status and has become a minor power. America had accumulated a lot of positive karma in the initial stages of her evolution, by renouncing colonial ambitions, her role in the world war, her hospitality to immigrants, for creating a society based on individual liberty and equal opportunities, and finally for her steadfast support to the independence struggle of other nations, especially India. All these positive karmas have catapulted America into a superpower. Sometimes a sincere and persistent support to a moral or spiritual cause brings great karmic rewards. So America’s support for the freedom of India which stands for the spiritual ideal might have brought her immense karmic benefits. But America

has accumulated much negative Karma after she became the superpower, by her later and present actions like, for example, her questionable and blood-stained interventions in Vietnam and Iraq and the nefarious activities of her intelligence agencies in smaller countries.

Let us take another example, ancient India. Indian civilisation, which was, and has to become, the spiritual guru of the world, has gained immense positive karma by creating, spreading and establishing some great moral and spiritual ideals and sciences (like yoga) which are essential for realising the ultimate evolutionary fulfilment of humanity. But she has also burdened herself with much negative karma by allowing some of her great ideals to degenerate into the caste system and the way she treated her low caste shudras. Just as steadfast support to some high moral and spiritual ideals brings great karmic benefits, display of ignorance and injustice in a civilisation which was entrusted with the task of upholding the highest spiritual values calls down severe karmic retribution. This was possibly one of the karmic causes behind the Islamic invasion of India which was described by Will Durant as one of the bloodiest in history. We can see here more than poetic justice in the way marauding Islamic invaders treated the Indian Brahmins who created the caste system and perpetrated the injustice and oppression of the low-caste shudra. To the medieval Indian Brahmin, the Islamic invaders were equivalent to Shudra. But when the Islamic invaders rode over medieval India, the Brahmins were their first target and the worst victim. The Islamic invaders treated the Brahmins with a much greater contempt and brutality than the way Brahmins treated the Shudras.

However, I would like to mention here frankly that these examples and conclusions are offered not as definitive “truths” but only as speculative probabilities. Only a yogi with the spiritual knowledge by identity, who can know by identifying his consciousness with the object of knowledge, can talk or write with authority and precision on the exact causes and consequences of karma. But within the mental domain we can only indicate some tentative possibilities.

The Spiritual Foundation: The Law of Oneness

We were discussing the factors which determine the quality of karma. This brings us to the question what are the types of action which can forge the

highest and the most positive karma? To answer this question we have to move on to the deeper spiritual foundation of karmic law. In the integral perspective karma is the process or mechanism by which two primal laws of life, Law of Unity and the Law of Spiritual Evolution of the human soul, are enforced and worked out in human life. Let us first look at the Law of Unity and its relation to the Law of Karma.

One of the greatest contributions of Indian civilisation, for which it acquires an incalculable and indestructible positive karma, is the discovery of the Law of Unity. Indian seers discovered that the innermost essence of all being and life is a Oneness without a second. We are all, and the entire creation, are the expression of an indivisible Oneness in which there is no other. We are part of each other and in our highest self all that exists are parts of our own universal and indivisible being. This is the spiritual foundation of all ethics, justice and karma. If I hurt you I am ultimately hurting myself because I am You. The energies of hurt, pain and violence thrown by me onto you finally returns to haunt me in some form or other with a more or less ugly and painful face. Similarly if I do good to you I am doing good to myself because I am You. The energies of kindness, beneficence, helpfulness, love and service which I have released return to me in some form or other, enriching my life. So ultimately, the justice inherent in the law of karma is not a moral justice based on punishment or reward for virtue and sin but a spiritual justice based on the law of Oneness.

Karma and the Law of Sacrifice

This essential inner Oneness of the Spirit manifests or expresses itself in Life as harmonious mutuality and an interdependent and interconnected unity and wholeness of life. We are all part of each other, connected to and dependent on each other and part of a larger whole. So, unity, mutuality, harmony, interdependence and wholeness are the highest law and values of collective life. Those groups, nations or civilisations which make a conscious effort to attune all the activities of their corporate life with these highest laws and values of life acquire the highest positive karma. In strategic terms, it means gradual and progressive subordination of the individual and the collective ego and its self-interest to the well-being and progress of others and the larger whole. In terms of motive and action, it means a greater emphasis on giving rather

than on taking or possessing; contribution to the well-being and progress of others or the larger whole rather than on personal profit; complementing partnership rather than competitive strife. For in a cosmic order governed by the law of unity, mutuality and interdependence, the highest karmic benefit accrues not to the selfish taker or possessor but to the selfless-giver who can give without expecting anything in return. The more we are able to do this, the more we receive from Nature and grow inwardly as well as outwardly. This is the reason why the Indian spiritual tradition viewed “sacrifice” as one of the highest laws. As Sri Aurobindo explains the deeper significance of this Indian concept of sacrifice:

“For this is the truth in Nature, that this ego which thinks itself a separate independent being and claims to live for itself, is not and cannot be independent nor separate, nor can it live to itself even if it would, but rather all are linked together by a secret Oneness. Each existence is continually giving out perforce from its stock; out of its mental receipts from Nature or its vital and physical assets and acquisitions and belongings a stream goes to all that is around it. And always again it receives something from its environment in return for its voluntary or involuntary tribute. For it is only by this giving and receiving that it can effect its own growth while at the same time it helps the sum of things.”(5)

Thus the Indian concept of Sacrifice is based on the Law of Unity and Interdependence. Each existence is compelled by this law to give or “sacrifice” to others whether it is conscious of it or not or doing it willingly or not. Most of us are not conscious of this law. So we are forced to sacrifice unconsciously and unwillingly deriving only a minimum of karmic benefit. But when we do the sacrifice consciously, with full understanding of the law in the mind and gladness in the heart, we get the maximum of karmic benefit. As Sri Aurobindo elaborates further:

“But, most often, the sacrifice is done unconsciously, egoistically and without knowledge or acceptance of the true meaning of the great world-rite. It is so that the vast majority of earth-creatures do it; and, when it is so done, the individual derives only a mechanical minimum of natural inevitable profit, achieves by it only a slow painful progress limited and tortured by the smallness and suffering of the ego. Only when the heart, the will and the mind of knowledge associate themselves with the law and gladly follow it, can there

come the deep joy and happy fruitfulness of divine sacrifice. The mind's knowledge of the law and the heart's gladness in it culminate in the perception that it is to our own Self and Spirit and the One-Self and Spirit of all that we give."(6)

So to get the highest spiritual benefit, the act of sacrifice or giving should be done not with the moral attitude of the do-gooder or that of someone seeking openly or secret some reward for his virtuous act; it should be done with a spiritual understanding that we are giving to our own highest and universal self in other person, giving unconditionally without expecting anything in return, but at the same knowing fully well, there will be many-fold return because we are giving to our own self. Again as Sri Aurobindo points out:

"Our sacrifice is not a giving without any return or any fruitful acceptance from the other side; it is an interchange between the embodied soul and conscious Nature in us and the eternal Spirit. For even though no return is demanded, yet there is the knowledge deep within us that a marvellous return is inevitable. The soul knows that it does not give itself to God in vain; claiming nothing, it yet receives the infinite riches of the divine Power and Presence."(7)

This brings us to an important karmic implication of the Law of Sacrifice. Sharing or distribution of goodness—wealth, power, knowledge, culture—brings a much greater karmic reward than creating goodness. In fact, creating wealth or knowledge or culture involves a responsibility on the part of the creator to distribute or share whatever he has created with others. Not doing it due to elitist pride, unwillingness, selfish attachment to the status quo and privileges of the elite lead to negative karma. Most of the great and ancient cultures of the world like India and Greece, which created high and noble ideals made no sufficient attempt to share and distribute their knowledge, ideals and culture with the masses. Whatever knowledge, wealth or culture created by these civilisations remained within a small ruling, trading or thinking elite, while the large population of masses remained in poverty, misery and ignorance, oppressed and exploited by the privileged upper classes. As a result these great cultures might have accumulated a certain amount of negative karma which was perhaps one of the factors behind the calamities that fell on them like for example two painful and humiliating foreign invasions of India and the barbarian invasions of Greece which destroyed the civilisation.

But until now, in the past or present history of our race, there is no nation, group or civilisation which had understood fully the practical implications of the highest law of unity and sacrifice and applied it successfully and consciously in its collective life. This includes the Indian civilisation which discovered the law. Ancient Indian seer discovered the law of spiritual unity of all existence. But the attempt made by the philosophic, religious and pragmatic mind of India to apply or embody this highest law in the outer economic, social and political life ended only in what Sri Aurobindo aptly describes as a "half-aristocratic, half-theocratic feudalism".(8) To manifest this highest law of unity and sacrifice in the outer life requires an enlightened and creative subordination of the individual and collective ego, gradually, step by step, to a larger and larger whole, until at a certain stage, ego is lost and disappears into the divine Whole and Unity. Until now, the ego in man, especially his collective ego, is either too gross to do this in the right way. But in the future, this law of unity and sacrifice will become something imperative for the survival and success of individuals and groups.

The future evolution of earth is moving towards a conscious manifestation of a global unity-consciousness in all the levels of our being—physical, vital, mental and spiritual. So in the future this law of unity and sacrifice will not be a moral or spiritual ideal pursued by a few spiritual seekers; it will become a pragmatic necessity for the survival and success of groups, even in the mundane areas like economics, politics or business. So in the future we may see more and more groups, to begin with smaller groups like organisations or smaller nations, opting for the unity-paradigm. And those groups which are able to successfully implement this unity-paradigm in their corporate life will be the leaders of the future.

Karma and the Law of Evolution

We have already discussed the Law of consequences and traced its spiritual foundation to the Law of Unity. The traditional eastern conceptions of Karma consider this law of consequences as the sole principle of the cosmic law. But according to Sri Aurobindo, beyond the law of consequences there is the Law of Spiritual Evolution and the guiding Wisdom of the Spirit. So Law is not all. Beyond the Law there is the Wisdom and Grace of the Spirit

which uses the law and its consequences for the spiritual evolution of man and the world.

The beneficial and adverse consequences of Karma are not a system of reward and punishment for virtue and sin or a system of motivation for the ethical development. Their purpose is not ethical growth but to provide the experience and learning needed for an integral spiritual development of humanity. So every experience like success and failure, good fortune or bad fortune, war and peace, prosperity or poverty come not as rewards and punishments for good or bad ethical behaviour but as opportunities for evolutionary learning and growth. We may say that divine wisdom which governs the world arranges the consequences of karma in such a way that each human individual or the group is given the right opportunities and the experiences at the right time so that it leads to the integral development of the individual and the collectivity.

In this vision of karma adverse circumstances like wars, calamities and foreign invasions are not necessarily due to past negative karma. For such difficult circumstances help in developing certain parts, powers and qualities of the human consciousness in the individual and the consciousness. So it may be the part of providence or plan of Nature, in the evolutionary education of the human organism. In the life of the individual, soul, the spiritual element in the individual, chooses the type of experiences it would have in each birth. In a collectivity like a nation or civilisations, we may suppose, that Nature provides each collectivity, in the course of its historical evolution, the necessary opportunities, challenges and the experiences needed for its integral development. But how effectively these experiences are used or tackled for the evolution of the collectivity depends on the quality of the leadership and people of the collectivity. If the people or leadership of the collectivity are sufficiently alert and creative to make use of the opportunities and challenges thrown by Nature and learn the right lessons, then it progresses rapidly to a balanced and integral development of its potentialities. On the other hand, if the opportunities are missed, challenges are not effectively tackled, and lessons are not learned, either due to laziness, cowardice, inertia or ignorance or lack of initiative, enterprise or creativity, then it creates negative karma for the group. This negative karma may take different forms. The same or similar circum-

stance may be repeated again but under more difficult conditions or else some major tragedies like, for example, a humiliating foreign conquest.

The Indian Example

Let us take, for example, the history of ancient Indian civilisation. Until the Islamic invasion in the medieval period, Indian civilisation progressed satisfactorily using the opportunities and meeting the challenges more or less adequately according to her inborn spiritual genius. The rich and favourable material environment provided by Nature in the Indus valley gave birth to a magnificent spiritual culture which contemplated and discovered the highest spiritual truths and laws of life and made a great attempt towards creating a civilisation based on these highest truths. And in the later stages of its evolution, when it was exposed to external influences, both the opportunities and challenges offered by this opening were tackled effectively. The challenge of a Greek invasion through Alexandrian hordes were successfully contained and defeated by Chanakya and Chandragupta who founded a great empire. Later, the challenge of a more dangerous Huns invasion was again successfully repelled by Gupta emperors. The opportunities provided by interaction with other civilisations like neighbouring Asian kingdoms or the more distant Roman empire were used for a creative expansion of trade, commerce and culture. During the Gupta age, India was a flourishing centre of intercontinental trade. The ideas of Indian thought, religion and philosophy travelled to distant lands. Whatever limited success or infiltration achieved by foreign invaders like the Greeks or Huns were assimilated and absorbed into the Indian society and culture. But when the Islamic invasion came, Indian civilisation could not adapt and cope up adequately with the new threat.

In Nature's management of human history, foreign invasions and conquest seem to serve two main purposes: first in a lethargic or peaceful community, it helps in developing the *kshathria* faculties of will, power, strength which are also essential for the integral development of the collectivity. Second, it acts as a goad to push a scattered and divided civilisation towards the realisation of unity, especially political unity. As Sri Aurobindo points out "When a people, predestined to unity, cannot accomplish its destiny, foreign rule is a provision of Nature by which the necessary compelling pressure is applied to drive its jarring parts to concord." (9) In India, repeated invasions from the

Islamic marauders came as a warning for the loosely diversified and divided civilisation to unite. But the leaders and kings who ruled India during that period, could not marshal the required political vision, strength and the adaptability to confront the aggressor with a united force. They were clinging to their narrow provincial patriotism and the lofty traditional *kshathria* ideals of chivalry and generosity to the enemy when the new enemy has no such ideals.

Again, when the Mughal empire disintegrated, there was another opportunity to realise unity. But the leaders of the Maratha and Sikh empires, which were the native and dominant political powers of the period, again were unable to harness the strength and vision to unify the country and prevent the slow and insidious infiltration of the British colonisers. The British invasion helped India to achieve political unity and open her ancient and insular mind to the modern ideals of science, technology, humanism and democracy. But these foreign invasions have seriously disrupted and slowed down the cultural and spiritual evolution of India. However, there can be two perspectives or possibilities on the impact of these alien invasions on India. The first possibility is that had Indian leaders at the beginning and end of the Islamic interlude displayed sufficient vision and ability to prevent these foreign invasions, unify the nation, and able to facilitate her natural evolution towards a new India based on her inborn spiritual genius, by now India might have been a great spiritual superpower guiding humanity safely and triumphantly towards its spiritual destiny. The other perspective is that the divine power allowed these invasions because She wanted India to achieve a greater and a more difficult spiritual synthesis integrating the Islamic and Western cultures with her own unique cultural ethos.

Implications for Human Development

This evolutionary vision of karma has some practical implications for collective development. If Law of Karma and its consequences are not a system of reward and punishment, but, a mechanism for working out the progressive evolution of the human organism towards integral development of the human potential, then we have here a seed-idea for a new paradigm of development based on “learning”. The central idea or assumption of this paradigm is that every event, experience or encounter in the history of a

collective human organism, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant are opportunities for learning something new or developing a new capability or in other words for evolutionary progress.

There are some ideas, concepts and attitudes in the emerging paradigms in business which are very much in sync with the evolutionary paradigm of karma. For example, the new paradigm in business looks at failure in a very positive light as a source of learning. There are some companies in US which has this concept and practice of celebrating a failed project that has taught some crucial lessons as the “perfect failure”. There is also the concept of “learning organisation” by Peter Senge which conceives learning “as creating and building the capacity to create that which you previously couldn’t create” and “continually enhancing their capacity to create” by looking at every problem, difficulty and challenge as an opportunity for learning and becoming better.(10) All these ideas are in harmony with the evolutionary laws of Nature. But to get the maximum inner and outer benefit from these ideas, they have to become part of a deeper and vaster spiritual vision of human development and integrated with the concepts we were discussing so far: Law of Unity, Karma, sacrifice, evolution and integral development.

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Indian culture and Hinduism

(Continued from the previous issue)

Kittu Reddy

*Indian culture has been from the beginning and has remained a spiritual, an inward-looking religio-philosophical culture. Everything else in it has derived from that one central and original peculiarity or has been in some way dependent on it or subordinate to it; even external life has been subjected to the inward look of the spirit.*¹

Sri Aurobindo

It is this inward-looking religio-philosophical culture which goes by the name of Hinduism.

However, in modern times, both in India and abroad, it is under severe attack and is often branded as communal, narrow and reactionary.

Let us therefore take a close look at the true and deeper meaning of Hinduism; we will then be in a position to make a sound judgment and then follow it up by making the necessary corrections and remove all the misunderstandings, genuine and deliberate that have recently cropped up.

In one of his letters, Sri Aurobindo writes:

...Hindu culture...is not such a weak and fluffy thing as to be easily stamped out; it has lasted through something like 5 millennia and is going to carry on much longer and has ...quite enough power to survive.²

From where does this power to survive emanate? Wherein lies the secret strength that has enabled it to last so long and is even now considered by many enlightened persons both in India and abroad as a powerful instrument for the betterment of human life?

To understand this phenomenon of survival, let us cast a quick look at the

history of civilisations and cultures. We see that all civilisations go through the cycle of birth, growth and death. As a matter of fact, most of the ancient civilisations have not survived and some have disappeared. This phenomenon has been explained succinctly by Sri Aurobindo in the following extract:

“A people, a great human collectivity, is in fact an organic living being with a collective or rather—for the word collective is too mechanical to be true to the inner reality—a common or communal soul, mind and body. The life of the society like the physical life of the individual human being passes through a cycle of birth, growth, youth, ripeness and decline, and if this last stage goes far enough without any arrest of its course towards decadence, it may perish,—even so all the older peoples and nations except India and China perished,—as a man dies of old age. But the collective being has too the capacity of renewing itself, of a recovery and a new cycle. For in each people there is a soul idea or life idea at work, less mortal than its body, and if this idea is itself sufficiently powerful, large and force-giving and the people sufficiently strong, vital and plastic in mind and temperament to combine stability with a constant enlargement or new application of the power of the soul idea or life idea in its being, it may pass through many such cycles before it comes to a final exhaustion. Moreover, the idea is itself only the principle of soul manifestation of the communal being and each communal soul again a manifestation and vehicle of the greater eternal spirit that expresses itself in Time and on earth is seeking, as it were, its own fullness in humanity through the vicissitudes of the human cycles. A people then which learns to live consciously not solely in its physical and outward life, not even only in that and the power of the life idea or soul idea that governs the changes of its development and is the key to its psychology and temperament, but in the soul and spirit behind, may not at all exhaust itself, may not end by disappearance or a dissolution or a fusion into others or have to give place to a new race and people, but having itself fused into its life many original smaller societies and attained to its maximum natural growth pass without death through many

renascences. And even if at any time it appears to be on the point of absolute exhaustion and dissolution, it may recover by the force of the spirit and begin another and perhaps a more glorious cycle. The history of India has been that of the life of such a people".³

The decline of Indian culture

However, sometime in the middle of the 19th century, it seemed and was thought by many historians and observers that India was at the point of dissolution. The society was steeped in superstition, manacled by primitive customs, and it seemed that the sense of community had all but vanished. The country was facing a crisis of immense proportions. The situation was similar to what India faced in the 14th century. At that time, the question was the continuity of India's life – whether her separate identity in culture, social organisation, religion and thought would be maintained or whether she would be merged in the expanding commonwealth of Islam. Then, India was saved by the spiritual revival of the 14th and 15th centuries. This time the question was different – it was not the continuance of the Hindu culture. Rather, the problem facing India now was the confrontation of a superior, expanding and highly dynamic civilisation with an old, static and as it appeared decaying culture. Here was a civilisation, which was convinced not only of its own incomparable greatness, economic strength, and technological and scientific superiority but was moved by a firm belief that the form of life it represented was the final one to which all others must conform. Along with this there was another problem that confronted Indian culture – it was the relationship of Hinduism with Islam and the problem of their coexistence in the new circumstances under the domination of a people alien to both. It was at this critical moment that the Indian renaissance began and this was essentially due to the manner in which Hinduism reacted to the foreign domination. This reaction, which first started in Bengal, spread to all other parts of the country and included all the fields of culture. The sole exception was in the political field; for, till the end of the nineteenth century, British rule was accepted as a beneficent development. Raja Rammohan Roy publicly thanked God for having placed India under the British rule. Prasanna Kumar Tagore declared: "If we were asked what government we would prefer, Eng-

lish or any other, we would one and all reply English by all means, even in preference to a Hindu government".

Independent India

However that might be, India recovered its strength and consequently in 1947 India attained independence and formed its own government. We shall not go into the political developments that took place since then. Suffice it to say that for the last 40 years or more, the country has been badly divided between the so called secularists and those who are called the communalists. This division which has taken an acute form today and is creating serious political divisions in the country is not a new phenomenon. It was there right from the beginning of the twentieth century and was the root cause for the creation of Pakistan.

The creation of Pakistan has only intensified this unfortunate division within India. It now manifests itself as the clash between the force of secularism and the force of pseudo-secularism. This latter force has been branded as communal and is supposed to be represented by the ideology of Hindutva.

The aim of this article is to show that this clash is based on a misunderstanding between these two apparently opposing forces. This misunderstanding is in some cases based on ignorance and often on deliberate misinformation due to political reasons.

In this article we are not concerned with the political aspect of the problem; we shall try to get to the true meaning of Hinduism and try to dispel the ignorance that is so rampant in India and abroad. We shall then see that there is no incompatibility between the forces of secularism and Hinduism; on the contrary they complement each other. It should then be possible to create a harmonious and unified political atmosphere in the country.

We have seen earlier in this article that a people and culture which learn to live consciously not solely in its physical and outward life, but in the soul and spirit behind, may not at all exhaust itself. Another point that must be noted is that India is what it is today because of Hinduism. As noted earlier, Indian culture is largely Hindu culture. In the early part of the twentieth century Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Our ideal therefore is an Indian Nationalism, largely Hindu in its spirit and traditions, because the Hindu made the land and the people and persists, by the greatness of his past, his civilisation and his culture and his invincible virility, in holding it, but wide enough also to include the Moslem and his culture and traditions and absorb them into itself".⁴

This is the line we must pursue and in order to do that we must first be clear as to what we mean and understand by Hinduism; we must be able to distinguish the permanent element in Hindu culture and those elements that need to change. As Sri Aurobindo wrote in the earlier part of the twentieth century:

"There is behind our imperfect cultural figures a permanent spirit to which we must cling and which will remain permanent even hereafter; there are certain fundamental motives or essential idea-forces which cannot be thrown aside, because they are part of the vital principle of our being and of the aim of Nature in us, our svadharma. But these motives, these idea-forces are, whether for nation or for humanity as a whole, few and simple in their essence and capable of an application always varying and progressive. The rest belongs to the less internal layers of our being and must undergo the changing pressure and satisfy the forward-moving demands of the Time-Spirit. There is this permanent spirit in things and there is this persistent swadharma or law of our nature; but there is too a less binding system of laws of successive formulation,—rhythms of the spirit, forms, turns, habits of the nature, and these endure the mutations of the ages, yugadharma. The race must obey this double principle of persistence and mutation or bear the penalty of a decay and deterioration that may attain even its living centre".⁵

Let us therefore try to disengage the fundamentals that make up the permanent spirit of Hinduism; next we shall try to see those lesser binding system of laws that belong to the external layers.

The Fundamentals

What then are the fundamentals of Hinduism? If we are asked, "But after all what is Hinduism, what does it teach, what are its fundamentals and what

does it practise, we can answer that it is founded upon a few basic ideas or rather fundamentals of a highest and widest spiritual experience.

1. First comes the idea of the One Existence of the Veda to whom sages give different names, the One without a second of the Upanishads, the Permanent of the Buddhists, the Absolute of the Illusionists, the supreme God of the Theists whether it be Vishnu, Shiva, Christ or Allah—in a word the Eternal, the Infinite.

2. The second characteristic feature of Hinduism is that the highest aim of life and spiritual experience is to discover this Infinite and enter into some kind or degree of unity with the Eternal. To arrive at this unity there are many paths and disciplines.

3. The third feature is that there are manifold ways of man's approach to the Eternal and Infinite.

One can follow this great spiritual aim by one of the thousand paths recognised or even any new path which branches off from them and you are at the core of the religion. Thus it respects all religions and approaches to the Highest.

The next point to note is that Hinduism did not fix a gulf between the highest supreme Existence and our external and material way of being. It was aware that there were other psychological planes of consciousness and experience in between and the truths of these planes were as real and tangible to it as the outward truths of the material universe.

Each man approached God at first according to his psychological nature *svabhava*, *adhikara* and gradually increased his capacity for deeper experience. The level of Truth, the plane of consciousness he could reach was determined by his inner evolutionary stage. There follows the great variety of religious cult; but these are not imaginary structures, inventions of priests or poets, but truths of a supraphysical existence linking the physical world and the supreme consciousness of the Absolute. And here in the limitations of the cosmos, God manifests himself and fulfils himself in the world in many ways, but each is the way of the Eternal. This is the reason why there are so many gods and diverse forms of worship in the Hindu religion.

We have here two fundamental principles of Hinduism: the principle of diverse approaches to the Divine and the principle of graduality, which means that each man grows according to his nature and stage of development.

The final idea of strongest consequence at the base of Indian religion is the most dynamic for the inner spiritual life. It is that while the Supreme or the Divine can be approached through a universal consciousness, He can be met by each individual soul in itself, in its own spiritual part, in the heart, because there is something in it that is intimately one and intimately related with the one divine Existence.

The essence of Hinduism is to aim at so growing and so living that we can grow out of the Ignorance which veils this self-knowledge from our mind and life and become aware of the Divinity within us.

These things put together are the whole of Hindu religion, its essential sense and, if any credo is needed, its credo.

Once we have seen these fundamentals and grasped them clearly, it becomes evident that Hinduism is wide, tolerant and, more important, represents the true practice of secularism. There is really no opposition between true secularism and Hinduism.

The external layers

We shall now identify those elements which belong to the less internal layers, and then see how they can be changed, adapted and even removed where necessary to suit the new conditions of the modern world and its values. And all this has to be done without compromising on the fundamental values.

As an example, let us take the fourfold caste system. There is no doubt that the caste system as it is practised now is a great obstacle to human progress and an insult to human values. However, whatever the degradation that has taken place today, it cannot be denied that it was a fine system in the earlier times. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

*“it was a well-devised and necessary scheme in its time; it gave the community the firm and nobly built stability it needed for the security of its cultural development,—a stability hardly paralleled in any other culture. And, as interpreted by the Indian genius, it became a greater thing than a mere outward economic, political and social mechanism intended to serve the needs and convenience of the collective life”.*⁶

And once more in the words of Sri Aurobindo: *“this profoundly con-*

ceived cycle gave a scheme which kept the full course of the human spirit in its view; it could be taken advantage of by all according to their actual growth and in its fullness by those who were sufficiently developed in their present birth to complete the circle.

*On this first firm and noble basis Indian civilisation grew to its maturity and became a thing rich, splendid and unique. While it filled the view with the last mountain prospect of a supreme spiritual elevation, it did not neglect the life of the levels. It lived between the busy life of the city and village, the freedom and seclusion of the forest and the last overarching illimitable ether.*⁷

However, with the passage of time, this great institution became degraded and lost its inner meaning. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“Apart from all phenomena of decline or deterioration, we should recognise without any sophisticated denial those things in our creeds of life and social institutions which are in themselves mistaken and some of them indefensible, things weakening to our national life, degrading to our civilisation, dishonouring to our culture. A flagrant example can be found in the treatment of our outcastes. There are those who would excuse it as an unavoidable error in the circumstances of the past; there are others who contend that it was the best possible solution then available. There are still others who would justify it and, with whatever modifications, prolong it as necessary to our social synthesis. The contention is highly disputable. The excuse was there, but it is no justification for continuance. A solution which condemns by segregation one sixth of the nation to permanent ignominy, continued filth, uncleanness of the inner and outer life and a brutal animal existence instead of lifting them out of it is no solution but rather an acceptance of weakness and a constant wound to the social body and to its collective spiritual, intellectual, moral and material welfare. A social synthesis which can only live by making a permanent rule of the degradation of our fellowmen and countrymen stands condemned and foredoomed to decay and disturbance. The evil effects may be kept under for a long time and work only by the subtler unobserved action of the law of Karma;

*but once the light of Truth is let in on these dark spots, to perpetuate them is to maintain a seed of disruption and ruin our chances of eventual survival”.*⁸

Similarly, we can take the example of the place of the woman in society. In ancient India during the Vedic times, man and woman were equal. One example is that there were a large number of Rishipatnis who had the same stature as the Rishis. But in the course of time there has been a general degradation. We now have to bring back the old glory where man and woman will be given their full rights to grow according to their own inner nature, their swadharma.

We can apply this principle to many other external rituals of Hinduism. We should however be careful in tackling these externals of Indian religion. The reason is that for most human beings, rituals and some form of external worship are indispensable. This is beautifully explained in the following words of Sri Aurobindo:

“The highest spirituality indeed moves in a free and wide air far above that lower stage of seeking which is governed by religious form and dogma; it does not easily bear their limitations and, even when it admits, it transcends them; it lives in an experience which to the formal religious mind is unintelligible. But man does not arrive immediately at that highest inner elevation and, if it were demanded from him at once, he would never arrive there. At first he needs lower supports and stages of ascent; he asks for some scaffolding of dogma, worship, image, sign, form, symbol, some indulgence and permission of mixed half-natural motive on which he can stand while he builds up in him the temple of the spirit. Only when the temple is completed, can the supports be removed, the scaffolding disappear. The religious culture which now goes by the name of Hinduism not only fulfilled this purpose, but, unlike certain credal religions, it knew its purpose. It gave itself no name, because it set itself no sectarian limits; it claimed no universal adhesion, asserted no sole infallible dogma, set up no single narrow path or gate of salvation; it was less a creed or cult than a continuously enlarging tradition of the Godward endeavour of the human spirit. An immense many-sided many-staged provision for a spiritual self-building and self-find-

*ing, it had some right to speak of itself by the only name it knew, the eternal religion, sanatana dharma. It is only if we have a just and right appreciation of this sense and spirit of Indian religion that we can come to an understanding of the true sense and spirit of Indian culture”.*⁹

Therefore while making any changes we must not remove the scaffolding; whatever changes are made should adjust to the modern values without touching the inner core.

Future of Hinduism

The final task that Hinduism has to fulfil is to bring spirituality into life itself. If Hinduism has to fulfil its true role in the renaissance of India, in the rebirth of the soul of India, it must insist much more finally and integrally than it has as yet done on its spiritual turn, on the greater and greater action of the spiritual motive in every sphere of our living. This does not mean eliminating religion; it simply means graduating from religion into spirituality.

When one studies the history of Hinduism, one will note that it has passed through two complete external stages; while a third has taken its initial steps and is the destiny of her future.

The early Vedic was the first stage: then religion took its outward formal stand on the natural approach of the physical mind of man to the Godhead in the universe, but the initiates guarded the sacrificial fire of a greater spiritual truth behind the form.

The Purano-Tantric was the second stage: then religion took its outward formal stand on the first deeper approaches of man's inner mind and life to the Divine in the universe, but a greater initiation opened the way to a far more intimate truth and pushed towards an inner living of the spiritual life in all its profundity and in all the infinite possibilities of an uttermost sublime experience.

There has been long in preparation a third stage which belongs to the future. This movement of the Indian spiritual mind has a double impulse. Its will is to call the community of men, each according to his power to live in the greatest light of all and found their whole life on some fully revealed power and truth of the Spirit. But it has had too at times a highest vision which sees the possibility not only of an ascent towards the Eternal but of a descent of the Divine Con-

sciousness and a change of human into divine nature. A perception of the divinity hidden in man has been its crowning force. This is a turn that cannot be rightly understood in the ideas or language of the European religious reformer or his imitators. It is not what the purist of the reason or the purist of the spirit imagines it to be and by that too hasty imagination falls short in his endeavour. Its index vision is pointed to a truth that exceeds the human mind and, if at all realised in his members, would turn human life into a divine super-life. And not until this third largest sweep of the spiritual evolution has come into its own, can Indian civilisation be said to have discharged its mission, to have spoken its last word and be *functus officio*, crowned and complete in its office of mediation between the life of man and the spirit.

Here is an extract from the Mother pointing to the direction that India should take:

*The division between 'ordinary life' and 'spiritual' life is an out-dated antiquity. All... have it in their minds: the division between leading a spiritual life and leading an ordinary life, having a spiritual consciousness and having an ordinary consciousness - there is only one consciousness.... if they need an opposition, let them take the opposition between Truth and Falsehood... So in all things, Falsehood and Truth are mixed everywhere:¹⁰
It would be better not to make any division .*

Finally, a reminder to the Indian government that *by following certain tempting directions she may conceivably become a nation like many others evolving an opulent industry and commerce, a powerful organisation of social and political life, an immense military strength, practising power-politics with a high degree of success, guarding and extending zealously her gains and her interests, dominating even a large part of the world, but in this apparently magnificent progression forfeiting its Swadharma, losing its soul. Then ancient India and her spirit might disappear altogether and we would have only one more nation like the others and that would be a real gain neither to the world nor to us.... It would be a tragic irony of fate if India were to throw away her spiritual heritage at the very moment when in the rest of the world there is more and more a turning towards her for spiritual help and a saving Light. This must not*

*and will surely not happen; but it cannot be said that the danger is not there.*¹¹

(Concluded)

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4. Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Vol. 2, p.262
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6. Ibid, Vol. 20, p.172
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Sri Aurobindo and Chandernagore

Trija Ray

[Author's note: I had an opportunity to know details about Chandernagore in the beginning of 1985 to meet the requirements of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives. Later, on 26 February, 1990 I delivered a talk entitled 'Determining a significant date in Sri Aurobindo's life' at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of Sri Aurobindo's setting foot at Chandernagore. The principal portion of this writing has been taken from that talk.]

On Sri Aurobindo's birth centenary Nishikanto wrote, you aspired for the freedom of the motherland and got into the expedition for freedom eternal.¹ Sri Aurobindo's endeavour to liberate India was in effect to enable the entire world to savour the taste of eternal freedom. In between these two phases of struggle for liberation lies his stay at Chandernagore for a few weeks, at one end of which there is the revolutionary Aurobindo Ghosh and at the other Rishi Sri Aurobindo. A resident of Chandernagore wrote, "Sri Aurobindo's stay at Chandernagore is like living incognito in the novel *Viratparba* of modern India, which remains, in the dark womb of the past, a close secret, mysterious and hazy, even today. This life in hiding is of a noble significance in the history of freedom movement, as also in the pursuit of spiritualism of the universal man'.²

Everybody knows that Sri Aurobindo left Calcutta secretly and came to Chandernagore. The news of his presence there was confined to a very few people. But before this stay incognito, he was felicitated at Chandernagore publicly. In September 1909, when Sri Aurobindo was travelling by train to attend the provincial conference in Hooghly, he was felicitated at Chandernagore station also – thus wrote Manindranath Naik, the revolutionary.³

There is no evidence of Sri Aurobindo having come to Chandernagore on any other occasion. In a talk given by Sri Amal Kumar Mitra on 24 May 1998⁴, it has been claimed that Sri Aurobindo came to Chandernagore twice more on the basis of the book '*Sikshaguru Prasange*', referred to by Srishchandra Ghosh. It says 'Sri Aurobindo went to see Charu Babu twice in the year 1903-04'. The orator argued that both Sri Aurobindo⁵ and Charuchandra Roy were alive at the time of the publication of the book⁵, hence the statement must be true. On this issue it may be stated that there is no proof that Sri Aurobindo saw the booklet or that its contents were brought to his notice. Besides there is no mention of this in all that Sri Aurobindo himself said about different issues of his life. What has been stated in the booklet is that Sri Aurobindo met Charuchandra Roy twice. Charuchndra Roy lived in Chandernagore; it has, therefore, been assumed that it was at Chandernagore that Sri Aurobindo came to meet him. But there is room for doubt in this presumption, the meeting could have been held elsewhere also. Whatever it might be, even if he had come to Chandernagore at this time, everybody would only recollect his stay in hiding here prior to his departure to Pondicherry, whenever Sri Aurobindo's association with Chandernagore is mentioned.

After his release from prison and till his departure to Chandernagore, Sri Aurobindo stayed at the residence of Krishnakumar Mitra, his 'Meshomasay'(husband of mother's sister), where the office of the journal '*Sanjeevani*' was located. Sureshchandra Chakraborty writes 'Aurobindo used to come to the house at Shyampukur Lane from his house at College Square around 4 or 5 in the afternoon...he used to return to College Square at 9/9.30p.m'.⁶ It is from this house at Shyampukur that Sri Aurobindo left for Chandernagore. We get details of this event in the reminiscences of Sureshchandra. 'It was about 8p.m. In a first floor room of a house at no. 4 Shyampukur Lane in the Shyambazar area in Calcutta, several young men sat around a person advanced in age... The name of this older man is Mr Aurobindo Ghosh and the younger people present there were Sri Birendranath Ghosh, Sri Saurindranath Basu, Sri Bijoy Kumar Nag, Sri Hem Sen, Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta and this writer...Rambabu entered the room and told Aurobindo in a worried voice that a warrant of arrest had been issued against him once again...We waited, worried and tense. Aurobindo thought for a while, for a few seconds only. Then he said 'I shall go to Chandernagore'. Rambabu asked 'Right now?'

Aurobindo replied ‘Yes, right now, at this moment’. Aurobindo stood up and exited from the house accompanied by Rambabu⁷.

Even though we get a precise account of the happenings of that night in the writing of Sureshchandra, who was a close confidant of Sri Aurobindo, the date is not known. Sureshchandra writes ‘It was February 1910, might be in the middle or towards the end of the month⁸. Purani, the biographer of Sri Aurobindo, merely said ‘February 1910’⁹ without mentioning any specific date. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publications, too, followed the same path ‘1910 February; leaves Calcutta for Chandernagore in French India’¹⁰. Nagendranath Guha Roy, who was closely connected with the arrangements for Sri Aurobindo’s departure to Pondicherry, also wrote along the same lines – (in February 1910) Sri Aurobindo all at once went to an untraced destination¹¹. Some were a little more specific than this. Peter Heehs writes mid-February¹². Srinivas Iyengar mentions ‘towards the close of February’¹³. According to the statement of Sri Aurobindo’s father-in-law, it was the end of February or beginning of March¹⁴.

Regarding the date of Sri Aurobindo’s departure to Chandernagore, everyone assumed it in his own way and till now the same trend is continuing. Peter Heehs commented that the issue ‘has long been a subject of speculation’¹⁵.

We can now come to those who sought to establish their views on the date based on their arguments.

According to Girija Shankar Roychoudhury¹⁶, it was

- a) end of February
- b) in the last week of February
- c) later part of February
- d) when the journal *Dharma* published (on 16 Falgun) the news of death of hanging of Birendranath Dasgupta, Girija Shankar commented: This happened only a week before Aurobindo left for Chandernagore.
- e) There is also a poem –
the bugle horn of destiny sounded
the escape was not an escape.

A profound mystery lies concealed in the self-contradictory words ‘escape was not an escape’. Possibly two or three days prior to Sri Aurobindo’s departure to Chandernagore the writing ‘*Bhagabat Darshan*’ (vision of the Divine) appeared in *Dharma* of 16 Falgun. According to the conclusion of Girija Shankar, the day of Sri Aurobindo’s departure was 16 Falgun or towards 28 February.

In determining the date of Sri Aurobindo’s journey to Chandernagore, the findings of Prabrajika Muktiprana and Prabrajika Atmaprana, the two biographers of Sister Nivedita, deserve special consideration. They did not speak of a specific date but gave a hint of it, linking Nivedita’s journey to Chandernagore with Sri Aurobindo’s stay there. Muktiprana writes ‘in February Sri Aurobindo departed for Chandernagore’¹⁷. Nivedita went to Chandernagore again on 28 February¹⁸. It appears that there was no meeting between Nivedita and Sri Aurobindo before the latter’s departure to Chandernagore. That is why Nivedita was anxious and went to Chandernagore on 14 February, the day of Saraswati Puja. She had to consult Sri Aurobindo on the matter of running the journal *Karmayogin*. Besides she was worried for him... There could not have been any other purpose of her going to Chandernagore on two days¹⁹.

Almost identical facts have been stated by Prabrajika Atmaprana, who, however, is a little more specific in her assertion that because Nivedita left for Chandernagore on the day of Saraswati Puja after the Puja function was over, Sri Aurobindo’s departure must have been prior to that²⁰.

If the versions of these two biographers of Nivedita are correct, Sri Aurobindo must have reached Chandernagore at least before 14 February; but that is not possible, because it is a proven fact that he was in Calcutta on the evening of 15 February²¹. Besides, quoting from Nivedita’s writings Peter Heehs has established quite reasonably that Nivedita could have gone to Chandernagore to meet her own requirements²².

The works of two of those who took pains to determine the date of Sri Aurobindo’s departure to Chandernagore need special mention. Uma Mukhopadhyaya’s name needs to come first. Thirty years ago from now she came to a conclusion on the basis of a letter of Motilal Roy. In that letter to Nagandrakumar Guha Roy, Motilal wrote that Sri Aurobindo reached Chandernagore the day after the Saraswati Puja. That year Saraswati Puja was held on 14 February. So Sri Aurobindo must have set foot in Chandernagore on the 15th²³. But that is not possible, because it is a proven fact that Sri Aurobindo was in Calcutta on the evening of 15 February. Uma Mukhopadhyaya did not know at the time of publication of her research paper that Sri Aurobindo was present at Chandpal Ghat on 15th afternoon to welcome his colleagues.

Peter Heehs needs to be mentioned next. The most laborious work in this respect has been done by him. According to him, Sri Aurobindo’s

‘Meshomasay’ (husband of mother’s sister), Krishnakumar Mitra, returned to Calcutta after serving his punishment term in exile. Two functions were organised in his honour on 15th and 19th. Sri Aurobindo was not present in any of them. Peter Heehs guessed that Sri Aurobindo’s absence at these two assemblies meant that he was not in Calcutta at that time. ‘Sri Aurobindo’s absence must have been conspicuous then, and it is significant now in the light of his departure from Calcutta’²⁴. According to Peter, since it was certain that Sri Aurobindo was in Calcutta on 15th evening, his departure from Calcutta must have been between 15th and 19th²⁵. In order to vindicate the date, Peter took recourse to the writings of Krishnakumar and his daughter, Basanti. Krishnakumar writes ‘After his release from prison, Aurobindo stayed in our house for almost a year. Only a few days after I came back, he did not return to our house one night... Finally I came to know that he was staying in Chandernagore’²⁶. Basanti Chakraborty writes ‘In February 1910, my father (Krishnakumar Mitra) came back to Calcutta after the termination of his exile term. A few days after that, Aurobindo left our house and went into hiding...’²⁷. On the basis of Basanti Chakraborty’s words ‘a few days after’ and Krishnakumar’s ‘only a few days after’, Peter came to the conclusion that a few days could mean three or four days, perhaps a week, but not much more²⁸ but it is not that ‘a few days’ would not mean ten days. Whatever it might be, Peter wanted to come to a conclusion on the basis of Basanti Chakraborty’s writings. Basanti let us know that one day a few people came to see Sri Aurobindo and Sri Aurobindo went out without taking his food. Peter thought that there could be only one incident which could take him away from the lunch table and that was to welcome his colleague Shyamsundar. Shyamsundar Chakraborty’s steamer anchored at the ghat at 4 or 5.15 p.m. Peter presumed that Sri Aurobindo went to Shyampukur Lane from there and left Calcutta around 8 p.m. He put forward two reasons for this assumption. One, it would be in tune with Basanti’s writing, because ‘one is not, after all, called away from the table every evening’ and two, ‘the morning of 16 February would then be morning of the day after the Puja. Here Peter’s assertion is built up on his conception of subjects like Puja, counting of days linking with sunrise according to Indian custom etc.’²⁹. He thus concluded, ‘I believe that Sri Aurobindo left Calcutta on the evening of 15 February 1910’³⁰. However, bearing in mind the responsibility of a historian, he commented elsewhere that it was ‘probably the

fifteenth’³¹. Peter knew that his view would not be accepted by all, so he wrote ‘The date of Sri Aurobindo’s departure for Chandernagore may never be established with absolute certainty...’³². So according to Uma Mukhopadhyaya, Sri Aurobindo reached Chandernagore on 15 February and 16 February according to Peter Heehs.

Keeping in mind the endeavour of the aforesaid researchers, we may now proceed further. We have to think of people who could have told the exact date. Sri Aurobindo’s name would certainly come first. He merely said ‘This happened in February...’³³. We could not find any writing of Bijoy Kumar Nag and Hem Sen, nor did we get any writing of Birendranath Ghosh, Charuchandra Roy and Srish Chandra. It is only Motilal’s writing that gives a date.

It is true that one has to be careful in accepting the date, year etc. appearing in Motilal’s writings because there are variations in different writings. He writes ‘towards the end of Magh’ in ‘*Jeevan Sangini*’³⁴. In ‘*Yugpurush Sri Aurobindo*’ he says ‘in the last week of February’³⁵. Again, in the essay ‘*Sri Aurobindo Katha*’ he writes ‘in the month of Magh’³⁶. On the other hand in the book ‘*Aamar Dekha Biplob O Biplobi*’, he says ‘the boat arrived at Raneer Ghat in Chandernagore one morning in the month of Falgun’³⁷. One has to be cautious about such contradictions, but it is important to bring every bit of information given by Motilal Roy within the ambit of discussion, because he was one of the principal sources of information in respect of Sri Aurobindo’s stay in Chandernagore.

It is surprising that neither Uma Mukhopadhyaya nor Peter Heehs made a mention of one of the writings of Motilal Roy where he informed that Sri Aurobindo arrived in Chandernagore on 21 February³⁸. This date, mentioned by Motilal Roy, does not find a place in the writing of anyone connected with Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Madhav Pandit wrote in one place ‘Motilal dates his connexion with Sri Aurobindo from February 21, 1910’³⁹. This comment indirectly tells of Sri Aurobindo’s coming to Chandernagore and his direct contact with Motilal Roy. From yet another source⁴⁰, it is known that Nolini Kanta Gupta, too, accepted with seriousness the date 21 February as stated by Motilal.

A certain writer finds support of the date 21 February in some other writing of Motilal Roy... Motilal jumped headlong with all his strength in the Saraswat festival; he had no contact with his family for four or five days. Motilal re-engaged himself in his family matters after the festival was over. Motilal writes

'I devoted myself in my family matters with much enthusiasm. However, I decided that Sunday should be a day of rest. Because it was my intention that the literary meet which was formed in my house on that day should not be discontinued' (*Jeevan Sangini* p.101). 20 February was a Sunday. It is reasonable to assume that Motilal could duly complete his task associated with the library meet. Had there been any hindrance, Motilal would surely have mentioned it. Based on these data, it can be said with certainty that Aurobindo arrived at Chandernagore on Monday the 21st February⁴¹. The quoted portion does not conform to Motilal's remarks – 'it was the day after the Saraswati Puja' – unless the literary meet continued up to 21 February. We would come to that issue later. For now let us recollect that Motilal and his associates mentioned this date time and again on the issue of Sri Aurobindo's setting foot at Chandernagore. In Motilal's writing we find '...Sri Aurobindo started journeying on the path of his attainment in this *Kalisadhana* (arduous ascetic practice towards realisation of Kali the Divine) on 21 February 1910'⁴². Based on his writing, his successor secretary of Prabartak Sangha wrote 'Sri Aurobindo was completely engrossed in contemplative meditation for 40 days from 21 February to 31 March 1910'⁴³. In the preface to the book '*Light to Superlight*' this date has been similarly accepted '...we would date on Sri Roy's (Motilal) authority on 21 February'⁴⁴. The short biographical note of Sangha Guru Motilal Roy kept in the Ashram room of Prabartak Sangha mentions: '21 February 1910 – Sri Aurobindo's arrival and stay in hiding in the house of the Roys'⁴⁵. One of the secretaries of Prabartak Sangha also expressed the opinion that 'it is on 21 February 1910 that Sri Aurobindo came to Chandernagore in the house of Prabartak Sangha Guru Motilal Roy's house...this is the correct date'⁴⁶.

The problem lies in the fact that the letter which Motilal Roy wrote to Nagaendrakumar Guha Roy says 'Sri Aurobindo arrived in February 1910, the day after the Saraswati Puja'⁴⁷. If this statement is correct, then the date happens to be 15th, but Motilal said with certitude that it was 21 February. On enquiring with Prabartak Sangha on whether there has been any deviation in the statement at different stages – letter to essay, essay to the published book – it is learnt that there is no copy of Motilal's letter to Nagendrakumar as also of the manuscript of the book '*Yugpurush Sri Aurobindo*'⁴⁸. To be certain of the matter, the writing, which appeared in the form of an essay in the journal *Prabasi*, was checked. There also it was found that Sri Aurobindo arrived in

Chandernagore on 21 February⁴⁹. As Nagendrakumar reproduced the letter in his book, the sentence remained unaltered⁵⁰. The difficulty in accepting the date 21 February is the statement which Motilal himself made elsewhere that it was the day after the Saraswati Puja. Peter Heehs writes '...the connexion between Saraswati Puja and Sri Aurobindo is clear'⁵¹.

It appears that the confusion may be cleared if we browse through news reports on Saraswati Puja in Chandernagore that year. On the occasion of the Puja, Saraswati Festival was held for a few days that year, an event that has been associated with Saraswati Puja. Motilal writes 'Saraswati Puja was organised on a massive scale under the direction of Charuchandra Roy...Charu Babu formed a working committee comprising Narendranath Ghosh, Ashutosh Neogi, Srishchandra Ghosh, Jyotish Chandra Ghosh and myself for holding this cultural Saraswati Puja. Thanks to his untiring efforts the function was held in a befitting manner in the site known to the citizens as *Karer Bagan* (the garden of the Kars) in Baghbazar'⁵². Motilal further writes elsewhere 'holding of this famed Saraswat Festival in Chandernagore after the murder of Samsul Alam was viewed humorously by the revolutionaries as an attempt to whitewash the revolutionary acts of Charuchandra done in the past'⁵³. Also in the writing of the distinguished revolutionary Narendranath Bandopadhyay of Chandernagore, there is some information about this festival. 'In that year (1910) Bandhab Sammilani organised an exhibition on literature and indigenous products on the occasion of the annual Saraswati Puja...On being informed of the exhibition by Narendranath and Srishchandra, Charuchandra took charge of the exhibition and organised it in *Karer Bagan* on Chandernagore Station Road'⁵⁴.

Sri Aurobindo once said 'I knew that I was to be handed over to somebody in whose house there was Saraswati Puja'⁵⁵. There is an indication regarding the house in the writing of Narendranath Bandopadhyaya. Even after the exhibition was over, the key of the *Karer Bagan* where Saraswat festival was held was in the possession of Srishchandra during Aurobindo's stay in hiding. With the intention of keeping Aurobindo Babu in that garden house, one evening Narendranath went to the house of Srishchandra...and decided without the knowledge of Charuchandra that Aurobindo Babu would be shifted to the garden after a day⁵⁶.

Now the question arises how long did the festival continue after the Saraswati Puja? That it continued at least up to 21 February is confirmed in the recorded

events in the life of Motilal Roy. It is seen there. ‘21 February – Saraswat Festival at the initiative of Charuchandra Roy. Reading out of the first printed essay ‘*Vani Vandana*’, written by Sangha Guru at the festival’⁵⁷. keeping in mind that the festival centring Saraswati Puja continued at least up to 21 February, it would not be unreasonable to accept 21 February as the date of Sri Aurobindo’s arrival in Chandernagore.

We now wish to mention about a writing which would indicate with certainty that Sri Aurobindo’s departure from Calcutta on way to Chandernagore was in an evening around 21 February. At the beginning of this treatise, we came across an account of Sri Aurobindo’s departure from the house at No 4, Shyampukur Lane to Chandernagore. Sri Sureshchandra Chakraborty, an eyewitness of the event was with Sri Aurobindo on the same boat. After 34 years he reminisced ‘The boat was set free. We floated on the river Bhagirathi. On reaching the surface of the river, we understood that it was the brighter fortnight, the smiling moonlight all around cast a sparkling lustre on the breaking waves. I did not know what lunar day it was, perhaps it was

The eleventh night in
The bright fortnight
A Sleepless moon
Was rowing the dream ferry boat
All alone⁵⁸.

Our boat moved on. We know not what the oarsman or the boatman thought. Such a moonlit night, the nature bathed in delight and the river Bhagirathi resplendent in joy!’⁵⁹.

The description of the moonlight may give us an indication of the date. There cannot be such bright moonlight on Sri Panchami or ‘*Shukla Sasthi*’ (the sixth night of the bright fortnight). After a lapse of many years, people may forget the year and the date but the association with nature – winter, summer, monsoon, storm or moonlight or darkness – all these remain etched in memory. It happened with Sureshchandra also. He could not remember the date but could remember the ‘bright fortnight’, ‘smiling moonlight casting a sparkling lustre on the rippling waves’. Such a moonlight may appear only after the *Dasami* night (tenth night after the new moon). It is amazing that Sureschandra, who was a lover of poetry, expressed his feelings in the words of Rabindranath where there is mention of ‘*Shukla ekadashi*’. We will wonder when we know that 21

February 1910 was such a ‘*shukla ekadashi*’. This fact is not a certain proof of the date, but of all the dates so far identified as the probable ones, 21 February appears to be the most acceptable.

21 February is the birthday of the Mother. If indeed Sri Aurobindo left Calcutta on this night or reached Chandernagore at dawn, then that would seem to be ‘a sanction and seal’⁶⁰ of the divine power on the chronicle of the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as has been stated by Sri Aurobindo when free India was born on his birthday.

For facts in respect of Sri Aurobindo’s arrival and stay at Chandernagore, one has to specially depend on Motilal Roy’s ‘*Jeevan Sangini*’ and other books and Narendranath Bandopadhyay’s ‘*Rakta Biplaber ek Adhyay*’. But on many issues the writings of these two writers are contradictory. Avoiding controversy, it can be said that Sri Aurobindo arrived in Chandernagore at dawn. Sureshchandra, his companion in the boat journey, writes ‘the boat sailed throughout the night and arrived at Chandernagore at the break of dawn when there was darkness still. Sri Aurobindo sent Biren from the boat to Mr. Charuchandra Roy, an eminent citizen of Chandernagore. But Mr. Roy expressed his inability to help Sri Aurobindo in any way’⁶¹. We learn from the writing of Narendranath Bandopadhyay that Srishchandra Ghosh got the news of Sri Aurobindo’s arrival from Charuchandra Roy’s house and advised Narendranath about it all⁶². But there was difficulty in sheltering Sri Aurobindo in Narendranath’s house, as Upendranath Chattopadhyay, Narendranath’s maternal uncle, was due to arrive there at that time. Both of them discussed the issue and decided that Narendranath would take charge of Arabinda Babu after the departure of his maternal uncle. Meanwhile it would be advisable to keep him in the custody of Motilal Roy, if it was feasible to do so⁶³.

What happened after this may be gathered from the words of Motilal Roy. ‘One morning towards the end of the month Magh (Jan-Feb) as I was going out to my workplace after having my breakfast, one of my friends (Srishchandra Ghosh, a revolutionary) hurriedly drew me aside and said ‘Have you heard what has happened?’ My friend continued ‘Arabinda Babu has come to Chandernagore. He would have gone away by now – it is very unfortunate... I heard that he sent a message to that place at 4 a.m. Now it is past 6.30’⁶⁴. After that Motilal quickly came to Raneer Ghat in search of Sri Aurobindo. In that ‘ghat’ a single boat from Calcutta was dancing on the waves of the river’⁶⁵.

Motilal went inside the boat and saw Sri Aurobindo. According to him ‘he had the same look as I saw him in the Hooghly provincial conference, now lying in the boat’⁶⁶. Motilal escorted the boat to a ghat near his house. He writes ‘I had to take him to a ghat not frequented by boats, lest bathers could have a look at him. . . .some noticed it, some others did not. I took him to my drawing room and felt relieved after getting him seated in an arm-chair’⁶⁷.

The few weeks that he stayed in Chandernagore were spent in secrecy. Motilal Roy writes ‘Sri Aurobindo made it known that he would stay here in hiding, nobody should come to know the news of his arrival’⁶⁸. Motilal Roy had to take special precaution to do this. Apprehending that news might leak out if Sri Aurobindo was sheltered in his own house, he took him to a friend’s house on the very first night. The next day passed in anxiety. I saw him in that friend’s house after evening. He told me ‘Please take me out of this place, I could not sleep last night’⁶⁹. Motilal then took Sri Aurobindo to his house again. Sri Aurobindo possibly stayed in Motilal’s house for four or five days⁷⁰. Those who were in charge of Sri Aurobindo’s stay did not consider it safe to keep him in any one place for a long time. Motilal writes ‘he was shifted elsewhere in the apprehension that people would come to know of it if he stayed in one place for long’⁷¹. According to pre-planned arrangements, Motilal returned home after shifting Sri Aurobindo, safe and sound⁷², to a specified location at the southern end of the town. Motilal further writes ‘I was relieved of the heavy burden of responsibility put on my shoulders. I felt at ease’⁷³. It may not be out of context to recollect here that Motilal occupied a permanent place of reverence in the heart of devotees by his acceptance of the opportunity of sheltering Sri Aurobindo, but he did not shoulder the prime responsibility of Sri Aurobindo’s stay at Chandernagore. His own words bear testimony to this. When Sri Aurobindo was being shifted elsewhere from his house, he wrote on the matter ‘I even had no intention to know where he was being shifted’⁷⁴. He wrote further ‘I did not feel it necessary to find out what happened to him. I used to get information about him being shifted from one location to another, who was deputed to be with him and so on’⁷⁵. We are greatly surprised to see him writing ‘I was startled. It is about a month since I saw him’⁷⁶. However, Motilal went to see Sri Aurobindo towards the end of his stay in Chandernagore. It was about the time of his departure to Pondicherry. According to Motilal, ‘All on a sudden I got busy in the arrangements for his departure’⁷⁷.

Motilal’s writings apart, even on the basis of Narendranath’s writings it is not possible to say now with certainty at which locations and for how many days Sri Aurobindo stayed at Chandernagore. Avoiding controversy and co-relating the works of many others, it can be said that he stayed in Narendranath’s house for one night after leaving Motilal’s house⁷⁸. He stayed in the garden house of the Kars after this. About the event of shifting Sri Aurobindo to this garden Narendranath wrote ‘Srishchandra forbade entering the garden through the gate on the main road. In a narrow lane at the back of the garden, a portion of the wall was in a broken state. While entering the garden in the dark through that location, Sri Aurobindo and Narendranath stumbled over each other. Arabinda Babu smiled and said ‘I see, finally we are destined to die in an accident, thanks to the English!’⁷⁹

He was sheltered finally, after his hiding in *Karer Bagan* and a few other locations in the Coolie Line by turn, in a room in Nichupatty near Laxmiganj Bazar near Jagannath Bari. On this issue, Motilal writes ‘Perceiving that the place (*Karer Bagan*) was much too exposed, he started staying in the northern part of the town in a place known as *Gulir Adda* (a haunt of opium addicts) attached to the Jagannath Bati’⁸⁰. Narendranath writes ‘Arabinda Babu stayed in Nichupatty also in Laxmiganj for a few days. In accordance with the arrangements made by Basanta Kumar, Sudarshan accepted the responsibility of looking after him’⁸¹.

Of Sudarshan Chattopadhyay, Motilal writes ‘This gentleman worked in the mill. In order to keep the stay of Sri Aurobindo a secret he used to lock the main gate at nine in the morning and get back home in the evening. Foodstuff was kept for Sri Aurobindo. He spent the whole day all alone’⁸².

We have some information about the food Sri Aurobindo ate during his stay in different places. While staying in Motilal Roy’s house, he used to eat food brought from shops. The impure food cooked in ghee provided by the shops was gulped down without hesitation⁸³. Later when Motilal brought him back from his friend’s house, his wife served lunch to Sri Aurobindo by offering him her own plate of food and arranged for his dinner also⁸⁴. All of these had to be done in order to keep the presence of Sri Aurobindo a secret. Narendranath writes ‘In the initial phase for a day or two, Narendranath used to go to Sri Aurobindo and serve him food according to arrangements made by Srishchandra. At that time, Arabinda Babu was staying in a small room by the side of the

corridor in Moti Babu's house⁸⁵. We further know from Narendranath's writing 'In deference to the wish of Arabinda Babu during his stay in the thatched room (the thatched room of the late Ramdayal Chattopadhyay in the Halderpara locality), arrangements for his milk and fruits were made. Principal meals used to be supplied from Narendranath's house'⁸⁶. From such isolated pieces of news, we get the account of his talks with various persons. Motilal writes 'He used to give lessons on yoga during the whole of the noon... In the night, my friend of whom I have mentioned earlier used to come and discuss politics with him'⁸⁷. During this period, he made acquaintance with Upendranath Chattopadhyay (Narendranath's uncle) who was connected with Servants of India Society⁸⁸. Narendranath, too, let us know the subjects on which Sri Aurobindo counselled him. His sadhana, his life style, his attempted revolutionary activities – all featured in them. The foremost of those words that Narendranath recollected were 'Remember always the teachings of the Gita, that is only what I can tell you'⁸⁹.

In this way, the stay in hiding in different places in Chandernagore was coming to a close. Sri Aurobindo had contact with Sukumar Mitra, his cousin, by letters exchanged through messengers. He was the person who sent clothes and other items of necessity to Sri Aurobindo. It was to him that Sri Aurobindo made it known, towards the end of March, that he wanted to go to Pondicherry⁹⁰. Narendranath writes, 'According to arrangements made in Calcutta it was decided to send him to Pondicherry on board the steamer Dupleix. By boat he was transported from Chandernagore to Agarpara Ghat in the custody of Amarendranath'⁹¹.

Whatever confusion there might be in determining the date of his arrival in Chandernagore, the day of his departure is known with certainty – it is 31 March 1910. He set out for Calcutta from Burai Chanditala Ghat. Sudarshan Chatopadhyay and Srishchandra Ghosh were his companions in the boat this time. On this issue, Uma Mukhopadhyay wrote about one Satya Karmakar who told her that he was also with Srishchandra⁹². But Satya Karmakar does not feature in the writing of anyone else.

Motilal was present at the time of Sri Aurobindo's departure⁹³. According to him 'It was near about the beginning of the third quarter of the night. There was silence everywhere, only the faint sounds of nightfaring birds could be heard. A half moon was floating in the sky. The earth was flooded with

moonlight...I kept standing on the bank. He boarded the boat along with my other friends. The splashing sound of the plying of oars was heard, the boat sailed further and further away'⁹⁴.

The phase of his stay in hiding in Chandernagore is very important in the life of Sri Aurobindo. However, the degree of importance has been assessed by many people in many ways based on the way we attempt to conceive his aim in life. Annada Shankar Roy wrote 'Chandernagore played a historic role in Sri Aurobindo's life. He moved to Pondicherry via French ruled Chandernagore'⁹⁵. Sri Aurobindo spoke of Pondicherry as 'my cave of tapasya'⁹⁶. In that cave he strove for and dreamt of an immortal life for man. Rabindranath found similarity of his appearance at that time with that of an 'ascetic absorbed in meditation in a mountain'⁹⁷. This image of Sri Aurobindo as an idol engaged in asceticism was revealed in his phase of life in Pondicherry which was hidden in the revolutionary Aurobindo Ghosh in the pre-Pondicherry phase of his life. Chandernagore is the land of transition where he set up his seat of intense and secluded meditation. In Sri Aurobindo's own words, he 'plunged entirely into solitary meditation and ceased all other activity'⁹⁸. Motilal depicted, in his own style, 'Sri Aurobindo arrived in my house in a state of trance. He has surrendered himself entirely to God. It appeared that he would utter a word only when someone would enter into conversation with him'⁹⁹. This is but one aspect of his sadhana; on the other side, we know that he was conscious about the practical aspects as he interacted with the persons who were managing his 'affairs (his stay and departure to Pondicherry). He was advising Sukumar Mitra and giving him directions on many matters connected to his going to Pondicherry'¹⁰⁰. There was even a touch of humour in his talks. We may recollect the incident, as narrated by Narendranath, that occurred while he was being moved to '*Karer Bagan*'. "In a two-storied house in Chandernagore, at the crossing of Padripara, something was taking place with much pomp. Everybody was charmed with the genial demeanour of Arabinda Babu, but the glint of humour in his disposition was not known to Narendranath earlier. Seeing the pomp and grandeur, he smiled and said 'I see one meal of yours could have been saved. It is not a bad idea to collect a plate of food from here'.¹⁰¹ "In his outwardly normal disposition he 'remained in secret entirely engaged in sadhana''.¹⁰²

Sri Aurobindo's arrival in Chandernagore and his decision to move to Pondicherry from there is not the result of any fore-planning or mental deliberation. His taking up this seat of sadhana was the outcome of an *Adesh*.

According to his own words, while staying in the office of Karmayogin when he heard about the search (by the police) and of the possibility of his arrest, 'he suddenly received an *adesa* to go to Chandernagore and carried it out immediately',¹⁰³. He said '...departure was the result of a sudden decision, taken on the strength of an *adesa* from above',¹⁰⁴.

'I suddenly received a command from above, in a voice well known to me, in these words; Go to Chandernagore',¹⁰⁵, said he.

And it was in Chandernagore that he received another command to go to Pondicherry. To the question why he chose Pondicherry as his field of sadhana, he replied, 'it was by an *Adesh*... command from above',¹⁰⁶.

'It was the inner voice',¹⁰⁷ said he. On being asked if there was not a chance of error in his interpretation he firmly said, 'It was impossible to make a mistake about or disobey the voice',¹⁰⁸.

Regarding the command from above, he referred to the prevailing circumstances at that point of time and said that when he went to Chandernagore secretly, a few of his friends were thinking of sending him to France and he was also contemplating what was to be done next. 'Then I heard the *Adesh* to go to Pondicherry',¹⁰⁹. When asked why to Pondicherry, he replied 'I could not question. It was Sri Krishna's *Adesh*. I had to obey',¹¹⁰.

A few sentences of Nishikanto are bound to come to mind.

Whom did you bring in here

In your dalliance from beyond the sea?

Light-dark complexioned, yet beautiful thou art,

Captivating with the fair flute¹¹¹

The play that enacted before man the dream of a marvellous dawn, had its initiation in Chandernagore where he stepped into another dawn. The phase of his stay in Chandernagore was a novel chapter in the play of life of Sri Aurobindo – a life which, according to the Mother, was 'a decisive action direct from the Supreme',¹¹².

That is why the mystery of the *Adesh* cannot be explained by external facts or data. Two sentences from *Savitri*, the epic of Sri Aurobindo, may come to our aid in this respect :

All was the working of an ancient plan,¹¹³

A way proposed by an unerring guide

The 'unerring guide' bound Chandernagore in the play of life of Sri Aurobindo.

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16. *Sri Aurobindo O Banglar Swadeshi Yug*. 1st ed. 1956. (a) Preface by the author (b) p.799 (c) p.826 (d) p.833 (e) p.833
17. *Bhagini Nivedita*. 1st ed, p.406
18. Ibid
19. Ibid p.408
20. Sister Nivedita of Ramkrishna-Vivekananda. 2nd ed, 1967, p.221
21. *Nirbasiter Pratyabartan* : Last Tuesday at 4 p.m. Sri Shyamsundar Chakraborty and Sri Satischandra Chattopadhyay arrived in Calcutta by the Rangoon Mail steamer 'Bharat'. Srijut Aurobindo Ghosh and friends and relatives of Shyamsundar Babu and Satis Babu were present at the Chandpal Ghat to welcome them. *Bharatiya Sambad*, p.11; *Dharma*, 9 Falgun, 1316. 3 Falgun, Tuesday was 15 February.
22. In December 1910 and January 1911 Nivedita, then abroad, wrote of her intention to stay in Chandernagore when she returned to India. It is probable that she had made contacts there before she left the country in October 1910. SAAR, Dec. 1984, p.241

23. How Sri Aurobindo absconded to Pondicherry. Uma Mukherjee, *People's Path*, Sep. 1964, p.54
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37. *Amar dekha Biplob O Biplobi*. Motilal Roy. 2nd ed, p.44
38. Op. cit 35, p.33
39. Sri Aurobindo. MP Pandit. Aug, 1983, p.264
40. From the diary of Sri Phani Roy of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, it is learnt that '...he (Nolini Kanta Gupta) is trying to collect detailed and authentic data regarding Sri Aurobindo's leaving Calcutta. He could get the correct date from the writing of Motilal Roy, who wrote that Sri Aurobindo reached Chandernagore the day after the Saraswati Puja. Saraswati Puja was held on 21 February. That day he started from house at 8 p.m.. The boat sailed off at 9.30 p.m. On 22nd, he reached Chandernagore at 4 a.m.' In the above-quoted portion, many fallacies would be evident if we collate them with the facts given in this booklet. But what is important is mention of the date 21 February.
41. *Sri Aurobinder Chandannagare Atmagopan O Pondicherry Palayan*. Kalidas Mukhopadyay Alekhya, 20th year, 2nd-3rd issue, pp.129-130
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45. Collected by the author from Prabartak Sangha Griha in Jan. 1990
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47. Op. cit 11, p.1623
48. Op. cit 46
49. *Chandannagare Sri Aurobindo*. Motilal Roy, *Prabasi*, Kartick, 1358 B.S, p.86
50. *Mahayogi Sri Aurobindo*. Nagendrakumar Guha Roy. 1370 B.S. ed, p.92
51. Op. cit 14, p.22
52. Op. cit 37, p. 42
53. Op. cit 35, p.34
54. *Rakta Biplaber Ek Adhyay*. Narendranath Bandopadhyay, p.55
55. Talks with Sri aurobindo. Nirodbaran, vol.3, 1973, p.69
56. Op. cit 54, p.56
57. *Sanghaguru Sri Motilal* (Record of events in the life of Motilal Roy). Prabartak Publishers. 1st ed, 1966, pp.15-16
58. Op. cit 7, pp.38-39
59. Ibid p. 42
60. Messages – The Fifteenth of August 1947. SABCL, vol. 26, p.400
61. Op. cit. 7, p.42
62. Op. cit. 54, pp.53-54
63. Ibid
64. Op. cit. 34, p.102
65. Ibid, p.103
66. Ibid, p.104
67. Ibid
68. Ibid, p.105
69. Ibid, p.109
70. If, according to Motilal Roy's words, Sri Aurobindo arrived on 21 February, then it counts up to 40 days up to 31 March. Elsewhere in *Yugpurush Sri Aurobindo*, he wrote (p.36) 'He went to Gondalbasa from my house towards the end of February'. Again he wrote that he did not see Sri Aurobindo for about a month. On the other hand, towards the end of Sri Aurobindo's stay in Chandernagore, Motilal met him, but Sri Aurobindo was not staying in his house at that time. It can therefore be assumed that Sri Aurobindo stayed in Motilal's house for 4-5 days.
71. Op. cit. 34, p.114
72. Ibid
73. Ibid

74. Ibid
75. Ibid, p.123
76. Ibid, p.125
77. Ibid, p. 128
78. ‘He who was waiting for us at the southern end of the town’, to whom Motilal handed over Sri Aurobindo, must be Narendranath Bandopadhyay. Narendranath resided at the southern end of the town.
79. Op. cit. 54, p.58
80. Op. cit. 34, p.126
81. Op. cit. 54, p.58
82. Op. cit. 34, p.126
83. Ibid, p.109
84. Ibid, p.112
85. Op. cit. 54, p.54
86. Ibid, p.55
87. Op. cit. 34, p.122
88. Op. cit. 54, p.56
89. Ibid, p.57
90. *Sri Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghosh*. Sukumar Mitra, Monthly *Basumati*, vol.31, 1359 B.S, pp.171-172
91. Op. cit. 54, pp.58-59
92. Op. cit. 23, p.51
93. Motilal was awoken from sleep by his friend who told him ‘He (Sri Aurobindo) wants to see you’. ‘I wrapped the end of my dhoti and accompanied him’ – *Jeevan Sangini*. 3rd ed, p.121
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This talk, originally given in Bengali, has been translated by Sri Kalyan Mukhopadhyaya

A New System Of National Education: Agenda For Change

Sachidananda Mohanty

There is an urgent need today for thinking through a new system of national education, commensurate with a globalised world. In most quarters, this need is seen in terms of the newly available job markets and rising economic opportunities for a mobile work force. It has logically meant the devaluation of traditional systems of knowledge such as the liberal arts, humanities and social sciences in favour of disciplines seen to drive the newer engines of techno-economic change.

Such a course, attractive but shortsighted, will be a colossal error. There is a gross inadequacy of thinking today regarding the current trend in globalisation. A proper understanding of the present challenges would require a critique of development models geared to the promotion of an oligarchy, clearly a prospect that has disturbing life-style consequences for large masses in post-colonial societies.

The right education for the global citizen, I argue, could come by eschewing the so called “global” models, uniform in approach. Rather, we need pedagogic methods and tools that are pluralistic, sensitive to the needs of regions, societies and cultures. Finally, I suggest that one way this could be accomplished is by the use of some of the key tenets of spiritual thinkers like Sri Aurobindo based on his philosophy of learning in the context of the emerging international order.

II

The traditional systems of education in the East or the West had generally seen merit in creating a context for learning that was free from the pressures of immediate social or political exigencies. Although largely class bound, catering to the elites of different kinds, the best systems always prided themselves in

being idealistic. In point of fact, they served pragmatic as well as idealistic goals.

This idealistic–pragmatic balance in education worked fairly well in the West till the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the early part of the 19th century in Britain and in the continent. The invention of the steam engine, the development of railroads and mercantile activity aided by an overseas colonial empire, led to the rise of laissez-faire capitalism and the concept of social Darwinism.

The new development was the radically new way intellectual legitimacy was sought to be provided, based on quasi-scientific ground of the assumed inequality among men. Aided by a fortuitous set of circumstances including the right to produce and inherit private property, the upper class European male fashioned out a system of education, guaranteed to promote inequity at home and abroad.

In the light of this development, it is quite amazing that some of the leading Victorian intellectuals propounded a system of education avowedly universal and democratic, a rhetoric of progress, exemplified in the writings of James and John Stuart Mill, Cardinal Newman, Charles Dickens, Thomas Carlyle as well as Utilitarians like Jeremy Bentham and others. The idea was to spread the enlightenment principle at home and abroad so that masses of the ordinary people everywhere could be brought under the benign influence of what Mathew Arnold called “sweetness and light”, a throwback to the earlier Hellenic principle. Newman in his *Idea of the University*, originally delivered in 1852 as a discourse for the establishment of a Catholic University in Ireland, spelt out a system of liberal education

I have gone through at some length the trajectory of Western education to underline that the pragmatic-idealistic balance of learning was irrevocably lost after the Industrial Revolution in England. While F.R. Leavis, T.S. Eliot and other humanists decried the techno-Benthamite civilisation, there was precious little in the West that offered a radical challenge to the dominant paradigm.

III

What then are our options in an era of late capitalism, which has exacerbated the idealistic-pragmatic divide and effectively witnessed the dethronement of all socialistic experiments? What system shall we in India fashion out that could effectively challenge the neo-colonial and hegemonic West? The optimists believe that the ‘India Shining Campaign’ is not entirely bereft of

truth; that today Indian intellectuals straddle across the globe in influential departments of study, that the Indian IT industry has outpaced the Chinese. The sooner Indian education gears itself to match the international expectations it is said, the better it is for our children!

But is this true? Aren't we at the risk of being part of the service industry of the advanced West which has begun to block outsourcing from the so-called third world even while singing the free market tune as manna from heaven?

Merely opposing the West in all fields including education is clearly not going to take us far. We need to work out an effective philosophy of education that is dynamic, forward looking, matching the needs of technology with the cultivation of the heart. In this sense, the UGC's newly introduced concept paper regarding the model University act appears to be flawed. It is partial in thinking and lacks conceptual clarity and an integral vision.

A massive overhaul of the system is not possible without a corresponding rise in budgetary resources for education. This can be achieved by vigorously pursuing peace making among our hostile neighbours. We could consequently cut our defence spending and manpower, reorient the defence to suit the newer requirements of our security environment and threat perception.

Secondly, we must involve the corporate sector for public philanthropy and welfare. Today such philanthropy is largely in the domain of religion. Indian business and industry, through the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) or Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce (FICC) must be made aware of their social responsibilities. Ultimately this could come through political pressure generated through citizen groups. Today organisations campaigning for better governance like the Lok Satta are in their infancy. What we need are more such groups and their ability to influence the political and business class for national education.

The new policy of National Education should steer clear of all doctrinaire approaches: religious or spiritual. It shall affirm freedom, flexibility and creativity in embracing the totality of the human self as the pivot of the new system of education. It shall eschew all artificial binaries like the sacred-secular and would seek to prevent the politicisation of religion by promoting the spiritual view of life that is non-divisive, non-sectarian and transcends the barriers of human ego.

In practical pedagogic terms, what would be the contours of such a system? Here are some:

In all spheres, the new system should attempt to bridge the gap between the elite and common schools, the State supported institutes vis-à-vis the elite private universities. The idea is not to pull down everything to a common level of mediocrity but to prepare vision documents, prioritise institutional goals within a reasonable time frame, fix rewards and disincentives and link the entire educational system to a national grid, while making adequate provision for regional/local variations. This means, for instance, that while syllabus could be local, national level tests in various disciplines, commonly administered, could determine students' skill and aptitude for higher studies.

Secondly, the new system should focus on the local, the regional, the national and the international/global in that order. Currently the process unfortunately is the reverse to the detriment of all.

At the school level, both in the State and private sector, the new policy shall suggest the strict use of the three language formula for all children from primary section onwards so that the elite is rooted to the ground realities constantly.

In the same manner, the school curriculum shall attempt a balance between the arts, aesthetics, music and the sciences. Institutes such as the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education and Rishi Valley School of the Krishnamurthy Foundation have shown the way.

At the College and University level for all the science, technology and business schools, it will be mandatory for students to register for courses in the humanities and social sciences.

Value education will occupy an important part in the new system. This will avoid instructions through sermons or doctrines both secular and religious. Instead, through imaginative modules, taught in a creative manner through student participation, children should be exposed to the nobility of human action, the virtue of selfless works, development of a national spirit free from jingoism or fanaticism, the importance of a decolonised mind, the growth of a national temper free from insularity and revivalism. They will also learn the value of dialogue and the significance of cooperative action.

They will learn the importance of competitive spirit for the sake of all round excellence. But they will relate this spirit to cooperative endeavours through the performance of many group tasks and social campaigns such as the spread of literary programs in the neighbourhood and districts. This will free the present

dominant mindset from greed for individual success anchored to a self-centred parasitical behaviour. The children will, in this sense, learn of India's rich pluralistic traditions, the Indic, the Islamic, the Buddhist, the Jain, the Sufi and the many orthodox and heterodox approaches, the Deshi and the Marga so that the achievement of the meritorious young is tempered by their sense of privilege, their responsibility towards the dispossessed many and their participation for the exciting nation building activity in India.

And finally the new system should actively promote physical culture as a co-curricular activity at the school and college education. The government and the corporate sector should be called upon to participate in the promotion of sports. Currently sports seems to be confined to the TV screen. This has to change if India is to have a trained manpower backed by all round physical fitness. In this sense, Swami Vivekananda's message to the Indian youth has not lost its relevance in today's context.

Quality education has always been perceived as the preserve of the few. We can ill afford this approach any longer. Promotion of islands of excellence in a sea of mediocrity and ignorance will surely be an invitation for disaster. Only an education, truly national in spirit, and wider in reach, a spiritualised education can avert this. It is time we put this into action for building a resurgent India.

The Theme Of Urvashi In The Indian Renaissance:

Madhusudan Datta, Rabindranath Tagore , Sri Aurobindo

(Continued from the previous issue)

Ranajit Sarkar

Rabindranath Tagore: (1861-1940) From Urvashi to Lakshmi.

The Poet's Mind

"I was born in 1861: that is not an important date of history, but it belongs to a great epoch in Bengal, when the currents of three movements had met in the life of our country."¹ This statement of Rabindranath can serve as the key-stone for understanding the working of his mind and its expression in the poems on the Urvashi-theme. The three movements belong to the re-awakening of the Bengali people and the revitalisation of their culture. The first movement was Rammohan's far-seeing vision and revolutionary effort "to reopen the channel of spiritual life which had been obstructed for many years by the sands and debris of creeds that were formal and materialistic, fixed in external practices lacking spiritual significance." The second was Bankim's literary revolution² that freed literature which "had been oppressed by a rigid rhetoric that choked its life and loaded it with ornaments that became its fetters". And the third movement, the rise of nationalism³ which "began to give voice to the mind of our people trying to assert their own personality." The last, too, was a revolutionary movement for "it set out with a great courage to deny and to oppose all pride in mere borrowings."⁴

All these three were at once revolutionary and creative movements. They broke and rejected old values in order to re-create new values and forms of spirituality, of literature and of national culture. Rabindranath, very early in his

life, was fired by this spirit of freedom and creative impulse. In his poetry and life we find frequently the symbolism of “the boundary”, *gandi*,⁵ which seems to have haunted him. Throughout his life he tried to overcome the sense of boundedness. This effort found expression in two ways: one, in the symbol of the traveller of the far-away; *dūrer yātri*; two, in the mystical presence of the infinite in the finite, *shimār mājhe ashīm*.

He once said that he “was constantly haunted by the nostalgic fancies of an exile.”⁶ He felt exiled and imprisoned in the boundaries of the school he attended for a few years,⁷ and in the limitations of creeds, customs and received ideas. His formal education was sporadic. In order to be free from the boundaries of home he insisted on going to school, but his great thirst for colour, music and the movements of life could not be satisfied there. Not at school, but at home, he found the necessary opportunity to discover poetry, music and art that could give him colour, music and the movements of life. He read Bengali - the works of Bankim and the Vaishnava poets - he read Sanskrit, he was fascinated by the rhythm, the colour and the life-vision of Kalidasa and by the liquid music of Jayadeva. He also learned English. His learning was not systematised. He could choose freely according to the demand of his imagination. Much later he wrote that he was fortunate he did not have “the kind of academic training which was considered proper for a boy of a respectable family.”⁸ Anyway he had his freedom.

It is not our objective to unravel the complex trends of the poet’s personality. He imbibed ideas and images, concepts and symbols from nature, from books and from his contact with a large number of people - artists, writers, musicians, philosophers and political and social activists. Describing the atmosphere in which he passed the formative years of his life he wrote, “Most of the members of my family had some gift - some were artists, some poets, some musicians and the whole atmosphere of our home was permeated with the spirit of creation. I had a deep sense, almost from the infancy, of the beauty of Nature, an intimate feeling of companionship with the trees and the clouds, and felt in tune with the musical touch of the seasons in the air. At the same time, I had a peculiar susceptibility to human kindness.”⁹

Rabindranath’s desire for freedom was less vehemently expressed than Madhusudan’s, for it developed in a climate propitious to freedom. This is not to minimise his sense of exile, the intensity of his yearning for the Beyond and the

Far-off. His forerunners, Rammohan, Madhusudan and Bankim had already prepared the ground on which the rebellious spirit could move forward unhindered. The achievements of these predecessors were in themselves immense, and a lesser mind than Rabindranath’s would have remained content in imitating and repeating those achievements.

He did not imitate the past, neither did he imitate what came from the “English text books”. He reinterpreted the past. He did not accept indiscriminately the interpretations of the works of ancient India either by orthodox commentators or by modernists. He knew that to fulfil the present the recognition of the past was essential,¹⁰ but that past had to be explored anew. Besides the new sense of the past he gathered also the new sense of the West. The romantic poets attracted him. His first visit to England, at the age of seventeen, gave him the opportunity to come closer to the spirit of English poetry. In order to seize all the implications of the Urvashi poems of Rabindranath we would have to follow closely the evolution of his mind at least up to the period of *Balākā* (1917). In relation to the Urvashi-theme we must take into consideration two poems, “*Ūrvasī*”, in *Chitrā* (1896) and “*Dui Nārī*”, in *Balākā*. The works - poems, plays, essays, stories, novels and criticisms - he published up to that period were already immense. We can only make a rapid survey of some of the ideas that have direct relevance to the understanding of these poems.

No estimate of Rabindranath’s poetry can afford to neglect the influence of the three revolutionary movements prevalent in Bengal in the early part of his life. All the three helped to form his mind but his personality gave a new meaning to the movements. Brahmo “spirituality”, in its origin, was rationalistic. But later joy and love added a new mystical and aesthetic dimension to it. Rabindranath was drawn by the Upanishadic vision of delight as the soul and essence of the world.¹¹ This sense of the joyful was fortified by the love he discovered in the Vaishnava poets like Chandidasa and Vidyapati. The sense of spirituality that he gradually developed may be characterised as the mystic-poetic apprehension of joy of which the expressions are beauty and love.

In his mind the “three movements” did not remain separate. The spirituality became poetical. The literary revolution too enlarged its boundaries. In his search for freedom he experimented with language and introduced new forms. Even though he did not fully recognise the value of Madhusudan’s contribution to the renewal of Bengali poetry, he carried the liberation of the language and

the poetic form further and he widened the field of metrical and rhythmical potentialities. Music, rhythm, colour and life-movement created new forms. Nature, the concrete image of beauty, pervaded his poetic imagination. The form itself became significant, and through the form the vision of nature appealed to the sensitive eye and through the eye to the very depths of the being. The sensuous beauty of nature and the sensuous love were not rejected in the name of spirituality, but sensuality was the concrete form of spirituality. Kalidasa and the Vaishnava poets helped him to arrive at this synthesis. About Vaishnava poems, he later wrote, "I must admit that the greater part of these lyrics was erotic and not quite suited to a boy just about to reach his teens. But my imagination was fully occupied with the beauty of their forms and the music of their words; and their breath, heavily laden with voluptuousness, passed over my mind without distracting it."¹² There were periods in his life when he denied the voluptuousness for a so-called mystical love. But his best poetry¹³ does not reject the physical; in the form and sense of the words the sensuous meets with the mystical.

The third movement, the sense of national value, merged with the others through the sense of beauty. One of the aspects of this movement, as Rabindranath saw it, was the incorporation of the past, "... we must not be indiscriminate in the rejection of the past".¹⁴ He accepted many truths of the past, both literary and spiritual. As the Upanishads were the most dominant influence in the spiritual element so was Kalidasa in the poetic. In Kalidasa he found a poet who could be held against Shakespeare.¹⁵ Kalidasa was his spiritual prototype. Rabindranath often identified himself with the ancient poet.¹⁶ He regretted in his poems that he was but "the Kalidasa of the printing age", *chāpār Kālidās*. He found inspiration in this poet of India's past, and his sense of beauty was strengthened by him. It is almost impossible to understand Rabindranath if one does not understand Kalidasa. Yet Kalidasa was not the only glorious name that helped to fortify the national pride.¹⁷ In his poems and plays he used themes of the epics and the Puranas, and of the Buddhist tradition.¹⁸

The three formative movements of India were supported, sustained and intensified by movements and thoughts from the West. The romantic idea of beauty and love, the vision of nature and the mystical experience of the infinite in the finite,¹⁹ could easily be accommodated within Rabindranath's poetic world

without their appearing to be alien and outlandish.²⁰ A poet does not grow out of poetic nothingness. The inborn creative imagination, *pratibhā*, cannot be denied, but the flowering of that imagination is not possible without the nourishment that the mind gets from his environment. These influences are not necessarily direct, there are more subtle means than reading books and following college-lectures. A sensitive mind absorbs and assimilates much that takes place around him.²¹

One very perceptive critic of Rabindranath has clearly formulated the process of assimilation of the different influences that were working in Bengal of the nineteenth century. Before Madhusudan and Bankim the mentality, imagination and art-form expressed in Bengali literature were narrow and bound within regional frontiers. Madhusudan and Bankim expanded the vision by introducing a new awareness, a new imagination and a new manner from beyond the seas. Rabindranath continued this work and arrived at a subtler, deeper and wider synthesis. In the first phase of modernism, Nolini Kanta Gupta argues, "Although the two currents, national and foreign, had come together, they did not fully mingle - they flowed side by side; there remained a sense of discontinuity, dissimilarity and conflict... In Madhusudan the two tunes rang separately; for the first time, it was in Bankim that a true synthesis began to take shape... Rabindranath's merit was that he succeeded in harmonising them fully, breaking the frontiers of regionalistic spirit he brought to the aesthetic creation of the Bengali a free breath, but it did not become 'foreign', it did not turn into an artificial imitation or an echo of the foreign ..."²² When some people say that "influence" is incompatible with Rabindranath's poetic mind²³, that he was not very receptive to influences, "peu sensible aux influences"²⁴, what they mean is perhaps that the influences have been transmuted into the substance of his personality. But there is no denying that the substance of India and of the West have contributed largely to form his poetry and thought.

What Rabindranath learnt from the Upanishads, Kalidasa, the Vaishnava poets and the Romantics can be formulated in a rather simplified way, in a triadic formula he coined himself in the manner of the Upanishadic seers: *satyam śivam sundaram*, "truth, good and beauty".²⁵ In Rabindranath, it is *sundara*, the beautiful, which can be said to determine the other two concepts. In this study we have to see particularly the implications of the beautiful; the other two concepts will gradually reveal themselves as forms of Beauty.

“Gladness”, he writes, “is the one criterion of truth as we know when we have touched Truth by the music it gives, by the joy of the greeting it sends forth to the truth in us.”²⁶ This is the philosophy of a poet who has no sympathy for the abstract truth of the metaphysician. The poet has a “sense of truth” through which he realises the “law in creation”; and he has a “sense of beauty” through which he realises the harmony in the universe.”²⁷ Thus we see that the good, and the beautiful, are the realisations of our sense of truth.

Rabindranath uses the words “love” and “joy” often as synonymous or as two expressions of the Upanishadic *ānanda*, “joy, whose other name is love”.²⁸ Beauty, as everyone knows, is a concept difficult to manipulate. Rabindranath was aware of it, and therefore often he reduced it to joy and love,²⁹ but it was a concept which, since the Romantics, had a great currency, and Rabindranath accepted it. Beauty, Rabindranath knew, was unseizable. But it is; we can feel its presence and its enchantment. “Beauty”, he writes, “is the wooing of our heart”; and when we recognise beauty in the world “there comes the call for our love”.³⁰

Love is the all-pervading expression of the Supreme; it is in love that “all the contradictions of existence merge themselves and are lost.”³¹ And there are many pairs of opposites with which we are constantly confronted in our intellectual, emotional and physical life. We shall consider some of these opposites which are relevant to our investigation, namely, heaven and earth, and liberation and bondage.

Rabindranath’s world-vision grasps both the poles of existence. He does not reject that which is beyond and apparently far away from our daily life. He sees the furthest in the nearest and the most intimate, the infinite in the finite, the immortal in death-bound life: *marite cāhi nā āmi sundar bhubane*, (“*Prān*”, in *Kari o Komal*) – “I do not want to die in this beautiful world...”

Man is mortal; this is a commonplace of human knowledge. But youth does not feel the reality of death in the flesh and the life-breath. Its vision is of the cosmic life, *prāna*, pulsating in the individual body and in the universal nature. Youth and springtime are its outward expressions, and love its soul.

In his later poems Rabindranath’s vision encompasses also the reality of death, but he never lost faith in the greatness of the life-force: *prāno virāt* – “life is immense”.³² In this life and on this earth, not in heaven after death, we must realise the love of the Supreme. Heaven and earth are not to be kept

eternally divorced from one another. English education, he realised, had imparted this idea of separation; it had taught that man should not try to bridge the sacred space separating god and man. But, he writes, “God is not far away, he is not in a church, he is among us.... The world is his eternal temple.”³³ And when he imagines a heaven beyond this earth, it appears as “heartless”, *hridi-heen*, for there, joy and love, are static: joy knows no pain and love no tears. Love in life is intense and lovable because it holds the opposites. Men are exiles in heaven.³⁴ He does not reject the ideals of heaven. He wants that those ideals should be brought down here. And it is the task of the poet to give men these ideals and to rouse in them the thirst of the heavenly nectar, *svarger amrita*.³⁵ Urvashi is this heavenly nectar, the divine beauty, for which man aspires.

Renunciation is not the goal of life. Rabindranath rejects the liberation that comes through renunciation and detachment, *bairāgya-sadhane mukti*, he wants liberation in bondage which is this world, this life and this manifold and variegated phenomenon.³⁶ Such a liberation is possible only in love. But love has many forms. And he explores it in its various manifestations. Although there is no very strict chronological evolution of the concept of love in his poetry, we can discern a few significant stages. In the first stage love is sensuous and emotional. The body and the physical senses are predominant. He prays to the Muse, the Lady of Dreams, *mānas-sundari*:

O my love,
when I ask for a kiss, do not smile
and bend your neck, do not turn your face away,
pour the bright red nectarous bliss
on my lips...³⁷

And even earlier, echoing the Vaishnava poets, he had written,
Every limb of mine yearns for every limb of yours,
the union of hearts cries for the union of the bodies.³⁸

The connotation is clear. It is not a vague sort of love afraid of the touch of the body; it is the strong love of the ancient *kāvya*-poets.

At the age of thirty he wrote the play *Chitrāngadā* which shocked many a puritanical mind; he was charged with obscenity. He showed that an important aspect of love, the first impulse of love, was physical beauty. Love was not just a thing of the mind. Pramatha Chaudhuri, defending his vision against the puritanical attack aptly remarks, “what we call love (*prem*), even though a thing

of the mind-world, is not unrelated to the body... Human love is not just a bloom of the spiritual sky, it shines forth embracing both the worlds of body and mind.”³⁹ Rabindranath repudiates the love that is only physical. In fact, such love is not love at all; it is only a greedy desire, *lālasā*. In such a love there is no beauty and no joy, for it is only a necessity, a compulsion. Necessity (*prayojan*)⁴⁰ is opposed to delight which is love.

But love, which is great in itself and encompasses god and man (*debatāre priya kari, priyāre debatā* - “I make god my beloved, and my beloved, god”) - is not its own ultimate. One fulfilment of love is union and enjoyment. But in life there may be a conflict between the satisfaction of love, and the call of duty, *dharma*. In such a case, love which otherwise binds in beauty and joy, frees the beloved for the pursuit of duty. This duty is what Rabindranath calls *mangala*, *śiva*, “good”. He is a poet, a poet of love. But he sees that love’s fulfilment is not just in the *preyas*, the desirable, the pleasing; beyond the pleasing one must choose the good, *śreyas*.⁴¹

This idea of love, *prem*, that surpasses itself and becomes good, *kalyān*, was suggested to him by his reading of Kalidasa.⁴² Following the development of the characters of Uma and Shakuntala, he discovered two stages of love. The two stages form a continuity, the second being the fulfilment of the first, “... this evolution is from the flower to the fruit, from earth to heaven, from *svabhāva* (nature) to *dharma*.”⁴³ Both the levels have their beauty, the first is related to the beauty of the senses, beauty of nature and of desire and physical attraction — *svabhāva-saundarya*. There is here a restlessness, a painful longing and the intoxication of youth. The second is related to the beauty of the good, *mangala-saundarya*; it is calm and harmonious; it is the fulfilment of desires; it does not reject beauty and pleasure, but finds beauty in the good and the truth. Rabindranath was distrustful of the good and truth that rejected beauty and hedonism as evil. There should be a constant harmony among good, truth and beauty. What he calls “love” is not sexual passion which “is fiercely individual and destructive”.⁴⁴ When one surpasses the individual passion and vanquishes *kāma*, like Uma, by *tapas*, love, even erotic love, has no conflict with *dharma*. When *dharma* unites two hearts, then there is no quarrel with *kāma*. When *kāma* tries to stir up rebellion against *dharma* confusion arises and *kāma* loses its abidingness and beauty its peace. But when it keeps its appointed place under the sway of *dharma*, it becomes a part of the total perfection - it

does not disturb the harmony of beauty. For, *dharma* connotes harmony; this harmony safeguards both beauty (*saundarya*) and good (*mangala*) and uniting the two it imparts to both a joyous fulfilment.”⁴⁵

Rabindranath was a votary of beauty that is delight and love. In Kalidasa he had found the ideal of love’s fulfilment. But the Vaishnava poets and the Romantics had taught him also the love which is ideal and unattainable, love-in-separation. Both these forms of love are free, but there is a difference. In the first, the freedom is spiritual; that which is egoistic longing for the satisfaction of one’s natural impulses changes into a selfless enjoyment, a union of body and soul purified by *tapas* removing all the dross of the too narrowly personal. *Kāma* becomes an expression of *mangala* (good) and *dharma* which transcend by their very definition all barriers of the ego. In the second the freedom is ideal. It is the imaginative freedom of the artist in man. Here too the starting point is the physical and erotic beauty from which imagination takes its flight. Then there is a process of sublimation, for, beauty - the woman who is beautiful - is free from any contamination of the real everyday world and life. Here *kāma* changes into an imaginative enjoyment of beauty. The artist, the poet and the hedonist in man know that this beauty is physically unattainable. *Viraha*, the sense of separation, is eternal but it has nothing of the earthly separation or personal pang. It is the universal beauty, incarnated in the image of the unattainable beloved for whom the poet sings, knowing all the time that that beauty is beyond the human reach. It is unattainable not because it is spiritual - the spiritual is real and can be attained by *tapas* - but because it is “ideal” and is a dream, a dream that man dreams in his youth but loses when the mind grows to maturity. After that he wakes up to the reality of a beauty and love, dharmic in their principle combining both heaven and earth, body and spirit, into one harmonious existence. In the first case, beauty is an offering at the feet of Lakshmi, the goddess of Beauty and Fortune, personification of *mangala*, *kalyana*, good, auspiciousness, in Rabindranath’s world-vision. Thus Chitrangada prays to Vasanta “Spring”, Season of Flowers and Youth, friend and comrade of *Kāma*, to make her body beautiful. May the beauty of this body, burst forth “like the lotus lying at Lakshmi’s feet” - *Lakshmir carana-śāyī padmer matan*.⁴⁶ In the second case beauty itself attains perfection - of this beauty Urvashi is the symbol.

The beauty we are speaking of is the beauty of a woman; the love we are

speaking of is the love of a man for a woman, even though at times the woman becomes universal, ideal and spiritual. Rabindranath also tried to express the love of a woman for a man in many of his plays, novels and poetic dialogues in which the women speak their own heart and utter their own feelings. Through mythological women like Devayāni⁴⁷ and Chitrāṅgadā⁴⁸ he shows that women are not merely passive instruments for administering pleasure to men.⁴⁹ It is significant to note that in his youth at least two women had directly or indirectly influenced his vision of women and of love. One of them was Kadambari Debi, wife of Jyotirindranath, one of his elder brothers. “Her image and memory”, a biographer of Rabindranath writes, “recur throughout the poet’s work, the alchemy of imagination turning the facts into a ‘greater truth’. In brief, she became an idealised symbol of deathless love.”⁵⁰

The other woman was Anna Turkhkar whom he met when he was eighteen. She was a few years older than he. She also left a strong impression on the young poet. In his old age the poet wrote about her, “I have never been able to forget her. Nor did I ever look upon her passion in any frivolous fashion. Since then my life has moved through the light and shade of diverse experience, the Lord has brought many strange things to pass. But I can honestly say that at no time have I looked down upon love, be of what kind it may.”⁵¹

Woman is neither an object of pleasure, a wily temptress, nor a bodiless angel. She has always a body even when she is idealised. Idealisation is however a part of the image. There is always the woman of flesh and blood, but to her, to her physical beauty, man adds his own imagination and makes up the woman-of-love. He wrote, *ardhek mānabi tumi, ardhek kalpanā*, “you are half woman and half imagination.”⁵²

“Ūrvaśī”, a Sublime Ode

The wonderful hymn, the ode, *Ūrvaśī*⁵³ was written in 1896, and was published in the collection *Chitrā*. But even in Rabindranath’s earlier poems we find the use of *Ūrvaśī* as the symbol of beauty, all-pervading and romantic. In a poem, *Yauban-svapna*, “the dream of youth”, the poet’s dream of beauty pervades the world. He sees beauty everywhere - music and rhythm, and an immense restlessness in his intoxicated heart. It is not just an abstraction. The whole experience of beauty appears incarnate before his mind’s eyes. The last couplet makes this clear,

Who has made me mad? What do I seek in the vast heaven?

I seem to see the eyes of some *Ūrvaśī*, wide open in the sky.⁵⁴

Ūrvaśī is already the symbol, that she will always be for Rabindranath, of beauty unattainable, ideal and romantic. She pervades the universe, she looks at the world and men, but does not act in the world. And man sees her and desires her but knows that he cannot possess her. She is the lady-of-dreams. We can look at her with wonder and admire her, but she will never be one of us. She personifies the dream of man’s youth.

In the period when he wrote *Ūrvaśī* he mentioned the nymph in other poems too. One poem⁵⁵ sings the glory of love that gives man the true sense of personality: love singles man out of the nameless multitude and crowns him king; he is made luminous like an eternally youthful god and is transported to the heaven of love, *premer Amarāvati*. Love is not only pleasure and enjoyment, *sambhoga*; there is also the love-in-separation, *vipralambha*. But both pleasure and pain, union and separation are imbued with aesthetic delight, *rasa*. And there, among Nala and Damayanti, Arjuna and Subhadra, Shiva and Parvati, lonely Shakuntala, and lonely Mahashveta, the poet sees also lonely Pururavas: “... and day after day,” he writes, “Pururavas wanders about in the woods, spreading the unbearable pain of separation through the world in melodious notes.”

Here again Rabindranath suggests that *Ūrvaśī* is unattainable. Pururavas is the lover and poet who makes sweet songs from the sadness of separation. The beloved remains ever far away: the distant ideal, the star that the moth desires but never possesses.

The love-in-separation is an essential aspect of human love-vision. Because of this there is tension, excitement, yearning, pain and tears which make love-experience all the more intense, more precious, something to aspire to. In a poem Rabindranath wrote on the day after he wrote *Ūrvaśī*, he describes the heaven which remains untouched by mortal tears and by the pain of separation. The poet prefers the earth where things have “a touch of tears”. Heaven would be more wonderful if it did not have the unmoving perfection fixed for all eternity, if there were some sudden songs of sadness and if “the golden lute leaning against *Ūrvaśī*’s breast would at times, suddenly, lost in thought, emit heartrending piteous notes in dire agony.”⁵⁶ But heaven does not care. *Ūrvaśī* sits in glorious beauty, symbol of love, moving the whole world, but herself unmoved.

Before coming to the two poems we may mention another curious reference which he made at the age of seventy. The reference is rather ironical, made in a light vein, to his own famous ode. A young Bengali student who loves a Bengali girl, goes for further studies to England where he meets many Western girls. He writes to the Bengali girl how extraordinary, how intelligent, how sophisticated the girls there are. And in one letter he says that “he went to bathe in the sea with Lizzy-/ (he quotes from a Bengali poet a few lines/ where Ūrvaśī rises from the sea.)”⁵⁷

This is only a dispassionate glance at the past; the distance is great enough to look at that poem as if it were of someone else, but a poem which has become a part of the Bengali poetic heritage so that a young Bengali student sees in it the picture of his own romantic dream.

Rabindranath wrote *Ūrvaśī* in 1896 and *Dui Nārī*, “Two women” in 1915. *Ūrvaśī*⁵⁸ is perhaps the one single poem, which has been universally considered as one of his greatest poetical achievements. Sri Aurobindo believes it to be “splendidly seen and expressed”.⁵⁹ Others find in it a deep and intimate emotional experience, sublime language and rhythm, and at least for once in the voice of the great lyrical poet “the epic grandeur”.⁶⁰ Even Thompson who had his full share of Christian and colonial bias⁶¹ and who could hardly be expected to seize the subtle pattern of suggestions, singled this poem out for special praise. “A world-masterpiece”, he calls it, “and not merely the most accomplished lyric of India.”⁶²

This poem contains eight stanzas, each of nine lines. The metre is syllabic, the first, third, fourth, fifth and sixth lines have each eighteen syllables, the seventh fourteen syllables, the second ten, and the seventh and ninth six syllables each. The rhyme-scheme is also fixed.⁶³ This fixed pattern makes each stanza a self-contained unit.

The vocabulary is highly Sanskritized,⁶⁴ with many polysyllabic words, and clusters of consonants. This gives a sense of majesty and remoteness, an epic grandeur and an oceanic cadence which is however relieved by words which are more colloquial, of which the sound is more liquid and devoid of consonantal clusters.⁶⁵ In a poem such as this, the rhythm and the sound-symbolism are of great consequence. We shall, however, leave this aspect unanalysed as no translation can reproduce adequately the sound-effect.

In most of the stanzas, the second line is a vocative phrase composed of the

vocative particle *hē*, an epithet describing *Ūrvaśī*, and the name *Ūrvaśī*. In the second stanza, the vocative *Ūrvaśī* is there but the other elements are replaced by an interrogative sentence; and in the last stanza the vocative particle is dropped because the descriptive epithet needed one extra syllable. On the semantic level these vocatives are important. They are like the nuclei of the stanzas which are poetic elaborations of the image or idea contained in them.

The idea of the first stanza is thus contained in, he *Nandan-bāsinī Ūrvaśī* “O *Ūrvaśī*, dweller of Nandana (Indra’s heaven).” She is heavenly; she has nothing of the mortal in her, nothing that we, men, consider to be familiar or intimate. Heaven is distant; it has its norms and its vision of perfection and beauty. She being a dweller of heaven is perfect in beauty, *sundarī rūpasī*, but she is not what earth and home desire: she is neither mother, nor daughter, nor bride. What other human relation can there be between a man and a woman? She can be the beloved, the partner in free love. But in a dharmic society such love can only be accepted as long as it is sublimated and remains symbolic. When *kāma* is present in a man-woman relationship it has its place, a very respectable place, within the dharmic scheme. But Rabindranath’s social vision did not accept free love and extra-marital love as dharmic. Extra-marital love as in the Vaishnava poetry, Sufi poetry and Romantic poetry is all right, because it is outside the dharmic scheme - it is poetic-aesthetic or mystic. *Ūrvaśī* is the symbol of the poetic-aesthetic sublimation of free love. She is a nymph, a woman exalted and idealised, who is not bound by the law of dharma. She is therefore beyond human social norms. Man can admire her and dream of her; he can be even erotically moved by her, but she remains for ever beyond his physical reach.

Notes and References

- 1 Rabindranath Tagore, “*The Religion of an Artist*”. in: Radhakrishnan, Contemporary Indian Philosophy, New York 1966. p. 25.
- 2 The work done by Bankim had surely a larger scope, but we must not forget that Madhusudan was the one who gave a new awareness and a new liberty of form and substance to Bengali poetry. Bankim did in prose what Madhusudan had done in poetry.
- 3 Rabindranath seems to shy from the political aspect of nationalism. He believed that freedom of expression could not be achieved without political freedom, yet because of

- his professed universalism it was difficult for him to see the reality of the nationalistic politics. In any case the conflict between nationalism and universalism remains one of the unreconciled elements of his thought-world.
- 4 Rabindranath does not give any name in relation to the third movement. However if we must look for a name the most suitable one will be that of Rajnarayan Basu, “the grandfather of Indian nationalism”. (See, Rabindranath Tagore, “*Svādeśikatā*”, in *Jibansmṛiti*). It is interesting to note that Rajnarayan was a great formative influence in the life and thought of the three poets we are dealing with here. He was Madhusudan’s friend and critic to whom the poet wrote most open-heartedly about his poetic ambitions, his experiments and his achievements, and whose criticism be highly valued. He was also a friend and collaborator of Rabindranath’s father, Debendranath, in organising the Brahmo Samaj. At a very early age Rabindranath came under his influence and identified himself with his vision of India. Rajnarayan was Sri Aurobindo’s maternal grandfather whom he admired immensely even though the contact was rather indirect.
 - 5 “*Ghar o bāhir*”, *Jibansmṛiti*, Rabindra-rachanabali (RRac). Vol. 17.
 - 6 “*A Poet’s School*”, in : *Faith of a Poet*, Selection of essays translated by various people. Ed. Sisiskumar Ghose. Bombay 1964.
 - 7 “... when I was thirteen I freed myself from the clutch of an educational system that tried to keep me imprisoned within the stone walls of lessons”. “*The Religion of an Artist*”, p.32.
 - 8 Ibid., p. 28.
 - 9 Ibid., p. 30.
 - 10 “The unfortunate people who have lost the harvest of their past have also lost the present age. “*The Centre of Indian Culture*”, in: *Faith of a Poet*. p.37.
 - 11 *ānāḍ hy eva khalv imāni bhūtāni jāyante ānandena jātāni jīvanti ānandam prayānti abhisamvisanti*.
 - 12 “*The Religion of an Artist*”, p. 29.
 - 13 The poems of *Gitanjali* earned him the Nobel Prize and world-wide recognition, but it is high time to realise that those poems are certainly not his most powerful and successful poetical works.
 - 14 “*The Religion of an Artist*”, p. 26
 - 15 See for ex. his essay “*Śakuntalā*”, *Prāchin Sāhitya*, RRac. Vol. 5.
 - 16 There are several studies on the relation between Kalidasa and Rabindranath: Bishnupada Bhattacharya, *Kalidas o Rabindranath*; Pabodh Chandra Sen, “*Rabīndra-dr̥ṣṭite Kālīdās*”, in : *Bharat-pathik Rabindranath*, Calcutta 1961.

- 17 Among the other personalities of the past whom Rabindranath most admired, Buddha and Ashoka are the most prominent.
- 18 Sukumari Bhattacharji, “*The Impact of Sanskrit Literature on Rabindranath Tagore*”. Proceedings of the First International Sanskrit Conference. New Delhi 1975. Vol.2, Pt. 1. pp. 53-72.
- 19 Cp.W. Blake, “*Auguries of Innocence*”. “To see a World in a Grain of Sand/ And Heaven in a Wild Flower./ Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand/ And Eternity in an hour.”
- 20 Romanticism in its classical form had already found expression in Madhusudan and in its mystic-emotional form in Biharilal who was greatly admired by Rabindranath. Biharilal’s influence is perhaps more genuine than the influence of the English poet’s in the formation of his poetic mind.
- 21 Some admirers of Rabindranath seem to think that to admit that other poets and poetic schools have influenced him is to diminish his originality. This is a purblind view of the functioning of the human spirit.
- 22 Nolini Kanta Gupta, “*Rabīndranāth o ādhunikatā*”, *Rachanā bali*, Vol. 1. Calcutta 1975. p.380. (tr. is mine).
- 23 Sukumar Sen, *Bāngla sāhityer itihās*, Calcutta 1967 (4th ed.) Pt.3, p.163.
- 24 Odette Aslan, Rabindranath Tagore, *Poètes d’aujourd’hui*, Paris 1961. p.30.
- 25 Here again we find his immense capacity of transmuting everything he lays his hands on into his own mind-stuff. As a young man he had read Victor Cousin’s book, *Du Vrai, du Beau et du Bien* (1837) which his brother Jyotirindra had translated into Bengali. The idea of this French philosopher who attacked empiricism, sensualism and materialism and founded his pantheistic philosophy on the three fundamentals - the Infinite or God, the Finite or the world, and the relation between the two- had marked the young poet deeply. Rabindranath sees in this triad of Truth, Beauty and Good the same kind of vision as that represented by the ancient Indian triad, *satyam jñānam anantam* (Taitt.Up.2.1).
- 26 “*The Religion of an Artist*”, p.33.
- 27 *Sāadhanā. The Realisation of Life*. London 1918. p.141.
- 28 Ibid., p. 104.
- 29 See the chapter “*The Realisation of Beauty*” in: *Sāadhanā*; and “*Saundarya-bodh*”, in: *Sāhitya*, R Rac. Vol. 8, pp. 355-372.
- 30 *Sāadhanā*, p.115.
- 31 Ibid., p. 114.
- 32 Ibid., p. 21.

- 33 “Mandir”, *Bhāratbarsha*, in. RRac. Vol. 4, pp. 455-460.
- 34 “Svarga theke bidāy”, *Chitrā* : “svarga tomar-i sukha-sthān,/morā parabāsī.”
- 35 “Ebar phīrao more”, *Chitrā*.
- 36 “Mukti”, *Naibedya*. See also, Prabhat Kumar Mukherji, *Life of Tagore*, p.54.
- 37 “Mānas-sundarī”, *Sonar Tari*.
- 38 “Deher milan”, *Kari o Komal*.
- 39 Pramatha Chaudhuri, “*Citrāngadā*”, *Prabandha-sangraha*, Pt. 1, Calcutta 1974 (Repr.) pp.206-207. There was also a period of mystic love in which the touch of the human had seemed to withdraw in order to make place for a bodiless spiritual love. But it had been a passing phase only.
- 40 *Sādhanā*, p.116; “*Śrāban-sandhyā*”, in: *Shantiniketan*, RRac. Vol. 15, p.42.
- 41 See Kath.Up. 2.2. Rabindranath has elaborated this Upanishadic idea on various occasions. *Mānusher dharma*, p.30. See also the poem “*Preyasī*”, *Chaitālī*: he *preyasī*, he *śreyasī*, he *binābādinā*, *āji mor citta-padme basi ekākinī dhālitecha svarga-sudhā* ...
- 42 There are two important essays:” *Kumārsambhab o Śakuntalā*” and “*Śakuntalā*” in: *Prāchin Sāhitya*, RRac. Vol. 5.
- 43 “*Śakuntalā*”, p.521.
- 44 *Creative Unity*, London 1959. p.8.
- 45 “*Kumārsambhab o Śakuntalā*”, p.516.
- 46 *Chitrāngadā*, p.168
- 47 “*Bidāy-abhishāp*”, a poetic dialogue between Kacha and Devayāni. Devayāni was the daughter of Shukra, the teacher of the demons. She fell in love with Kacha, son of Brihaspati, the teacher of the gods. But Kacha rejected her love.
- 48 Chitrāngadā, daughter of the king of Manipura, married Arjuna.
- 49 B. B. Majumdar, *Heroines of Tagore. A Study in the Transformation of Indian Society*, 1875-1914. Calcutta 1968. p.17. In this book the author analyses many women characters from Rabindranath’s works.
- 50 Prabhat Kumar Mukherji, *Life of Tagore*, p.56.
- 51 Qu. by Mukherji, *ibid*, p.40.
- 52 “*Mānasī*”, *Chaitali*.
- 53 *Ūrvasī* in Bengali, but in order to keep the continuity the same transcription (*Ūrvasī*) is kept throughout.
- 54 *ke āmāre kareche pāgal - śunye kena cāi ānkhi tule,/yena kon Ūrvasīr ānkhi ceye āche ākāśer mājhe*. “*Yauban-svapna*”, *Kari o komal*.

- 55 “*Premar abhisek*”, *Chitrā*.
- 56 “*Svarga haite bidāy*”, *Chitrā*.
- 57 “*Sādhāran meye*”, *Punashcha*.
- 58 Rabindranath made also an English version of it (*The Fugitive*, No.11) which is considerably curtailed. Moreover, whatever be the value of Rabindranath’s English poems they have not the music and poetic intensity of the Bengali originals. We can safely disregard this English version.
- 59 Sri Aurobindo, “*Kālidāsa’s Characters*”, Vol. 3. p.270.
- 60 Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Rabindranath*, Rachanabali, Vol 1. p.409.
- 61 Sisirkumar Ghosh writes about Thompson, “It would be tedious to go over his prejudices and innuendos.” *The Later Poems of Tagore*, Westport. Conn. 1975. p.228.
- 62 Thompson, R.T., *Rabindranath Tagore. His Life and Works*, p.79. This sort of judgment should not be taken too literally.
- 63 aabbccdd.
- 64 This is not to say that it is not Bengali. What I mean is that there is a profusion of *tadbhava*-words used in this poem.
- 65 If one wants to get some idea of the rhythm and the metrical pattern one must either read or listen to the reading of the original Bengali.

The National Value of Art

(Continued from the previous issue)

Pabitra Roy

IV

This is where Sri Aurobindo's idea of the national value of art comes in. He maintains that spirituality is the fountain and the goal of human evolution. Meanwhile, thought is the highest that man has attained. We may have *manas*, or mind or *citta* as working synonyms for the thought. Now the thought has two sides, judgment or reason and imagination. As he contends, both of these sides are necessary to perfect ideation. Reason and imagination are two functions of thought and Sri Aurobindo gives them names derived from *Tantrik* practice. Imagination, along with contemplation is a function of the right hand, *daksinācāra*, they are the centres "that see the truth" while criticism, reasoning, discrimination, inquiry are functions of the left hand, *vamācāra*, these are centres that "judge the truth". Science, philosophy and criticism are *vamācāra* disciplines, while art, poetry and idealism pertain to *daksinācāra*. The values of one are not the values of the other. Those of *daksinācāra* are subtle and profound, and its workings are less visible and sensational in character.

Disciplines of the right hand, art and poetry, in particular, have helped man upward in the course of his passage through civilisational cycles. They are not mere refinements or luxuries, rather necessary to life. Sri Aurobindo distinguishes three uses of Art, aesthetic, intellectual and the spiritual. The aesthetic use of art is cathartic, it brings about purification of the *citta* or mass of established ideas feelings and actional habits. The aesthetic side of art stands justified as and when it purifies life by beauty, raises conduct by instilling in us a distaste for the coarse desires and savage passions. He distinguishes *manas* from *buddhi*. The latter is thought proper in its perfected form, it is independent of desires, the claims of the body and the interference of the emotion. Ordinarily, *manas* is a theatre of "thought - sensations". *Manas*, as he says elsewhere, is "sense-mind" (*The Life Divine*, 1949, p. 59). It is another sense,

the sixth besides the five, as some of the Indian schools of thought hold it to be. It uses sense organs for the basis of its experience. Speaking in terms of his evolutionary ontology, *manas* is an instrument of ignorance. Mentality is a middle term, below it there is the subconscious, above it the supramental. These ontological categories need not detain us, we are simply noting the fact of *manas* and its purification by the aesthetic use of art. Mind, then, is a passage.

In suggesting the thesis that the beautiful and the good are ontologically related as the fundamental truth of existence, Sri Aurobindo advances a radical view. Kant, it is well known, has laboured the distinction between the two at the level of judgments, the reflective and the determinant. And yet he has to argue the case that the beautiful is the symbol of morality (*Critique of Judgement*, section 59). Existence and concepts make all the difference between the two classes of judgments. Yet Kant endeavours to come out of his rigid epistemology by saying that the ideas of imagination somehow open the windows on the Ideas of Reason. Sri Aurobindo does not have to encounter the Kantian problem in the matter of the linkage between art and life, on the one hand, and the aesthetic and the ethical, on the other.

He argues that the sense of virtue is very largely aesthetic. He refers to the Greek ideas of the *euprepes*, the *dikaion*, the *agathon* and the *kalon*. The *kalon* is purely beautiful. As he writes, "The... remarkable part of Aristotle's moral system is that in which he classifies the parts of conduct by a purely aesthetic standard, the excess, defect and golden, in other words, correct and beautiful, mean of qualities" (*The National Value of Art*, p. 11). This too was not enough, for the Greek ideas were after all moulds that had to be broken, the self of man rescued from its imprisonment to forms and external stands. "The progress of ethics in Europe", writes Sri Aurobindo, "has been largely a struggle between the Greek sense of aesthetic beauty and the Christian sense of a higher good marked on the one side by formalism on the other by an unlovely asceticism" (*The National Value of Art*, pp. 11-12). The point is that the good must be beautiful, without ceasing to be good. The object of existence is not a deontology of virtues. The progress and practice of virtue do not consist in a rejection of beauty and delight. As the Buddha once told Ananda that the noble eightfold path is lovely in the beginning, lovely in the middle, and lovely in the end. Association with the lovely is the whole, not half of the holy life (*Vinaya Patika*, i. 20-21, also *Samyutta Nikāya*, vi. 314-316). The virtuous person is of

good cheer, he does not wear a long face. Even Kant, the rigorist had accommodated this view. The aesthetic and the ethical are the twin formations of the delight of existence, and need not be viewed as being in a state of war with each other. In life, the enjoyment of the delight is hampered by the demands of body and the vital passions. Art and poetry provide a field in which the animal can be excluded, and the emotions are made to walk disinterestedly. Poetry and art have great use in man's arrival at his higher fulfilment. Viewed in this way, the aesthetic use of art functions in a kathartic manner, which Sri Aurobindo assimilates to *cittasuddhi*. This itself is an important inter-conceptual achievement.

It is the aesthetic education of man that Sri Aurobindo has in view. Plato dwells with extraordinary emphasis on the importance of music in education. There is a correspondence between music and the character of the people. The mind is influenced by what it sees. If the eye is trained to the contemplation and understanding of beauty, harmony of line and colour, the taste, habit and character of the people will be trained to follow a similar law of beauty and harmony in life. Sri Aurobindo's argument is: if the appointments of our life and the objects around us are things of taste and beauty, our habits, thought and feelings would be raised, harmonised and made sweet and dignified. Poetry's office is purification of the heart. The detached and disinterested enjoyment of the forms of emotions that make up life is made possible by poetry. It helps ethics in attaining a state of mind unalloyed by the disturbance of the self-regarding passions. Painting and sculpture lack the movement that poetry has, it is fixed and expresses only a given moment, yet this stillness and calm of art have a special value. Art, he says, stills the emotions and teaches the delight of a restrained satisfaction. Music, he says, deepens the emotions and harmonises them with each other. "Between them music, art and poetry are a perfect education for the soul" (*The National Value of Art*, p. 16). They are great educating, edifying and civilising forces.

V

Sri Aurobindo has never been an aesthete, yet his view of the arts incorporates much or most of the truth of aestheticism. I have in mind Walter Pater's essay "The School of Giorgione" in *The Renaissance*. Sri Aurobindo's admission of the differences of kind in aesthetic beauty corresponding to the differ-

ences in kind of the gifts themselves recalls Pater's thesis of the untranslatable charm of each of the arts. Sri Aurobindo does not go by a false generalisation over all arts. Like Lessing's analysis of the spheres of sculpture and poetry, Sri Aurobindo's analysis is an important contribution. Each art has its own specific order of impressions and an untranslatable charm. A just apprehension of the differences of the arts is the beginning of aesthetic criticism. There are differences, albeit, between Sri Aurobindo and Walter Pater. With Sri Aurobindo, poetry enjoys a primacy over other arts, with Pater, it is in music that the true type of measure of perfected art could be found. Although each art has its incommunicable element, its unique mode of reaching the beyond, yet the arts may be represented as struggling, which music alone completely realises. To this extent, Walter Pater will have a fellow traveller in Rabindranath.

We may now turn to the intellectual use of art. Having drawn the distinction between the creative, imaginative and the critical, analytic characters of intellectual activity, Sri Aurobindo remarks that art stimulates sympathetic insight, self-identification with other minds. The barrier between the ego and its other breaks down, and makes communication possible across space and time. Rabindranath interpreted the term *sāhitya* in the sense of communication. More importantly art is quick to catch suggestions and leads to a fresh widening of knowledge and thereby opens a door into the deeper secrets of inner nature, the depth and measure of which remain unattainable to the instruments of science. In our times, Jacques Maritain has argued for non-conceptual knowledge embodied in poetic intuition. In his *Degrees of Knowledge* he argued that sensation, reason, revelation and mystical union are grounds of different but equally significant kinds of knowledge. These can cooperate without friction if the right distinction is made between their respective claims. Even Kant, speaking of poetry, remarks that it "expands the mind by setting the imagination at liberty and by offering, within the limits of a given concept, amid the unbounded variety of possible forms accordant therewith, that which unites the presentment of this concept with a wealth of thought to which no verbal expression is completely adequate, and so rising aesthetically to ideas. It strengthens the minds by making it feel faculty-free, spontaneous, and independent of natural determination of judging nature as a phenomenon in accordance with aspects which does not present in experience either for sense or understanding, and therefore of using it on behalf of, and as a sort of schema for, the

supersensible” (*op. cit*, Section 53, Bernard translation). The statement as it comes from Kant is important, and the idea that poetry could be a schema for the supersensible is quite significant in view of its resonance with the meaning stratum of *dhvani* or *vyngya* invoked in a classical manner by Abhinavagupta. Poetry, said Whitehead, is a search for meanings as yet unexperienced, beyond those stabilised in etymology and grammar (See *Adventure of Ideas*, Cambridge, 1961, pp. 227-28). Martin Heidegger’s thesis about the intimate connexion between poetry and philosophy is also a case in point. All reflective thinking is poetic, and all poetry in turn is a kind of thinking. Sri Aurobindo too holds that poetry is thought, but it is intuitive thinking.

As for poetry and its intellectual import, there exists a considerable body of opinion. We have noted quite a few them. What is of significance is that Sri Aurobindo extends the intellectual over the domains of sculpture and painting as well. How does he conceive of these two plastic arts? In the *Foundations of Indian Culture* there are remarkable passages of great value in terms of insight and illumination. The literature on painting is quite well-known, and painting has been held in high esteem in the Indian tradition : just as, it is said, the king is of prime importance among men, so is painting among the arts *kalānāmiha citrakalpa*. But hardly has there been any aesthetic evaluation of sculpture. And it is Sri Aurobindo who has come up with rich and profound observations on the aesthetic and intellectual uniqueness of sculpture and painting in respect of the mentality, motive and message of the two plastic arts.

VI

Sculpture, notes Sri Aurobindo, is static, self-contained, necessarily firm, noble or severe, and demands an aesthetic spirit capable of these qualities. It is spirit in form. The sculptor’s figuring imagination obeys and does not replace “the original Dharma of the material.” Sculpture does not encourage aesthetic self-indulgence. The material is stern, and it calls for a cast of mind founded on assured thought and vision, stable in temperament, and fixed in imagination of things that are firm and enduring. In Egypt, Greece and India, sculpture was conceived against natural background and support. Grand and profound motives were called for, a penetrating spiritual vision, a sense of things eternal to base the creation. One wonders if the unfathomable calm of the Buddha as embodied in Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka could have been delineated in painting at all.

Painting requires another mentality. The sculpture expresses in static form. For him “eternity seizes hold of time in its shapes and arrests it in the monumental spirit.” (*The Foundations of Indian Culture* p. 242). Painting, says Sri Aurobindo, dwells on “the mobilities of the soul rather than on its static eternities”, and casts out the self into the grace and movement of psychic and vital life. Accordingly there is a liquidity of form in painting, a fluent grace of the line. Painting is a mobile and emotional way of self-expression, and the most sensuous of the arts. The task of the painter is to spiritualise the sensuous, and making its beauty a revelation of the spiritual emotion. If a painting is artistically successful, the soul and the sense subsist in harmony. The painter “asserts the eternal at play in time” and the perfection of form, and closer becomes an enlightenment of the inner being. The remarkable image of “the eternal at play in time” is also there in Rabindranath’s essay on the six canons of Indian painting, referred to earlier. We may, for while, look at it briefly.

Rabindranath’s understanding of the manifestation of form in painting is dialectical and iconic. He says, pictures emerge as varied impressions of Kali’s dancing feet staining the radiant white bosom of Shiva. The surface is blank and unvariegated pure light. The darkness of black lines cannot show itself. As finite black lines fall rhythmically upon silent white surface, formed figures emerge, and picture comes into being. Colours, he notes, mediate the intimate duality of light and darkness, that is the absence of light. They are like the quarter measure of musical notes. Just as the quarter notes show us the way of transcending a note struck, so do colours liberate us from the fixity or bondage of lines. Lines are fixed delineations, but colours throw a bridge across that which is circumscribed and that which is beyond it.

What needs be noted is that Rabindranath’s account of the miracle of pictorial creation is interpreted in terms of the mystical eroticism of the finite and the infinite, and it draws upon the analogy of the musical mode. However, the basic dualities are the same for both Rabindranath and Sri Aurobindo : Time and Eternity, the finite and infinite. Both of them have been heirs to the importance of the suggestion of the Beyond in everything created. The ontology of the Spirit, of course, has the primacy for Sri Aurobindo, while for Rabindranath the magic of the appearance is what holds the stage.

Much in the manner of Hegel, Sri Aurobindo divines that art is the expression of the Spirit, and it brings back beauty to the expression of the Spirit and

nothing but the Spirit. Hegel's philosophy of art, however, does not have anything like what Sri Aurobindo has called the delight of existence. Hegel appears to suggest that it is Spirit in self-identical universality which is expressed in art. This may not be true for Sri Aurobindo. For him, every work of art is an individual expression, an expression of something that cannot be expressed in any other way, and therefore cannot be known apart from its unique expression.

It should be borne in mind that even though Sri Aurobindo states the case for the intellectual use of art, his theory of art is not intellectualist in the manner of either Kant or Hegel. Let us consider the concept of form. With Kant, form is abstract, and it is the only aesthetic quality, because it is perceived by all men, and hence judgments about it must be universally valid. As for beauty, Kant argues that if it were actually in the form, it would be recognised universally; this is what he denies. There is a grain of truth in Hegel's view that in beauty the distinction between particular and universal, purpose and means, concept and presentation needs no obliteration or reconciliation, for they have not yet made their appearance. There is no gulf to be bridged. Sri Aurobindo's approach is integral. For him, there can be no art without unity, or 'creative unity' as Rabindranath uses the phrase. The unity that Sri Aurobindo has in view is neither of form and detail and ornament of a work of art, but "the unity which all this in its totality serves not so much to express in itself but to fill it with that which comes out of it and relieve its oneness by multitude. An original oneness, not a combined or synthetic or an effected unity is that from which ... art begins and to which its work when finished returns or rather lives in it as in its self" (*The Foundations of Indian Culture*, p. 216). The unity intended is the unity of the Self, and hence it is indefinable. In all these, Sri Aurobindo is arguing for a sense of unity that is intuitive, not merely rational or formal, or what he himself has put in the remarkable phrase, "Oneness by multitude".

The talk about the intellectual use of art may sound queer to modern ears. We have been accustomed to look upon art as divorced from Truth. But what Coomaraswamy has called the traditional view of art had always been an affair with cognition. The connexion of beauty with wisdom had been a well-known thesis of the medieval scholastics. St. Bonaventura is reported to have said that it is knowledge that makes the work beautiful. Beauty is identified with intelligibility in terms of the shining of the formal light upon what is formed or proportioned. The literary work that simply pleases is flattery, said Plato in the *Gorgias*

(5030), and rhetoric was conceived by Aristotle as the art of giving effectiveness to truth. Coomaraswamy quotes the *Lankāvatāra Sutra* (II. 114) expressing that "the doctrine is communicated only indirectly by means of the picture; and whatever is not adapted to such and such persons as are to be taught, cannot be called teaching" (*See Why Exhibit Works of Art, London, 1943, pp. 105-6*). Beauty has to do with cognition. If beauty is not synonymous with truth, neither can it be isolated from the truth. Let us remember, the distinction is logical, but there is coincidence *in re*. In talking about the intellectual use of art, Sri Aurobindo has brought back a forgotten mode of apprehension of art.

Let us now turn to the idea about the spiritual use of art. As Sri Aurobindo holds, it is in the service of spirituality that art reaches its highest self-expression. It should be remembered that Sri Aurobindo's concern for art is in the context of human evolution, which he envisages as a stormy and toilsome pilgrimage. Mind or the intellect is not the highest term of man's existence. Man's seeking after beauty extends from the infrarational parts of his being to the suprarational. The rational is only a middle plane of our aesthetic seeking. In the higher reaches of creativity the rational is surpassed and left behind. "The intellect is not the poet, the artist, the creator within us" (*The Future Poetry*, p. 169), says Sri Aurobindo. He distinguishes between *construction* and *creation*. The intellect constructs, but does not create. What is required for creation is vision and inspiration. He does not put off the office of the intellect and its operations. The intelligence can achieve talent, its success is formal, it can perfect technique, it can discover truth of ideas and reason, it is critical and analytic. What it falls short of is the awakening of vision and insight. Reason, he says, studies always from outside, even though it can and does remove the dullness and vagueness of our habitual perceptions, false and crude aesthetic habits arising from the lower mind overcome by vital sensuousness. The role of reason is to enlighten and purify the aesthetic instincts and impulses, but it cannot guide them to complete insight. It shapes and fulfils to a certain extent the aesthetic intelligence, but it cannot give the definitive law for the creation of beauty. In *The Divine Comedy*, Virgil, possessing only the natural light of the intellect, had to come to the end of his task as Dante's guide to Paradise, Virgil tells Dante:

"... you have come to a place where I, of myself, can see no further". (*Purgatorio, XXVII, 127, tr. C.H. Sisson, Oxford, 1993*).

In a similar manner, reason, in the end, has to hand over the task of art to a higher faculty of the suprarational. As Sri Aurobindo puts the matter, to find highest beauty is to find God. The ascent to the suprarational beauty passes through three stages. In the beginning there is beauty of form, in the middle beauty of the ideas, and finally the absolute beauty. The senses and the reason are and may be its channels. It is only with the help of the intuitive gaze that the suprarational beauty could be apperceived in the variation of its masks and forms. The intuitive discrimination is more keen and precise in its sight than the reasoning intelligence.

Then art in its spiritual employment seeks for our highest, truest and largest self. The infrarational gropes for it blindly, the rational seeks for it through logic, order and analysis, the suprarational touches and lays hands on the Reality itself in its care and essence, enlightening all the details of life from the centre of existence. The immense value of art and poetry to the human spirit lies in their immediate power for inner truth, for self-enlargement and liberation.

In his study of the cycles of society, Sri Aurobindo has been a critic of the falsehood of conventional standards of life and society. In the arts and poetry, there is generated the habit of blind reliance on fixed authorities, a stereotyped reign of convention. But he points out that humanity is developing, and is not to return to its old ideas. In the domain of the arts, the celebration of the old forms is compared by Abanindranath to *shavasādhana*, a ritual with corpses. What Sri Aurobindo suggests instead, the life-forms of the truths of life should call for growth and change. Man has to study himself, and come face to face with the soul in himself. In the course of man's attempts at fathoming the subjective secret of himself, a deepening subjectivism has come about in art, music and literature of the world. He defines subjectivism as a road of return to the knowledge lost in conventional objectivism. Subjectivism proceeds from within and regards everything from the point of view of a developing self-consciousness. Life is a self-creating process of becoming more and more conscious. "The whole impulse of subjectivism is to get at the self, to live in the self, to see by the self, to live out the truth of the self internally and externally but always from an internal initiation and centre" (*The Human Cycle*, p. 69).

VII

Art and life are not divorced from each other in Sri Aurobindo's thought. In his integral view, neither the ethical being nor the aesthetic being is the whole man, nor can either be the sovereign principle. According to him they are merely

two elements, both equally indispensable for human self-perfection. What he proposes is to combine them, to enlarge the sense of ethics by the sense of beauty and delight. Both *tapas* and *ānanda* have to be rightly and harmoniously possessed by man as the mental being. The ultimates of life are spiritual. Neither puritanism nor hedonism is the way of human development. Yet art has a priority for Sri Aurobindo. The aesthetic being of man, he says, has the aim of finding the Divine through beauty. The highest art is that "which by an inspired use of significant and interpretative form unseals the doors of the spirit" (*The Foundations of Indian Culture*, p. 284).

We may now return to the question of the national value of art. The points that Sri Aurobindo raises are: the place of art in the evolution of the race, and its value in the education and actual life of a nation. As for the first, we have had his concept of *cittasuddhi*, and all that the concept entailed. As regards the value of art in education Sri Aurobindo has been a thinker of significance.

All of our nation-makers have been critical of the system of education introduced by the British, and we have perpetrated it even after we freed ourselves from our colonisers. There have been thoughts about national education. In British India creative educational thought came from outside the official sources. Vivekananda, Rabindranath, Sri Aurobindo and Gandhi were each in his own way, outsiders. All of them wanted our lives to return to the roots and spread its branches upward and outward. They felt that the prevailing imported mode of education helped neither the formation of taste nor independent thinking. We could not be ourselves alone nor could we hope to survive by cutting ourselves from our national culture. Emancipation from the bondage of the soil is not freedom for the tree, so goes an aphorism of Rabindranath. *Totākāhini* (The Parrot's Training) is Rabindranath's dreadful parable on what passed for education in India. At the end of a long pupilage, inside the cage, the bird dies.

Sri Aurobindo, too, brought his indictments against the British system of education in India. It depreciated the value of the beautiful, and afforded no training of the aesthetic perceptions. He averred that by mercenary and soulless education we are cut off from our ancient roots of culture and education, and thought it could be corrected "by the stress of imagination, emotion and spiritual delicacy" (*The National Value of Art*, p. 1). According to him, the sense of the beautiful has a great effect on the life of a nation. The manners, social culture, restraint in action and expression are a large part of national

prestige and dignity, and are based on the sense of form and beauty. In the art of life, beauty implies the sense of what is correct, symmetrical, well-adjusted, fair to the eye and pleasing to the imagination. The absence of these qualities together with rudeness, coarseness, vulgar violence, overbearing brusqueness and selfishness is to be considered a source of national weakness. Through the education of artistic culture of the perceptions and sensibilities it should be possible to foster the sense of form and beauty, the correct, symmetrical, well-adjusted, fair and pleasing. It may be argued that Sri Aurobindo is confusing the values of social existence with those of the aesthetic. But given the premises of an evolutionary philosophy of consciousness with an accent on its gradual transformation, the issue cannot be held against him. In keeping with his integral approach to the problems of life and existence, there is no hiatus between the secular and the sacred in his scheme of thought. Reality is omnipresent, there is one continuum of the involved consciousness moving from the infrarational towards the suprarational. It is the working of the mental logic that keeps beauty away from the machinations of everyday life. Moreover, Reality as the delight of existence figures itself into episodes, aesthetic or otherwise, but underneath it is the spirit that sustains them all. As our consciousness changes into height, and depth and wideness of the spirit, the episodes of our mental living become inter-referential. If this line of argument is admitted, then it becomes possible to reconcile our *inlook* into ourselves with our *outlook* on the world. Hence there can be a talk about rendering life uplifted towards a higher development through the subjective turn of art and poetry. As Aristotle had suggested, the virtuous person chooses the mean by habit, in Sri Aurobindo's context too, a man's taste could be educated and trained, so that his sense of beauty made habitually active, correct and sensitive. It should be one of the prime objectives of education. It is not Sri Aurobindo's point that every man should be an artist, on the contrary, the point is that every man should have his artistic faculty developed and trained, and as a result the nation will be habituated to expect the beautiful in preference to the ugly. "A nation surrounded daily by the beautiful, noble, fine and harmonious becomes that which it is habituated to contemplate and realises the fullness of the expanding Spirit in itself". (*The National Value of Art*, p. 21).

(Concluded)

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“SADHAK NOLINIDA – The Wayfarer of the Sunlit Path”

Manoj Dasgupta

[Mother’s organ music]

The music we have just heard is Mother’s organ music and she called it “Marching in search of the soul”. It is intended to set the general mood and the central theme of this evening’s talk.

Let me first relate briefly the genesis of today’s talk. Since the beginning of Nolini-da’s birth centenary year, I have received several requests to say something on Nolini-da which I politely, sometimes not so politely, brushed aside. However, just three weeks back the same request was repeated again, and somehow this time I yielded. What made me bold to undertake this hazardous task are the six notebooks. In fact, there are five and the sixth one is just a few pages. These notebooks are Nolini-da’s very personal diary, his daily report or, as he puts it, his ‘book of confession’, which he submitted daily to Sri Aurobindo during the period 26 July 1932 to 24 September 1935, so covering a span of three years. By force of circumstances, it has fallen to my lot to become their repository. The experience of going through these pages is to put in one word – elevating - an exhilarating uplift. When one goes through these pages one cannot help being filled with an élan ... an impetus, a desire to emulate the grand and sublime example that Nolini-da’s life is and shall ever be like a guiding polestar. Ever since I went through these pages, I have harboured a secret desire to share this experience with fellow sadhaks. As you know in *Savitri* it is said “Imperfect is the joy not shared by all”. This then briefly is the genesis of today’s talk.

Considering the time at our disposal, I have restricted myself mostly to the first notebook. You will appreciate that I had to be very cautious and judicious in my selections and if, in spite of that, I have committed any indiscretion I seek Nolini-da’s indulgence.

The first day of this book of confession is dated 26-7-1932.

Nolini-da begins thus: “I place myself on the dissection table. You will find here only what is ugly and disreputable, loathsome and stinking. Give me the power to tear open the mask and lay bare things in their absolute naturalness, extenuating nothing. There is no likelihood of exaggerating anything. The very genesis of this confession is a very mixed thing. The first or the most insistent impulse to do it did not come from an aspiration towards purification. If that were the only reason I would have deferred, still more I could tell myself that purification would come inevitably, slowly or swiftly, in its own time, and that there might not be any need at all to bring out these dirty entrails to the fore and place them physically, so to say, before you. I could have imagined that things were progressing not badly even without this surgical operation.”

Now we come to the title “Sadhak Nolini-da – the wayfarer of the Sunlit Path.” You might wonder why I put “Sadhak Nolini-da”. Well, as you know Sri Aurobindo has somewhere said that mostly the sadhaks here in the Ashram are part-time sadhaks. But Nolini-da’s case was different, he was a full time sadhak. I chose “Sadhak Nolini-da”, because the Nolini-da that I wish to project today is not the Nolini-da as most of us knew him to be the *siddha purusha*, the realised soul, the *stithaprajna* of the Gita —

*prajahāti yada kāmān
sarvān pārtha manogatan
ātmany evā ’tmanā tuṣṭaḥ
sthitaprajñas tado ’cyate*

Of this description that the Gita gives of the *stithaprajna*, I think, you will not find a better example than Nolini-da. But as I said this is not the Nolini-da that I wish to project today. The Nolini-da that I am going to reveal to you is the Nolini-da of the early thirties and I am sure most of us who are present here did not know him physically then – except Dyuman-da, Nirod-da, Sahana-di, Mrityunjoy-da, and a few others perhaps. Sadhak Nolini-da is more close to us, more human if I may say so.

Somewhere in July 1933, Nolini-da, in his diary, writes to Sri Aurobindo: “Something is nowadays almost constantly whispering into my consciousness, ‘It is time, high time; take the final leap, the last one that will land you definitely into the other consciousness, and turn you away from the ordinary consciousness for good.’ May the insistence acquire greater and greater strength till the thing is achieved.”

We shall consider today the Nolini-da before this final leap. I feel it is more relevant to us, because it teaches us through a living and concrete example how

to prepare oneself for this great leap. That explains the title “Sadhak Nolini-da”. And I have added, “the wayfarer of the Sunlit Path”. Echoing Sri Aurobindo’s words, when he said “If Nolini is not doing my yoga who is doing it?”, I may say, “If Nolini-da is not a wayfarer of the Sunlit Path who is?” A few words just as to what is the Sunlit Path. I have taken two portions from Sri Aurobindo’s letters which will explain what the Sunlit Path is.

Sri Aurobindo writes: “The sunlit path can be followed by those who are able to practise surrender, first a central surrender and afterwards a more complete self-giving in all the parts of the being. If they can achieve and preserve the attitude of the central surrender, if they can rely wholly on the Divine and accept cheerfully whatever comes to them from the Divine, then their path becomes sunlit and may even be straightforward and easy. They will not escape all difficulties, no seeker can, but they will be able to meet them without pain and despondency, — as indeed the Gita recommends that yoga should be practised, *anirvinnacetasa* [6:23] — trusting in the inner guidance and perceiving it more and more or else in the outer guidance of the Guru.”

The second letter: “The sunlit path can only be followed if the psychic is constantly or normally in front or if one has a natural spirit of faith and surrender or a face turned habitually towards the sun or psychic predisposition (e.g. a faith in one’s spiritual destiny) or, if one has acquired the psychic turn. That does not mean that the sunlit man has no difficulties; he may have many, but he regards them cheerfully as “all in the day’s work”. If he gets a bad beating, he is capable of saying, “Well, that was a queer go but the Divine is evidently in a queer mood and if that is his way of doing things, it must be the right one; I am surely a still queerer fellow myself and that, I suppose, was the only means of putting me right.” But everybody can’t be of that turn, and surrender which would put everything right is, as you say, difficult. At least it is difficult to do completely. That is why we do not insist on total surrender at once, but are satisfied with a little to begin with, the rest to grow as it can”.

Nolini-da’s life is a poem par excellence, a hymn of the psychic predisposition. When I used the image of Nolini-da’s life as poem I am not being original. Nolini-da himself writes this to Sri Aurobindo: “However much I may like the world of ideas and pure knowledge I can never be satisfied with being a theoretical man. I have an ambition to be a practical man also and when I fail to be creative in the domain of art and literature I tell myself I must be creative in life. Instead of writing poetry I must live poetry. My life should be a living poem pure and perfect in form, rhythm, movement, substance. And from time to time I do try to execute this poem par excellence but like all creation it is not easy and it does not blossom at your bidding.”

As regards the psychic opening Sri Aurobindo says: “Then only can the psychic being fully open when the sadhak has got rid of the mixture of vital motives with his sadhana and is capable of a simple and sincere self-offering to the Mother. Purity, simple sincerity and the capacity of an unegoistic, unmixed self-offering without pretension or demand are the condition of an entire opening of the psychic being.”

Yes, purity, simple sincerity and the capacity of an unegoistic unmixed self-offering without pretension or demand, this is the secret of sadhak Nolini-da, which enabled him to tread the sunlit path and reach the sanctum sanctorum of the Mother’s consciousness and become a collaborator. You will recall Mother’s writing in his birthday cards “Nolini, en route towards the superman.” — “To Nolini, with my love for a life of collaboration, and my blessings for the prolonged continuation of this happy collaboration in peace and love.” Purity and sincerity, a crystal transparency, this is what you find in Nolini-da today.

As regards purity, Nolini-da writes, in one of his diaries, to Sri Aurobindo: “I want to be purified of these ugly movements and so I lay myself bare with no hesitation. Purity has such a charm for me. It moves me as much as love itself, in fact I feel such a fund of purity somewhere in me which all this mass of ugly perversities cannot touch and contaminate. I hope it is not mere illusion of vainglorying.”

Another day, he writes: “I am feeling a sort of necessity or demand upon my body that it should be made pure, pure, pure, relieved of its dross. The best, the only means, is, of course, to fill the body with the Mother’s presence. May I realise it.”

How does Nolini-da obtain this purity, this integral purity? He obtains it by laying himself bare to Their touch. These notebooks that he used to submit to Sri Aurobindo contain also his prose poems, which were corrected by Sri Aurobindo and later published, as you know, in the famous book “*To the Heights*”.

Now in one of these prose poems he writes:

I lay myself bare— limb by limb,
From the outmost to the inmost, from the highest to the lowest,
From the crown of the head to the tip of the toe,
From my senses to my soul.

I lay myself bare - simply and wholly -
To the touch of the one who is our Beloved,

Like a baby, all beauty in its sheer nakedness,
Rejoicing ecstatic in the warmth of the mother’s lap.

The clothings and trappings, the pretences and falsities -
All the proprieties that make up our adult wisdom -
Cast to the winds— come as innocent as when you were born
And bathe in the wide sunlight of the Love Divine.

So, this is his secret – to lay himself bare. And this Nolini-da did mercilessly, he laid himself bare to the holy and purifying gaze of the Master. And because he was most uncharitable to his own personal weaknesses he could become all charity towards our human shortcomings and failings. You will recall Amal Kiran's reminiscences, where he says, "I remember the Mother saying that she had never heard him speak ill of anybody to her." There was never any bitterness in Nolini-da.

I propose to take up now, immediately, as I told you, how he lays himself bare, his reports of his slacknesses, and you will see how most often Sri Aurobindo writes just a word or so in the margin. That Sri Aurobindo has carefully gone through all he writes can be seen by the detailed corrections – you know, the slip of the pen, if Nolini-da has missed a preposition, a comma, etc., Sri Aurobindo fills it in; that shows that he has gone through these notebooks very carefully.

Nolini-da writes: "I think I have found out the canker in my physical consciousness, the very cornerstone of the obstacle that prevents any dynamic manifestation of the Power in me. It is a very strong and solid formation of doubt and distrust and cynicism entrenched in a far-off backyard-corner, and from there exerting its searing influence. I have the impression that it is a sort of stout stumpy person, sitting tight on his cosy seat, and sometimes smiling with a sardonic smile. It was always there but I never wanted to recognise it. Whenever it popped up its head, I turned away from it or if I wanted to look at it, it glided away. It was such a shame to find in oneself a movement of such a kind – complete denial. Viewed from the standpoint of the entire consciousness it occupies such a tiny place, it seemed it could be almost neglected, and that is what I was doing so long. It seemed to me it did not matter that this insignificant corner does not recognise what the rest of the entire consciousness so easily accepts. Evidently, what appears more, it was not weak or important to that degree. This worm ensconced in the very bedrock of the spiritual life must be pulled out and crushed. It is a sort of octopus. I think my rheumatism is its physical expression. It is a sort of octopus that is spread out underground and swallows up all the gifts and blessings that come from the Mother. Am I correct in my diagnosis?"

Sri Aurobindo "Yes, it is true, it was there."

Nolini-da continues: "Tear off from me this octopus, root it out, let the passage be thus made clear and free, and the physical consciousness be something like the wide azure light-bearing skies."

Sri Aurobindo writes: "This thing is in the very nature of the material consciousness and it is that which prevents even the strongest experiences getting hold of the whole being down to the physical and changing it. It has not to be left to itself but dealt with."

On another day, Nolini-da writes: "The immediate reaction of the Mother's chiding upon my vital was that it became more sad. It sighed and said to itself that all these weaknesses are part and parcel of human nature and will stick to it to the very end. The vital does believe in its ultimate conversion and transformation but that it thinks can only come when the full supramental power has descended, till then absolute purity is impossible and relative purity even if attained is not of much use and somehow one has to manage or bungle through as best as one can. This feeling or belief is not new to me. It has been, I think, a constant companion and one of the most weakening and distressing elements of my consciousness. Human nature cannot be changed very much unless and until it is made to change by the Force of the Divine nature and one does not know when and how the Divine Force will come in its supreme Power. When it comes, everything will certainly be changed but till then, in the meanwhile, human nature will remain human nature. Such is the attitude of the vital, maintained I think for self-justification and I have some difficulty in combating it successfully." Where Nolini-da writes, "and one does not know when and how the Divine Force will come in" Sri Aurobindo underlines 'when' and 'how' and adds "and also why, if the attitude is so neutral and uninviting".

I now come to an interesting item – food and greed. Nolini-da writes: "I was never very much troubled by inopportunities of the palate; and I can easily accommodate myself to any kind and any amount of food. That is the general condition. But at times, on occasions, I become greedy. And if there is not a violent reaction against bad quality and small quantity of food, there is still a pronounced or subdued irritation in the nerves. I wanted to tell you the lemon story that will best illustrate my condition. I was using one lemon for three items, a part I was using at ten in the morning, for drink with one spoon of sugar, another part along with the midday meal, and a third part for my afternoon hot drink. Suddenly, one day, I found it was becoming difficult for me to manage three times with one lemon. I could not explain matters. I thought I was using too much, but it could not be so, then I found that the lemon was to blame. It was getting smaller and smaller. [*This is the peculiar humour of Nolini-da.*] That caused some irritation and I told Amrita, who reported the matter to Mother.

Amrita told me that Mother would give us every day one lemon so long as Munibhai's [Dyuman-da's] supply was there. This solution did not please me at first for I would have liked to get the proper thing, from the department concerned. I did not want to demand anything special from the Mother for me alone. Even, I told Amrita, I did not require the lemon that Mother had given him for me. But immediately, I thought it was wrong movement, – I should never, on any account, refuse anything that came from the Mother. The only regret was that the Mother did not give me the thing personally. For I always like to have things from her hands, whatever may be the intrinsic value, or no value, of the thing itself. And so, every day when I carried the basket of lemons with me, when I saw Mother, I expected her to give, (offer), me one. Once or twice she gave, and then she stopped. [*This is enough cause for anyone of us to revolt but now see how Nolini-da takes it.*] This once or twice she gave and then she stopped—naturally it was a good lesson. But I was soon cured of expectation, and even the attraction or greed for thing. And now, I receive from her with a greater purity and freedom anything that she chooses to give. [*A beautiful example of the Mother's way of working. What we think to be a gesture of 'no love'... actually, you see, it cuts us asunder of all attachment.*] Another movement of greed I must mention. In the morning, it was my practice to take only two slices of bread. But gradually a greed developed to take three. I yielded several times, then resolved that I should make it a rule not to take more than two slices under any circumstances. I could not always keep to the resolution – I have not yet attained the stage of certainty in this matter. At one time, I was attached to phosco. [*This was a drink that was given those days; something like the cocoa which used to come from France, as Dyuman-da tells me.*] Mere milk I could not stand. As a child because of malarial fever, I had to live practically on milk and quinine. It appears that as a baby I was very fair and stout, and good looking. Both my parents are very fair, so I used to be called Raghuvēr. But this quinine and malaria made me what I am. That association gave me a disgust for mere milk. So I always wanted a strong decoction to drown the smell and colour of milk. But now, I am surprised to see that I am almost entirely free. I can take quite easily mere milk, cold milk, even watery milk. It is a progress I cannot deny, but if I get better things than pure milk, kheer for example, I can't say that I am indifferent or that my mouth does not water."

Another item is butter. "I was extremely attached to it and eagerly waited for Pavitra's grace. I would get vexed when he forgot or, for some reason, did not supply according to the schedule time. Here also I find that I have become freer, that is to say, negating. If I do not get I do not mind, but if I get I can't say

that I am not pleased. The mango season awakened a strong movement of greed. [*Ah, here is something interesting.*] I have to bring to your light two incidents – two wrong movements of greed. Mridu was preparing some fritters in the kitchen. As I was passing she called me and wanted to give me some to taste. She had asked me previously, but I had then the good sense to refuse. But now, in the presence of the fritters, my refusal became very half-hearted; and I accepted a few and ate. I cannot say that this is the first time I have done such a thing, but I am not a habitual criminal. However, crime is crime and once or more than once does not make much difference in the gravity of the guilt. I pray that I may not repeat the thing. The other [*incident*] is that I was somewhat upset and irritated to see the amount of curd we get at midday dwindling day by day. [*This is very interesting. We should pay attention, because it is very relevant to us, I mean we should copy Nolini-da's reaction, as it happens exactly to us too – the amount of curd that we get at midday dwindling day by day.*] Yesterday and today, we received almost half the amount we were receiving before. Yesterday, there was just a shaking in the poise, but it was all right in few seconds. But today, I was even bitter against Dyuman. [*Poor Dyuman-da, he continues the same fate today also.*] I did not, and I do not tell him anything of the kind, and asked Amrita whether Dyuman fixes the amount of milk to be bought as he chooses or what? Amrita said: "everything that Dyuman does has Mother's sanction behind it". I knew that, still the greed was strong enough to cloud the consciousness for a while. The disturbance did not last long, not more than five minutes or even less. [*For us it is twenty-four hours.*] But I do not want to give even that two minutes leave to the lower vital. It is so nice to take whatever is given, and I have. It is so easy for me to have the experience of the happiness, the ease, the freedom of such an attitude that I do not want any mixture in it. I pray that this be the last outburst. Another thing I can inform you of, in this connexion, that we have decided to discontinue phosco in the evening, once the present tin is exhausted. I had an impulse to hand over the whole tin to you, to be given to the Dining Room. But then I thought the movement too dramatic; or is it again a lurking greed that stopped me and the movement was correct?"

Sri Aurobindo writes, "No, it was all right to keep it."

Now I will touch on some experiences of Nolini-da.

He writes: "The last subject on which I wanted to write, to complete my confession, is about yoga and yogic experience. I admit, and I know and feel, that I have had great and real experiences – some were in the inner consciousness. But what I regret is that only a very little thought of it has shown itself outwardly. In fact, the outwardly conscious part in me can record almost noth-

ing of the deeper experiences. The best of my experiences I had in my dream of sleep. Therefore, I like my sleep. It is rarely tamasic, although I do not often remember. What happens is that the effect remains, and I always feel refreshed and happy after a sleep. But that is not of much use to me, if I cannot get beyond it, if I am not able to bring my normal consciousness in line with my consciousness in sleep. This want of palpable and tangible, can I say sensuous, experiences, at one time made me think that Yoga is a thing foreign to me, I was never a yogi in any of my past lives and even, I used to say, I did not know how to do yoga, and I was not doing yoga. What I do is love the Mother, what I aspire to, is to love her more and more.”

Sri Aurobindo writes: “If you perfect that, it is itself a yoga.”

Here is a beautiful experience. “The day was not a bad one, it was not necessary for me to be grim in resolution, I could command a quiet pressure, and was feeling very free. Still, I craved for more concentration. I had a very beautiful experience, – I felt that I had bundled myself up and leaped into the Mother. She was encircling me completely, so that no part of me was outside her, not even my uncontrollable and recalcitrant physical consciousness. Not only she was surrounding me, she was penetrating me from within, through and through; the feeling lasted for sometime. It is a pity that experiences of this kind, do not last long. And, to say that that is to be the normal condition of life! I get the incline of power that is not sombre and vehement but smiling and yet irresistible. It does not emit heat but radiates the soothing and persuasive coolness. It is not the fire of our earth that burns and bruises, smokes and crepitates. It is something like the serene and silent luminousness, the steady and unaging radiance of the distant stars.”

The last that I would like to read is: “Today I felt very nice while I was walking on the route in the presence of the Mother. I felt so free and happy and strong too. I felt in my head something, the consciousness I think, leaping up from step to step, as it were, snapping a tie or band, till it reached to the crown, where I felt an exhilarating sensation, and even sought to stretch further up, while all the while, the consciousness in the heart was steadily upholding the whole process. I hope it is the definite beginning of the breaking of my head.”

Next experience is remarkable: “Today I felt that some sort of digging into the brain cells is necessary. An influx of light, filling and flooding the brain is comparatively easy. But to make the light permanent and effective, it must be got in the most material particles of the brain. That means a patient spadework. Another thing I felt that no external pressure, least of all the pressure of the mental will, is to be brought to bear upon the brain cells. These must have a free movement of their own to change and rearrange themselves, according to their

own inner urge. So, at one moment I withdrew the will and left the brain people to themselves. For some seconds I found them very much nonplussed and quite at sea, and even somewhat fearful or nervous like a rudderless boat. But they recovered very soon and seemed to enjoy their independence and showed a very **goodwill** to change themselves. Of course, the movement was not so clear and definite as I describe it. But this seemed to be the central element of an experience of a mixed character.”

The last piece I wanted to read out. Nolinida-da writes: “Yesterday night Sahana and Amiya called me to their place to hear some good words, *bhalo kotha*. Particularly, as Dilip and Saurin would not be there, they would feel free and quite at home. So I went, Jyotirmoyi was not present as she was busy writing her book. Sahana said that she wanted to go deep, deep, always deep so that she might entirely lose herself into the Mother. She wanted some inspiration from me to be able to do it. I give the substance of what I said in reply: – ‘Always one has to start with the psychic being. The first and constant touch with the Mother one gets there. The more you sink into it, the more you get of the Mother. It is the basis, it is the beginning; for you must find the Mother not only in your innermost being but in all your being. From the psychic you must extend to the outer heart or the higher vital. The emotions are to be consecrated to the Mother: That would be when you feel love, devotion, joy. Next, the lower vital must also get the Mother’s touch. The lower vital, when purified, will give force, intensity, enthusiasm; not restlessness but an ardent one point- edness. And finally, the physical should also come in.” Sahana, at this point asked, “Then shall we have constant touch with the Mother physically also?” I answered, “Not quite that perhaps. When I spoke of the physical I meant the subtle-physical. For I have had the experience, and very intensely too, of the touch of the Mother in the subtle-physical. The experience is so near the material physical that you do not find any difference at all between the two. The touch through the subtle senses is not less poignant and concrete than the touch through the physical senses. As regards the real material touch, we must not ask for it or think of it; we must leave it entirely into the hands of the Mother, for her to give it when and how she chooses. It is her seal of affirmation, her final blessing. Indeed, to get the Mother really, integrally, we must not lay too much stress on the physical intimacy. It is the intimacy in the psychic and the higher and lower vital, and the subtle-physical that must be thoroughly established. If we want to know and realise her as she is, we must experience her in all these deeper and higher regions. Otherwise, we run the risk of erecting her as an idol and worship her only with external rites and ceremonies. Not that these are reprehensible or unhelpful, but they should not be made too much of, and in-

sisted on as the only thing needed. We receive the Mother's physical touch whenever she chooses to give it to us, with gratitude and humility and never demand it. It is her sanction, her seal, to a consciousness that reveals her reality to us.' I proceeded further, 'The Mother did come to us as close as possible on the physical. She did so as she found it necessary for her purpose. Now she has retired or withdrawn. In a way, this is also necessary for her purpose. [Nolini-da is alluding to here: in 1931 Mother..., what you call apparently, fell sick and for a period of about one month she was seeing nobody, except a very few, Amrita-da, Pavitra-da etc. So this is what he says] Now she has retired or withdrawn. In a way, this is also necessary for her purpose. Once she came down to us and prepared us, now she has receded and seems to say that we too on our side must try to go up a little to catch her.' I hope I am not very much beside the mark in my perception?"

Sri Aurobindo writes: "It is quite right."

Nolini-da continues: "I remember just now that I spoke of another experience to complete the integral realisation of the Mother's touch. I said 'Our entire being should feel the Mother not merely as a whole, *en masse*, but that each limb should feel and realise her independently.' I felt at times, for example, that each cell of my body was an independent being, a separate personality, a complete individual by itself, and each had its own separate conscious relation with the Mother. It was a peculiar experience but so exhilarating."

I read again the passage which I feel very relevant today: "The Mother did come to us as close as possible on the physical. She did so as she found it necessary for her purpose. Now she has retired or withdrawn. In a way, this is also necessary for her purpose. Once she came down to us and prepared us, now she has receded and seems to say that we too on our side must try to go up a little to catch her."

I end with Nolini-da's apocalyptic vision in 1977. "The Mother says just see, look at me. I am here, come back in my new body, Divine, transformed and glorious. And I am the same Mother, still human. Do not worry. Do not be concerned about your own self, your progress and realisation; nor about others. I am here, look at me, gaze into me, enter into me wholly, merge into my being, lose yourself into my love. You will see all problems solved, everything done. Forget everything, forget the world. Remember me alone. Be one with me, with my love."

Love the Mother, this is the only mantra that Nolini-da knew and sought to communicate to us.

(This is the transcript of a talk delivered on the occasion of Nolini Kanta Gupta's Birth Centenary)

Jugal Kishore Mukherjee 1925 – 2009

R Ranganath

Jugal Kishore Mukherjee, one of the most eminent intellectual sadhaks of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, passed away on December 15, 2009 at the age of 84. Though somewhat weakened physically due to his age, and all the more so because of an unfortunate accident, when knocked down by a motor cycle a few years ago, he was actually in quite good health and did not suffer from any chronic ailments. His sudden end came as a shock to the ashramites. He had a deep inner life and there can be no doubt that his soul has winged its way into the protective arms of the Divine Mother.

Jugal Kishore Mukherjee, affectionately called, "Jugalda", by one and all in the Ashram, was born in a remote village in Bengal. His father passed away when he was only an infant in his mother's arms. His mother, reduced to very difficult circumstances, somehow managed to raise Jugalda to boyhood with often one sparse meal a day. Jugalda's brilliant intellect was noticed by the village school teacher and he was helped and referred to a better school some distance away from his own village. His mother, ever willing to sacrifice her all for the sake of her son, somehow managed to support him in order to enable him to pursue his studies. He landed in Calcutta for his college education and came in contact with the Sri Aurobindo Pathmandir in College Street, an important centre for the dissemination of Sri Aurobindo's teachings. Studying often under street lights, he managed to complete college. He was lucky enough to have the great Meghnath Saha as his professor.

He never forgot his mother's advice, dinned into his ears from infancy: "Remember, my son, for those who have no one in this harsh world, there is always God, the Universal ever-present Friend, who never fails." Guided by

his mother and beaten into tough mettle by the vicissitudes of a life of extreme poverty, he developed an irreversible inner life, and it was only natural that when only 24 years old, without pursuing further studies, Jugalda came and settled in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1949. Hence he was blessed with the Grace of having had Sri Aurobindo's Darshan for two years.

Jugalda was assigned work in the Ashram School by the Mother, where he taught Physics. But on any given day, rather than teaching Physics he would be more inclined to be discussing Sri Aurobindo's philosophy or Yoga. Such was his love for Mother and Sri Aurobindo around whom his life was centred! On the occasion of one of the Anniversaries of the Ashram School, he was asked by the Mother to play the role of the hero in Sri Aurobindo play, "*Perseus the Deliverer*". It was during one of the rehearsals in Her presence, that the Mother commented most favourably about the clarity of Jugalda's mind. His thoughts were always precisely formed and clearly expressed.

Jugalda organised the Higher Course in the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education and was made the head of that section when the location was shifted to the present four-storied building on the Sea Front which the Mother named, "Knowledge". Frequently corresponding with the Mother, he took detailed guidance from her for running the institute. In the last couple of years, he consciously withdrew from active service in "Knowledge", declaring to one and all, that he wanted to "realise" Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's teachings, having studied them for a whole lifetime.

Jugalda was a prolific writer, having written many books in English and Bengali. He was a contributor to many journals connected with Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. In his book, "*The destiny of the Body*" (1975), he discusses the transformation of the human body into a divine supramental body from a scientific and biological angle. With his vast knowledge of science, he points out many interesting facts about longevity in the animal world. In 1989, he wrote "*Sri Aurobindo's Poetry and Sanskrit Rhetoric*". In 1990, followed another book from his pen: "*From Man Human to Man Divine*". Then in 1995, came a book on Sri Aurobindo's Humour "*Sri Aurobindo The Smiling Master*". In 1994 he produced a small booklet entitled "*The wonder that is Amal Kiran*" in commemoration of the ninetieth birthday of K.D. Sethna, another very eminent Aurobindonian scholar, author and literary critic. In his book, "*The Practice of the Integral Yoga*", Jugalda gives practical hints to be applied in day to day

life-situations, keeping in mind the principles of the Integral Yoga. "*The Mystery of Death, Fate, Karma and Rebirth*" was published in 2004 and it seemed that this subject was already holding his attention in the last phase of his life. Then came some booklets: "*Sri Aurobindo Ashram: Its role, responsibility and Future Destiny*"; "*The Ascent of Sight in Sri Aurobindo's Savitri*"; "*Principles and goals of Integral Education*". There were two Bengali books as well: "*Poorna Yogar Sadhan Paddhati*"—in two volumes and "*Mrityu Rahasya*".

Jugalda was often consulted, personally by many and officially by the Ashram, for clarifications regarding the subtler points in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. In his personal life, Jugalda was ever the perfect example of "simple living and high thinking". He always shunned luxury, even ordinary creature comforts and lived a very simple, bare life. His room was full of books that overflowed even onto his bed, for lack of storage space in cupboards.

His withdrawal from active life, restricting himself to his small room, which was diagonally situated across the street to Sri Aurobindo's room, seemed to be the preparation for his last years on earth,

Jugalda's passing away has undoubtedly left a gaping hole in the intellectual fabric of the Ashram life. Any enquiry given to him regarding Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's teachings, was always answered quoting book, chapter, para, page.

His absence will be felt to a high degree.