

Śraddhā

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

Vol.1 No. 4

24 April, 2010



Sri Aurobindo Bhavan
8 Shakespeare Sarani • Kolkata 700 071

Publication Details

Frequency of publication : Quarterly. Published on 15 August, 24 November, 21 February, 24 April.

Annual Subscription : Rs 150.00 **Single copy** : Rs. 50.00 Those wishing to have the journal mailed to them may please send an additional Rs. 100.00.

For overseas readers : Annual subscription :US\$ 45 inclusive of postal and bank charges.

All payments to be made in favour of **Sri Aurobindo Centre for Research in Social Sciences**.

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Published by
Sri Aurobindo Centre for Research in Social Sciences
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8 Shakespeare Sarani
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Phone : 2282 3057 , 2282 2162 , 2282 1819

Printed by
Basab Chattopadhyaya
Shilalipi
16 A Tamer Lane Kolkata 700 009
Phone 2241 4580

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ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय

Śraddhāvāṁl labhate jñanam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

Cover Design : Champaklal's painting '*Riches*' (cactus flower)

Editorial

To the English poet, April might seem to be ‘the cruellest month’ but to us, children of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, April stands as witness to two events of great moment. It was in this month which is the confluence of the months of Chaitra, generally considered the last month in the Indian calendar year, and Baisakh, the beginning of the New Year which is also the harbinger of spring or the celebration of Life, exactly hundred years ago, that Sri Aurobindo turned the sleepy ghost town of Pondicherry sacred by setting foot on its soil on 4 April. And ten years later in 1920, on 24 April the Mother, too, arrived for the second time, this time to stay permanently in Pondicherry. This second coming of hers, we now celebrate as the day of her Final Arrival in India. What occult significance does this day hold for us?

To learn about its deeper mystery and understand its inner meaning, let us turn to hear what KR Srinivasa Iyengar, the noted biographer of both Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, has to say in his monumental work ‘*On The Mother : the chronicle of a Manifestation and Ministry*’ (Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 3rd ed, 1994). He says ‘...Mirra was reaching the end of the Japanese interlude, having arrived at a new poise of purposive purity and serenity and puissance; and, on the other hand, Sri Aurobindo was approaching the end of the great *Arya* phase of his career, “tying up his bundle...teeming with the catch of the Infinite” awaiting the right time to open it and call into existence his Deva Sangha....The Yoga was now poised for a new leap, for a new and decisive phase of action and manifold realisation. Everything was ready: the room, the lamp, the oil, the wick – and it only needed somebody divinely appointed for the task to arrive upon the scene, strike the match, light the lamp and throw open the illumined chamber for the reception and initiation of the first of the new race... That ‘somebody’ who came to Sri Aurobindo’s aid was of course Mirra, the Mother. As Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1935, “the sadhana and the work were waiting

for the Mother’s coming”’(p.201). Again he says ‘It was in this state, facing the problem of self-change and world-change, that the coming of Mirra provided the necessary element of dynamism’ (p.92). ‘For Mirra, the four years in Japan had on the whole been a period of quietude and sadhana, a time for perfection in minutiae, a season for the cultivation of the integral as well as the miniature; in a word the Japanese interim had proved a sanctuary and phoenix-hour for the whole tapasya of a Mahasaraswati...the “Power...that is needed for the fullness of her creation”’(pp.201-202). Thus **24 April**, the anniversary of the Mother’s second coming and final arrival can be looked upon as ‘the tangible sign of the sure Victory over the adverse forces’(p.857).

We are particularly grateful to Dr Kireet Joshi for kindly allowing us to reprint one of his talks addressed to the Super School in Auroville some years back. The informal conversational nature of the talk delivered in a wonderfully relaxed way adds a sense of intimacy and freshness. Only a person of his erudition and depth of learning could bring out so clearly and in such simple language the many difficult and abstruse metaphysical concepts elaborated in the article.

With the publication of this issue, **Sraddha** completes its first year of existence. We hope and pray to the Mother that with her Blessings and Grace, we may continue to remain steadfast to the aim that we set for ourselves viz. to be true and faithful to the aspiration of our inmost being.

We are grateful to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust for permission to reproduce Sri Aurobindo’s article ‘The Gita: an introduction’ from the book entitled ‘*Bengali writings*’ published by The Ashram Trust in 1991, The Mother’s photograph with a few lines from Sri Aurobindo appended to it, Champaklal’s painting ‘Riches’ (cactus flower) on the cover of the journal, the article by the late Indra Sen on ‘The Integral Yoga of the Mother’ from the book *Sri Aurobindo on Yoga* edited by Dr. Indra Sen and published by Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi, copyright to which is held by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust and the few lines of quotations from KR Srinivasa Iyengar’s biography on the Mother. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are reproduced here with acknowledgements and thanks to the Trustees.

The Gita: An Introduction

Sri Aurobindo

(These essays, originally written in Bengali, were published first in serial form in the Weekly Review, *Dharma*, and later in a book entitled *Gita Bhūmika*. The book is divided into three sections. The first of these sections has been translated here. The Dharma articles were published in 1909-10 and were not revised since)

FOREWORD

The Gita ranks first among the world's scriptures. The knowledge that has been briefly explained in the Gita is the highest and most secret knowledge. The law of right living, *dharma*, propounded in the Gita includes within its scope and is the basis of all other law of right living. The way of works shown in the Gita is the eternal path for the world's march to the heights.

The Gita is as if the bottomless sea, the source of myriad gems. One may spend a whole life-time fathoming its depths and still not touch the bottom or gauge how deep it is. One may search for a hundred years and still find it difficult to gather even a hundredth part of the riches contained in this endless store of gems. And yet, if one can recover one or two of these gems, the poor man may become rich, the deep thinker acquire wisdom, the hater of God become a devotee, the mighty and powerful hero of action come back to his field of work fully equipped and ready for achieving his life's purpose.

The Gita is an inexhaustible mine of jewels. Even if the jewels are gathered from this mine for ages, the coming generations will always be delighted and astonished by their acquisitions of new and priceless ones. Such is this Book, replete with deep and occult lore. And yet the language is perfectly dear, the style is simple, the surface meaning easily grasped. By simply gliding along the surf of this bottomless sea without taking a deep plunge, there is a certain gain in strength and joy. By taking a walk around the peripheries without entering the

deep recesses of this mine illumined with jewels, there can be found strewn among the grass bright jewels which will keep us rich throughout life

The Gita may well have a thousand commentaries, but a time will never come when a new one will not be needed. There can be no such world-renowned scholar or man of deep knowledge as can write a commentary on the Gita on reading which we can say, this is enough, it will not now be necessary to add another commentary on the Gita, everything has been grasped. After expending all our intellectual powers, we can hope to understand and explain only a few facets of this knowledge. On being engrossed in Yoga or by rising from height to greater height on the way of desireless works, all we shall be able to say is that we have had experience of some of its truths, or have applied in the course of this life one or two of the Gita's teachings in actual practice.

Whatever little the present writer has realised in experience, whatever little he has practised in the way of works, the meaning he has found by reasoning and thought based on that experience and practice, to elucidate that as an aid to others will be the aim of these essays.

THE SPEAKER

In order to understand the meaning and object of the Gita, it is at first necessary to consider the Speaker, the listener and the time and circumstance: The Speaker is Lord Sri Krishna; the listener is His friend Arjuna, the most heroic of men; the circumstance is the prelude to the terrible slaughter of Kurukshetra.

There are many who say that the Mahabharata is only a symbol; Sri Krishna is God, Arjuna the human soul, the sons of Dhritarashtra the inner enemies of the soul's progress, the Pandava army represents the forces that help towards liberation. This is to relegate the Mahabharata to a low position in the world of letters and at the same time to minimise and bring to nought the deep seriousness of the Gita, its utility for the life of the man of action and its high teaching that makes for the progress of mankind. The war of Kurukshetra is not simply a frame for the Gita picture; it is the prime motive and the best occasion for carrying out the law given in the Gita. To accept a symbolic meaning for the great war of Kurukshetra is to reduce the law of the Gita to a law of ascetic quietism inapplicable to life in this world, not a law of the heroic man, a law to be followed in life.

Sri Krishna is the Speaker. The scriptures say that Sri Krishna is God Himself. In the Gita too, Sri Krishna has proclaimed Himself as God. It has

there been declared, on the basis of the Avatara doctrine in the fourth chapter and the theory of the Vibhuti in the tenth, that God dwells hidden in the bodies of all creatures, shows Himself to a certain extent through the manifestations of power in some particular beings, and is fully incarnated in the person of Sri Krishna. According to many, Sri Krishna, Arjuna and Kurukshetra are mere metaphors, and in order to recover the true meaning of the Gita these metaphors are to be ignored. But we cannot reject this part of the teaching. If the Avatara doctrine is there, why should Sri Krishna be ignored? Therefore, God Himself is the propounder of this knowledge and the teaching.

Sri Krishna is an Avatara. He has accepted in human form the law of man's body and mind and spirit and has played his game, *lila*, accordingly. If we can grasp the obvious and the occult meaning of that play, we shall be able to grasp the meaning, the aim and the method of this world-game. The main feature of this great game was action impelled by total knowledge. What was the knowledge underlying that action and that play has been revealed in the Gita.

Sri Krishna of the Mahabharata is a hero of action, a great yogin, a great man of the world, a founder of empire, statesman and warrior, a knower of *brahman* in the body of a Kshatriya. In his life we see an incomparable manifestation and mysterious play of the Supreme Power, *mahasakti*. Of that mystery, the Gita is an explanation.

Sri Krishna is Lord of the worlds, universal Vasudeva; and yet, by shrouding His greatness he has entered into play by establishing with men relations like those of father and son, brother and husband, intimate associate and friend and enemy. In His life is implied the supreme secret of the Aryan knowledge and the highest meaning of the way of devotion. Their essential principles are also part of the Gita's teaching.

Sri Krishna's incarnation is at the juncture of the Dwapara and the Kali age. In each of the evolutionary cycles, *kalpa*, God incarnates in full at such junctures. The Kali age is the worst as well as the best among the four epochs. This age is the reign period of Kali, the impeller of sin and the principal enemy of man's progress; the utmost degradation and downfall of man occur during Kali's reign. But there is a gain in strength by fighting against obstacles and new creation comes through destruction of the old; this process is seen in the Kali age too. The elements of evil that are going to be destroyed in the course of the world's evolution are precisely the ones that are eliminated through an inordinate growth; on the other hand, seeds of new creation are sown and sprout, these seeds become trees in the Satya age that follows. Moreover, as in astrology all the

planets enjoy their sub-periods in the period of a particular planet, so, in the period of Kali, each of the four ages, Satya, Treta, Dwapara and Kali repeatedly enjoys its sub-period. Through this cyclic movement, there is in the Kali age a great downfall followed by an upward trend, another great downfall and again an upward surge; these serve the purposes of God. At the juncture of Dwapara and Kali, God through His incarnation allows an inordinate growth of evil, destroys the evil, sows the seeds of good and prepares favourable conditions for their sprouting; then begins the period of Kali. Sri Krishna has left in the Gita the secret knowledge and the method of work that would be useful for bringing in the age of Truth, *satyayuga*. When the time comes for the Satya sub-period of Kali, the world-wide propagation of the law of the Gita is inevitable. That time is now come, that is why the recognition of the Gita, instead of being confined to a few men of wisdom and learning, is spreading among the generality of men and in foreign lands.

Therefore it is not possible to distinguish Sri Krishna the Speaker from His Word, the Gita. Sri Krishna is implied in the Gita, the Gita is Sri Krishna in His form of the Word.

THE LISTENER

The recipient of the knowledge given in the Gita is the mighty hero, Arjuna, son of the great god Indra and the best of the Pandavas. Just as it is difficult to discover the aim of the Gita and its hidden meaning by ignoring the Speaker, similarly that meaning would suffer by ignoring the listener.

Arjuna is Sri Krishna's intimate associate. Those who are Sri Krishna's contemporaries and have come down to the same field of work establish various kinds of relations with the Supreme Purushottama in human form, in accordance with their respective capacity and previous acts. Uddhava is Sri Krishna's devotee, Satyaki is a faithful follower and companion, king Yudhisthira is a relative and friend who is moved by His counsel, but none could establish with Sri Krishna a relation as intimate as Arjuna. All the close and endearing relations possible between two men of the same age were present in the case of Sri Krishna and Arjuna. Arjuna is Sri Krishna's brother, His closest friend, and husband of His sister Subhadra, dear to Him as His own heart. In the fourth chapter the Lord has pointed to this intimacy as the reason for choosing Arjuna as the one person fit to hear the supreme secret of the Gita:

*sa evāyaṁ maya te'dya yogaḥ proktaḥ purātanaḥ
bhakto'si me sakhā ceti rahasyaṁ hyetaduttamam*

“I have revealed this old and forgotten yoga to you this day, because you are my intimate friend and devotee; for this yoga is the best and the ultimate secret of the world.” In chapter eighteen too, there has been a repetition of this statement while explaining the keynote of Karmayoga which is as if the pivotal point of the Gita:

*sarva-guhyatamaṁ bhūyaḥ śṛṇu me paramaṁ vacaḥ
iṣṭo'si me drdhamiti tato vaksyāmi te hitam*

“Once again you listen to my supreme Word, the most secret of all. You are extremely dear to me, therefore I shall speak to you about this, the best of all paths.” These two verses are in their substance on the lines of the Vedic scriptures, as for example, the Katha Upanishad, which says:

*Nāyamātmā pravacanena labhyo
na medhayā na bahunā śrutena
yameva eṣa vṛṇute tena labhyas—
tasyaiṣa ātmā vṛṇute tanūṁ svām*

“This Supreme Self is not to be won through the philosopher’s commentary, nor by brain-power, nor again through a wide knowledge of scripture. He alone can win Him who is chosen by God; to him alone this Supreme Self reveals His own body.” Therefore, it is he who is capable of establishing with God sweet relations like those of friendship and the rest that is the fit recipient of the knowledge given in the Gita.

This implies another thing of great importance. God chose Arjuna because he embodied in himself both devotee and friend. There are many kinds of devotees. Normally, a devotee brings to mind a teacher-disciple relationship. Love is no doubt there behind such devotion, but ordinarily obedience, respect and a blind devotedness are its special characteristics. But friend does not show respect to friend. They joke and play and have fun together, use endearing terms; for the sake of the play they may taunt and even show disrespect, use abusive language, make undue demands on each other. Friend is not always obedient to friend; and even though one may act according to a friend’s advice out of admiration for his deep wisdom and sincere goodwill, that is not done blindly. One argues with him, expresses doubts, at times even protests against his views. The first lesson in the relation of friends is the giving up of all fear; to give up all outward show of respect is its second lesson; love is its first and last word. He is the fit recipient of the knowledge given

in the Gita who understands this world-movement as a sweet and mysterious game full of love and bliss, elects God as his playmate and can bind Him to himself in a tie of friendship. He is the fit recipient of the knowledge given in the Gita who realises the greatness and the power of God, the depth of His wisdom and even His awfulness, and yet is not overwhelmed and plays with Him without fear and with a smiling face.

The relationship of friendship may include as part of the game all other kinds of relationship. The teacher-disciple relation—if based on friendship becomes a very sweet one; such precisely was the relation which Arjuna established with Sri Krishna at the commencement of the Gita’s discourse. “You are my best well-wisher and friend, in whom else shall I take refuge? I have lost my power of thought, I am frightened by the weight of responsibility, I am swayed by doubts as to what I should do, overwhelmed by acute sorrow. You save me, give me advice. I leave in your hands all responsibility for my weal in this world and beyond.” In this spirit did Arjuna approach the Friend and Helper of mankind with the object of receiving knowledge. The relation of mother and child too becomes part of friendship. One older in age and superior in wisdom loves a younger and less enlightened friend as a mother does, gives him protection and care, always holds him in his lap and saves him from danger and evil. Sri Krishna manifests his side of motherly love as well to one who establishes friendship with Him. Friendship may bring with it not only the depths of motherly love but also the keenness and acute joy of married love. Friends crave each other’s companionship always, pine at separation, are delighted at the endearing touch, and feel a joy in even giving up one’s life for the other’s sake. The relation of service too becomes very sweet when it forms part of friendship. As has been said above, the more the endearing relationships one can establish with the Supreme Godhead, the more does the friendship blossom, the more does one gain in capacity to receive the knowledge of the Gita.

Arjuna, the friend of Krishna, is the principal actor in the Mahabharata; in the Gita the teaching about the yoga of works is the primary teaching. Knowledge, devotion and works, these three paths are not mutually contradictory. In the path of works, to do works founded on knowledge and in the power given by devotion, to act for the purpose of God, at His bidding and in union with Him, this is the teaching of the Gita. Those who are frightened by the sorrows of the world, tormented by the distaste for life, *vairāgya*, those who have lost interest in this play of God, are desirous of hiding themselves in the lap of Infinity and leave this play, theirs is a different path. No such feeling or desire was there in

Arjuna, the mighty warrior and the bravest of heroic men. Sri Krishna has not revealed this supreme secret to a quiet ascetic or wise philosopher, has not elected any Brahmin vowed to non-violence as the recipient of this teaching; a Kshatriya warrior of tremendous might and prowess was considered to be the fit receptacle for obtaining this incomparable knowledge. He alone is capable of entry into the deepest secrets of this teaching who can remain undisturbed by victories or defeats in the battle of life. This Self is not to be won by one who lacks in strength: *nāyam-ātmā bala-hīnena labhyaḥ*. He alone who cherishes an aspiration to find God in preference to a desire for liberation, *mumukṣutva*, can have a taste of the proximity of God, realise himself as eternally free in his true nature, and will be capable of rejecting the desire for liberation as being the last resort of the Ignorance. He alone is capable of passing beyond the modes of Nature, *gunātīta*, who after rejecting the tamasic and rajasic forms of egoism is unwilling to remain bound even by an egoism of the sattwic type. Arjuna has fulfilled his rajasic propensities by following the law of the Kshatriya, and has, at the same time, given the power of *rajas* a turn towards *sattva*, by accepting the sattwic ideal. Such a person is an excellent receptacle for the Gita's teaching.

Arjuna was not the best among his great contemporaries. In spiritual knowledge, Vyasa was the greatest; in all kinds of worldly knowledge of that epoch, Bhishma was the best; in the thirst for knowledge king Dhritarashtra and Vidura led the rest; in saintliness and sattwic qualities Yudhishtira was the best; in devotion there was none equal to Uddhava and Akrura; his eldest brother Karna, the mighty warrior led in inborn strength and courage. And yet, it was Arjuna whom the Lord of the worlds elected; it was in his hands that He placed divine weapons like the Gandiva bow and gave to him eternal victory; it was through him that thousands upon thousands of India's world-renowned fighters were made to fall; and he founded for Yudhishtira his undisputed empire as a gift of Arjuna's prowess. Above all, it was Arjuna whom He decided as being the one fit recipient of the supreme knowledge given in the Gita. It was Arjuna alone who is the hero and the principal actor in the Mahabharata, every section of that poem proclaims the fame and the glory of him alone. This is no undue partiality on the part of the Supreme Divine or of the great Vyasa, the author of the Mahabharata. This high position derives from complete faith and self-surrender. He who surrenders to the Supreme with complete faith and dependence and without making any claims, all responsibility for his own good or harm, weal or woe, virtue or sin; he who wants to act according to His behests instead of being attached to works dear to his own heart; who accepts

the impulsions received from Him instead of satisfying his own propensities; who puts to use in His work the qualities and inspirations given by Him instead of eagerly hugging at the qualities admired by himself—it is that selfless and faithful Karmayogin who becomes the Supreme's dearest friend and the best vehicle of His Power; through him is accomplished flawlessly a stupendous work for the world. Muhammad, the founder of Islam, was a supreme yogin of this type. Arjuna too was ever on the alert to make an effort at this self-surrender; this effort was the cause of Sri Krishna's love and satisfaction. He alone who makes a serious effort at self-surrender is the best fitted to receive the Gita's teaching. Sri Krishna becomes his Teacher and Friend and takes over all responsibility for him in this world and in the next.

THE CIRCUMSTANCE

In order to understand fully the motives and causes of the acts and words of a man, it is necessary to know under what circumstances the acts were done or the words spoken. When at the start of the great war of Kurukshetra the exchange of missiles had begun, *pravṛtte śāstra-sampāte*, it was at that moment that the Lord revealed the Gita. To many this has occasioned surprise and annoyance; they say it must have been due to the author's carelessness or faulty intelligence. But in actual fact, Sri Krishna revealed the knowledge contained in the Gita, at that particular moment and in that situation to a person in that frame of mind, with full knowledge of the time, place and circumstance.

The time was at the commencement of the war. Those who have not developed or put to a test their heroic qualities or strength in a mighty flood of action can never be fit to receive the knowledge given in the Gita. Moreover those who have embarked on a great and difficult endeavour, an endeavour which automatically gives rise to many obstacles and obstructions, many enmities, fears of many setbacks, when in the course of that great endeavour there is acquired a divine strength, to them at that moment in order to take the endeavour to its final conclusion, for the successful carrying out of the divine's work is this knowledge revealed. The Gita lays down in the Yoga of works the foundations of the path to God. It is through works done with faith and devotion that knowledge is born. Therefore the traveller on the path indicated by the Gita does not leave the path and have the vision of God in a remote and quiet hermitage or hill or in a secluded spot; that heavenly Light illumines the world for him, that sweet and powerful Word comes within his hearing, all of a sudden in midway, amidst the noise and bustle of works.

The place was a battlefield, between two armies where missiles were flying. To those who travel on this path, take the lead in works of this nature, often the realisation, *yogasiddhi*, comes and the supreme knowledge dawns, all of a sudden at a critical and momentous hour which determines the march of destiny in this direction or that, depending on the nature of their acts. That knowledge is no bar to action, it is intimately connected with action. It is no doubt true that knowledge also dawns in meditation, in loneliness, when one turns back on one's self; that is why the sages love to be alone. But the traveller on the path of the Gita's Yoga can so divide his instruments of mind, life and body that he experiences loneliness in the midst of a crowd, peace amidst noise, supreme repose while engaged in a whirl of activities. He does not regulate the inner being by outward circumstances, he controls the outer by the inner state. The ordinary Yogin is afraid of life, he escapes from it and takes to Yoga in the shelter and protection of an Ashram. Life itself is the Ashram for the Karmayogin. The ordinary Yogin desires an outward peace and silence, a disturbance of the peace impedes his inner askesis. The Karmayogin enjoys a vast peace and silence within; this state becomes deeper in the midst of external noise; any external disturbance does not harm that inner askesis, it remains undisturbed. People say, how was the Sri Krishna-Arjuna dialogue possible in the middle of armies going in for battle? The answer is, it was possible through the power of Yoga. Through that power of Yoga, amidst the din of battle, at one particular spot, with Sri Krishna and Arjuna peace reigned within and without; the noise of war could not affect these two. In this is implied another spiritual teaching applicable to works. Those who practise the Gita's yoga are the most capable workers and yet remain unattached to their work. Right in the midst of their work they may hear the inner call of the Self, desist from the work and plunge themselves in yoga and do the inner askesis. They know that the work is God's, the fruit is His, we are instruments; hence they have no anxiety about the fruit of their work. They also know that the inner call comes for facilitating the yoga of works, for an improvement in the working, for the increase of knowledge and power. Therefore they do not fear to desist from their work; they know that in the spiritual effort there can never be an unnecessary waste of time.

The attitude of Arjuna comes from a rising of the last doubts of the Karmayogin. There are many who, perplexed by world-problems, the problem of suffering and pleasure, the problem of sin and virtue, declare an escape or flight as the only pathway to the good, and proclaim the virtues of an ascetic withdrawal from life, *vairāgya* and the renunciation of works. Lord Buddha

has taught that the world is impermanent and full of suffering, and has shown the way to attaining Nirvana. Others like Jesus and Tolstoy have been staunchly opposed to war which has been the ancient law of the world and to the system of marriage which maintains the continuity of humankind. The ascetics say, work itself is the product of ignorance, reject ignorance, reject all work, be quiet and actionless. The Advaitin says, the world is false, utterly false, merge yourself in *Brahman*. Then why this world? Why this life? If God exists, then why does He undertake this useless meaningless labour like that of an immature boy? Why did He start this arid joke? If the Self alone exists, if the world is nothing but an illusion, why again does this Self impose this ugly dream on its pure existence? The atheist says, there is neither God nor Self, there is only the blind action of a blind force. But what kind of view is that? Whose is this force, from where is it born, and why again is it blind and insane? No one has been able to give a satisfactory answer to these questions, neither the Christian nor the Buddhist, nor the Advaitin, the atheist or scientist. All are silent on these points and are at the same time eager to shirk the issue by evading the question. Only the Upanishads and the Gita following their line have been unwilling to shirk the issue in this way. That is why the Gita has been chanted during the war of Kurukshetra. Acts terribly worldly—the killing of one's teachers and brothers and kin—these were the objects of the war. At the commencement of that war which destroyed thousands of creatures, Arjuna throws away the divine bow from his hands knowing not what to do, says in a pitiable tone:

tat kiṁ karmāṇi ghore mām niyojayasi Keśava

“Then why do you engage me in this terrible work?” In answer there arises, amidst the din of battle, in tones of thunder, the mighty song uttered by the mouth of God:

kuru karmaiva tasmāt tvam pūrvaiḥ pūrvataram kṛtam

yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgam tyaktvā dhanañjaya

buddhiyukto jahātīha ubhe sukṛtaduṣkṛte

tasmād yogāya yujyasva yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam

asakto hyācaran karma param āpnoti pūruṣaḥ

mayi sarvāṇi karmāṇi saṁnyasyādhyātmacetasā

nirāśīrṇirmamo bhūtvā yuddhasya vigatajvaraḥ

*gatasaṅgasya muktasya jñānāvasthitacetasaḥ
yajñāyācarataḥ karma samagraṁ pravilīyate*

ajñānenā vṛtam jñānam tena muhyanti jantavaḥ

*bhoktāraṁ yajñatapasāṁ sarvalokamaheśvaram
suhṛdam sarvabhūtānāṁ jñātvā mām śāntim ṛcchati*

*mayā hatāmstvaṁ jahi mā vyathisthā
yuddhyasva jetāsi raṇe sapatnān*

*yasya nāhamkṛto bhāvo buddhiryasya na lipyate
hatvāpl sa imānlokān na hanti na nibadhyate*

“Therefore you go on doing works; the kind of work your ancestors have been doing, that work you too have to perform.... Do works in a state of union with the Divine, by giving up attachment.... He whose will and intelligence are fixed in yoga passes beyond virtue and sin in the field of work itself. Therefore strive for the yoga, yoga is the best means to work.... If a man works in a spirit of detachment, he will certainly find God.... With a heart filled with knowledge, entrust to Me all your works; get rid of sorrow by giving up desire and by rejecting egoism; enter the fray.... He who has no attachments left and is free, whose mind lives always in knowledge, he who does works for the sake of sacrifice, all the works of such a man instead of being a cause of bondage at once get completely dissolved in Me.... The knowledge that lies hidden within all creatures is covered up by ignorance. That is why they fall into delusion by creating the dualities like joy and sorrow, sin and virtue.... A supreme peace can be obtained by knowing Me as the Lord of all the worlds, the enjoyer of all kinds of works like sacrifice and askesis, and the friend and beloved of all beings.... It is I who have killed your enemies, you destroy them as a mere instrument, do not grieve; get into the fight, you will conquer the adversary in war.... He who has an inner being free from egoism, whose will and intelligence remain unattached even if he destroys the whole world, still he does not kill, does not undergo any bondage of sin...”

There is no sign here of an evasion of the question, of shirking the issue. The issue has been set forth in clear terms. What is God, what is the world, what is life, what is the way to right living? These questions have been answered by the Gita in brief. And yet the Gita’s aim is not to teach asceticism but to teach the way of works. Herein lies the universal utility of the Gita.

The Special Emphases in the Integral Yoga of the Mother

Indra Sen

The Synthesis of Yoga of Sri Aurobindo is a clear and a full presentation of the system of Integral Yoga. But only ‘The Yoga of Divine Works’ (Part I) of it was revised and then ‘the psychic being’ was introduced. The place of the psychic being is obviously of capital importance. It makes consecration spontaneous and joyful. It easily evokes Divine Presence and creates a vivid feeling for the Divine Will and thus makes Divine works possible. Its emergence makes us distinctively aware of the ego selfhood and thus a progressive liberation from the ego becomes possible. It then reintegrates the myriad movements of mind, life and body under its own form of consciousness and also turns them towards the Divine, which makes divinisation possible. Of such fundamental importance is the psychic being. Its importance is even more in ‘The Yoga of Divine Love’, as the psychic being is ‘the Bhakta’, a true child of the Divine Mother.

It is with the psychic being that Bhakti comes to its own. The Bhakti of the Mind and the Vital lack that purity, that intensity, that constancy. But this part of the *Synthesis* stands as it was in the *Arya* and the psychic being does not clearly figure in it. However, in the *Letters on Yoga* it is prominently there.

In the ‘Yoga of Divine Knowledge’, again it is through the psychic being that identification with the inner being of things and persons becomes possible, which makes sure intuitive knowledge available. Again in the ‘Yoga of Self-perfection’, it is the psychic being which makes first perfection of nature possible. But in these two parts again, the psychic being does not distinctively figure. However, in the letters dealing with knowledge and self-perfection, it does. *The Life Divine* was completely revised and there, as is borne out by the chapter entitled ‘The Triple Transformation’ and otherwise, the psychic being has its due place of honour and distinction.

It is extremely interesting, the psychic being is said to be the Mother’s contribution to our system of Integral Yoga. But the Mother’s early writings do not give a clear indication of it. The first clear mention and characterisation of it is available in the Mother’s *Conversations* published in 1931. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have been explorers and experimentalists in the realm of the Spirit and

possibly it is during 1920 and '31 that this crucial discovery was made. Sri Aurobindo once wrote that during 1914 and '20, while he was busy writing for the *Arya*, Sadhana was waiting for the Mother's coming. It was possibly after Her coming when Sadhana picked up that this divine evolving element of human nature was identified and made the primary object of Sadhana.

The complete body of Integral Yoga as it stands today thus comprises the *Synthesis*, the *Letters on Yoga* and *The Life Divine*. Other writings on the subject would be supplementary.

Now, the Mother pursued a Sadhana, as is evident from Her *Prayers and Meditations*, clearly integral in its approach (covering Knowledge, Love and Works) as also integral in its aim (that of integral transformation of life). Sri Aurobindo has, in fact, said that his and the Mother's paths have been the same from the beginning.

The Mother guided in Sadhana on the lines of Integral Yoga and ordinarily Sri Aurobindo's writings on the subject and the Mother's writings are identical or complementary. But the Mother developed certain new emphases in Her writings as well as the actual life of the Ashram, which much enrich Integral Yoga as such. And it may be useful to contemplate these distinctive emphases and to continue to avail of them in our Sadhana fully.

The Mother's own writings, which constitute Her Integral Yoga, are these : *Prayers and Meditations*, *On Education*, *Four Austerities and Four Liberations* and *Flowers and their Messages*. Each one of these gives in itself a complete form of the Sadhana of Integral Yoga.

Prayers and Meditations give it in the form of flaming aspirations, self-offerings, intense concentrations, meditations and intimate communions and achieve progressive self-perfection and Divine realisation. It is as a personal pursuit and it gives to the Sadhak the same approach which has a unique advantage of its own—a personal relation with the Divine, a settled inwardness, high sincerity and a vivid feeling for inner growth.

On Education and *Four Austerities and Four Liberations* are systematic expositions of Integral Yoga in an intellectual form. The former gives the details of the processes by means of which the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual parts of the integral personality have to be developed to their supramental perfection. The book gives a complete and a clearly stated plan of work for a seeker of Integral Yoga and integral perfection.

The other book too is a similar exposition and gives a complete guidance. It lays down four lines of sadhana or approaches and aims at a realisation of the Divine in all His four primary aspects of Love, Knowledge, Power and Beauty. In a brief compass, a clear guidance on the approach and the aim of Integral Yoga are stated.

The *Flowers and their Messages* is a large volume with striking and vivid pictures of a large number of flowers along with their spiritual significances and occasional directives for Sadhana. It is a vivid aesthetic feeling that we enjoy, while living in the company of the flowers of the book and it moves us in all the planes of our being and tends to lift us by innumerable approaches to the Supramental ideal. It is again by itself a complete guidance of Integral Yoga.

These four books of the Mother constitute a beautiful and a powerful scheme of Sadhana of Integral Yoga—the first through vivid spiritual urges and feelings, the next two through large and wide intellectual expositions and the last one through aesthetic enjoyment. How complementary and mutually helpful are these approaches! And how wide and varied does Integral Yoga become! It is extremely enjoyable to dwell on the pictures of the flowers, see their spiritual significances and contemplate the spirit of each flower, when we are not inclined to read a book on yoga. Similarly to turn to the *Prayers and Meditations* and just live in a feeling of adoration of the Divine is a marvellous relaxation and recoupment.

Other writings of the Mother, *Conversations*, *Words of Long Ago*, the numerous volumes of *Questions and Answers* are all on Sadhana and inspire a reader to pursue integral perfection of life. But the four books mentioned earlier present Integral Yoga as a whole from distinctive approaches.

We may, in the end, briefly mention the special emphases of the Mother, which are of great practical value for a sadhak of Integral Yoga.

One important thing stated above may be considered again. One interested in Integral Yoga normally limits oneself to the *Synthesis* and the *Letters on-Yoga*. But reading of these two works demands intellectual concentration and that cannot be sustained for a long time. This can be easily supplemented by the activities of aesthetic enjoyment (of *Flowers and their Messages*) and spiritual adoration (of *Prayers and Meditations*) and that would indeed be a great advantage in the pursuit of Sadhana.

The Mother's Integral Yoga, as a whole, lays a special emphasis on beauty as a distinctive and powerful approach. Beauty can be, according to the Mother, a complete pathway to the Divine. Surely, if one had faith in the Beauty of the Divine, recognised the Divine as *Param Sundar*, could feel allured by His attractiveness, the seeking of the Divine and the sadhana will tend to become easy and spontaneous, the problem of the recalcitrantelements of nature will cease to be a serious affair. In the moral and mental approach, there is strain, tension and struggle. In the aesthetic approach, the mood of enjoyment is dominant. There is relaxation, there is receptivity, there is easier assimilation.

Beauty also means an appreciation of harmony, of peace, of unity. That means an intensification of the aspiration for the same. Thus the approach of beauty

has obvious advantages and Sadhana stands to gain from it a great deal. We should have more and more sense and feeling for beauty, harmony, peace and unity in us and around and then continually move on to the highest perception of these in the Divine.

Another emphasis of the Mother is regarding the pace of works in Sadhana. Ordinarily, we consider meditation as the representative activity of the Spiritual pursuit. But does it or can it bring about a release from the ego, which is the primary aim of Sadhana? It may and it may not. But work done as consecration can do so more easily. The attitude of self-giving is the essence of the matter. Our ordinary attitude is acquisitive, self-appropriating and that builds up the ego personality. This has to be replaced by the inner attitude of self-giving and of the appreciation of a larger, wider, an all-comprehending selfhood. This can be done easily when we are at the physical level and are concerned with bodily actions and the palpable good of others than when we are dealing with the subtle mental processes within. Self-giving and self-effacing attitude in meditation is extremely difficult, while it is much easier in works. The Mother considers the approach of works much more useful in Sadhana. Of course, one must keep a watch over the spirit in which works are done, works must be done more and more disinterestedly, for the good of others, as service to the Divine, out of love. Such works are a powerful means of bringing about release from the ego, which leads to spiritual realisation.

Works also provide a test for the state more or less achieved in and through meditation. We can easily feel detached and free from external situations in a state of meditation. But if we feel the same when we are in a working relation, with the world, then alone we are really free and detached.

Further, works give us a mastery over the physical conditions and that is essential for the manifestation of the Divine in the world and an integral transformation of life.

Thus works receive a high emphasis in the Mother's Integral Yoga. And it is a wonderful advantage for the modern man interested in yoga. He need not complain that he cannot manage to find time for meditation. His heavy occupation can itself become a constant yoga by progressively changing the inner spirit and attitude of his works. And that can lead him to the highest spiritual fulfilment.

The Mother's identification with the earth and the material creation is profound and She disapproves of any world-renouncing trend in nature. She strongly feels that it is a loss to the world that people with self-sacrificing impulses should think of giving up the world. The world is the Divine's creation, is intended for his manifestation, and it should be our aim and ambition to realise the Divine in normal life and manifest His sublime laws in the same.

Our entire life and behaviour proceed from certain attitudes, and the quality of all our thoughts, feelings and actions depends upon the quality of the attitudes. And

these attitudes are basically a few and through them our whole life can be more easily controlled and guided. The 'champa' flower was a great favourite with the Mother—its colour, its fragrance, its form of the five petals opening out and upwards are so wonderful. She called it 'psychological perfection' and said it stood for 'Surrender' as the base which supported five attitudes and they bring about all the perfection which a sadhak needs in order to be successful in his spiritual adventure. If the attitudes are set right and duly cultivated, all the ideas, feelings and actions will automatically get into proper form. What a simplification of Sadhana!

Surrender means the resolution to abandon the ego selfhood of anxiety, insecurity, struggle, strain and narrowness and seek the soul selfhood of essential joy, sureness of existence, clarity, confidence and perfect hopefulness. On this basic attitude rest five other attitudes and these are :— (I) Sincerity or Transparency, (II) Faith or Trust, (III) Devotion or Gratitude, (IV) Aspiration or Courage, (V) Endurance or Perseverance. The same may be represented graphically like this:



The 'Champa' Flower (Psychological Perfection)

Now, is this not a most interesting, extremely simple and perfectly effective pursuit of Integral Yoga? Are Jnana, Bhakti and Karma, all the three fundamental capacities of the being, not duly mobilised? And will they not prepare the Adhara for an integral realisation of the Divine as Knowledge, Love and Will?

The Mother's Integral Yoga and Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga are identical. Their paths were the same from the very beginning. Yet there are interesting distinctive emphases in the Mother's Integral Yoga and it is well worth bearing them in mind and availing of them in Sadhana.

In the end, here is, in one sentence the Mother's Integral Yoga:

The Integral Yoga of the Mother tends to inspire a life pursued and lived in a deep feeling of love and beauty for the Divine—the highest and most cherished being and fulfilment—in increasing awareness, concentration, meditation and consecration in works, seeking and discovering the psychic being within and the Divine Reality in the universe and then manifesting the same normally in life, even in the bodily constitution itself, more and more.

Veda Vyasa's Mahabharata in Sri Aurobindo's Savitri

(Continued from the previous issue)

Prema Nanda Kumar

4. So Many Versions!

It is very well known that the Mahabharata has been the seed-bed for a major portion of literature in all the languages of India. Including Sanskrit, of course. In fact, the Classical Sanskrit Age owes a good deal of its corpus almost entirely to Vyasa's epic. Classical Sanskrit literature is associated with the first millennium and its earliest authors like Bhasa (4th century A.D). The imperial age of the Guptas was a golden period for men of letters. Sanskrit ruled supreme in the first millennia and engaged itself in retelling the myths and legends in the epics. The Mahabharata proved to be a gold mine for aspirant poets. Due to the exigencies of time and repeated attacks of destruction unleashed by Muslim rulers upon Hindu places of worship and their destruction of palm-leaf collections in libraries like the one at Nalanda, we have lost much. But enough has trickled into our times to prove the vibgyor sheen and sublime grandeur of Sanskrit literary creations in the past.

Kalidasa chose the legend of Shakuntala from Vyasa; Bharavi created his immortal Kiratarjuna from the Arjuna-Hunter encounter when the hero gains *pasupatastra* from Shiva by undertaking tapasya. The Rajasuya incidents regarding 'first honour' offered a perfect subject for Magha who indited Sisupalavadha. The second millennium has brought forth a splendourous flowering of creative writing on Mahabharata legends in all the languages of India. Some characters have had a special fascination for the creative writer: Kunti, Karna, Draupadi, Nala and of course, Savitri.

One reason for the importance of Savitri in the psyche of Indians is her direct connection with the Vedas. The sun is the Savita and Viswamithra's prayers for the sun's effulgence to reside in our hearts has been recited and meditated upon by Indians through millennia. "*Om tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi dheeyo yonaprochadayaat*". Sri Aurobindo has said that the Savitri idea has Vedic beginnings:

"The tale of Satyavan and Savitri is recited in the Mahabharata as a story of conjugal love conquering death. But this legend is, as shown by many features of the human tale, one of the many symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle. Satyavan is the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance; Savitri is the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun, goddess of the supreme Truth who comes down and is born to save; Aswapati, the Lord of the Horse, her human father, is the Lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of spiritual endeavour that helps us to rise from the mortal to the immortal planes; Dyumatsena. Lord of the Shining Hosts, father of Satyavan, is the Divine Mind here fallen blind, losing its celestial kingdom of vision, and through that loss its kingdom of glory. Still this is not a mere allegory, the characters are not personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch and they take human bodies in order to help man and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life."

The idea took a crystalline shape in human terms by the time the events of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata took place. When the demonesses appointed by Ravana sought to frighten Sita into submission as she languished in the Ashoka grove in Lanka, Sita recited the names of a number of chaste ladies who had adorned the Indian society in earlier times. She would be guided by their lives and follow only Rama as they had followed their husbands. The list of ideal couples given by her is impressive and heart-warming and begins with Suvarchala and Surya:

"I am forever devoted to Rama as Suvarchala is to Surya; as Arundhati is to Vasishtha; as Rohini is to Chandra; as Lopamudra is to Agasthya; as Sukanya is to Chyavana; as Savitri is to Satyavan; as Srimati is to Kapila, as Madayanti is to King Sudasa; as Kesini is to Sagara and as Damayanti is to Nala".¹

Just as Sita draws strength from these ancient tales, we have a situation in the Mahabharata where some of the tales are recounted by Rishi Markandeya to help the Pandavas and Draupadi retain their self-confidence. The tale of Savitri is found in the Vana Parva. The five Pandavas have lost their land and are forced to wander in the forests. Rishi Markandeya comes on a visit. After offering him the honours due to a guest, Yudhistira asks the rishi whether he had ever come across a lady like Draupadi who helps her husband in a spirit of complete sacrifice. The sage assures him that there have been many ladies in the past who have not only suffered intensely but had helped the husband regain his kingdom, prestige and power. He then tells the Pandavas and Draupadi the tales of Savitri and Damayanti. The story of Savitri, retold in seven cantos is one of the most significant branch stories of the epic.

Rishi Markandeya begins saying a great king Aswapati ruled over the kingdom of Madra. As he had no issue, he performed tapasya meditating upon Goddess Savitri. The goddess appeared and gave him the boon of a luminous daughter (*kanya tejasvini*). At the appointed time, the queen gave birth to a girl. As the child was the gift of grace from the goddess Savitri, the king named her Savitri. Savitri grew up into a beautiful girl but nobody came forward to ask for her hand. She was brilliant in every way and the young men felt awed:

*Taam tu padma palaasaaksheem jvalantheemiva thejasaa
Na kaschid varayamaasa thejasaa prativaaritah²*

The distressed father asked his daughter to go out herself on a search and find a person whom she would desire willingly. She went out on a journey. When she returned to Madra she found Rishi Narad closeted with Aswapati. On being asked by her father, she replied that she had chosen Satyavan, the son of Dyumathsena of Shalwa city, who was living as an exile in the forest. Dyumathsena had also lost his eyes. None of this information discouraged Aswapati but Narada's exclamation that Savitri had committed a mistake pulled him up. He was worried about Satyavan but was assured by the rishi that the young man was a fine person. On being pressed to speak out, he said:

"Yes, there is but one (blemish) and is such that, because of it, all the high merits and virtues stand helplessly still; try howsoever one may, it is not possible to erase that blemish.

Satyavan will in one year from today abandon his body, his life here expended; that is the only blemish bearing on him and there is no other."

Aswapati's reaction was very natural, appropriate to a loving father who had hoped for a happy married life for his only daughter:

"Come hither, O Savitri; to make a happier choice, O fair and virtuous, proceed again; all the several great qualities avail nothing as they remain suppressed in that flawed measure.

Short is his life-span and as the revered Narad, respected by the gods also, says, he shall at the end of the year give up his body."

Savitri is firm on her choice. *Sakrud kruto maya bhartaa na dhviteeyam vrunomyaham!* I have chosen him as my husband and I shall not choose again!

Rishi Narad advised Aswapati to proceed with the wedding, and gave his blessing:

"The marriage of your daughter Savitri shall be without any ill-hapening; I shall now take my leave; let always noble and propitious things be to all."

Aswapati proceeded to the forest with Savitri and his entourage. After receiving Dyumathsena's permission he performed the marriage of Satyavan

and Savitri, and returned to Madra. The newly weds lived happily and Savitri was an ideal Hindu wife. She gave up her rich robes and ornaments and looked after her parents-in-law with great care. Living a simple life, she was yet very happy to be spending her time as a tapasvin (*kalasthapasyathaam*) with Satyavan. There was but one worry gnawing away at her heart though she did not speak of it to anyone:

"But then Savitri, with woe in her heart was languishing ever; on getting up, in the morning or while sleeping in the night, at every moment, what Narad had foretold, those words constantly remained in her mind."

Three days prior to the day foretold by Rishi Narad, Savitri undertook the rigorous Three-nights Vow. She fasted, meditated day and night and stood still appearing like a block of wood (*kaashtabhuteva*). On the concluding day she performed a fire-sacrifice. Then she saluted the elders in the ashram complex and received their blessings. Presently Satyavan and Savitri went to the forest. Satyavan grew tired while felling a tree. For a while he rested down on the lap of Savitri complaining of dizziness. Soon he was no more.

Savitri now realised the presence of Yama who appeared before her as a glorious god. He told her that Satyavan was a great person but fate had cut short his life. Then he walked away taking with him the life of the young man. Savitri followed Yama and spoke words of goodness and wisdom. Yama was delighted with her words and asked her to withdraw as this was a perilous path. But she continued to follow him and Satyavan's life. Four times Yama asked her to choose a boon. She asked for Dyumathsena's eyesight, his kingdom, one hundred children for Aswapati and one hundred children for her with Satyavan (*mamaathmajam Satyavathasthaurasam*). But she continued to follow Yama, speaking intelligent words:

"Benedictions of the persons established in the Truth go never unfilled; neither in them is the ill of selfishness, nor is there the wounded sense of lost pride; and because such three qualities are ever present in the saints, they are hailed as protectors of the world."

Happy and pleased at Savitri's words Yama said that she should ask for an unequalled boon (*apratimam varam*). Savitri asked for Satyavan's life and Yama was delighted to accede to the request. He blessed them to lead a happy married life together for four hundred years and withdrew. The couple returned home and all was well.

It is very interesting to note that just as the Bhagavad Gita in the Mahabharata has not lost its original form and import, the story of Savitri has remained practically the same as in Vyasa through hundreds of retellings down the centuries. For instance, the Matsya Purana that came much later than Vyasa's epic, speaks

of Savitri's story. Bhagawan Matsya (the incarnation) speaks of Savitri's tale to King Manu. There is a colourful description of how King Aswapati of the Saakala race performed worship of Goddess Savitri by offering white lotuses in a havan in the company of thousands of brahmins. After ten months, on a chaturthi day, the Goddess appeared and gave him the boon of a beautiful daughter (*sobhana*). The *Matsya Purana* says simply that Aswapati arranged Savitri's marriage but Rishi Narad appeared and gave the dire warning.

The Purana has a canto of thirty-five verses in which Satyavan and Savitri wander in the forest on the day foretold by fate. Satyavan points out the various trees like the mango, the Aswaththa, the Ashoka and the Kimsuka trees in full bloom, the wind that blows so sweet, the creepers that close in on the footpath, the sound of bees that sounds like cupid getting ready his bow and arrows to strike at couples like themselves. The koels are singing, this forest is beautiful like you! (*vibhaati chaarutilakaa thvamivaishaa vanasthali*). The story-line, however, follows the upakhyana in Vyasa. When releasing Satyavan's life, Yama blesses the couple with five hundred years of happy married life.

Savitri's story has undergone innumerable versions not only in Sanskrit but also in all Bhasha literatures. And yet, just as the verses in the Gita have remained the same, firm like a rock, the story of Savitri has remained the same in all versions. So many poems, dramas, folk lore. Savitri remains Savitri as we see her in the Mahabharata. One who does not give in to despair at the most critical moment in her life, a lady whose love for her husband is steady and unflinching, a brilliant flame and yet completely simple that we all can relate with her very easily.

We could do with a single instance. There is the traditional Savitri Paadam which is recited by women in Tamil brahmin households during the Savitri Vrata observed in February-March. The poem is obviously the work of a woman for use by women. That it was not perceived merely as a giver of long life for one's husband is clear from the fact that Sister Subbulakshmi, the dedicated social worker of Madras, published it seventy years ago. She was a Brahmin child widow. Fortunately for us, her father refused to bow down to the obscurantist forces of the society and educated her till she could stand on her own. She started a "Widow's Home" and a Higher Elementary Training School which soon blossomed into a purposive instrument of rehabilitation for women who were marginalised in the name of tradition.

One of the problems confronted by Sister Subbulakshmi was the lack of self-confidence in the inmates of her home. Towards helping them in this area, she lectured on choice classics like the Bhagavad Gita and published books. One of the poems she chose to teach was Savitri Paadam for she believed the

widowed and abandoned young girls could draw inspiration from the strength of purpose exhibited by Savitri. The central theme remains the same but there are embellishments with which the girls could relate easily. Thus not only does Savitri say she will not choose again but adds some more:

"Will a pativrata go around choosing several men
After deciding on one? Be he ugly, an idiot,
Character-less, hideous, unattractive,
Short-lived, he (Satyavan) happens to be
Dear betrothed to me. I have chosen a partner
After my heart. Give me in marriage to him."

The marriage of Savitri takes place in the forest. The bride is decked up as in a Brahmin wedding in South India!

"The parrot-ling was bathed in turmeric water
And decorated: a sindur on her broad forehead;
The tresses plaited with hanging pendant for the end
The slim-waisted Saitri was rubbed with rose-water
From the bottle and cool sandalpaste."

The sari and the ornaments are all typical of South India. There is a mock re-enactment of the brahmachari (Satyavan) going to Benares for studies and the bride's father stops him, gives him a coconut and promises to give his daughter as well. Thus Satyavan becomes a householder (*grihastha*). However, the main thread of the tale shows no deviation from Vyasa. The emphasis is on the strength of the holy thread (*mangalya*) tied by Satyavan to Savitri to mark their wedding. This adherence strictly to the code of female chastity and plentiful children assured a woman her high place in Tamil society. Which is exactly what we find stressed in Savitri Paadam.

Yet, Sister Subbulakshmi had chosen the poem not for this lesson alone. For most of the inmates of her home could not hope for such normalcy. It was good for them to learn about all this but she hoped they would be drawn to the firmness of Savitri as a tapasvini, a yogini, an achiever. Her faith in India's heritage to help people rise in consciousness and strength is revealed in her introduction to the Bhagavad Gita:

"Our Puranas have a twy-fold significance: the internal and the external. The reason for this double approach is that it should be of use to all people who are in different states of consciousness. If the high truths of the Hindu religion are revealed openly, many people would miss the deep ideas imbedded there. But when the idea is presented as a story, first it is read and enjoyed and even as one's mind becomes mature slowly, one begins to seek the truth of the tale."

Obviously more than the pleasures of marriage and motherhood, Sister Subbulakshmi was attracted by the message of stern self-discipline and self-confidence that are symbolised by the character of Savitri. While Savitri in this poem behaves just like Vyasa's heroine, the unknown poet adds that she took care to keep the body of Satyavan safe, underlining the need for a presence of mind:

"Savitri rose immediately and proceeded
To safeguard her husband from birds and beasts;
She bent thick boughs and broke branches,
And covered him with plenty of leaves.
Then the golden creeper walked with Dharma."

The two converse in great amity. Yama is full of kindness; Savitri is very respectful, and speaks wise words without showing any fear. Yama gives boons:

"Even if one were to study logic and the shastras
No one can speak so prayerfully as you.
My heart has grown cool with joy, listening to your praises."

The Savitri Paadam concludes that this is the greatest story of all the ones spoken in the Mahabharata. It does one good to note that like Vyasa's Savitri, this folk tale also projects a heroine who does not shed any tears. This is proof enough that Savitri's tale has been a helpful guide to women in India during all these years. Suffice it to say that almost every language in India has its own versions (folk or otherwise) of the Savitri-Satyavan legend.

Into this magnificent world of Bhasha literatures came a new entrant with the introduction of English education. With its characteristic speed in adaptation, India welcomed the language and made it feel at home in every way. Before long, the English educated Indian learnt to use the language creatively, defying the cultural divide. Where are English terms for concepts like *dharma*, *sastra*, *pativrata*, *tapasya* and *Rta*? But nothing has been impossible to achieve for the Indian. The first English version of Savitri's tale blossomed from the tender pen of the young Toru Dutt (1856-1877).

Toru Dutt's father had converted to Christianity, not an uncommon event in those days when the Gospel of Christ held many attractions for the English-educated Indian. But the family belonged to a culture that flowed in their veins. Day after day Toru's mother told her children, Aru, Toru and Abju, tales from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Toru Dutt's poem, 'Sita' has captured this scene poignantly:

"Three happy children, in a darkened room!
What do they gaze on with wide-open eyes?
A dense, dense forest, where no sunbeam pries,

And in its centre a cleared spot. — There bloom
Gigantic flowers on creepers that embrace
Tall trees ..."

The legends sank deep into the mind of Toru. She wrote narratives on some of them and these were published posthumously by her father as Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindusthan. One of the stories chosen by Toru was the *Pativrata-pakhyana* in Vyasa's epic. 'The Ballad of Savitri' is in five parts and is imbued with rainbow romanticism. But it is Vyasa's Savitri, the unique person, not a mere romantic girl:

"What was her own peculiar charm?
The soft black eyes, the raven hair,
The curving neck, the rounded arm,
All these are common everywhere.
Her charm was this — upon her face
Childlike and innocent and fair,
No man with thought impure or base
Could ever look; — the glory there,
The sweet simplicity and grace,
Abashed the boldest; but the good
God's plenty there loved to trace,
Mirrored in dawning womanhood."

She wanders happily wherever she wants and Aswapati has no objection, for, "in those far-off primeval days / Fair India's daughters were not pent / In closed zenanas." One day she meets Satyavan in a hermitage and learns about his story. For her it is love at first sight.

Back in Madra, Rishi Narad comes to meet Aswapati. As they are conversing Savitri comes in and the Rishi asks:

"And who is this bright creature, say,
Whose radiance lights the chamber's gloom —
Is she an Apsara or fay?"

When he learns that Savitri had chosen Satyavan as her life's companion, he expresses his doubts. Satyavan is a wonderful person, nor has the Rishi anything to say against King Dyumathsena. Only, the young man has but one more year to live. King Aswapati asks Savitri to choose another groom, and Toru inserts a note on "the dreadful curse of widowhood", a realistic picture of decadent India:

"the vigils, fasts,
And penances; no life is worse
Than hopeless life, — the while it lasts.

Day follows day in one long round,
Monotonous and blank and drear;
Less painful were it to be bound
On some bleak rock, for aye to hear –
Without one chance of getting free ...”

But Savitri is firm. The elders give their blessing. The marriage takes place in the Madra capital (Toru’s innovation) and the wedded pair go to the hermitage home of Satyavan. The new bride does not speak of the terrible problem to anyone. It remains “a skeleton in Savitri’s heart.” She performs vratas, feeds Brahmins. The dreaded day arrives and Satyavan decides to go to the forest in the evening to collect fuel. He is not afraid, he is used to the darkness. Savitri asks Dyumathsena’s permission to go with her husband but the old king dissuades her. She was already tired with fasts and was not accustomed to the dark woods. She might prove to be a hindrance to Satyavan! But he agrees at last as this is the first time she has asked for something from her parents-in-law!

The young couple gather fruits and flowers as Satyavan keeps up a happy chatter. The moment comes and he has a sharp headache. He rests on Savitri’s lap and sleeps. Here Toru has made changes in the progression of the story. Probably she was following a Bengali retelling which her mother may have used when she told stories to Toru and her siblings when they were little children. From the forest we come to the kingdom of Death who is on his throne. Some messengers who had gone to bring Satyavan’s life have returned empty-handed. Yama’s voice reminds one of a High Court Judge:

“Why hath the Prince not been brought here?
The hour is past; nor is appeal
Allowed against foregone decree;
There is the mandate with the seal!
How comes it ye return to me
Without him? Shame upon your zeal!”

The messengers report that they dared not touch Satyavan because of a girl who was sitting beside the young man. She was so pure and held “the austerity of grace” illumining the spaces which prevented them from venturing close to the Shalwa prince. Death decides to go himself and finish the job.

As Satyavan lay dying, Savitri sees the approach of a godlike being whose presence seems to instil fear on the onlookers. He tells her he is Yama and takes away Satyavan’s life, “the soul no bigger than the thumb.” In spite of Death’s gentle remonstrance, Savitri follows him into the beyond, speaking to him words of wisdom and kindly praise. He is pleased and gives her boons.

However, she continues to follow him and says:

“Men call thee Yama – conqueror,
Because it is against their will
They follow thee, — and they abhor
The Truth which thou woudst aye instil.
If they thy nature knew aright,
O god, all other gods above!
And that thou conquerest in the fight
By patience, kindness, mercy, love,
And not by devastating wrath,
They would not shrink in childlike fright
To see thy shadow on their path,
But hail thee as sick souls the light.”

It must be remembered here that Toru had already lost her elder sister Aru and younger brother Abju. She herself was just twenty years old and quite ill. Yet the brave heart could see through the mystery of Death so beautifully! Death is pleased and gives her boons that she asks for: Dyumathsena’s eyesight and kingdom, progeny for Aswapati. She does not ask for more except that she should always live amidst good people. Death is overwhelmed. Savitri has not asked for anything for herself! He says he will give a last boon and she should now ask for something for herself. Calling upon his boundless mercy, she asks for her husband’s life and children. Death grants them happily, releases Satyavan’s life, blesses them to live happily for four hundred years and vanishes in a flame.

As in Vyasa, they both return to the hermitage. All is well that ends well. The young Toru, with the shades already closing around her yet concludes the ballad beautifully and we cannot help a lump in our throat as we read the lines:

“As for Savitri, to this day
Her name is named, when couples wed,
And to the bride the parents say,
Be thou like her, in heart and head.”

The other important English version of the Savitri legend comes from Romesh Chunder Dutt’s Mahabharata: the epic of India rendered into English verse. Dutt was re-telling the entire epic, a rather ambitious project and had his hands full with the main story line of the Kaurava-Pandava fratricidal war. In the course of the telling he had necessarily to abandon the branch stories but the legend of Savitri he could not. He says:

“Among these various legends and tales I have selected one which is singular and striking. The great truth proclaimed under the thin guise of an eastern

allegory is that a True Woman's Love is not conquered by Death. The story is known by Hindu women high and low, rich and poor in all parts of India: and on a certain night in the year millions of Hindu women celebrate a rite in honour of the woman whose love was not conquered by death. Legends like these, though they take away from the unity and consciousness of the Epic, impart a moral instruction to the millions of India the value of which cannot be overestimated."³

Dutt's is essentially a translation but he has chosen to abridge the narrative, though none of the important components are missing. Here is Savitri's reply when Aswapati asks her to choose another young man as her husband:

"Pardon witless maiden's fancy, but beneath the eye of Heaven,
Only once a maiden chooseth; twice her troth may not be given.

Long his life or be it narrow, and his virtues great or none,
Satyavan is still my husband, he my heart and troth hath won.

What a maiden's heart hath chosen that a maiden's lips confess,
True to him thy poor Savitri goes into the wilderness!"

These lines may not have the sterling self-possession we find in the words of Vyasa's Savitri, but they are enough to prove how the legend has remained by and large the same in all future re-tellings. This is because Vyasa wrote his epic on granite, as Sri Aurobindo has described the style of the Mahabharata.

So many versions but the Great Bass is Savitri's steely strength and deep love for Satyavan. That being the truth about the legend, Sri Aurobindo's choice was to be expected. He had been reading the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and wondered how the ladies of India could be considered as illiterate and fear-ridden. When he was studying the two epics at Baroda, and decided to translate a few passages, it was natural for him to choose the scene in the Ramayana where Kausalya's maternal heart is in anguish because of the pronouncement of exile on Rama. Again, the passage where Sita speaks with sincere passion that men can think of women as being incapable of enduring hardship:

"What words are these,
Rama, from thee? What frail unworthy spirit
Converses with me uttering thoughts depraved,
Inglorious, full of ignominy, unmeet
For armed heroical great sons of Kings?
With alien laughter and amazed today
I hear the noblest lips in all the world
Uttering baseness ...
I go with thee this day, deny who will,

Nor aught shall turn me. Fear not thou lest I
Should burden thee, since gladly I elect
Life upon fruits and roots, and still before thee
Shall walk, nor faltering with fatigue, eat only
Thy remnants after hunger satisfied .."⁴

And, of course, Vidula in the Mahabharata. There were others, Citrangada, Damayanti, Uloupie. But Savitri became the chosen heroine for Sri Aurobindo's mahakavya in English, drawing in the entire granite strength of Vyasa into it, apart from Vedic symbolism and all the best in Indian culture. Today Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* glows as a symbol that inspires us to put in the needed effort for our own transformation and for the transformation of future humanity as well.

"Love came to her hiding the shadow, Death.
Well might he find in her his perfect shrine.
Since first the earth-being's heavenward growth began,
Through all the long ordeal of the race,
Never a rarer creature bore his shaft,
That burning test of the godhead in our parts,
A lightning from the heights on our abyss."⁵

It is not going to be Love and Death. With Savitri in action, it is going to be Love's annihilation of Death. The Upanishadic prayer, *Mrityor maam amrutham gamaya*, in action. Towards Immortality then!

(To be continued)

References

- 1 **Valmiki Ramayana**, Sundara Kanda, canto 24, verses 9-12
- 2 "Her eyes were like full-blown lotuses and she seemed in her beauty to be flaming with splendour; indeed, warded off by that fiery brilliance, no one approached her asking for her hand." All translations from Vyasa cited in the essay are by R.Y. Deshpande
- 3 **Perspectives of Savitri Volume One** (2000), 493.
- 4 SABCL, Vol.8, pp. 11-13
- 5 SABCL, Vol. 28, p 14

The Path of Nachiketa

(Continued from the previous issue)

Alok Pandey

Having initiated Nachiketa, the deserving aspirant into the path of Immortality, having given him the broad outlines of the inner law and the spiritual path, Yama, the teacher, goes on to reveal to this young soul, some profound secrets and mysteries of life as seen from the spiritual side. For what we know of life and its mysteries is as seen from this side through the thick and obscure mantle of the physical sheath and material nature. We try to guess what is within from the few hints and waves thrown upon the surfaces of our nature. We try to understand the higher by analysing the shadows that we find below our feet. We try to read the larger picture by viewing the contents of the smaller frame that is fixed and set before our eyes. Naturally we err. It is like trying to understand the secret of the lotus by analysing the contents of the mud in which it blooms. But there is another approach, the approach that the yogis of yore adopted. Shearing and tearing the veil of lower nature, they first arrived at the highest possible vantage point and then saw. They first climbed the mountain peaks of silence to the very source of the Word and from there spoke with the authority that comes from the breath of God. Or else diving deep into the heart of creation, they found the secrets lost in the blind alleys of time. Yama, the guardian of the lost secrets, the keeper of the law that drives the spirit of Time, now reveals some of these to Nachiketa.

Yama reveals that which humanity seeks unconsciously but in Nachiketa this seeking has taken a conscious turn. The secret of Immortality is found within this body but not in its material substance. It lies within its folds as a householder dwells within a house. We cannot know who dwells in the house simply by looking at its walls and ceilings. This body too is his house, like a city with eleven gates (five senses for reception and five for action and the eleventh being the ego-self that finds its place in the mind). Through these

gates and windows the householder relates and interacts with the world that is in a process of constant mutation and change. But he, the dweller is neither born nor dies. He simply assumes a body, dwells in it for a while and then crosses over and changes it as one would an old house or a worn-out garment. Just as the wear and tear of the garment does not indicate the state of the wearer; just as the condition of the house does not indicate the condition of the dweller so too this inmost dweller, the soul within, remains essentially pure even when the outer nature is devious in its ways. That is why it does not grieve when it takes up a body or field of nature as its abode since it remains unstained in its essential self, just as it remains unborn even when it seems to take birth and die. However its deliverance comes when it is freed from the clutches of the ignorant nature and the limited house in which it has set itself. This is true freedom, the freedom of the soul from the bondage to ignorance and limitation. The rest is only a relative freedom and acts within limits of nature fixed for each being and person.

Next Yama describes this soul as a Swan that dwells always in the purity of the higher regions. However it descends into the mid-worlds and even the worlds below, the waters and the earth so to say. It binds itself to the law appropriate to each type and brings the Light and Might of the Truth to the heart of man. The soul has often been compared to the dweller of the house of body, or to the rider of the chariot of life. This is true of the soul in relation to nature, at least of a certain poise that it takes as soon as it clothes itself in the investiture of the flesh. But when it comes to the intrinsic nature of the soul, its true nature and its dynamic side then the most apposite symbol is that of the swan. The soul is not just a passive dweller but also a guide and a leader, the power that discriminates between the truth of the Divine and the falsehoods of earth nature just as the swan can differentiate between milk and water. The mythical swan doing so is itself a symbol since milk represents the first source of nourishment, it is therefore the symbol of life-giving force that flows out of the mother's love or in other words the power that flows down from the Creator Himself. Water is simply the flux and flow of the world-forces in which we are normally caught up. But in this world the two, the divine and the undivine (a distinction practical rather than absolute but one that is important from the evolutionary perspective) are intricately mixed together and our mind cannot separate truth from error or its masks.

It is only the soul that can do so by an intuitive knowledge. Here Yama describes the same function of the soul as the power that draws the main breath upward and the lower downward. Thus it can separate the lower movements of the life force from the higher ones. Giving an impetus to the higher movements, the soul keeps the lower tendencies under check and at their proper place below. Besides, like the swan it is pure and immaculate in its pristine purity even when it is found in the lakes below. Still its natural abode is the high mountains or the higher regions of consciousness from where it has come. It eats and drinks the nectar of the lotus flower which again is a clear symbol of the sweetness and bliss of the divine consciousness. No wonder that the soul is often seen in symbolic visions as the swan and one who has liberated the soul from its casings of ignorance is called a Paramhansa, the supreme swan! This is what Nachiketa and indeed all who strive after Immortality must seek first and foremost. To uncover the soul from its casings, to free it from the trappings of the sheaths of ignorance, to learn to distinguish the true soul consciousness from the rest of the instrumental nature is the first step towards immortality.

This is That thou seekest.

Now Yama goes on to reveal some profound occult truths. It is by the soul and not by the force of life alone that man lives. It is the soul that is the Master of the house; life and mind are simply delegate powers. When the soul chooses to leave the house of body, then nothing can keep it from falling apart. But having departed, the journey of the soul does not end. It must finish its curve of bringing out all the potentialities of the divine consciousness that are held within it as in the seed a tree. But one life is too brief for the full fruition of this tree of Perfect knowledge. Depending upon the level of development and unfolding that the soul has arrived at during its life in the body it either returns or else moves through the higher planes towards the Immovable. This development or unfolding depends upon the degree and extent to which the soul could express itself in and through the actions of a human being, through his thoughts and feelings and will and impulses as much as through his visible outer actions. The law of karma is thus not a tribunal of reward and punishment but a process of evolution through action. If the action done is with the right consciousness or the soul consciousness then we grow in knowledge. If it is done with the wrong consciousness or the ego of the instruments rather than

the impulsion of the soul then one returns to learn more. It is this that is the secret cause and source of all things, of all our secret impulses, the origin, the alpha and omega of our existence, the master clue. This does not sleep even when the body and mind fall into torpor, this remains awake. Thus we must seek and learn to act always from the summit of our consciousness, that is to say, from the inmost soul. This is the second secret of Immortality.

This is That thou sleekest.

What then is the relation of the spirit with the form that it inhabits? Yama explains further that just as the spirit informs the form by its presence, the form conditions and limits the spirit by its mould. Even as there is one Fire that enters into many forms assuming its shape; even as Air is one but entering different forms it assumes the shape of the form, so too there is but one Spirit entering diverse forms and conditioned and limited by its shape and properties. The Spirit is omnipotent but that does not mean that it acts in an arbitrary way disregarding the conditions of play of form and name. It acts through them and therefore is limited (rather than bound) by them. There can be no real bondage as the Spirit is in its very nature eternal and free. But its action is naturally limited by the medium or the instrument through which it acts. We may even say that the One Spirit finds Itself in two poises, - one that is the static poise of Its self-aware Existence; the other is its dynamic poise of action. As it leans towards the former it regards all things as the eternal Witness who moves all things while remaining Itself unmoved, just as the sun sustains all life from the distant firmament and yet partakes neither of its sin and suffering nor of its good and happiness. As it leans towards creation, the same Spirit becomes limited in its motion and action according to the form in which it enters and through which it acts.

This the wise know and realising this poise of the eternal unchanging Self or Spirit become calm and free. The ignorant see only division since they are identified with the form that is ever changing and many. But the wise grow calm even as they behold the One Spirit that has fashioned these countless things. Thus they behold the One Self within them. Theirs is eternal felicity and not for others. This is the great discovery we must make - the One Spirit behind many things, the One Eternal moving midst transient scenes and images. It has created for Its habitation and play, the One Consciousness that makes all things conscious to whatever degree. Him the wise and strong behold in

their self. Theirs is eternal peace and not for others. This double qualification like an emphasis is an indicator that thus alone can man's road to calm and happiness or rather to true and lasting peace and felicity can be found and not by any other means. To see the One Self in all things is to discover the Joy that endures forever. This is wisdom, this is Peace.

What follows is a powerful mantra: '*This is He*' is all even the wise ones can realise. But none can define or limit Him. All Light is but the reflection of His glory or a shadow; the sun loses its shine and the moon its lustre; the stars burn not there nor lightning can flash nor any earthly fire. Yet it is by Him that all shines and follows its course. But who can know or tell of him.

Thus ends as if abruptly the second cycle of the second chapter. But not quite so since Yama has already led Nachiketa to the very highest of doors, the threshold of what can be said in human language and in terms of our understanding. What is beyond it cannot be spoken or beheld by the mind. Death is not allowed admittance beyond this threshold kingdom. What lies beyond can only be experienced and realised by the aspiring soul if it is as one-pointed and sincere as Nachiketa.

(To be continued)

Detachment and The Integral Yoga

Debashish Banerji

Detachment in a spiritual sense is the development of another dimension within us, a dimension which coexists with our active personality but is outside of it. It is to find an inner freedom, to discover a part of the being that cannot be touched by external circumstances or by the outer being's activities – a separation within between what we know as ourselves in the world and something which is intrinsic and connected to an infinite being, a sort of an immutable witnessing. That is detachment.

How do you do it? How can you arrive at it? Everybody has to find his own way of arriving at it. For example, an approach through the mind may be some form of Rajayoga meditation, a process by which you can watch your thoughts. The best practice for this is to find a time which you can repeat everyday. It is best to fix a time because just like poetic inspiration, spiritual power also works habitually, it can be invoked more powerfully if there is a certain time which one fixes. So one can take a certain period of time everyday and it does not need to be a long period, not more than half an hour to start with – or even fifteen minutes, fifteen to twenty minutes.

During this period you can try just to watch your thoughts. Make it your intent to watch the thoughts. In the beginning it may be very difficult, but also, you may find it easy. Try to avoid expectations. There are many people who at the first attempt find that they can watch the thoughts. But because we are habitually identified with our thoughts, you usually find it difficult to watch them. You may find that the mind jumps from thought to thought and you are completely involved in its movement. You sit down and are identified with the jumping of the mind, then at a certain point you realise that you couldn't watch your thoughts, so many thoughts went through your mind and you became them, became identified with them, you couldn't watch them. You may find

your thinking interrupted at some point by the thought that you wanted to watch the thoughts but couldn't. That is a moment where a part of the mind which has aligned itself to your intent has kicked in. So at that point you try again. Even if the first few times it feels futile, you feel like a fool, you feel frustrated – 'what am I doing, why I am doing it', the important thing is to maintain the practice.

Many people feel if they don't succeed, say, in three sittings, they start believing 'it is impossible for me' or 'it's going to take a very long time', 'it is not do-able'. These thoughts are to be immediately discouraged because the emergence of the power of witnessing is unpredictable, it can happen suddenly. You cannot know when it will click in. Suddenly you discover that you are watching your thoughts, that thoughts are coming and going but something in you has separated itself and is not affected by them. This is the beginning of detachment - at the level of the mind at least. This can be deepened with practice. We can spend longer and longer periods and then you find that throughout the day constantly there is something in you that remains untouched and awake like a witness. You are doing whatever you are doing – sometimes you are involved, sometimes you are upset, sometimes all kinds of waves of normal behaviour are going through you but you recognise the fact that something in you is outside of your active self, is not touched and you can withdraw, retreat into that. And, at the same time you realise that there are two separate things – the part of your being that is not touched by anything and the part of your being that is active, thinking, feeling, acting.

So developing this separation is the essence of detachment. Detachment doesn't mean that one needs to stop meeting people, stop talking to people, stop doing things or seclude oneself in a room. Those are just practices of exclusion. But the experience of detachment is one that nobody even needs to know anything about. You may be more involved in life than most people. You may have an active interaction with all kinds of people. People may feel that you are intimately involved in the world, but something in you is absent, and gradually you feel that a large part of your being is like that, that whatever it is that you are doing occupies only a minuscule portion of your existence.

At an exhibition of the Alipur Bomb Case, there were pictures of all the freedom fighters. The Mother has talked about them to Mona Sarkar – she

has spoken of the fearlessness in their eyes. She says the psychic being is right there in the eyes and it is completely fearless.

You can look at all of them, impressive as they are and then you look at Sri Aurobindo's photograph there and you realise that to him all this activity is a minute portion of his existence. Freedom of India is important to him but he is so much vaster than that. That's the power of detachment. It's an inner quality and it supports you.

In the Gita they talk about two Purushas – *Akshara* and *Kshara Purusha*. The *Kshara Purusha* is involved in the entanglement of life, but the *Akshara Purusha* supports it – that is Static Power. The development of that - it's firstly the awakening of that, because it's in all of us, it's inside us. So the question is since we are identified with the active part we are not aware of this static part. We have to develop an awareness of that part.

Detachment and Freedom

Another source of detachment is the psychic being. Maybe everyone is not so drawn to developing mental detachment or awakening the purusha of the mind. But deep in the heart, the psychic being exists as a source of spiritual detachment. To connect behind the heart with that living source which is there - you have first to recognise that the psychic being is an entity, that it is an independent living consciousness. It is not some kind of metaphor or imagination or even a part of the being that you are already familiar with or that is involved somewhere in your other actions. It is a being, it has substance to it, and its substance is an independent substance. You may feel it as a flame. The Mother talks about experiencing it as a flame within. It's not just the seeing of a flame, it's the substance of an inner flame. The psychic substance is substantial, it is concrete, and to come into contact with that is the source of the beginning of identifying with the psychic being. If you bring your attention behind the heart and focus it there, if you pray to the Mother, at some point there is an opening, and you feel this substance. And this substance can then be experienced as that fire which we feed with our offerings, into which everything can be put as in the Vedic yajna. You can go within to that inner centre, you can reside there. Whatever problems or difficulties you may have, this is the inviolable shelter within you into which you can retreat and reside and there you experience freedom, because that is always completely free.

One may act out of that consciousness and once again one may have a dynamic life in the world without feeling trapped by it. The nature may take a long time to transform, or to even to bring into some kind of order. Many of you have addressed the difficulties of the vital; difficulties of the vital belong to the nature; these may stay with us for a long time. They may be very difficult to overcome because the habits of the nature have their roots in the struggling Unconscious, and they need to be grappled with. But even to grapple with the problems of the nature you need a key. If you don't have this key you often end up with frustration and guilt. You'll constantly feel a sense of unworthiness - 'why am I not able to solve this problem in my nature?' The thing is to find a part in your being which is already free. This is the key. It doesn't change the problem of the nature (or the nature of the problem) but it gives you the attitude with which to tackle it. Then you can approach it with the best that you can give it, and you are not concerned about the amount of time it will take because somewhere you are already free. If you fall, you get up and start walking again, because something in you is free. So I feel it's very important for anybody on this path, first and foremost, to experience spiritual freedom in whatever way they can, at whatever level of the being they can. And it is accessible to all of us, because there is something in all of us which is always free.

But one must have courage to find this freedom, one must make oneself available to spiritual freedom. It is our conditioning, our fears, our duties which stand in the way, which prevent us from claiming what we come with from birth, our birthright. We are so afraid of freedom, something in us feels - 'If I stop thinking about the things which I have to do, then my life will completely collapse'. The Mother talks about a young Japanese man who asked her, 'You talk about the divine within. What is this divine within?' She says she put him in touch with his psychic being. He used to come to her regularly, but after this he stopped coming. Then when she met him after some time, and asked why he had disappeared, he said, 'You know what you showed me is very dangerous. I am afraid I will become unfaithful to the Emperor.' Prior to World War II, the Japanese were culturally conditioned to take their Emperor as God. They had to obey him with their lives. So to awake to an inner source of freedom, to which the Emperor meant nothing, was terrifying to this man.

Rejection of Thoughts

So what it amounts to is that our socially constructed ego is afraid of spiritual freedom, because its importance and reason for existence is challenged by it. This part feels that if it experiences unconditional freedom, it will collapse, which indeed it will and it retains its stranglehold on our surface identity by convincing us that we will have no existence if it collapses. This is the first thought or idea to be firmly and deliberately rejected. That is where mental discipline comes in, where the conscious act of rejection comes. If you learn to reject this thought, if, every time it comes into your mind, you say, 'Go away, I am not concerned about you,' then it will lose its strength. There are certain thoughts which are obsessive. They insist, 'How dare you not think of me? I am the key to your life; you have to give me your attention.' If you have sufficient mental strength, then you can forcibly push it away. With the determination of your inner mind you can respond to it - 'I have no need for you, I don't need anything. I am not afraid of any consequences of life or death, because I am free beyond them.' If you can practise that kind of rejection of thoughts then it is not that difficult to come into contact with the part in you which is free.

Offering and Mental Attitude

But if you cannot use your mental strength to reject these obsessive worries, that is where offering to The Mother can be a very helpful power. This is a great tool, a very great weapon that Sri Aurobindo has given us. Here you say to yourself - 'I have no power over my own life. I cannot predict what will happen to me tomorrow.' You do this also with a part of the mind - a part which is faithful to the Divine - in our terminology we would say this is a part of the inner mind which is under the psychic influence or at a higher pitch, which has become psychisised. The role of mind in training attitude should not be underestimated - the mind under the divine influence can be a very good trainer of our inner being. It can play the role of a teacher and say in reply to the fears and worries - 'Think about it, you really have no control over your own life. What will happen tomorrow you don't know at all, so whatever is obsessing you, offer it to the Mother, because she knows. She has control over circumstances, and she knows better than you what is best for you.' Because, indeed, we have very little idea of what is best for us. We like to believe in our personal knowledge based on our power of

experience and we take pride in our freedom of choice but all this experience and all this choice is sunk in seven fathoms of Ignorance and something in us knows this. We want control but we are so helpless and so ignorant. The more clearly we understand this, the more clearly we also see the action of divine Grace in our lives. Without this constant Grace, we would be obliterated as individuals and as a race long back. So this part of our mind can bring home to the rest of us this lesson – “You have no control and no knowledge of what is best but She knows what is best for you and has the power to achieve it. Surrender your concerns to her .”

To develop this attitude progressively, to have the mind address the vital and the rest of the being, bringing constantly to their attention the fact that they cannot know what is best for them, nor can they know what the future holds for them – this is a very strong directing help for fostering the practice of a constant and integral offering to The Mother. But remember that to be effective this knowledge must not remain theoretical, it needs to be made active. It is like Sri Aurobindo’s comment about the passage in the Gita about remembering the Divine at the time of death. In the Gita, Krishna says, ‘If you remember Me at the time of death, then you will come to Me’. According to Sri Aurobindo, this sounds like a lazy man’s short cut to Nirvana, except that it is not so easy to achieve a sudden willed remembrance of the Divine. To remember the Divine at will one must practise constant remembrance of the Divine. This applies in the case of offering as well. One must practise offering in one’s everyday life and for this one must make active and constant the practice of the need for offering . “Why should I offer?” – this question should have a clear and ready answer at the forefront of our consciousness at all times, because without that there is enough hidden in each of us to subvert our best efforts.

Even when a part of our being feels the need for a spiritual life or for the practice of yoga, a large part of us remains quite happy with life as it is; it cannot understand any demand of offering or surrender being made of it since it feels quite self-confident, independent, in control of itself. It has no need for the Divine. So why should it offer itself to the Divine? This is where the active practice of the mind’s mentorship is a powerful help, the practice of the reminder to all our parts that we are really helpless, that we don’t have

any hold over the future and that we have very little idea of what is best for us, for ourselves - but that there is a Presence and Power that knows and this is the Mother. And so, whatever forces itself as an obsession on the mind with its sense of urgency and necessity, learn to offer it to that Power. Put the burden on her shoulders. You don’t need to carry that burden. When you can do that with fullness, with all your will, you receive a distinct feeling from within. This is a recognition of the fact that it has gone to her shoulders. She has accepted my burden.

Handing over the burden

Dyuman, a great sadhak of the ashram, writes about how he came to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. He says that from an early age, after his college education, he felt a constant inexplicable weight on his shoulders. He used to feel as if he was carrying a chronic physical load yet he didn’t know what it was. But after his first darshan of Sri Aurobindo, when he left the room, he suddenly realised that the load had disappeared – he felt light, the burden had gone, and it never came back. This is the guru’s Grace – he had taken the burden. So we all carry this burden, it’s the burden of personal responsibility. It’s a curse of Ignorance, of feeling that we are lonely conscious agents in an unconscious world, that our well-being is in our own hands, our unaided efforts and we have to control all of life’s enormous unpredictable forces. The more conscious we become the more we realise how laughable this illusion of control is. And it is only then that we can learn to put the burden on Their shoulders, because it’s really Their burden.

To the extent that this can be done sincerely, by the building and the practice of the proper attitude, you start finding that circumstances in your life change. They sometimes change gradually and sometimes suddenly, but in either case you realise that they change miraculously. This has happened in everybody’s life. I think all of us here can confirm that many things that we thought would be very difficult, with an invocation to The Mother and an offering to Her, become much easier. You find that even if you have to go through it, there is a strength and a help constantly with you, easing the journey. Little miracles continue to become your everyday experience. Her grace surrounds you. This is the power of putting the burden on her shoulders. It is an aspect of surrender. This is offering. Surrender is a more complete and integral thing but offering is an indispensable part of it .

Quiet Mind and Freedom of the Self

So, by doing this we create space within ourselves. More and more we feel free. More and more we feel unburdened. We realise that we have some control over the thoughts which surround us, which are trying to enter us. They don't control us. And then we begin coming into contact with a part in us which is completely untouched and which cannot be touched, because it is another dimension. This is the Purusha.

To discover this other dimension it is helpful to begin with the inner mind. The subtler operations of the mind, the deeper contemplative thoughts are coming from the inner mind, it is a more conscious aspect of prakriti. The purusha is not the inner mind; the purusha is separate from the inner mind. In yogic terminology, the inner mind is called the inner instrument (*antahkarana*) – but inner mind can become the first reflective instrument in prakriti of the purusha. In this way, by reflection, the inner mind can develop silence. Even when thoughts are circling in the outer mind, you are aware of them but not identified with them, they are not happening to you or by you, they are happening in you but not to you. This is how we can form a part of the mind which is untouched by thoughts. That is what Sri Aurobindo calls 'quiet mind.' Quiet mind is not silent mind. But quiet mind is the beginning, it is the necessary precondition to arrive at freedom of the Nature. Freedom of the Self lies behind the freedom of the nature. To the extent that we develop a quiet mind, we also start becoming aware of the presence of the purusha behind it, supporting it, which is what it reflects. It is a witnessing presence. We may become aware of this through these exercises of trying to watch the thoughts and clearing a space in the inner mind which refuses entry to them. But this awareness comes upon us unexpectedly, unpredictably. It can dawn on us at any stage of the exercise, it can come in glimpses and then as a steady presence or it may establish itself all at once. We realise that it is another dimension coexisting with the operations of what we call the mind. This is why we can become partially aware of it even before establishing the quiet mind. Thus one can contact freedom of the Self, which is something intrinsic within us, the purusha which is conscious and free. But this does not involve itself in action; it is an inert witnessing Outsider. In the meantime action continues in us by the power of Nature, Prakriti. As it says in the Gita, Prakriti and its modes will run you, whether the ego is active or not. Sri Aurobindo's first

major discovery after the Nirvana was this, it didn't matter that he had Nirvana and had no initiative to act, Prakriti would make him act, make him speak. He was to give a political speech the next day, but had no will to give it after realising Nirvana. But his teacher asked him to go up to the podium and allow the speech to be delivered through him and this is just what happened - he witnessed himself giving the speech, though he had no will to give it.

Change of Nature and Surrender

Thus Nature will continue to run in us, even if we find the freedom of the Self. Of course, Sri Aurobindo also tells us that Purusha has power over Prakriti. It is not just the witness, *sakshi*, but the giver of sanction, *anumanta*. But this sanction does not transform or change the quality of the nature, it either allows it to run its course or to cease from action. This is why developing the quiet mind serves such an important first step. Not only does it give us access to the presence of the Purusha, it can also become the beginning for a reorganisation of the Prakriti. Nature, prakriti, in us in its intrinsic form is unregenerate, it hasn't been organised, it hasn't been set into any kind of perfection. This is a very important part of this yoga – to perfect the nature, to transform the nature. That takes a very long time, but in the meantime one can begin by bringing certain elements into it, bringing calm into it, establishing a quiet mind, making it receptive to a higher prakriti, to the Mother's Force rather than to the lower prakriti, the force of Nature, and then trying to draw on that constantly, in different actions and activities of the life.

It is when one begins this process of transforming the Nature, that one finds that there is so much unconsciousness in us, of which we are completely unaware. We realise that the human being is so complex, so deep, it's literally like what the psychoanalysts say - our conscious surface personality is just the tip of an enormous iceberg. There is so much about ourselves that we don't know that starts surfacing. And then this word 'surrender' starts taking on significance and meaning, because we progressively realise that we are so helpless in front of our own nature. Today I may find that I have some realisation, even spiritual realisation of some kind, but that I am still completely helpless in so many other ways. So then you realise the practical necessity of surrender, and learn to call on some higher power, to call on The Mother for Her help. And that is a movement of the psychic being in us, the movement of calling, the movement of surrender, that then starts making the Grace active in our lives in a detailed manner, a detailed Grace.

The Dynamic of Aspiration and Grace

The whole yoga of Sri Aurobindo condenses itself to the first sentence of the book *The Mother* : “There are two powers that alone can effect in their conjunction the great and difficult thing which is the aim of our endeavour, a fixed and unfailing aspiration that calls from below and a supreme Grace from above that answers.” This double process, this engine, this dynamic action of aspiration and grace, an unfailing call from below and a supreme Grace from above that answers, needs to become active in one’s life and that is a critical stage in the yoga.

One of you asked if the realisation of the psychic is the first step of this yoga. You may think of it in this way, but then that is a very big step; realisation of the psychic is already an advanced realisation. We have to look at earlier stages, steps to the psychic realisation that need to establish themselves, become realisations. One of these critical realisations which needs to establish itself is this engine, *yantra*, this double dynamic of aspiration and grace. I would say this realisation is the beginning of the Integral Yoga. One knows that somewhere at the centre of one’s being there is something called a psychic aspiration that has been lit that cannot be quenched, that cannot be extinguished and that in response to this constant aspiration something from above is responding constantly, constantly. The perception of this can be obscured but it can’t be extinguished. This is the beginning of the Integral Yoga.

Jivatman and the Psychic Being

One of you asked about the difference between what Sri Aurobindo calls the jivatman and what he calls the psychic being. Things like jivatman, psychic being, etc., these are words until you realise them. One can have a sort of mental understanding of these things, and the mental understanding is helpful – this is why Sri Aurobindo has given us these words, because when one has some kind of experience or realisation one needs a map, otherwise one may be confused. You don’t know what it is that you have realised, you may have realised a part of some spiritual condition and think that you have had the whole realisation. Many people make this kind of mistake. I have encountered a number of people who think that they have gone beyond Sri Aurobindo and The Mother in their realisation. And then they start professing their “advanced teachings” and inducting disciples. This is why it’s important to have a sincere understanding, within one’s present limits, and a sincere aspiration for true

understanding, of what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have written. But we cannot have a clear understanding of what they have written about until we experience these things. Once you experience it the words become alive. The words are already living but you don’t know the life of those words until you experience it in your own life.

It’s enough to know that jivatman belongs to the *akshara* part of the being; in other words, it is immutable; it doesn’t enter into time. Jivatman is like a soul blueprint that exists in some kind of soul space, a spiritual space, eternal spiritual space. From it there is a projection that enters time – that is the psychic being. This also projects itself and stands behind the mental, vital and physical sheaths of the nature as the mental, vital and physical purushas.

The one becomes the many by this mechanism. One atman, paramatman becomes many, one purusha becomes many purushas. In the Gita there is this correction to the earlier Sankhya. The earlier Sankhya believed that there is one prakriti but many purushas, since many individualities mean many subjectivities. The Gita gives a corrective to this; it says there is one purusha and one prakriti. Then how do we account for the many subjectivities that we are, the many living beings, jivas? The one supreme Purusha has represented itself to itself as many witnessing centres. It is as if it has separate concentrations within itself. Each of these self-concentrations is an individualised purusha, what Sri Aurobindo calls the “central being” of each individual. Central being – he uses this term for the jivatman which is like our spiritual blueprint which remains outside time, but in a dynamic sense, it is jivatman’s projection, on one particular plane, which constitutes the location of each person’s central being in manifest space. It still hasn’t entered into time and the process of change but it is a purusha because the central being is each individual’s principal mode of being, what determines his or her *swabhava*. The dynamic law of becoming of this *swabhava* is what is called *swadharma*; this is the manifesting quality in time. So the location of the central being becomes the determinant of one’s predominant law of being and becoming. If the central being is the mental purusha one will be of the brahmin proclivity; if it is the vital purusha one may be of the kshatriya or vaishya proclivity and if it is the physical purusha, one will have the sudra proclivity or predisposition. This is how central being is related to swadharma. The jivatman projects itself as the mental purusha, the vital purusha and the physical purusha but one of

these is the central being. The jivatman also projects itself as our innermost being or psychic being and this also bears the predominant characteristic of the central being. In the Vedantic tradition, this is expressed in terms of the Purusha. The predominant Indian tradition is a patriarchal tradition so this purusha based expression is the only one which is traditionally understood. That's the reason why in the Veda you have the *Purusha Sukta*, which makes the divisions of Purusha into the varnas, the basis of *swabhava* and *swadharma*; the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra are born out of the parts of the Supreme Purusha.

Surrender to The Mother

But these multiple concentrations of the Purusha may also be seen as the self-becomings of the Para Prakriti, the Shakti or Conscious Power of the Purusha, because after all this concentration is tapas, chit-tapas, an activity of the Supreme Prakriti. The Gita brings this out where it describes individuality in terms of the self-becoming of the Para Prakriti – *para prakritir jiva bhuta*. This points to an alternate formulation which prioritised the importance of the female or matriarchal principle in the understanding of *swabhava*, *swadharma*, the central being and the jivatman. Sri Aurobindo has revived once more this matriarchal formulation – through the importance of para-prakriti, in fact, the centrality of para-prakriti, because without this formulation, we cannot think of a transformation of Nature. So for him the more significant formulation is what emerges from his text “*The Mother*” - that the central being is born out of one of the four aspects of the Divine Mother, out of Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi or Mahasaraswati. This therefore also constitutes the qualitative essence of each of our psychic beings. So though we may say that it is the jivatman which projects its emanations or representations as a Purusha into the jiva, it cannot do this without the power of concentration, tapas of the Prakriti. It is this which precipitates Purusha into the jiva - as the central being, standing behind the mind, vital or physical and the psychic being, bearing the predominant quality of the central being. It is this quality which will determine whether your activity is proceeding mainly out of the mind, mainly out of your feelings or your willed experience or mainly out of the body. This is what lends the idea of *Swadharma*.

Swadharma may be thought of as a law of self-becoming. In the Gita, Krishna says to Arjuna that it is much better to follow one's own *swadharma*,

even badly, than to be good at another's *swadharma*. This issue is of great importance in the Gita because Arjuna is being exhorted to arise out of his despondency and take part in battle as a kshatriya. But though *Swadharma* can be a convenient starting point in our yoga, it is not something to be made a fetish of. Here, whatever one's *swadharma* may be, it needs to be surrendered to The Mother because the Mother is the integral power of Becoming. Your central and psychic beings may have been born out of Mahakali but Sri Aurobindo is not asking you to make your surrender to Mahakali or to *īṣṭadevī*. He is asking you to surrender to The Mother. The reason is that she is the integral power of Becoming. She not only integrates you and brings the other powers into action in your life, she is also integrating the entire universe, because she knows what to bring into your consciousness and when, in a harmonious fashion so as to create a coordinated universal growth towards the supramental manifestation.

The supramental life is one in which All is one and yet each is different but it is governed by the Oneness. The power which controls the supramental consciousness is the integral power of The Mother – Aditi, the central circle in the Mother's symbol. This is what we are called to make our surrender to.

The Action of the Four Powers of The Mother

The four Mahashaktis of The Mother are all supramental powers in their origin, so each is active on all the parts of the being, though it may have a more concentrated expression in one part. This is just as in the case of the modes of Prakriti, the gunas - *sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Tamas* is more settled in the physical, *rajas* is more settled in the vital, *sattwa* is more settled in the mind, but each is active in the entire nature. It is similar with the action of the four Mahashaktis – Maheshwari acts more characteristically through the mind, Mahakali more through the vital, the higher vital, the will part of the vital, Mahalakshmi acts more through the emotional part of the vital and Mahasaraswati acts more predominantly through the physical being, developing and expressing its skills. But, at the same time, each is active on all four parts of the being. So it isn't really possible to isolate their action in any one part of the being though there is a certain centrality of action. There is an action centred in one of these parts of the being depending on the *swadharma*. Children of Maheshwari are the Brahmins, Children of Mahakali are the

Kshatriyas, Children of Mahalakshmi are the Vaishyas, Children of Mahasaraswati are the Sudras. So the central being will locate itself accordingly, and the psychic being will take on a specific quality accordingly.

Growth and Transformation of the Psychic Being

But whatever the quality expressed by the psychic being, it is also potentially of infinite quality. Behind the psychic being is the psychic entity and the psychic entity is a portion of the original integral Mother, Aditi, Para Prakriti, the central Supramental Shakti. Thus it is capable of bringing forth from its own potential, powers of the Mother which are unexpressed in its present constitution. It can constantly transform itself under the guidance and action of the Supreme Mother. This transformation of the psychic being is at the centre of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Sri Aurobindo speaks of the Integral Yoga in terms of what he calls the Triple Transformation. Ultimately, this triple transformation is accomplished through the growth and transformation of the psychic being. The first transformation is the transformation of the inner and outer nature by the power of the psychic, the psychicisation – the coming to the front of the psychic being and its recasting of the mind, life and body into its own principle. The second transformation is the cosmic or spiritual transformation. Here it is the psychic being that must unite and identify itself with the Cosmic or Universal Being, with what Sri Aurobindo has called the Overmind. The psychic purusha must become one with the Overmental Purusha and transform the nature by the power of the Overmental Shakti. And finally, the third transformation is the supramental transformation. And here it is the psychic being that has to become supramentalised. The psychic purusha must unite and identify itself with the Supramental Purusha and transform the entire nature by the power of the Supramental Shakti. The Mother says that the psychic being holds the key to supramentalisation. And it is a supramentalised psychic being that in its physical aspect can bring down the Supermind into the cells of the body.

So the key to this very complex growth and transformation of the psychic being is in the hands of The Mother, the central or integral Supramental Shakti and nobody else. None of the emanated Powers of the Mother can do it. They can be deployed by her to do it. Into our lives she brings these powers. We are put through various experiences in which various powers of the Mother

aid us, act on us, act through us in our journey. But the central granter, the giver of the yoga and its movements, its circumstances, its inner and outer growth is the Mother, the supreme Mother at the transcendent centre and origin of the manifestation.

(This is a slightly edited version of a talk given at Van Nivas, Nainital, a few years ago)

Sri Aurobindo's Critique of the Western Philosophy Of Science

Tapan Banerjee

This paper proposes to understand Sri Aurobindo's critique of the claims of Reason. The history and achievements of Science in the West are viewed as results of the operation of Reason. We may characterise Reason, as it has been held in the West since the Greek times to the Age of Enlightenment, as having had two senses : self-evidence and mediated experience. Either of the two has been taken as providing good enough ground for the cognitive validity of knowledge claims, empirical and mathematical. René Descartes, who is hailed as the father of modern philosophical thinking, had argued for self-evidence of mathematical thoughts. But under the aegis of Francis Bacon, empiricism gradually took over the domain of science. More than introspection, observation and experiment came to be given a higher premium. What Bacon had called *experimentum crucis*, came to guide scientific endeavour in discovering causal laws and testing of hypotheses.

This philosophy of science entails the following : knowledge, worth calling science, must be objective, public, open to examination, repeatable, testable, and supported by adequate number of experiments. Any knowledge claim has got to be justifiable by an appeal to data or facts, and hence, knowledge is inter-subjective. Nothing esoteric is admissible, and by implication, the role of the subjective is relegated to a realm that could be said to be non-objective, non-cognitive or non-science. There is another side of the story. Beginning with the Greeks, reason, *ratio* or *logos* has been looked upon as something non-material. Mind or the organ of reason is distinguished from the body which occupies space. Descartes designated mind as *res cogitans* and it is held in opposition to *res extensa*. Mind or reason is immaterial, does not occupy space, or *a priori*, as Kant held. The Age of Enlightenment, of which Kant was the greatest champion, made Reason arbiter, sovereign or governor of life.

The problem naturally begins from this point. Do we have, in this part of the world, any faculty corresponding to what is called Reason in the West? The

answer is not easy to come. *Manas* or even *buddhi* is material in nature according to the schools of *darśana* in India. For Sāṃkhya, *manas*, *buddhi* are evolutes of *Prakṛti*, hence material in nature. They do not partake of essentially Conscient nature of *ātman*. It is the *ātman* which uses *manas* and *buddhi* as instruments or *karaṇ* in the process of having knowledge (*anubhava*) of objects (*padārtha*). This account of the status of *manas* and *buddhi* is shared equally by all *darśanas*, be it Nyāya, Vedānta, and even the Buddhist or the Jaina philosophies. It is for such reasons as this that the Upaniṣads say that mind cannot attain to *That*, nor does logic, which is an operation of mind. Any knowledge derived from these sources is mediate (*parokṣa*), and *a fortiori*, only non-mediate (*aparokṣa anubhūti*) can grasp the essence of Reality.

Sri Aurobindo built his elaborate system of thought upon the presuppositions as the above. He examines the claims of reason *a propos* the status of mind he acknowledges or allows. For Sri Aurobindo, Mind is an instrument of knowledge, but not omniscient, nor is it omnipotent, since it remains under the pull from below, the vital inconscience of Life. It is “sense-mind”, or as he terms it, it is an “instrument of ignorance”. Sri Aurobindo's concept of mind is at variance with the classical Western concept of mind or Reason, *nous* or *logos*. This point needs to be borne in mind before we embark upon considering his critique of the philosophy of science as we find in the West. In *The Life Divine* there are extensive elucidations on the status of mind, its higher grades, types of knowledge and methods. When all these are taken together, we can then be alone in a position to appreciate his critique of mental operations that are exhibited in the modes of scientific inquiry, and their claims. To make the point further perspicuous, one should note that Sri Aurobindo's epistemology is evolutionary, and therefore, since knowledge presupposes consciousness, it is the evolution of consciousness that matters. The point is, is mind, depending on the senses and the vital, purely conscious? If not, then the claim to omniscience is to be rejected, unless, of course, the mind, as it is constituted, undergoes radical, integral transformation. And this is what Sri Aurobindo's conception of Yoga aims at.

Now, a word about “intuition”. The word is hardly perspicacious. There have been variant usages of the word with a variety of meanings. In the West, Spinoza has the graded cognitive ladder rising from *imaginatio*, *ratio* to *intuitio*. Kant uses the term in the sense of sensuous perception. In Bergson, intuition apprehends Reality as in a flux, *élan vital*. Bradley has “immediate experience” to apprehend the Absolute, with all its seasons and fruits of the year, in a non-moving poise. Sāṃkhya favours *aparokṣa anubhūti* of Brahman, which does not move, trans-temporal as it is. Sri Aurobindo appears to have em-

ployed in the sense of non-conceptual, non-mediate apprehending consciousness of the one and the many. For Sri Aurobindo, intuition is one of the higher grades of ascending consciousness, such as the Higher mind, the Illumined mind, etc., below of course, the Overmind and the Supermind. Sri Aurobindo critiques the Western philosophy of science from the point of view or the vantage point of the higher possibilities of mind's ascension to the Supermind.

It may also be mentioned in this context that most of the modern Indian thinkers have had a predilection for *aparokṣa* type of apprehension or consciousness. And, most of them have critiqued the Western philosophy of science favouring immediate, non-conceptual mode of Reality-cognition. Tagore had it that the logical intellect, apart from the luminous imagination, is never the full story of man's spiritual endeavours. He was fascinated by astronomy since his childhood, also more importantly, wrote a primer of science, called *Viśva-parichaya*, and dedicated it to a physicist of international reputation. Vivekananda was all for science, but he never critiqued it, rather held that Advaita Vedanta and Raja-Yoga were as much science as science itself. Krishnachandra Bhattacharya sharply distinguished science from philosophy and Radhakrishnan championed the intuitive method and tried to show how different aspects of human experience have enough room for intuition, and that intuition was not contra-rational, rather supra-rational. Radhakrishnan's dialectics were termed by Western philosophers as "counter-attack" from the East. It is against such a backdrop that we propose to contextualise Sri Aurobindo's critique.

II

Sri Aurobindo provides an ontological cartograph, and contextualises the mind in the ascending ladder of evolution of the involved Reality. Neither Rationalism nor Empiricism provides such a contextualisation of the mind, and hence of Reason. Mind is a middle term, says Sri Aurobindo, and this means a lot for both epistemology and ontology. Mind is a middle term between Life on the one hand, and the Supermind on the other. And, between the Mind and the Supermind there exist higher orders of being, each comprehending the lower ones while opening up to the higher. The ascent is integral.

The master idea behind Sri Aurobindo's metaphysical schematism is expressed in the following statement in *The Life Divine*: "all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony"¹. The problem of science or its philosophy lies in the materialist denial of the Spirit. And these two terms of existence, Matter and Spirit, stand to be harmonised or integrated. Herein lies

the source of Sri Aurobindo's critique of the philosophy of science. Sri Aurobindo had an elaborate theory of the mind and its operations, Reason and Imagination being two significant movers. The latter is projective in nature, bringing into view the possibilities of life and existence. The one unaided by the other is, as Kant would have said, either blind or empty. There is, then, the intuition, a term invested by Sri Aurobindo with a new meaning and function. This will have to be taken into account in understanding Sri Aurobindo's critique of the philosophy of science and its materialist-empirical presuppositions. The chapters in *The Life Divine*, such as "The Methods of Vedantic Knowledge" and those on the mind need to be taken into consideration with a view to understanding his critique of the epistemology of empirical science. The upshot of the argument is that neither the Materialist nor the Ascetic represents the fuller human being. For its flowering we do need integrating the two typic paradigms.

III

Scientific inquiry brings us to knowledge from the world of instinctive information and experience, i.e., we 'own' knowledge by experience that is always a mixture of truth and error, of good and bad. Sri Aurobindo, who says "all science, all true knowledge comes by going behind the superficialities and discovering the inner truth and the hidden law"², is well aware of errors and mistakes committed by the truth-seeking mind and, at the same time, is seen hopeful about science that helps rediscovering the knowledge, when he ensures that "The hope lies in Science, in the intelligent observation, utilising, initiation of the forces and workings of the Inconscient"³ or, the true self. The approach of logical analysis (scientific inquiry) goads the mind from the finite towards the infinite. It welcomes only ceaseless facing of problems until reasoning finds an end.

The knowledge developed this way is transformed into wisdom by "intuition" (derived from the Latin root *intueri* = to contemplate or to look inside), better cognised as Indian insight of creativity, allowing it to enjoy, thereby, a difference from the Western tradition of logic and science. The Indians accept intuition as the eye and reason as appropriate eye-glasses to gain better vision. Intuition, the Indian minds hold, is integral knowing and it comes as a 'flash' that instantly frees man from his inherent inconsistencies. That is why Sri Aurobindo avows that intuition is "the highest possible state of our knowledge when mind fulfils itself in the supramental"⁴. When Helmholtz says, "Happy ideas come unexpectedly without effort like an inspiration"⁵, we notice recognition of intuitive flash in the phrase 'unexpectedly without effort'. The *flash*

arises (whether in India or outside) when all limitations transcend, reasons end, and ontological enquiries collapse. It cannot, however, be conceived of; it is, at best, to be seen as a state of mind to make ourselves one with the truth, i.e., a state is attained when analytical inquiries stop altogether making the man concerned a free being. Plato is confident of a state superior to reason. In his *noesis* or ‘Understanding Without Images’, the highest grade of cognition, mind reasons “from Ideas, through Ideas and in Ideas”⁶. In viewing *noesis* above the grade of *dianoesis* or ‘Reasoning With Images’, Plato admits major convictions of life as intuitive and *noesis* surpassing the logical mind. The Hindu expression *aparokṣa*, used for intuitive knowledge arising out of a fusion with reality, comes very close to Plato’s *noesis* and both of these liberate men from the bonds of mathematical (logical) intelligibles. To quote Radhakrishnan: “Buddhaghosa makes *prajñā* or intuitive insight superior to *vijñāna* or logical knowledge and *saṃjñā* or perceptual knowledge”⁷.

Reason, though, appears as instrument of a particular level of ignorance, is a booster for human endeavour focused to reach the maximally deterministic finitude. Great thinkers throughout the world accept this view. However, following Kantian concept of reason, one learns about ultimate principles only, for his Ideas of Reason (Soul, World and God) represent no realistic nature and so are unconditioned. These do not receive spatio-temporal fulfilment that, in Kantian language, remains respectively beyond the forms of external intuition and internal intuition. For Kant, a genius advocating pure thinking, human knowledge is always conceptual, i.e. sense-conditioned and, hence, has no intuitive faculty at all, which is, he believes, a privilege of God only. In his philosophy, he is found to ignore “the natural self-confidence of reason that it knows things as they are in sense perceptions.”⁸ Sri Aurobindo, by contrast, lays stress on the well-organised, conscious force active within reason, that, despite its limitations, guides man towards a restrained, unbiased search for truth. Also, he admits that intuition is a development of the elevated human mind and, thus departs from Kant’s view.

Yet, reason fails. It fails at a point owing to its innate limitations. It is widely noticed that man, in general, uses reason (science) for a teleological knowing. Sri Aurobindo’s phrase *world of ideas* refers to utilitarian persuasion of knowledge for he knows that man’s reason normally acts within certain imperative objectives. In his *world of life*, reason loses its control. In one of Tagore’s seasonal songs (*varṣā* : song no-127) we thus hear - *kāraṇ sudhāyo nā, artha nāhi tār* (ask me no reason, for it carries no meaning or objective).

But, why does reason fail? Whenever part of gained or recollected knowledge is applied to satisfy only vital world, reason slips from performing its inherent function and errs. When knowledge is pursued for its own sake, reason excels itself by offering aesthetic delight for mankind. Tagore finds a *rhythm in reason* at work and, with understanding of reason, he precisely emphasises : “ there is not merely a logic but also a magic of mathematics which works at the world of appearance, producing harmony”⁹, for it is the problems of harmony wherein lie those of our existence.’ Tagore’s feeling of this creative rhythm as “dance-steps of numbers in the arena of time and space”¹⁰ is explicit in one of his songs (*Pūjā*/song no - 321) : ‘*tapan tārā nāce, nadī samudra nāce, / Janma maraṇa nāce, yuga yugānta nāce*’—the sun and the stars dance, dance rivers and seas / Life and death dance, dance eons after eons. It is the magic, the rhythm, of mathematics that takes us beyond scientific knowledge or the intellectual truth, toward the much aspired harmony, a world where man can possibly ascend — defying narrow cellular confinements— to the level of the seer. When Shakespeare’s Lorenzo says- “ Such harmony is in immortal souls” (*The Merchant of Venice* - Act V. Sc.1), we can, standing at different levels of our scientific progress, at least sense the profundity of the aspired harmony and try to leap beyond the realm of logic. It is true that man loves reason, for he cannot resist its centripetal force of attraction, but it is truer that he nurtures a searching passion for something dearer lying outside the circle of reason.

Reason or logical knowledge, therefore, gets limited and has to fail after certain steps chiefly due to its natural duality of differentiating the Knower (subject) and the Knowable (object). In contrast, intuitive knowledge holds them one in essence, different in existence. Quantum mechanics, that led to a drastic reappraisal of the concept of objective reality, also echoes intuitive insight. However, one should not think that reason and intuition are at odds with each other, rather the former is to be highly valued for its action in letting loose the barriers of sensory knowledge, thereby preparing mankind to arrive at the doors of truth of phenomenal existence. Intense interest in a problem, working with it patiently, foreseeing truth of potentiality are all a subject of reason, while sudden emergence of the fiery truth as an inevitable outcome falls in the domain of intuition.

Intuition is surely a *flash* (for its suddenness and its discontinuity through transitory appearance like the lightning), but reason, despite its limitations, is to be honoured as a sustained *torch* that guides our movement in an obscure alley.

A complete absence of reason can never create a ground for intuition to emerge. It implies then, the ‘flash’ of intuition is not an accident, nor a miracle—it always arises “out of a matrix of rationality”¹¹, out of a direct awareness associated with reason.

The greatness of science lies not in its magnificence, but in its sense of wonder, where reason and intuition are found assimilated, i.e., empirical data get amalgamated with heightened insight. This wonder is the truth that gives us unbound and untasted joy. It is echoed in Vivekananda : “the greatest truths are the simplest things in the world, simple as your own existence”¹². It immediately inspires us to recall Plato’s idea of ‘timeless’ existence, “against reason — as a reality, more real than our actual experience”¹³. In the age-long search for knowing the truth — which is most hidden yet most simple and real and a truth that is rhythmically mathematical (Tagore’s vision) as well as timeless (Plato’s view), for it does not emerge following our discovery, although it is a very real event — rests the acme of human endeavour. At this state, we can say, that science is being used by man about understanding of the natural world and is to be used to bring about order in his own. That could rewrite the human text. We await wondrous opening of such text beyond which we can go nowhere.

IV

In coming to the present context, one finds India nurturing the pride of a microcosmic truth, while Europe boasting of that gathered from external experiences. The irresistible flux of the nineteenth century European conquerors, however, shattered such traditional beliefs of India. It was made possible by the enthusiastic scientific advancements of the West which, while they satisfied psychological wants of the Western mind, disturbed the Indian mind through a neglect of India’s vibrant tradition as something living on philosophical rumination and writing, thereby a sarcasm on the ancient Indian convictions. As an obvious sequel, the easy-going, sleepy Indians, in their soil, received an unexpected blow. An unrest was followed by a struggle between the new impact of Western ideas and the cave-hidden Indian truth, which the indigenous people loved parroting even at the hour of crises. It became smooth for the enquiring westerners to variously exploit the slow-moving, prejudiced Indian mind that started dazzling at the marvels of the European science, and so felt blind to look into its own glorious past. This very attitude was seen as a weak entry point through which the externally awakened mind of the West could reach the Indian inertia of the time. The colonisers’ entry was further eased due to the

growing Indian tendency to own the new arrival of the economic approaches on the one hand, and a vulnerable confidence arising out of a very shallow realisation of the enriched *ātmodvīpa bhava* Indian mind on the other. The westerners virtually had to face little challenge to overcome the prevailing hurdles of the Indian psyche.

During this crisis period, very few resolved Indians could come up to brave the western attitude. In Vivekananda’s writings we discover that “ the traditions in India are not to be rejected with supercilious contempt ,”¹⁴ Aware of European materialistic perfections, an awakened Sri Aurobindo is found to retort : “Science is a light within a limited room, not the sun which illumines the world”¹⁵. In both we find the Indian spirit flowing afresh. Both of them were of strong conviction that “logic was the main arsenal”¹⁶ in the ancient Indian tradition. It is found pregnant with Gargi’s indomitable inquiries, Carvak’s reasoned scepticism, sceptical arguments of the Rig Veda (X.129) and India’s pioneering in logic, mathematics and other scientific questions. The pre-Buddhist school of *Nyāya* is applauded for its analytic argument and critical treatment of metaphysical problems. The antiquity of Indian logic can be traced to the Jaina Agamas. Gautama, the author of *Nyāya Sūtra*, systematised the principles of reasoning almost contemporaneously to that of Aristotle. India also gave birth to the ‘science of inquiry’ (*Ānvikṣikī or Darśana*) by the sixth century B.C. And, we must appreciate its modern relevance, for today’s science admits that every inquiry starts in doubt—a necessary step in its advancement. Every science, in its essence, is *Nyāya* whose root is found in ancient Indian soil and not in the experiential western wonders. In Kṛṣṇa’s proposal to seek resort to pure intellect or *buddhi*, a realm of reasoning as well as understanding (the Gītā-11.49), secrets of scientific ascent are once again found imprinted in the soil of antique India. This *buddhi*, in Sāṃkhya, is ascertaining and decisive—the qualities that dominate the realm of reason and science. India of the ages had thus nurtured its creative and analytic spirit together and developed a world of free-thinking within. There lies the country’s glory.

V

The Western reliance on open inquiry followed by reasoning out an existing problem apparently creates a conflict with the Eastern reliance on spiritual wisdom of the past. The conflict, in Sri Aurobindo’s language, is between the ‘Materialist Denial’ and the ‘Refusal of the Ascetic’. His vision, however, helped him from getting lost in celestial solitudes and the seer was not after discover-

ing an obsessed India but was engaged in expressing divinity in human terms without denying the material dynamism. It was he who wrote : “The touch of Earth is always reinvigorating to the son of Earth, even when he seeks a supraphysical Knowledge”¹⁷. The statement hints at an integral idea of the East and the West, an idea essential for building a dynamic yet enlightened national order. In his idea, true science never binds man in spatio-temporal confinements—for bondage can never reveal a truth—and, it is on this basis that he advocated a synthesis of inner experience of Indian past with the present western scientific observation that resolves the indeterminacies. The search for knowledge towards attaining a terrestrial omnipotence was recognised by Sri Aurobindo as the *soul* of modern materialism. This he views as the divine limitation. Yet, he proposes to “preserve the truths of material Science and its real utilities in the final harmony”¹⁸ by investing in the service of the Spirit that marks the manifestation of Matter. His synthetic idea truly nurtures the potency of schooling our hearts to take our lives to excellence.

A great mind of his time, Sri Aurobindo viewed science as a discourse of facts, i.e. a world of *is* and believed that its movement to that of *ought* requires growth of intellectual, dispassionate spirituality. An evolution of material realm to that of supra-material one was his dream to see an elevated humanity. He believed that without attempt and perseverance, the two pillars of the domain of reason, nothing reaches a man—not even the intuitive flash. It implies that reason precedes intuition and, so there cannot be any logic to reject the achievements of science or reason. Yet he could foresee an end to the Age of Reason the world over. Bergson, who viewed science as essentially utilitarian in origin, also mirrors Sri Aurobindo in substituting intuition for intellect as the proper organ of absolute knowledge.

In the history of humanity, causality appears as an active relationship that brings to life something new. Yet, owing to the limited nature of human experience, the universality of causality is often denied, for man is unable to prejudge its character beyond science. A question arises about whether there remains any scope of human choice or freedom in the world of causality. In Sri Aurobindo’s cyclic-evolution idea, however, causality is altogether dropped and, so, human choice gets its sanction. This stands as a significant departure from the familiar linear causality since the identity of an individual is essentially a function of his choice. In his idea we find ascent of involved Matter to Life that evolves into Mind (a partially developed, ignorant instrument) and, then to Supermind (Knowledge and Truth). This Supermind descends reversibly to the involved Matter

(self-limiting divinity) to gear up the willed attempts of man. It constitutes the constant flow of evolution and, this is where Sri Aurobindo realised that the “materialistic view of the world is now rapidly collapsing,”¹⁹

Looking individually, it appears that West is not willing to give up reason, and East is reluctant to renounce its spiritual asset. Sincerely concerned of the upliftment of humanity as a whole, Sri Aurobindo exalted the idea of recoiling of the highest power to the lowest perfection to avoid any evolutionary error, and his objective, oriented towards a positive synthesis of East and West, was founded on the latent, yet Infinite divinity that has room for all sorts of diversities within its unity. In the synthetic idea we hear the echo of Vivekananda : “If one takes the obverse he must take the reverse of the same coin,”²⁰ i.e. a true synthesis moves towards an impartial and unprejudiced acceptance of its component parts to set the desired harmony. An undeniable interdependence of the components is acknowledged in a synthesis of ideas. India has ever remained a witness to this. In its tradition lay the truth of life or that of reality. Sri Aurobindo’s hopes emerge from an India where that truth sleeps expectant.

VI

Sri Aurobindo delved deep into the resourceful Indian tradition and realised that the same ‘All’ appears both as the ‘Subconscious’ and the ‘Superconscious’ formulations. In his idea of evolution, involved knowledge evolves into supreme consciousness, i.e. the ‘Subconscious All’ or ‘Life’ changes into ‘Superconscious All’ or ‘Light’. Intuition, being the first teacher, remains common to both—only in veiled state in the former and in manifested state in the latter respectively. The evolutionary pathway is mediated by ‘Reason’ and ‘Manas’ both, but with the progress of evolution, *Reason* gradually ceases and *Manas* stills. Sri Aurobindo, therefore, views evolution as going beyond the mind and the reason towards the self-luminous knowledge. His fascinating cyclic evolution idea gives room to reason replacing even intuition and, thus, paints an idea of ‘descent’. While evaluating, it is found that the descent is not a downfall, rather in this process, a lower faculty (like reason) always gets scope to imbibe the sap of higher faculty (intuition) in order to revitalise its methods for a better cycle in the next run. The cyclic order, therefore, makes it clear that all sorts of limitation (realms of reason, mind) remain there in the human system, but are transformed into enriched faculties in due course of progress, when flickering lights slowly become steady. This is how the knowledge of the Self is revealed to man and it is how man acquires force to go beyond the natural fetters—a play that is not enjoyed through the profits of so-called scientific harvest only.

VII

The universe is a cosmos, not a chaos. Even in most chaotic systems, there is a kind of order and that is why a scientific treatment of the universe is possible. A human being, as an exemplary open system, stands far from equilibrium, for an equilibrium does not allow exchange of mass and energy of the being with its surroundings to occur, i.e. throughout his life, he exhibits an increasing order of entropy (chaos) deep into the molecular level, yet presents an emergence of order within. His very existence appears a *miracle* for him. And, the empirical “science fails if it attempts to transform a miracle into an equation”²¹, for science rebuilds another fetter of a particular space and time through such transformations. An obvious question arises : how does then science project itself to its practitioners ? As a sustained search for knowledge, it appears truly as an epistemic project in its making. Sri Aurobindo felt it and also recognised the great service of the rationalistic materialism and appreciated coming up of marvels of Western science through breaking of dogmatic beliefs, but did not get hypnotised at such wonders. In one of his sonnets, he makes his stand clear: Our truths “discovered are but mire and trace / Of the eternal Energy in her race ,”²²

Western claim to be in the vanguard of modern scientific advances and Indian rumination of its ascetic tradition impressed with the charismatic *vairāgya* — both remained far from the undefined, yet attainable Truth, and, so appeared as two extremes to Sri Aurobindo. He saw both of them as great ‘bankruptcy’ — one of ‘Spirit’, the other of ‘Life’ respectively. He was conscious of such polar lacunae and was a great visionary in rediscovering the cosmic Energy through a coherence of intellect and intuition, for he realised that crisis of mankind could be overcome by a harmony of East and West. In his evolved mind he found development of physical and psychical forces as the primary necessity to make the recipient ready for a departure towards a greater perfection. This could be a way out to help Knowledge revealed in Matter. For this to attain, he preferred ‘interchange of regenerating impulses’ to ‘exchange of forms’ towards outweighing divisions or differences of the East and the West in the days ahead. By such inter-fertilisation he hoped, Western courage could be interchanged with Eastern humility. The amalgamation of life’s kinetics and resourceful (yet long-slept) spirit would encourage the ‘psychic being’ to come forward to govern the outer man in the unending game of locating the goal, i.e. ‘knowing’ ‘the Infinite within’ the finite man. Only then, believes Sri Aurobindo, would the decisive turn to true science be written for mankind.

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The Soul

Kireet Joshi

When we use the word soul, what do we normally mean? Soul really means the stuff of which a thing is made. When we say this is the soul of an institution, the soul of the home, the soul of life, what we mean is that it is that without which the thing concerned could not have been made.

Many people, in many circumstances and many contexts, use this word, soul, loosely and that is why there is a great deal of confusion on this subject.

Apart from this definition that I have given you, we shall deal with some of these confusions. The word soul is sometimes used for something that is abstract, something that is ethereal, something that is intangible, something that is not capable of being seized upon, something that escapes us, something that seems to be lying above us. Now these words also are not entirely inapplicable to the real soul but they do not indicate exactly what the soul is. First of all the soul is not really intangible as many people believe it to be, the soul is not abstract, the soul is not something that cannot be seized, or that which cannot be grasped. To talk in positive terms the soul is concrete. In fact, when the soul is experienced, you feel that even the solidity of a substance such as a table is not as solid as that. When you really experience the soul, its concreteness is so great that the ordinary idea that the soul is abstract is found to be fundamentally incorrect. It is abstract only in the sense that in our ordinary life we take only material substance to be solid and everything else to be abstract, but actually speaking this matter is less concrete than the soul itself. When you really experience it, you feel the solidity and the stuff of it to be so powerful that it will be even much more solid than a heavy pillar of steel. It is true that it is above all that we know at present but it is also in everything that we know. The soul is present in everything — in the body, in our movements, in our thoughts, in our feelings, emotions, impulses, predilections, preferences, attractions, because

actually it is the stuff of which all this is made, so it is bound to be present everywhere.

Now there is another idea of the soul, which is conceived in the terms of a ghost. Very often people speak of the soul as spirit, and people say that when a man dies then the spirit goes on moving about in the house, in the surroundings and sometimes can be seen also by some people and they call it a ghost. In fact in *Hamlet*, the whole story is told by Shakespeare to point out that in human life the role that can be played by doubt is horrible and one that can lead to overall tragedy unless one becomes very clear, particularly about the inner realities of life. Men live basically on the outer surface but there are many inner realities, like the ghost, for example. The important message of this whole drama is that there are invisible realities, which do play a role in life. But very often these ghosts are regarded to be the soul of man, which comes out of the body and wanders about but there is truly speaking a great distinction between the ghost of this kind and the true soul.

This is the knowledge that India possesses. Ghosts certainly exist but we must know what exactly a ghost is. And how is it different from the soul? The ghost is the stuff of the vital desires, which are very strong and persistent; and when the human body dies, these desires still remain alive. They have a kind of subsistence and even a form, which is very similar to the form of the living man of which these desires were a part. So in certain conditions it can be seen even physically — you might say an invisible visibility — and there are so many facts of this kind that there is no reason to doubt the existence of this. But they basically are a kind of a conglomeration of the desires of the dead man and they are so strong that they persist for their satisfaction. There are human beings who are very attached to their wealth and after the death the individual remains around the wealth and protects it. They can even harm the person who tries to steal the money or makes an attempt to possess the wealth. But it is not the soul. It is only a conglomeration of a few desires, which have been left unsatisfied, and they are so powerful that they want to persist in the same old atmosphere.

Over and above the vital desires there are also mental thoughts. There is a big distinction between desires on one hand and mental thoughts on the other. This entire science is very briefly given in one *Upanishad*, the

Taittiriya Upanishad. There are hundred and eight *Upanishads*, out of which twelve are very important— *Upanishads* like *Isha*, *Katha*, *Kena*, *Chandogya*, *Vedaram*, *Mundaka*, *Mandukya*, *Taittiriya* are some of these twelve *Upanishads*. They are extremely important because they give in brief what is given at length in the *Vedas*. *Vedas* are such a vast literature — four big books containing thousands of mantras — that even one lifetime is not enough to read them. They are all in Sanskrit and in a language which one cannot understand. But the *Upanishads* are more intelligible, that is why many people turn to *Upanishads* to understand what is written in the *Vedas*.

They are very brief, for example *Isha Upanishad* has only eighteen verses but in eighteen verses the whole philosophy of the *Veda* is contained. Some other *Upanishads* are smaller or bigger. *Taittiriya* is quite a long one but it is a very important *Upanishad*, which says that a human being is basically composed of three parts — *annamaya*, *pranamaya*, and *manomaya*. *Annamaya* is the physical, which is visible to all of us. *Anna* means food and food is a word, which is used in Sanskrit also for physical. There is also *pranamaya*, which is a vital self. This vital being consists of desires; now the word desire is only a kind of a small abbreviation of many things. There is first of all instinct at the base of the desire. There is a distinction between instinct and desire. Instinct can even be unconscious but desire is always conscious — when you say “I desire something”, you are conscious about it — but in the case of instinct even though there is an impulsion, you may be unconscious about it. When you say, “Instinctively I got up”, you may not have even intended but instinctively you get up. So an instinct is an urge to do something without any voluntary decision or even any conscious decision. You may also become conscious of it but for doing it you may not need to take a conscious decision. “I become angry” is an instinct, anger is an instinct; curiosity is an instinct. You hear some sound and immediately you want to know what it is; I enter into some house, and immediately I begin to look around — it is simply curiosity, there may be no purpose in looking around but there is a real curiosity to find out what it is all about. Sexual desire is also an instinct; there are some attractions which are instinctive, there are some repulsions which are instinctive — for example the mongoose has an instinctive dislike and enmity against the snake and vice versa. Similarly among human beings also there are instinctive

attractions and instinctive repulsions, they are involuntary. But all of them imply some kind of action. All instincts are, as it were, drives of action; they result always in action — there is an emotional feeling and there is also a drive towards action. Now this is the lowest part of our desire.

At a little higher level, instinct begins to manifest as a desire in which you consciously begin to have an intention, motive and impulsion to do something to satisfy the intention and motive. There is also a distinction between motive and intention although we use the two words interchangeably. My motive is to get knowledge so that I can pass the examination. Going to the library and getting a book are intentions aimed at realising that motive. Therefore, the higher object is called the motive and all other actions that we need to fulfil or to realise that motive are called intentions. In a desire there is an emotion involved; the base of it may be instinct but not only instinct; you may have gone beyond the instinct. So although in the beginning it may have begun with an instinct, afterwards you begin to have a conscious desire for an object in which there is emotion involved, then there is a motive involved in it and then there may be an intention of doing something. And usually the desire has a kind of an urge to fulfil itself.

At a still higher level, there may be pure emotions. Not desires, but emotions, which are states of feelings. When you go to a beautiful forest full of flowers, you feel very happy — there is no desire to clutch at anything or to obtain something but you feel happy, that state of happiness is an emotion. I am sitting with you and I feel very happy, there is a joy, there is no desire in it but it is a state of happiness. Similarly, there is no desire for sorrow, yet there is an emotion of sorrow. One can have a long list of various kinds of emotions. These different kinds of emotions are called feelings. While I am talking to you there is a real joy but a special movement of it may be feelings of joy. I may talk to you, there may be fun, there may be wit and it produces that feeling of greater happiness — apart from a general state of happiness there is a greater happiness — it is a feeling. So various branches of emotions are all feelings.

Now this entire field — instinct, desire, emotions and feelings is called *pranamaya* — *prana* means breath — it all depends upon breathing basically. According to the Indian science, if breathing stops, all these things will disappear because breathing is the real cause of what we call nervous

reactions. If you examine our physiology you will find that all emotions, feelings, desires are nothing but reactions of the nerves. If nerves become dead then feelings stop. For example, if someone is paralysed, the nerves are affected, they become numb, and they do not function. Therefore even if you touch, there is no feeling. This paralysis happens because the breath has stopped in that part of the body. Therefore *prana* is very important for the entire field of instincts, desires, emotions and feelings. There is one more element in the field of vital or *pranamaya* and that is will. There is a difference between desire and will. I may desire a glass of wine but I may not will it. I may have a desire for it but I know it is injurious to health, I know that it upsets my mind; I come out of my own self as it were; I lose control over myself. Knowing all these consequences, even though I may desire it, I may not will it. For a desire to become a will, you must weigh the consequences of desires and then make a choice to put the desire into action or not, and when you do that, then that takes the form of will.

Normally, human beings are moved by instincts, just like animals. Animals are only instinctive, they have very little of thought or any kind of memory or any imagination. Human beings are also very largely instinctive, but these instincts develop into desires and some of these desires become very powerful in some human beings, for example, desire turning into ambition; a kind of a longing. Instinct becomes not only a desire for immediate satisfaction but also a longing, which can last for twenty five years, thirty years, maybe fifty years. A person may have the ambition to become the prime minister of his country. It may take fifty years to realise that ambition and one can sustain that kind of a desire for a long time if there is a great longing for it.

There are certain kinds of love where even if you are separated for many years, if it is a true love and there is a longing to meet, then even if it takes years and years and there are hurdles and hurdles, you overcome them. So, certain desires become longings, attractions, long-standing attractions. Similarly, certain repulsions also become long-standing; it can remain for thirty, forty years. There are many people who fulfil their revenge after twenty or thirty years and then they feel satisfied in their life. So there can be long-standing ambitions, long-standing attractions, long-standing repulsions or short-lived desires or short-lived repulsions. So we see that most human

beings are instinctive but when they become more conscious they are ruled by desires. Out of desire they begin to have many emotions, some of which human beings begin to value more.

There are many things that I experience — out of them I select for example, “I would like to be with so and so for such and such time whenever I am free”, or, “Whenever A is present I feel very comfortable so I always go to him whenever I have time.” Emotions, which are more stable, arise out of experiences of desires, from which emerge the consequences of desires. Then one considers the pros and cons. One can decide to satisfy one’s desire taking into consideration the consequences, or control the desire, master it, eliminate it; all this is the operation of will. It is therefore said that a human being, as long as he is only instinctive, is purely animal. And when he begins to have some desires, he starts becoming human. But it is only when he begins to develop the will that his manhood really comes into picture. A man who has no will or has not developed his will-power has not yet entered into manhood; he is carried over by desires, instincts, impulses, passions — he is not in his self-possession. That is why it is said that the most important thing in education is to develop the will-power of the child, because a child is normally instinctive and gradually has to grow into manhood and therefore there is so much insistence upon the development of will-power. Now this is true of all human beings because we are also like children, and we also need to develop quite a lot.

The most important thing for human beings is to develop will-power. All this is the subject matter of *pranamaya*. There is a huge complexity in our whole vital life. And if we really open the drawer of our vital being, *pranamaya*, we will find all kinds of things littered almost in a chaotic manner — papers and pencils of various colours, some papers torn and some papers crumpled. This is what we are normally. But the will-power develops basically when the third element develops, that is *manomaya*, the mental.

What is mind, actually? Just as the vital is the field of feelings, emotions, desires, similarly, mind is the field of conception. There is a distinction between feeling and conception. A conception is a form in which the object, which is physical, or any other object is represented. A representative form of an object is called conception and normally this conception is expressed in the form of words. All our capacity of using words is because of the power

of conception. I see a table; if I want to tell you about the table, I have two ways of expressing it. One is to take you to the table and say, “Look, this is what I mean”, in which case conception is not necessary. Or else if I know the trick of conception and the use of words, then without the need of bringing you to the table I can simply say, “I want to speak to you about the table”. I use the word ‘table’ and immediately what happens is that the image, representation of the table comes to your mind. This representation of the table is the conception. That he is capable of these representations is a great capacity of man. It gives him the possibility of representations of various things and therefore within a small compass he can contain so many objects. All representations are brief as compared to the objects — the word table or the concept table is smaller than a table itself. So because of brevity, the capacity of connecting objects becomes quicker. Therefore the advantage of the mind is that by its use one can quickly connect many objects and understand their interrelationship.

Here again, the word interrelationship is very important. Just as mind is fundamentally a capacity of conception, mind is also a capacity of understanding. We usually say that when we entertain our mind or train our mind we begin to understand things better. Therefore, just as the mind is fundamentally a capacity of conception, mind is also a capacity of understanding. What is the meaning of the word ‘understanding’? When do I say, “I have understood”, and when do I say, “I have not understood”? Both ways we can try to understand the thing. You understand a thing first when you can touch it; it is one way of understanding. But even that is not sufficient. You may say that even if you touch an object you may not really understand it. Take for example the story of *Othello*. In this story, the handkerchief plays the major part. The story basically rests upon a handkerchief. Many people may see just a handkerchief but the way in which Othello sees it makes him understand many things; the whole story becomes quite different on seeing just one handkerchief. Merely seeing an object is not enough for understanding, the context in which an object is seen is very important. So all understanding basically is the grasp of an object in the context of everything else. When the context is seen, then you say, “Yes, now have I understood”. That interrelationship of an object with all the rest is what is called understanding.

Now the human mind is capable of conception, it is capable of understanding, and thirdly it is capable of withdrawing from the rush of all emotions. It is the third capacity of the mind. It is very often difficult but it is capable of gradually withdrawing and becoming a witness, pure witness. I can observe my own anger although very often when I am angry, I become anger myself; I even lose all control over myself. When I do not even know that there is anger, I am simply a wave of anger myself; there is only explosion and nothing else. But when the mind has been trained to withdraw itself more and more, particularly in the calmer moments when our mind has become more and more a witness self, then we see that even when anger overpowers us, then this habit of witnessing comes to our help and we can see ourselves that, “Now anger is rising, I am being overtaken by anger, explosion is taking place.” Because of this witnessing consciousness you can intervene and even if anger remains you can stop the manifestation of it. Now this intervention of the mind is actually the action of will of which we spoke earlier. So without the mind there is no action of will, therefore will is usually called intelligent will.

There is intelligence which works in order that the will operates and this will operates because of the capacity of the mind to withdraw from the rush of emotions, desires, instincts, sympathies. It is a great capacity of the mind. So when we speak of educating a child in mental development, three things which are necessary are the power of conceiving, the power of understanding and the power to withdraw from the rush of emotions so that one can witness them. These three powers are extremely important in mental education.

Every human being normally has got these three elements — the body, the vital and the mental; but none of these is the soul, although the soul is present in all of them. The soul is the stuff of everything but the soul is still different from all the three. Many people think that the vital *prana* is the soul, which it is not. Similarly many people think that the mind is the soul, which also it is not, because mind seems to be uplifted and high and can move about in imagination — it looks as if it is ethereal, something corresponding to our concept of something that is superior and high.

Now it is true that mind is certainly superior to many things in our consciousness but there is still something deeper than mind and that is the soul. In Sanskrit it is called *antaratman*. How do we distinguish between

mind and the soul? Since the soul is the stuff of everything, it will naturally have qualities that are present in the body, life and mind. The soul, for example, has a kind of substantiality which even matter has got, it has feelings just as the vital has got, it has the knowledge just as the mind has got. Now these three things are present in the soul and yet it is something else. What is that something else? First, a spontaneous sweetness in the consciousness, spontaneous sweetness, not depending upon objects — when I am with you, I may feel very sweet because of your presence; with you I understand what sweetness of a relationship is. But when the same sweetness or even greater sweetness is experienced without dependence upon any object, that is the sign of the soul.

In *Katha Upanishad* it is described as *madhavadaha* — *madhu* means honey, *adaha* means eater — the soul is described as the eater of honey, the eternal honey, it is like a sponge which constantly oozes out honey. Each one of us has got a soul, just as each one of us has got a mind. It is full of sweetness, inherent sweetness, you do not have to manufacture it and you do not have to be in contact with any object in the world to experience it. When you touch it you will automatically find sweetness in it and you will be filled with sweetness. That is the first characteristic of the soul — inherent sweetness of consciousness — not merely sweetness coming from outside, but that which is inherent, inborn. Just as the capacity of thinking is inborn in the mind, similarly the capacity of experiencing sweetness independent of any object in the world, internally, is a speciality of the soul.

The second characteristic of the soul is that it has an automatic knowledge of the truth. If the soul is brought into the real play, put in the presence of many facts, many people, it will automatically turn to the truthful man, truthful woman, truthful child, automatically, just as the sunflower turns automatically to the sun. The soul is like a needle that automatically turns to all that is truthful. In the mind, truth is to be sought for. In the mind it may be mixed with error. We start with ignorance and doubt and gradually eliminate errors and arrive at some kind of truth. It is a big labour and in that too we are not sure whether it is really true or not. We simply say: “I think it may be true, probably it is true,” and to make it certain you require so much evidence. Only then can you say, “Now I think it is really true” and even then fresh evidence might emerge and disqualify what was previously believed to be

the truth. We see in the judgments of the courts, how very often, even with clinching evidence, a wrong judgment is given. So, mind is a seeker of truth, it may arrive at the truth but it is never certain about it. The soul, on the contrary, is automatically sure of what is true, without evidence. Therefore, if the soul consciousness is really discovered, it can automatically find out what is true and what is false. It is compared with a swan, which has the capacity of separating milk from water. It is so said that if you fabricate a story and give it to the soul, it will automatically separate the truth from the falsehood — it will not look for evidence.

Similarly, it has another capacity of distinguishing between good and evil, who is noble and who is not noble, whether somebody is truly self-sacrificing or not or only making a pretence of sacrifice. Similarly, the soul has a real eye for beauty; even in the ugly it can find out what is beautiful. That is why, when a mother has real love for her child, she always finds the child to be beautiful — because real motherhood is very near to the soul. All mothers in the world while experiencing real motherhood are very near to their soul. Fathers cannot experience this but mothers experience this very deeply, that is why motherhood is such an important thing in life. So, sweetness is the first recognition of the soul, and then comes the capacity to distinguish truth from falsehood, capacity to distinguish good from evil and the capacity to distinguish between the beautiful and the ugly.

There is a third element in the soul; it has an inherent knowledge of what is the purpose of the life in which it is involved now. “What is the direction that my life must take? What is the purpose of my life? What am I here to do? Should I be an engineer or a doctor or a lawyer, a coolie or a scribe, or what? How do I know what I am to do?” These are questions that everyone asks. If you give a chance to the soul it has an answer. In fact this is the one question, the answer to which you can find in no book but which you can find only in the soul, “What am I to do in life?” Books can give a general guidance, but what your specific work is, can be found only in your soul and nowhere else. That is why if you really want to know your aim in life, it can be achieved only by going to the soul. So, this is the fourth important element in the soul — the knowledge of the aim of life of the individual.

There is a further capacity of the soul. The capacity to deal with the

confusions, doubts and errors of the mind, the capacity to control undesirable desires, to eliminate wrong relationships which one builds up in life, the capacity to overcome the obscurity of the physical, the resistance of the physical and the illnesses of the physical. These three capacities are also present in the soul. It not only has the knowledge of dealing with them but also the skill of dealing with them. You might say that the soul is both like an architect and a mason. An architect is one who designs out of materials a beautiful structure. Similarly, the soul has body, life and mind as materials and the soul knows how to design and harmonise body, life and mind in a beautiful manner and like a mason he can also ultimately construct that beautiful building. The soul has a further capacity. It can communicate deeply with the souls of others inwardly, without even speaking, even without outer communication. It may use outer communication if necessary but it is not indispensable for it. The telephonic lines of the soul with other souls are very direct.

And finally the greatest capacity of the soul is that it is inherently aware of God. God is, for most people, particularly in modern times, an idea or a belief which is imposed from the outside and most of us doubt whether God really exists or not. But for the soul, God is a living reality. For the soul, the one object that is really real is God. It is in direct touch with God and it can communicate with God, it has the sweetest relationship with God and it can discover what is God's will and can manifest it.

In the *Veda*, the greatest discovery that our Vedic *rishis* made was the discovery of the soul. The word they used for the soul was *Agni* and to explain to ordinary people, they said that you must light *Agni* every day in your house. This is the prescription they gave and they made *Agni* the centre of the entire Indian life. They said that for every turn of life you have to do a *havan*, you have to light the fire. They said that if you go inwards, you will discover the soul, which is like a flame, an inner flame, a flame of aspiration, a flame, which always moves upwards. Like fire, it always moves upwards and it is always pure. In fact, impurities can be burnt by fire but fire is always pure. Whatever you might do, fire can never be impure; similarly the soul is always pure. Therefore every human being is basically pure in the soul and if you can really reach the soul of somebody, you can forget all the impurities of outer nature. All the things that we call ugly, wrong and

bad are forgotten when we come to the soul plane. It does not mean that every human being in his outer being is pure. But if you really want to establish a true relationship with somebody, you can find in his soul a real purity in which everything can be burnt away. So, if you really meet somebody at the soul level, the entire past can be thrown out, wiped out. Everything can be forgotten, forgiven, it truly vanishes. The soul is like a slate in which purity remains, whatever else you have written can be rubbed off.

That is why the Vedic *rishis* compared the soul with only one thing and that is *Agni*, and that is why they made *Agni* the centre of human life, of the entire social life and they said that at every turn of life, human beings have to discover *Agni*. The very first mantra of the *Rig Veda* gives the whole secret of the soul. It says *agnimire*, "O soul, I worship you". This is the secret mantra. If you want to find your soul, you just say, "O soul I worship you." If you constantly do it, the soul itself will come out in the front and you will begin to shine with the nature of the soul. Then it says, *purohitam*, "you are the *purohita* — leader." *Purohita* does not mean an ordinary priest. *Puroha* means front, *hita* means put forward; that which is put forward is called *purohita*. So the soul is the *purohita*, one who is always in the front, he is constantly guiding you, although you may not listen to its guidance, you might not be aware of it. It says *purohitam yajnasya devam ritvijam*. He is the *ritvija* — the one who knows the cycles of development, where one is at present in the long cycle of development. You may have had many past births. It knows all the past births, it knows where you are now, it knows the direction in which you are going, it knows the cycles by which you can move towards it. It is *ritvijam* — *ritu* means the season. It is the knower of the seasons of the soul's development. It is *hotaram*; it is the one who can call all the powers that are in God because it has direct contact with Him. It is *ratnadhatamam*. Here *ratna* means happiness, bliss, sweetness — it is the holder of all the bliss that is possible, even the highest bliss. So, if a human being is in search for the highest bliss he will get it only by going through the soul. Such is the importance of the soul in our search of life.

The soul, also called the *antaratman*, is a delegate of our real individual soul, the *Jivatman*, which is a still deeper reality behind the *antaratman*. When people talk of *jiva*, the soul, they are referring to the *Jivatman*. *Antaratman* is that which is spread out in our body, life and mind, which

is there within our heart, inside our heart. The *Jivatman* is still beyond it, it is the real individual centre of God himself. Let us now dwell upon this.

God himself is Universal, therefore He is called the cosmic self, He is spread out everywhere and there are experiences in which you feel so wide and so intimate with everything in the world that it all seems to be one united thing. All diversity is, as it were, simply the diversity of oneness.

These are experiences of the cosmic self. The *antaratman* is mainly connected with the individual development. It can also open up to universality, but universality is not its constant experience. In the cosmic self, its experience is universal constantly. This cosmic self is an expansion; it is never ending. It is therefore called an expansion of God, the essence which is universal. Now if you examine the idea of essence you will find that essence is always something that is the same, however it may manifest. For example, we may tell a story to indicate one basic truth, we may tell the story in ten different ways but the essence of the story remains the same. Expressions of essence can be small, can be wide, and can be widest, as wide as the whole of space, whole of time, so even if there is an expression of the essence as wide as the whole of time or the whole of space, the essence itself still remains the same. This can happen only if the essence is more than space and time. Therefore it is said that God is spaceless and timeless, capable of infinite space and infinite time. Essence is called *Sat*, that which is. It is also called Transcendental, because it transcends all expressions, all that we can conceive. So God is transcendental and capable of universality, He can expand and manifest Himself. He is also capable of — it is a very special capacity of God — of containing himself fully in individual centres.

This is one of the surprising capacities of God that He can concentrate the whole of Himself in many small individual centrations. It is somewhat like a poet writing a poem of seven lines, or fourteen lines, a sonnet and saying, “all my message is contained in these fourteen lines”. All that he has thought, all that he has lived, all that he has experienced is contained in these fourteen lines. A great poet is capable of it. Similarly God can contain himself in a small centration of Himself and as you open out, it opens out itself to the whole cosmos and to the Transcendental.

You might say that the centration of God is capable of universalisation and transcendence because it is itself a centration of the universal and of

the transcendental. Therefore from this side also it can expand into infinity, into universality, into transcendence.

Jivatman is God himself but in a finite centration. It always remains united with God. If you really discover your *Jivatman* you will find that it is all the time united with God. It does not have to make an effort to unite with God. This is why it is said that if you really want to see yourself truly, the best perception of it is given in the *rasa lila* of *Sri Krishna*. Sometimes in rare moments you can have this vision in which *Krishna* is dancing with *gopis*. Each *gopi* is a *Jivatman* and each one of us is one of them already; whether we know it or not, each one of us is already engaged in the dance with *Sri Krishna*. We are constantly at play with Him, with God himself. This is our basic status, our only work. When we realise the self-knowledge, know ourselves truly we will find that we are constantly at play with the Lord, already. There is no division of the *Jivatman* from God, it is all knowing, and there is nothing, no knowledge that is denied to it. The *antaratman* or the delegate has knowledge but compared to that, the knowledge of the *Jivatman* is omniscient. The true *Jivatman* has all the knowledge and this *Jivatman* obeys God’s decisions automatically, there is no disobedience.

Now I will tell you a story. A time came in the play of *Sri Krishna*, who is the symbol of the Lord Himself, when He decided to have a certain kind of play. He is capable of many kinds of play because there is nothing that is impossible for God, so He is also capable of a specific play. All the souls agreed to that play. He said, “I would like you to forget yourselves.” But how does one forget? There is omniscience in which you cannot forget anything; all knowledge is present. God gave a kind of a process by which these individuals could forget themselves. Because of omniscience all around it had to be a gradual process. If you are living in the sea of knowledge, you cannot forget anything. In the first condition you are omniscient therefore you have got comprehensive knowledge. The faculty by which comprehensive knowledge can be obtained is what is called the faculty of truth consciousness. This is a Vedic word, called *rita chit* — *rita* means truth, *chit* means consciousness. All that is truth is known simultaneously without any effort in that faculty. It is quite different from mind, which has to labour and grope, whereas the *Jivatman* has the faculty of omniscience in which automatically everything that is true is known comprehensively. That *rita chit*

is also called Supermind because it is a faculty of knowledge, which has to grope for nothing. So you might say that the basic faculty of the *Jivatman* is Supermind.

Now this supermind has three capacities: comprehensive knowledge, apprehensive knowledge and projecting knowledge. In comprehensive knowledge, everything is known as one, united. All the variations, which are there in the unity, are seen as harmonies of oneness. You can imagine a grand symphony being orchestrated by a great conductor who has complete mastery over each and every movement, all united together in complete harmony. Somewhat like this is the consciousness of the comprehensive *Jivatman*. The master conductor is aware of the totality of the symphony and at the right moment he can direct the flute player that it is now his turn to play the flute, simultaneously he turns to the violin man and directs him. Now this capacity of specifying particular movements is called apprehensive consciousness. Each one of us has also got something similar to this consciousness even in our life. I may know the whole story before I start narrating it to my child but I unfold it gradually. Now this is a capacity of apprehensive consciousness. It does not abrogate the totality that you have in your mind but you have a capacity of relating it step by step. So, manifestation of the totality in a step-by-step movement is what is called apprehensive movement, as opposed to the comprehensive movement. Now in an apprehensive movement a third movement becomes possible. As I narrate the story I give the emphasis on one point rather than another point. This capacity of playing with emphasis (multiple or otherwise), so that certain points become much more prominent and other points become subordinated is called projecting consciousness. Now all the three are present simultaneously in the *Jivatman* — comprehensive consciousness, apprehensive consciousness, and projecting consciousness, just as the storyteller has all the three consciousnesses present simultaneously, even though the child may not be aware of all the three simultaneously.

God has got all the three simultaneously, *Jivatman* has got all the three simultaneously, but having reached the point of projecting, emphasising one thing, a new possibility arises and that is of exclusive concentration of consciousness. When I emphasise one thing, it is quite possible that I may remain for a long time stressing on that point. During that time, all the rest

remains ignored, and if I will — that is important — if I will, then I may remain stuck to that concentration and keep all other points ignored for a long time. For example, I may be playing the role of *Rama* in a drama. I know the whole drama very well myself; I know also that I am not actually *Rama*, but somebody else. But when *Sita* gets captured by *Ravana* and I weep, I forget that I am an actor; I also forget that in the drama I am a great king — so noble and mighty, I forget that weeping is quite inconsistent for *King Rama*. Forgetting all that, I weep and weep thoroughly, truly, with all my heart. The greater the concentration on my weeping, the greater is the forgetfulness of everything else and the greater is my acting. The more I forget that I am really acting the better is my acting. This is a special power, which is called exclusive concentration of consciousness.

Now, to get back to the game — God wanted all the souls to forget themselves. To arrive at that command, the *Jivatman* had to first of all live in the three states of consciousness — comprehensive, apprehensive and projecting. At the point of projecting, it had to take one step further by which it became concentrated only upon one important point and all the rest he put behind and ignored. It forgot that it is the *jiva*, having the capacity of all — comprehensive consciousness, apprehensive consciousness and projecting consciousness. It forgot, but it was not abolished. When the actor is acting as *Rama*, that he is not *Rama* is not abolished. He has got his own family, he will go back home and meet his wife and children and so on. He as Mr. X is not abolished, his family is not abolished, but for this moment, he believes that his family does not exist, he does not exist, the whole drama does not exist; only his weeping exists. It is a very special quality of consciousness that he exercises. He may not feel like exercising it, but if God has willed that the *Jivatman* wants to play a game of this kind, then it is possible for it to play this game. So at a given time, to follow God's game, the *Jivatman* agreed to forget itself. This act is called the act of ignorance. He ignores the rest, concentrating only on one point. It does not mean that the *Jivatman* is not enjoying the three states of consciousness at the same time — only that it is not aware of them. While it is exercising that exclusive concentration of consciousness it is not aware of all the three, but the moment it withdraws from that exercise it becomes aware of it.

There is a state of consciousness where even while acting as *Rama* the

actor is aware of his relationship with his wife, his home etc. But that consciousness is different from the frontal consciousness. This word frontal is very important. All forgetfulness arises out of making a distinction between frontal consciousness and inner consciousness. In the inner consciousness the *jiva* continues as before, his constant play with God continues, his *lila* continues but in the frontal consciousness it is left out. Now all of us are in that condition of self-forgetfulness. We are all *Jivatman*.. Each one of us agreed with God, made a contract with Him and said, “You know the purpose of this game, we do not, but since you want to play a game, we shall participate in it.” As a result of which we put back our consciousness of God, our consciousness of ourselves in the centres of God, our capacity of universalisation, our capacity of comprehensive consciousness, apprehensive consciousness, projecting consciousness. Even when they are operating, we shall remain unconscious of them, but unconscious only in that point. You can always recover it if you want it — just go backward and you will recover it and you will find that you were always in that consciousness. Now this is what has happened to all of us.

Each one of us actually knows why God has done this. The *Jivatman* really knows why this kind of game has been selected. It is the great secret of the universe. What is the reason for this self-forgetfulness? It is only by self-forgetfulness, that gradually this self-forgetfulness can be brought to such a point that it becomes completely unconscious. First of all this self-forgetfulness is partial but gradually you can reach a point where a stage is reached of complete unconsciousness. Now take again the example of the actor playing the role of *Rama*. When he concentrates only on weeping, he becomes so much one with weeping, his concentration on weeping is so great, that he even forgets he is weeping. He is not even conscious of it. It was only an act of weeping at first, and then it became real. So to arrive at complete unconsciousness — a complete opposite of himself — was the first intention of God. God is full consciousness, but through the consent of the individuals, this possibility was created in which complete unconsciousness was created.

If this unconsciousness can be broken afterwards, then the delight, which comes out of the breaking, is extremely intense. Such a delight is not available anywhere, not even in his highest consciousness. To attain to this kind of

experience — the highest kind of delight, it was necessary to forget, to arrive at unconsciousness and then to gradually break it. During the breaking, a lot of suffering is produced. But if, during that period, you go on pressing forward and really break this unconsciousness, even partial unconsciousness, and rise up again to that original state, then something else will be added to it, which was not available in the beginning — the most intense delight, a kind of perfection in the exact opposite conditions. To give an example — unless you become very thirsty you will not understand what it means to be quenched. The real value of water is realised not when water is available easily but when you are deprived of it and are very thirsty. Then when you get water, the delight you experience in drinking it is not available when you are getting water quite normally. Similarly, when you are deprived of the real consciousness and gradually you rise into it, the unconsciousness is completely broken and there is a rush of consciousness, then the delight that comes is tremendous. Now to gain this experience the whole drama had to be played. Each one of us has agreed to this drama; it is now no more possible for you or for me to say, “I do not like this drama.” In this drama, each *Jivatman* is given a specific role. It is as if God is playing the big orchestra in which each one has a certain part and we have all agreed to play that part.

In the original stage, long, long ago, there was complete darkness. During the evolutionary process, first came matter, then came life, and then came mind. We are here now with our ordinary consciousness of mind. We are slightly conscious — quite unconscious in fact. We are a mixed bag. It is in this present state that we feel all kinds of dualities: happiness misery, knowledge ignorance, honour dishonour, victory defeat. It is an important stage of development and at every step, your suffering is a reminder that you have to ultimately act to break the ignorance. Do not cry over the suffering which is there, it is inevitable because you are rising from unconsciousness towards consciousness in which all kinds of experiences of duality will be there. If you feel uncomfortable, it is inevitable. In the ignorant consciousness how can you expect a complete felicity? You cannot, this is the normal state of your consciousness and the moment you feel pain, you realise that it is God’s message to you that now the time has come for you to break this and to move forward.

This knowledge has been given by the *Jivatman* to its delegate the psychic entity. Therefore, the psychic being has got the knowledge, automatic knowledge of what has gone before in previous births; where you have reached now and where you have to move forward. Therefore at any given stage in life, wherever there is a problem, we should take the problem as an indicator of the need to break the limitation, by going back to the soul — the psychic entity that is most immediately available to us. In our present consciousness, the *Jivatman* is not available because it is far off as it were, but the nearest to our body, life and mind is this *antaratman*, the psychic entity, which is seated inwardly. The *Jivatman* has sent this delegate into us so that we may get the guidance more easily. Therefore, individuals need to discover this soul — the psychic entity as soon as possible, particularly when we are in a situation where we really feel some kind of suffering, some kind of a need to come out of it and to really enter into a new consciousness.

(This is an edited version of a talk given at the Super School in Auroville some years ago)

The Divine Grace

Larry Seidlitz

As Sri Aurobindo wrote in the opening sentence of his important book, *The Mother*, “There are two powers that alone can effect in their conjunction the great and difficult thing which is the aim of our endeavour, a fixed and unfailing aspiration that calls from below and a supreme Grace from above that answers.” (p. 1) So we see that both are necessary and further that they are complementary, interactive, and synergistic. Therefore, in addition to understanding clearly specific practices that we can implement to make progress in the Yoga (published in the previous two issues of *Śraddhā*), we must understand the nature and action of the Divine Grace, its place in the Yoga, and its relation to our personal practice. In this article, I hope to shed some light on these issues by examining key passages from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on Grace.

What is the Divine Grace?

It may be useful if we can first develop a clearer conception of what Grace is, linking it to our general understanding of Sri Aurobindo’s views about the nature of existence and of yoga. It is no accident that Sri Aurobindo emphasises the concept of Grace in the opening of his book, *The Mother*, because the concept is closely connected with Her. The Mother is the Divine Shakti, the Divine Power, “the divine Conscious Force that dominates all existence, ... the consciousness and force of the Supreme.” (*The Mother*, p. 19). He further explains that

In all that is done in the universe, the Divine through his Shakti is behind all action but he is veiled by his Yoga Maya and works through the ego of the Jiva in the lower nature.

In Yoga also it is the Divine who is the Sadhaka and the Sadhana; it is his Shakti with her light, power, knowledge, consciousness, Ananda, acting upon the Adhara and, when it is opened to her, pouring into it with

these divine forces that makes the Sadhana possible. But so long as the lower nature is active the personal effort of the Sadhaka remains necessary. (The Mother, p. 6)

Sri Aurobindo sometimes refers to the Grace as emanating from the Mother. For example, he writes, *“For the grace of the Divine Mother is the sanction of the Supreme and now or tomorrow its effect is sure, a thing decreed, inevitable and irresistible. (The Mother, p. 10)* In another passage he describes it this way: *“Grace is something spontaneous which wells out from the Divine Consciousness as a free flow of its being.” (Letters on Yoga, p. 790)* In another interesting passage he says,

...this divine grace, if we may so call it, is not simply a mysterious flow or touch coming from above, but the all-pervading act of a divine presence which we come to know within as the power of the highest Self and Master of our being entering into the soul and so possessing it that we not only feel it close to us and pressing upon our mortal nature, but live in its law, know that law, possess it as the whole power of our spiritualised nature. (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 595)

In some other passages, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo make the intimate connection between the physical embodiment of the Mother and the Grace explicit:

The Divine Grace alone has the power to intervene and change the course of Universal Justice. The great work of the Avatar is to manifest the Divine Grace upon earth. To be a disciple of the Avatar is to become an instrument of the Divine Grace. The Mother is the great dispensatrix—through identity—of the Divine Grace, with a perfect knowledge—through identity—of the absolute mechanism of Universal Justice. (Collected Works of the Mother (CWM), vol. 14, p. 87)

It is the work of the Cosmic Power to maintain the cosmos and the law of the cosmos. The greater transformation comes from the Transcendent above the universal, and it is that transcendent Grace which the embodiment of the Mother is there to bring into action. (Sri Aurobindo, The Mother, p. 50)

In her universal action the Mother acts according to the law of things—in her embodied physical action is the opportunity of a constant Grace—it is for that that the embodiment takes place. (Sri Aurobindo, The Mother, p. 50)

Thus, we may say that Grace is the conscious Power of the Divine, the Mother, which is behind all action in the universe, but that normally its action is veiled and works through the mechanisms of the lower nature, not directly. When, or in proportion to which, the individual's nature is opened and surrendered to the Divine, it pours its divine forces directly into the sadhaka.

It is this direct, freer action of the Divine Mother working on the individual that Sri Aurobindo seems to refer to as the Grace, as distinct from her normal veiled activity that works through the mechanisms of the lower nature. He writes:

Destiny in the rigid sense applies only to the outer being so long as it lives in the Ignorance. What we call destiny is only in fact the result of the present condition of the being and the nature and energies it has accumulated in the past acting on each other and determining the present attempts and their future results. But as soon as one enters the path of spiritual life, this old predetermined destiny begins to recede. There comes in a new factor, the Divine Grace, the help of a higher Divine Force other than the force of Karma, which can lift the sadhak beyond the present possibilities of his nature. One's spiritual destiny is then the divine election which ensures the future. The only doubt is about the vicissitudes of the path and the time to be taken by the passage. It is here that the hostile forces playing on the weaknesses of the past nature strive to prevent the rapidity of the progress and to postpone the fulfilment. (Letters on Yoga, p. 475)

We see that Sri Aurobindo clearly distinguishes between the action of the Grace and the normal mechanisms of karma, in which our life and destiny are largely the natural result of our previous actions both in this life and previous incarnations. It is a higher Power that intervenes in the normal law of the working of the karmic energies, and it can annul or supersede them. Nevertheless, he notes here that while the power and eventual success of the Grace are infallible, the time taken to fulfil its action may be short or long, and is often delayed by the hostile forces.

The omnipresence of the Grace

We get a somewhat different perspective on the nature of Grace from the Mother's talks. At first sight, her perspective seems to contradict Sri Aurobindo's view of the Grace as a special intervention acting when the nature is open and surrendered, but I think it is quite possible to reconcile them and find that while

emphasising different aspects, together they give us a more refined view of Grace. In many of her talks referring to Grace, the Mother seems to emphasise its constant and ever present action in the world. For example, she says,

In the whole manifestation there is an infinite Grace constantly at work to bring the world out of the misery, the obscurity and the stupidity in which it lies. From all time this Grace has been at work, unremitting in its effort, and how many thousands of years were necessary for this world to awaken to the need for something greater, more true, more beautiful.

Everyone can gauge, from the resistance he meets in his own being, the tremendous resistance which the world opposes to the work of the Grace. (CWM, Vol. 9, pp. 420-421)

We see here that from the Mother's perspective, the Grace is constantly acting everywhere. At the same time, she notes that its action is resisted and opposed by the ignorance of the lower nature, and thus its eventual aim and result of awakening the world to the Divine have required many thousands of years. This idea of the omnipresence of the Grace brings to mind Sri Aurobindo's conception, quoted earlier, that the Divine through his Shakti is behind all action in the universe, but that this action is veiled by his Yoga Maya in the lower nature. According to this view, the Divine Force is constantly pressing on the manifestation to progress, to open, to awaken to the Divine that is within it and supports it and with which it is one in its inmost reality. On the one hand, there are the present limitations of the evolving world which constrain, resist, and deny the free and rapid working of the Divine Force, and on the other hand there is the constant pressure and infallible action of the Divine Force *working through* all of these resistances in a patient but persistent and compassionate manner.

In one of the most powerful passages on Grace, the Mother says, *I have said somewhere, or maybe written, that no matter how great your faith and trust in the divine Grace, no matter how great your capacity to see it at work in all circumstances, at every moment, at every point in life, you will never succeed in understanding the marvellous immensity of Its Action, and the precision, the exactitude with which this Action is accomplished; you will never be able to grasp to what extent the Grace does everything, is behind everything, organises everything, conducts everything, so that the march forward to the divine realisation may be as swift, as complete, as total and harmonious as possible, considering the circumstances of the world.*

As soon as you are in contact with It, there is not a second in time, not a point in space, which does not show you dazzlingly this perpetual work of the Grace, this constant intervention of the Grace.

And once you have seen this, you feel you are never equal to it, for you should never forget it, never have any fears, any anguish, any regrets, any recoils... or even suffering. If one were in union with this Grace, if one saw It everywhere, one would begin living a life of exultation, of all-power, of infinite happiness.

And that would be the best possible collaboration in the divine Work. (CWM, Vol. 8, p. 251)

She expresses here something of the wonderfully complex and intricately powerful action of the Grace, of the divine Power that is at work in the universe, leading it towards the divine realisation as swiftly and harmoniously as possible. There is in its action an omniscient, all-comprehending wisdom that is perfectly suited to meet the conditions of the world in the best possible way. It balances swiftness and vehemence with love and compassion so as to move the evolution forward as quickly as possible without causing undue pain and suffering in its creatures who are as yet subject to the resistance of the mental, vital and physical nature. If it moves too quickly, then more that could not keep up would be destroyed; if it moves too slowly, then the suffering associated with the ignorance would be prolonged. Moreover, it works in all beings and things and events, which are all in dynamic relationship, simultaneously. It puts just the right pressures in the right places at the right times, cognizant of the rippling effects throughout the system. It manages the great descents of light and power in the avatars and vibhutis that spread throughout the world, and the subtle interventions that prevent a scrape or answer a humble prayer.

Still, it would seem that the Grace acts differently in different people according to their openness and receptivity to the Divine. As Sri Aurobindo says, *"If you open yourself on one side or in one part to the Truth and on another side are constantly opening the gates to the hostile forces, it is vain to expect that the divine Grace will abide with you."* (The Mother, p. 3) When the being is fully open and surrendered to the Divine, the Grace, the Divine Force, can flow freely in and guide, direct, and lead the person forward swiftly and harmoniously. Here the individual consciously moves in the wake of the Divine, lives in its light and power, and is as if carried from delight to greater delight. However, if the individual is closed to the Divine and rejects the Grace, then the person becomes caught in the swirl of the ignorant forces of the mind, vital, and physical nature. The divine Grace is still there and still leads the being *through* this ignorant action, but the way becomes convoluted, fraught with

suffering, and the deliverance is postponed. Even here the obstacles, the pain, the delay are a Grace, for the obstacles and pain prevent the person from going even further afield and train the obstinate nature to move in the proper direction, and the delay provides the person additional time to grow and integrate his wayward parts. In such cases, the Grace even may grant the individual his ignorant desire or indolence, so cherished by the person even at the expense of the divine Presence.

The omnipotence of the Grace

We can understand that because the Grace is equivalent to or comes directly from the Divine Mother this is an omnipotent Power that can do everything. As Sri Aurobindo says of the Grace in *The Mother*,

A little of it even will carry you through all difficulties, obstacles and dangers; surrounded by its full presence you can go securely on your way because it is hers, careless of all menace, unaffected by any hostility however powerful, whether from this world or from worlds invisible. Its touch can turn difficulties into opportunities, failure into success and weakness into unfaltering strength. (p. 10)

When we remember that one aspect of the Mother is Mahakali, we may realise how formidable a force the Grace can carry. Describing Mahakali, Sri Aurobindo writes, “When she is allowed to intervene in her strength, then in one moment are broken like things without consistence the obstacles that immobilise or the enemies that assail the seeker.” (*The Mother*, p. 29) This is the Power at our disposal for the work of the sadhana, and it is because of this fact that we can cherish the aspiration to carry out and succeed in this sadhana. It is really only because the Grace is there and ready to act and lead and carry us through that the transformation of the nature and the supramental realisation are at all possible.

Nevertheless, as Sri Aurobindo explains, it is not easy to have this omnipotent Force work in us in its own native strength and power. For that requires “a total and sincere surrender; there must be an exclusive self-opening to the divine Power; there must be a constant and integral choice of the Truth that is descending, a constant and integral rejection of the falsehood of the mental, vital and physical Powers and Appearances that still rule the earth-Nature.” (*The Mother*, p. 2) Therefore, the power of the Grace that works in us in the beginning of the sadhana and for a long time is normally scaled to the measure of our aspiration and openness. Indeed, its action is usually veiled from the seeker for a time until the outer nature is progressively purified, surrendered, and grows in consciousness. Nevertheless, this is not so

much a limitation of the Grace, but is simply its usual way of working. Sri Aurobindo explains that

It is not indispensable that the Grace should work in a way that the human mind can understand, it generally doesn't. It works in its own “mysterious” way. At first usually it works behind the veil, preparing things, not manifesting. Afterwards it may manifest, but the sadhak does not understand very well what is happening; finally, when he is capable of it, he both feels and understands or at least begins to do so. Some feel and understand from the first or very early; but that is not the ordinary case. (Letters on Yoga, p. 610)

This does not mean that the Grace is not working even when its action is not apparent or recognised, it does, and frequently its action is recognised in retrospect.

Moreover, the Grace is not a Power that imposes itself on a resisting or refusing nature, or at least in that case it works in a manner scaled and appropriate to such a nature, not in its own sovereign and direct way. As Sri Aurobindo says,

The Divine Grace and Power can do everything, but with the full assent of the sadhak. To learn to give that full assent is the whole meaning of the sadhana. It may take time either because of ideas in the mind, desires in the vital or inertia in the physical consciousness, but these things have to be and can be removed with the aid or by calling in the action of the Divine Force. (Letters on Yoga, p. 583)

Thus, we see that whereas the Grace is all powerful and that only through its power can human nature be radically transformed and divinised, normally it does not manifest its full power or possibilities without first preparing the nature gradually over time. Its action at first is often not apparent on the surface, nor recognised by the person. It is as the individual learns to call for the Grace, and sincerely and integrally opens to its action that the Grace begins to work more openly and powerfully. As the Mother put it in her *Prayers and Meditations*, “Thou canst make of me all that I need to be, and in the measure in which my attitude allows Thee to act on me and in me, Thy omnipotence has no limits.” (*Dec. 3, 1912*).

It may also be noted that in some cases it does act openly and powerfully even from the very beginning of sadhana or without any sadhana or conscious aspiration on the part of the individual. In other cases, a relatively minor effort at sadhana, or a simple, sincere call to the Divine may bring powerful and unexpected results, even of spiritual experiences or permanent realisations. The working of the Grace is incalculable, it is a sovereign force; it cannot be

commanded or expected as a right for one's labour, and in some cases it may act without any apparent cause or justification. As stated by Sri Aurobindo,

Grace may sometimes bring undeserved or apparently undeserved fruits, but one can't demand Grace as a right and privilege—for then it would not be Grace. As you have seen, one can't claim that one has only to shout and the answer must come. Besides, I have always seen that there has been really a long unobserved preparation before the Grace intervenes, and also, after it has intervened, one has still to put in a good deal of work to keep and develop what one has got—as it is in all other things until there is the complete siddhi. Then of course labour finishes and one is in assured possession. So tapasya of one kind or another is not avoidable. (Letters on Yoga, p. 612)

Personal effort and Grace

Since the action and timing of Grace are in the hands of the Divine, it is necessary for sadhaks of the yoga to go on with their personal practice and effort. The two naturally work in tandem. As the personal effort in the form of the aspiration, rejection, and surrender of the sadhak advances and becomes more constant and integral, the action of the Grace becomes more powerful and apparent.

In actuality, personal effort and Grace are really two different ends of a single process. We experience ourselves and our personal effort as separate and independent of the Grace, but as Sri Aurobindo says in *The Mother*, “*In Yoga also it is the Divine who is the Sadhaka and the Sadhana...*” Our own personal effort and sadhana are themselves an action of the Mother, are themselves the action of the Grace. We perceive that we are doing it, but in reality it is the Divine Mother who is doing it and our ego is simply taking credit because it is identified with this activity.

It [the idea that the sadhana is done by the Divine rather than by oneself] is a truth but a truth that does not become effective for the consciousness until or in proportion as it is realised. The people who stagnate because of it are those who accept the idea but do not realise—so they have neither the force of tapasya nor that of the Divine Grace. On the other hand those who can realise it feel even behind their tapasya and in it the action of the Divine Force. (Letters on Yoga, p. 593)

This personal effort can thus be viewed simply as part of the process of the manifestation of the Grace, which over time brings with it the spiritual realisa-

tion and the transformation of the nature. The spiritual practice we undertake can itself be viewed as part of the intended change, for the spiritual change involves not only an inner change in the consciousness, but also an entire change of the outer life and action. Part of this outer change is a progressively intensifying sadhana expressing itself through purification and developing perfection of one's physical, vital, and mental nature, concentration, devotion, and an offering of oneself and one's activities to the Divine.

How to call the Grace

We have seen that our own personal effort is also integrally related to the action of the Grace, that it is viewed by us as independent from the Grace only because of the continuation of the ego sense, the sense of being a separate individual being with an autonomous will. As long as this ego sense is there, there is a need for our personal effort. We have also seen that part of the personal effort demanded of us is to give our integral assent to the action of the Grace, to open ourselves to its action in us, and still more actively, to aspire and to call the Grace to act in us and to remove the obstacles to its free and direct working. The question then arises, what is the best way to call the Grace of the Divine to work in us? The Mother has discussed two alternative possibilities and their differences:

If one simply invokes the Grace or the Divine, and puts oneself in His hands, one does not expect a particular result. To expect a particular result one must formulate one's prayer, must ask for something. If you have only a great aspiration for the divine Grace and evoke it, implore it, without asking it for anything precise, it is the Grace which will choose what it will do for you, not you.

That is better, isn't it?

Ah! that's quite another question.

Why, it is higher in its quality, perhaps. But still, if one wants something precise, it is better to formulate it. If one has a special reason for invoking the Grace, it is better to formulate it precisely and clearly.

Of course, if one is in a state of complete surrender and gives oneself entirely, if one simply offers oneself to the Grace and lets it do what it likes, that is very good. But after that one must not question what it does! One must not say to it, “Oh! I did that with the idea of having this”, for if one really has the idea of obtaining something, it is better to formulate it in all sincerity, simply, just as one sees it.

Afterwards, it is for the Grace to choose if it will do it or not; but in any case, one will have formulated clearly what one wanted. And there is no harm in that.

Where it becomes bad is when the request is not granted and one revolts. Then naturally it becomes bad. It is at that moment one must understand that the desire one has, or the aspiration, may not have been very enlightened and that perhaps one has asked for something which was not exactly what was good for one. Then at that moment one must be wise and say simply, “Well, let Thy Will be done.” But so long as one has an inner perception and an inner preference, there is no harm in formulating it. It is a very natural movement.

For example, if one has been foolish or has made a mistake and one truly, sincerely wishes never to do it again, well, I don’t see any harm in asking for it. And in fact, if one asks for it with sincerity, a true inner sincerity, there is a great chance that it will be granted.

You must not think that the Divine likes to contradict you. He is not at all keen on doing it! He can see better than you what is really good for you; but it is only when it is absolutely indispensable that He opposes your aspiration. Otherwise He is always ready to give what you ask. (CWM, Vol. 8, pp. 255-256)

The state of Grace

In several letters, Sri Aurobindo refers to the development within ourselves of a “state of Grace,” an inner condition which is open and receptive to the action of the Grace. For example, he writes:

But the touch of grace, divine grace, coming directly or through the Guru is a special phenomenon having two sides to it,—the grace of the Guru or the Divine, in fact both together, on one side and a “state of grace” in the disciple on the other. The “state of grace” is often prepared by a long tapasya or purification in which nothing decisive seems to happen, only touches or glimpses or passing experiences at the most, and it comes suddenly without warning. (Letters on Yoga, p. 621)

It is important then to inquire into the nature of this state of Grace—what are its special qualities? Subsequently in the same letter, Sri Aurobindo points to its central element:

This decisive touch comes most easily to the “baby cat” people, those who have at some point between the psychic and the emotional vital a quick and decisive movement of surrender to the Guru or the Divine. I

have seen that when that is there and there is the conscious central dependence compelling the mind also and the rest of the vital, then the fundamental difficulty disappears. (Letters on Yoga, p. 621)

The Mother discusses a similar state and offers some advice in developing it in the following:

If you have had even a second’s contact with the Grace—that marvelous Grace which carries you along, speeds you on the path, even makes you forget that you have to hurry—if you have had only a second’s contact with that, then you can strive not to forget. And with the candour of a child, the simplicity of a child for whom there are no complications, give yourself to that Grace and let it do everything.

What is necessary is not to listen to what resists, not to believe what contradicts—to have trust, a real trust, a confidence which makes you give yourself fully without calculating, without bargaining. Trust! The trust that says, “Do this, do this for me, I leave it to You.” That is the best way. (CWM, Vol. 9, p.428)

In another letter, Sri Aurobindo alludes to a related aspect of this inner state as follows: “Perhaps one could say that it [spiritual humility] is to be aware of the relativity of what has been done compared with what is still to be done—and also to be conscious of one’s being nothing without the Divine Grace.” (Letters on Yoga, pp. 1387-8) The Mother seems to concur with the central importance of this spiritual humility in being receptive to the Grace, as is revealed in her answer to this question:

What is the way to accept the Grace with gratitude?

Ah! First of all you must feel the need for it.

This is the most important point. It is to have a certain inner humility which makes you aware of your helplessness without the Grace, that truly, without it you are incomplete and powerless. This, to begin with, is the first thing.

It is an experience one can very well have. When, you see, even people who know nothing find themselves in quite difficult circumstances or facing a problem which must be solved or, as I just told you, an impulse which must be overcome or something that has disturbed them... and then they realise they are lost, they don’t know what to do—neither their mind nor their will nor their feelings help— they don’t know what to do, then it happens; there is within them something like a kind of call, a call to something which can do what one cannot. One aspires to something which is capable of doing what one can’t do.

This is the first condition. And then, if you become aware that it is only the Grace which can do that, that the situation in which you find yourself, from there the Grace alone can pull you out, can give you the solution and the strength to come out of it, then, quite naturally an intense aspiration awakes in you, a consciousness which is translated into an opening. If you call, aspire, and if you hope to get an answer, you will quite naturally open yourself to the Grace.

And later—you must pay great attention to this (Mother puts her finger on her lips)—the Grace will answer you, the Grace will pull you out of the trouble, the Grace will give you the solution to your problem or will help you to get out of your difficulty. But once you are free from trouble and have come out of your difficulty, don't forget that it is the Grace which pulled you out, and don't think it is yourself. For this, indeed, is the important point. Most people, as soon as the difficulty has gone, say, "After all, I pulled myself out of the difficulty quite well."

There you are. And then you lock and bolt the door, you see, and you cannot receive anything any more. You need once again some acute anguish, some terrible difficulty for this kind of inner stupidity to give way, and for you to realise once more that you can do nothing. Because it is only when you grow aware that you are powerless that you begin to be just a little open and plastic. But so long as you think that what you do depends on your own skill and your own capacity, truly, not only do you close one door, but, you know, you close lots of doors one upon another, and bolt them. You shut yourself up in a fortress and nothing can enter there. That is the great drawback: one forgets very quickly. Quite naturally one is satisfied with one's own capacity. (CWM, vol. 6, pp. 322-323)

So we see that the most important element of the state of Grace is spiritual humility, a state in which one feels that one is powerless without the Divine. That naturally creates the condition in which one becomes open and receptive to the Grace to act. On top of this, the Mother adds the importance of aspiration, an intense call to the Divine Grace to intervene. Finally, she adds the importance of gratitude to the Divine after it does help, so as not to shut the door again to the Grace by taking personal credit for its success. The Mother refers to the effectiveness of this combination of spiritual humility and intense aspiration in a different conversation:

One must have a great purity and a great intensity in one's self-giving, and that absolute trust in the supreme wisdom of the divine Grace, that It knows better than we do what is good for us, and all that. Then if one

offers one's aspiration to It, truly gives it with enough intensity, the results are marvellous. (CWM, Vol. 7, p. 243)

There are several other qualities that make up the state of Grace. Here Mother points to several of them: *"In all cases, without exception, whatever may happen, calm and quietude and serene peace and an absolute faith in the divine Grace—if you have all this, nothing can happen to you."* (CWM, Vol. 7, p. 82) These same qualities were echoed by Sri Aurobindo, *"Rely for the sadhana on the Mother's grace and her Force, yourself remembering always to keep only two things, quietude and confidence."* (Letters on Yoga, p. 1414).

Grace and the psychic being

It may have become apparent that the state of Grace is similar to, perhaps coincides with, what has been referred to as the psychic attitude. There are suggestions in Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's writings that there is an important link between Grace and the psychic being. In the following passage, Sri Aurobindo describes the nature and character of the psychic being, where its relation to the attitude of the state of Grace is apparent:

The psychic does not demand or desire—it aspires; it does not make conditions for its surrender or withdraw if its aspiration is not immediately satisfied—for the psychic has complete trust in the Divine or in the Guru and can wait for the right time or the hour of the Divine Grace. The psychic has an insistence of its own, but it puts its pressure not on the Divine, but on the nature, placing a finger of light on all the defects there that stand in the way of the realisation, sifting out all that is mixed, ignorant or imperfect in the experience or in the movements of the yoga and never satisfied with itself or with the nature till it has got it perfectly open to the Divine, free from all forms of ego, surrendered, simple and right in the attitude and all the movements. (Letters on Yoga, pp. 1396-97)

Sri Aurobindo further explains how the action of the psychic being can stimulate the action of the Grace: *"The Divine Grace is something not calculable, not bound by anything the intellect can fix as a condition,—though ordinarily some call, aspiration, intensity of the psychic being can awaken it, yet it acts sometimes without any apparent cause even of that kind."* (Letters on Yoga, p. 610) Elsewhere he says simply, *"The more one develops the psychic, the more is it possible for the Grace to act."* (The Mother, p. 332) In another passage, he describes the psychic way to succeed in Yoga:

It is not by tormenting yourself with remorse and harassing thoughts that you can overcome. It is by looking straight at yourself, very quietly,

with a quiet and firm resolution and then going on cheerfully and bravely in full confidence and reliance, trusting in the Grace, serenely and vigilantly, anchoring yourself on your psychic being, calling down more and more of the love and Ananda, turning more and more exclusively to the Mother. That is the true way—and there is no other. (Letters on Yoga, p. 1698)

Finally, the following passage by the Mother reveals the close relation between the psychic being and the Grace:

Psychic life in the universe is a work of the divine Grace. Psychic growth is a work of the divine Grace and the ultimate power of the psychic being over the physical being will also be a result of the divine Grace. (CWM, Vol. 7, p. 41)

The transforming power of Grace

There is a miraculous quality to the action of the Grace which bears closer scrutiny. Earlier I had occasion to cite a quotation from Sri Aurobindo that expresses this quality: *“Its touch can turn difficulties into opportunities, failure into success and weakness into unfaltering strength.” (The Mother, p. 10)* But as we have seen, this powerful transforming action of the Grace typically requires on our side a state of grace centrally made up of an exclusive faith and reliance on the Divine. As Sri Aurobindo said

A sadhak should always remember that everything depends upon the inner attitude; if he has a perfect faith in the Divine Grace, he will find that the Divine Grace will make him do the right thing at every step . . . But for things to happen like that, you must have a deeply-rooted faith pervading your whole being, contradicted by no other movement in you. (Letters on Yoga, pp. 1696-1697)

This inner attitude of perfect faith seems to be a key to realising the transforming effects of the Grace. And a crucial aspect of this faith is the perception that the Divine is always present and leading us through all the experiences of life, whatever their outward appearances, to Himself in the most swift and harmonious way possible. The Mother expresses the importance of the proper attitude, the faith that is necessary, in this passage:

There are no words that can explain the magnificence of the Grace, how the whole is combined so that all may go as quickly as possible. And individuals are miserable to the extent to which they are not conscious of it and take a false position in regard to what is happening to them. (CWM, Vol. 11, p. 204)

We may put it like this: The Divine is present everywhere at every moment and is leading and carrying the entire manifestation forward to its divine efflo-

rescence as wisely and compassionately as possible. Even the apparent obstacles and evils in the world that oppose us in our evolutionary journey are turned by the Divine into aids and powerful levers that carry us more quickly to himself. When this faith or this perception is perfectly established, then we become aware of the omnipresence of the Divine Grace, together with its transforming power. The Mother has described this phenomenon in the following passages:

It may be said in an absolute way that an evil always carries its own remedy. One might say that the cure of any suffering coexists with the suffering. So, instead of seeing an evil “useless” and “stupid” as it is generally thought to be, you see that the progress, the evolution which has made the suffering necessary—which is the cause of the suffering and the very reason for its existence—attains the intended result; and at the same time the suffering is cured, for those who are able to open themselves and receive. The three things—suffering as a means of progress, progress, and the cure of suffering—are coexistent, simultaneous; that is to say, they do not follow each other, they are there at the same time.

If, at the moment when the transforming action creates a suffering, there is in that which suffers the necessary aspiration and opening, the remedy also is taken in at the same time, and the effect is total, complete: transformation, with the action necessary to obtain it, and, at the same time, cure of the false sensation produced by the resistance. And the suffering is replaced by... something which is not known upon this earth, but which is akin to joy, well-being, trust and security. It is a super-sensation, in a perfect peace, and which is obviously the only thing that can be eternal. (CWM, Vol. 11, p. 43)

For you are always under the illusion that pain belongs to you. This is not true. Pain is something thrust upon you. The same event could occur, exactly the same in all its details, without its inflicting the shadow of a pain on you; on the contrary, sometimes it can fill you with ecstatic joy. And it is exactly the same thing. But in one case, you are open to the adverse forces you want to reject from yourself, and in the other you are not, you are already too far away from them to be affected by them any longer; and so, instead of feeling the negative side they represent, you feel only the positive side the Divine represents in the experience. It is the divine Grace which makes you progress, and with the divine Grace you feel the divine Joy. But instead of identifying yourself with the Grace which makes you progress, you identify yourself with the ugly thing you want to get rid of; and so, naturally, you feel like it and suffer.

That is an experiment you can make if you are just a little conscious.

There is something in you which you don't want, something bad—for one reason or another you don't want it, you want to pull it out— well, if you identify yourself ever so little with that thing, you feel the pain of the extraction; if, on the contrary, you identify yourself with the divine Force which comes to liberate you, you feel the joy of the divine Grace—and you experience the deep delight of the progress you have made. (CWM, Vol. 8, p. 84)

...once one has not only understood but also felt that the Supreme Lord is the originator of all things and one remains constantly in contact with him, all becomes the action of His Grace and is changed into calm and luminous bliss. (CWM, Vol. 10, p. 247)

These passages suggest that the Divine Grace is constantly present leading and helping us to progress, and to the extent that we perceive this, its action and transforming effects become increasingly powerful, harmonious, and blissful. The contrary appearances of struggle, incapacity, and suffering are a falsehood, they represent a denial in our consciousness of the Divine Presence and Grace. We could say that they are a distorted perception of the Truth of existence, and while creating a discordant and painful image of our life, are not fundamentally real. Therefore, they are capable of being transformed into a truer image and finally into the Divine Truth itself. As our perception is corrected and progressively transformed into the Truth, the Divine Presence and Grace become increasingly manifest. The effects of this change are not simply in our mental perceptions, but are integral and transformative of all the levels of our being.

Vasishtha Ganapati Muni & The Art of Multiple Concentration

Sampadananda Misra

Introduction

Vasishtha Ganapati Muni was the foremost disciple of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. He was born on the 17th November of 1878 in Kalavarayi, a small village situated in the Vizag district of Andhra Pradesh. He was a mighty spiritual personality with a vast knowledge of Sanskrit. A yogi, poet, philosopher, critic, scholar, an eloquent speaker, an ardent devotee of Mother India, he never deviated from his goals: the revival of the Vedic teachings and the attainment of India's freedom through the power of *tapas*. Thus he did intense *tapasya* to reach his goals. He untiringly endeavoured to reveal the inner significances of the Vedic hymns, and believed that the future of India rests on a complete revival of the Vedic truths. The Muni, in a true sense, followed the path of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and was a great admirer of them. He had the first darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on 15th of August 1928. After that he stayed in the Ashram for fifteen more days and during those days he had the great privilege to spend time and meditate with the Mother. In fact, the Mother had told the Muni that Sri Aurobindo and herself have recognised him as a man who could do their divine work.¹

The Art of Multiple Concentration (avadhāna)

What does the word *avadhānaī* mean? The Sanskrit word *avadhāna* means “attention, concentration”. A person who concentrates is known as *avadhānaī*. But the uniqueness of an *avadhānaī* is that he could simultaneously concentrate on several topics. He possesses a great memory power and a very high power of concentration.

Looking at the oral tradition of learning Vedas one comes to know that it was through this high power of concentration that ancient Indian sages were able to memorise all the Vedas and to have mastery over several disciplines. From this tradition branched forth several types of *avadhāna* or feats of concentration. Gradually, *avadhāna* developed as a literary activity or sport.

In this type of literary activity the *avadhānaī* exhibits the power of simultaneous and multiple concentration on different things or items belonging to literature. This first arose naturally in Sanskrit and later evolved in other Indian languages too. However, only Kannada and Telugu have maintained this heritage intact, while the latter has taken this scholarly literary feat to very great heights.

In an *avadhāna* performance the *avadhānaī* is asked different types of questions and given various tasks by a number of scholars. He must answer the questions, step by step, in four rounds, through extempore metrical compositions according to the specifications given by the questioners, without taking any help from any book or writing material. The whole show is an oral outpour. The number of scholars who ask the questions may be eight, hundred, or even a thousand. If the number is eight then the performance is called *aṣṭāvadhāna* or Eight-fold Concentration and the person is called *aṣṭāvadhānī*; if the number is hundred it is called *śatāvadhāna* and in the case of a thousand it is called *sahasrāvadhāna*. While the *aṣṭāvadhāna* lasts for two hours, the *śatāvadhāna* goes on for two days and the *sahasrāvadhāna*, takes all of 20 days. The scholars who ask questions to the *avadhānī* are called *pr̥cchakas* or questioners. Each *pr̥cchaka* asks questions related to one particular theme.

Among the various types of *avadhāna*, the *aṣṭāvadhāna* is the most common and popular. Here, the *avadhānaī* has to confront eight scholars who ask questions on eight different themes. Composition of verses in an enigmatic way, such as by eliminating several vital letters or by using several chosen letters, or by the employment of unusual words; several types of verbal acrobatics; non-stop versification at a high speed; identifying and commenting on select verses from the vast body of classical literature; providing solutions to literary riddles without violating the rules of versification; playing chess; counting the irregular rings of a bell or the number of flowers thrown on the back; indulging in lively talks of wit; participating in Sastric debates; mental arrangement of a cluster of cluttered letters into a meaningful verse, etc. are some of the distinctive items implemented in an *aṣṭāvadhāna*. These items are not fixed. They may vary from performance to performance.

To make the task even more difficult, the *avadhānaī* has to compose the poems in four rounds, stanza by stanza. In each round he must remember the question asked earlier by the *pr̥cchaka* and the stanzas already composed by him and continue from that point. Only for the *āśu* he has to compose all the four lines at a stretch.

At the end the *avadhānaī* has to recite each *śloka* composed by him in its entirety, serially, item by item, except for *āśu*. This is called *dhāraṇā*.

Vasishtha Ganapati Muni as an Avadhānaī

It is true that Vasishtha Ganapati Muni was a poet, a patriot, a Tantric, a visionary, a Rishi, and in addition he was an *avadhānaī* par-excellence.

The Muni had performed excellent *aṣṭāvadhānas* at many places in India, and he was highly respected for his ability to perform successfully this type of literary feats. Here are few examples to illustrate his excellence in this art.

Āśukāvyaracanam or composing poetry extempore is an important part of the *avadhāna* activity. The Muni was an unparalleled *āśukavi*. Once during the performance of an *avadhāna* at Madras he was asked to compose hundred verses in one hour (*ghaṇṭāśatakam*). The topic specified for this was the legendary story of Nala and Damayanti. The Muni started at such a speed that he composed twenty-five verses in six minutes. The appointed scribes who were to commit it to writing were not able to cope with the speed of the Muni. The entire assembly was wonderstruck. The president of the function was greatly delighted with this, and told the Muni to stop going further. He said, with this speed one could compose two hundred and fifty verses in one hour. So those twenty-five verses were enough to prove the Muni as a great *āśukavi*. There are many such examples of Muni's extempore compositions.

Vyastākṣarakathanam is another item in the *avadhāna* performance in which the person appointed for this item interrupts the *avadhānaī* repeatedly and gives at random the serial numbers of syllables in a poem, which he has in his mind. The *avadhānaī* must remember and rearrange the syllables in the right order to find the poem. Normally, the verse chosen for this should be in a metre comprising less number of syllables or it should be one quarter of a verse. In one performance the *vyastākṣari* examiner chose a very difficult verse for the Muni. The verse was in a metre called *sragdharā* which contains twenty-one syllables in each of its quarters. So, all together there are eighty-four syllables in this metre. The full verse which was composed by the examiner himself was chosen for the Muni for *vyastākṣarakathanam*. The Muni had such a sharp memory and high power of concentration that finally,

he not only could rearrange the letters of the verse given in a disorderly manner, but he astounded the assembly by saying the entire verse from the end to the beginning syllable by syllable, and also by reciting it in the usual way. The verse was:

अप्सां द्रप्सामलिप्सां चिरतरमचरं क्षीरमद्राक्षमिक्षुम्
द्राक्षां साक्षा=जक्षं मधुरसमं यं द्रागविदे= मरन्दम्।

bt u चामाचामन्यत u मधुरिमगरिमा शE u राचार्यावाचाम्

आचान्तत u हन्त किं तैरलमपि च सुधासारसीसारसीम्ना ।।

apsām drapsām alipsām cirataramacaram kṣīramadrākṣamikṣum
drākṣām sākṣādajakṣam madhurasamadhayam drāgavindam marandam
mocāmācāmamanyo madhurimagarimā śankarācāryavācām
ācānto hanta kiṁ tairalamapi ca sudhāsārasīsārasīmnā

It was a practice that at the end of the *avadhāna* performance the *avadhānī* has to comment critically upon any famous verse. For this occasion the Muni chose this particular verse and started commenting elegantly upon this. He delighted the assembly by his flawless eloquence and made all thunderstruck by pointing out a series of mistakes in the verse. For details one can see *vāśiṣṭhavaibhavam* by Kapali Sastry, chapter 11)

On one occasion a Sanskrit scholar asked the Muni to express his views on poetry in *vasantatilakā* metre which has fourteen syllables in each of its quarters. He put the condition that the Muni should compose the verse as per specifications made by him. The Sanskrit scholar took a piece of chalk and drew a rectangle having fifty-six squares, since the metre in which the verse had to be composed demands to have fifty-six syllables. Then he started pointing out to the squares at random. On whichever square the scholar put his finger the Muni wrote down a letter there. In this manner all the squares were filled up spontaneously by the Muni. Finally, the complete verse expressing the Muni's views on poetry was:

प्रीतिं ददाति विपुलां श्रियमातलतुति निर्माति नूत्नसमयं दुरितं "wltuति।

आSeo करोति दयान्यपि देवतानां कस्मै शुभाय न भवेत् कविता विदोषा ।।

prītim dadāti vipulām śriyamātanoti

nirmāti nūtnasamayam duritam dhunoti

ārdrikaroti hṛdayānyapi devatānām

kasmai śubhāya na bhavet kavitā vidoṣā

Poetry, free from all demerits or blemishes, gives delight, grants enormous prosperity, creates a new era, removes all difficulties, and it even melts the hearts of the gods. To whom does it not prove good?

Although, the available examples of Muni's *aṣṭāvadhāna* performance are very few, yet these show his exceptional retentive memory, great power of concentration, ability to compose unblemished extempore poetry, spontaneous creativity, imagination, poetic ability and quick thinking, and prove him as a consummate scholar and literary genius.

Conclusion

The whole secret of the *avadhāna* lies in the power of concentration. It is the key which, when combined with a will and perseverance, can open all doors and lead to success in any endeavour – whether in material or the spiritual field. In the categorical words of the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram: “Whatever you may want to do in life, one thing is absolutely indispensable and at the basis of *everything* – the capacity of concentrating the attention. If you are able to gather together the rays of attention and consciousness on one point and can maintain this concentration with a persistent will, *nothing* can resist it – whatever it may be, from the most material physical development to the highest spiritual one. But this discipline must be followed in a constant and, it may be said, imperturbable way; not that you should always be concentrated on the same thing – that's not what I mean – I mean learning to concentrate.... There is nothing in the human or even in the superhuman field, to which the power of concentration is not the key. You can be the best athlete, you can be the best student, you can be an artistic, literary or scientific genius, you can be the greatest saint with that faculty. And everyone has in himself a tiny little beginning of it - it is given to everybody, but people do not cultivate it.”² But only concentration is not enough and what is needed is a multiple concentration. Sri Aurobindo said: “...attention to a single thing is called concentration. One truth is, however, sometimes overlooked; that concentration on several things at a time is often indispensable. When people talk of concentration, they imply centring the mind on one thing at a time; but it is quite possible to develop the power of double concentration, triple concentration, multiple concentration. When a given incident is happening, it may be made up of several simultaneous happenings or a set of simultaneous circumstances – a sight, a sound, a touch or several sights, sounds, touches occurring at the same moment or in the same short space of time. The tendency of the mind is to fasten on one and mark others

vaguely, many not at all, or, if compelled to attend to all, to be distracted and mark none perfectly. Yet this can be remedied and the attention equally distributed over a set of circumstances in such a way as to observe and remember each perfectly. It is merely a matter of *abhyāsa* or steady natural practice.”³ This multiple concentration is natural to the consciousness higher than the mind and is the whole basis of the *avadhāna*.

References

1. For more details on Muni's association with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother refer to the present author's article "Vasishtha Ganapati Muni and his Association with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, published in the September 2008 issue of the *Mother India*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
2. Complete Works of the Mother, Vol.9, pp. 360-361
3. Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Vol.17, pp.220-221

Laying the Foundations for Indian psychology

Kundan Singh

Abstract

Impressed by the apparent potential of physics to explain, predict and control natural phenomenon, western psychology rooted in a Newtonian-reductionist framework—as well as guided by the philosophy of naive Realism—embraced a methodology identical to what is employed by the natural sciences to generate universal, rational, objective and value-free laws of human behaviour. This gave western psychology the much-coveted status of science. The emergence of a postmodern worldview has thrown into critical relief the notion of rational, objective and value-free science or for that matter any knowledge pursuit. This paper narrates the problem associated with the objectivity of psychological knowledge by drawing largely from the critique of science by Thomas Kuhn, Paul Feyerabend and Karl Popper which emerged from their analysis of the history of science. Kuhn's view leads one to identify the crucial role that paradigm plays in scientific research. An extension of his arguments, as well as some evidences from anthropological research, suggests that psychological knowledge is relative with respect to person, time, culture and paradigms. A meta-analysis of Kuhn leads one to conclude that his argument bites itself or swallows itself—by becoming self-referential—giving birth to a peculiar situation where opposite categories like relative and absolute, objectivity and subjectivity, and the truth and falsity of facts co-exist.

The second half of the paper examines the future of western psychology as a science against this impasse generated by the recognition of relativism, self-referentiality and the aforementioned paradox, and what should be the true foundation for Indian psychology. Vedanta and Mahayana Buddhism have long ago recognised that the intellectual, logical and discursive pursuit of human knowledge ends in such kinds of cul-de-sac and impasse, and that such a recognition should necessitate a shift towards changing our modus operandi of knowledge pursuit. Mind is not the final summit in the evolution of mankind.

There can be faculties other than mind which can be used to uncover nature's truths, and it is not in the spirit of science to fall prey to scientism. Furthermore, this paper, which draws substantially from the writings of Sri Aurobindo, discusses the possibility of psychology which will be made possible by making a mystical exploration into the nature of Reality where forces invisible to the ordinary human eye, which nevertheless determine human behaviour, will be observed and known. Such psychology has been our Indian legacy. It is time that we recognise it and introduce its epistemological, metaphysical, and ontological underpinnings in Indian universities.

The Origins of Scientific Thought in Psychology

Western Psychology's identification with science is clearly revealed through a cursory examination of the contemporary conceptualisation of the discipline. Throughout its history, psychology has been defined in myriad ways. The early psychologists defined it as the study of mental activity. With the advent of Behaviourism at the turn of the century, and its central concern with studying only the phenomenon that could be objectively measured, psychology came to be described as the study of behaviour. This definition has featured in most psychology textbooks of 1930's through the 1960's. The cycle has come full circle with the development of cognitive and humanistic/transpersonal psychology, as most current definitions of psychology make references to both behaviour and mental processes (Henley, Johnson & Jones, 1989). Despite little variations, most definitions of psychology describe it as science. While conducting a survey and an analysis of the definitions of psychology in psychology textbooks published between 1887 and 1987, Henley et al. (1989) report that "psychology is the study/science" appears in about 80% of the textbooks of psychology. It is thus apparent that mainstream western psychology considers the discipline to be a science and uses a methodology similar to what is applied to the study of physical objects.

In the late nineteenth century, physics rooted in the Newtonian framework was solving puzzle after puzzle, and this led philosophers like J.S. Mill to believe that by subjecting human beings to a similar kind of experimental set up, they would be able to isolate cause and effect relationships in quantitative terms, which would then allow them to generate universal laws of human behaviour. However, more than a hundred years have elapsed since the first experimental lab was established by Wundt in 1879, and the outcome of this approach has been thousands of theories mostly at variance with each other—all trying to

explain behaviour and behavioural problems from many different perspectives and standpoints.

The crucial question, however, is that how can we have so many theories of human nature—all claiming scientific objectivity—and yet not be able to explain anything conclusively. For none of the theorists claimed that their laws were not scientific—on the contrary they all claimed that these laws were derived from an objective and an unbiased observation. Therefore, it becomes increasingly pertinent to review the central tenets of the methodology that have guided psychological research generating these theories, and consequently the pitfalls of this approach before we talk about a new paradigm of psychology and more specifically Indian psychology—which is the thrust of this paper.

Science was formalised by Francis Bacon in the seventeenth century when he wrote that in order to understand ourselves we have to stop consulting Aristotle and start questioning nature itself. Bacon gave two fundamental laws of science: induction and deduction, which form the basic tenets of positivism, a school of thought which has dictated the conduct of psychology from the past to the present. Positivism later developed into logical positivism, and together they are called the "received view of science." Though logical positivism and positivism differ in certain ways, induction and deduction form the bedrock of their methodology proposed for uncovering nature's truths. Also, the birth of science was buttressed by a philosophy that has been called naive Realism, which contends that there is an objective reality independent of the observer. In other words, objectivity was the cornerstone of the Enlightenment or the Modern era where it was presumed that science following a definite methodology would be able to solve all the mysteries of the world. The unarticulated assumption was that there is a world that existed separate from the individual and it can be understood by wresting out its secrets by a rational, unbiased and value-free observer. Consequently, the philosophy of realism created dualism such as subject and object, fact and value and sharp divisions like objective reality and subjective feelings.

The Problem with Induction, and Challenges to Objectivity

Induction starts with observation, stemming from an unprejudiced mind. The observations lead to singular statements—referring to a particular state of affairs at a particular time—that form the body of facts from which the laws and theories that constitute scientific knowledge can be derived. For the singular statements to culminate in universal laws, an important condition that needs to

be met is that the number of observation statements forming the basis of generalisation must be large (Chalmers, 1982).

Following this, a finite set of singular statements would lead to a universal law. This was designated as inductive reasoning and the process as induction. Once the inductive laws are established, they can be tested at a different place and time. This is the process of deduction. The essential condition for the methodology of science is that the observation has to be value free, detached and objective. The subjective state of the observer, taste and expectation are not supposed to intrude in the act of observation.

As stated before, an important premise of induction is that the number of observations must be large. However, despite a large number of cases showing consistency, it is not guaranteed that the next event would not be contrary to it. Hence repeated observation cannot ultimately explain induction. For example, no matter how many white swans we may have encountered, it does not imply that all swans are white; the next that we encounter may be black (Popper, 1992). The inductive principle is considered as the mainstay of science by positivists. They maintain that if it is removed from the canon of science, science will lose its power to determine the nature of Truth. But how does one logically prove that the principle of induction is true in the first place and not an assumption. In other words, how does one ascertain that the inductive principle helps uncover the truth? It is argued that since it seems to operate well in a large number of cases, the premise is correct. This implies that one uses induction to justify induction and thus the argument assumes circularity. This is called the problem of induction. (Popper, 1992)

The most serious drawback with induction is, however, with respect to its claim of objectivity in observation. It is a very common experience that no two individuals register the same thing even if the respective images on their retinas are the same. One does not require much knowledge of psychology to know that the observer's perception is determined by his or her expectations, belief, knowledge, inner state and psychological make-up.

The contention of an inductivist, that the true basis of scientific knowledge should proceed from an unbiased and unprejudiced mind, is further rendered absurd by the practice of the scientist to consider only such data that are relevant to his or her research. Since the idea of relevant and irrelevant is always present during the course of investigation, the possibility of an unbiased and unprejudiced observer takes a back seat. The investigator or scientist cannot be but an integral part of the research work and his or her subjectivity is bound to play an

instrumental role in the outcome of the research. Thus, it can be safely said that the data that are generated by the scientist are not objective but collected within the larger framework of theory. They do not have an independent existence, rather they are constructed within the confines and boundaries of a theory. In other words, data are theory-laden and objectivity is the last thing that scientists should claim. Expressing similar concerns, Feyerabend (1993) writes:

The history of science, after all, does not consist of fact and conclusions drawn from facts. It also contains ideas, interpretation of facts, problems created by conflicting interpretations, mistakes, and so on. On closer analysis, we find that science knows no “bare facts” at all but the “facts” that enter our knowledge are already viewed in a certain way and are, therefore, essentially ideational. (p. 12)

For any meaningful research—or for that matter any research—to take place it is imperative that the researcher has some sort of a framework, otherwise how is she going to interpret the data. Data are essentially neutral, and meaning needs to be ascribed to them. It is the paradigm with all its presuppositions, and, as previously acknowledged, the predispositions of the researcher—her psychology, her cosmological world-view, her language, her inner states, her belief, her expectations, and her previous knowledge of the world—which helps in the interpretation of data. The mainstream discourse on science presumes that facts and value are separate. Feyerabend (1993), however using countless examples from the history of science, states that this is a myth:

The material which a scientist *actually* has at his disposal, his laws, his experimental results, his mathematical techniques, his epistemological prejudices, his attitude towards the absurd consequences of the theories which he accepts, is indeterminate in many ways, ambiguous, *and never fully separate from the historical background*. It is contaminated by principles which he does not know, and which, if known, would be extremely hard to test. Questionable views on cognition, such as the view that our senses, used in normal circumstances, give reliable information about the world, may invade the observation language itself, constituting the observation terms as well as the distinction between veridical and illusory appearance. As a result, observation languages may become tied to older layers of speculation which affect, in a roundabout fashion, even the most progressive methodology. (p. 51, italics in original)

The problem of objectivity is further compounded by the fact that “we speak more about our observation of the world rather than of the world, and we do this through a less than fully adequate language system. The linguistic limitation, by itself causes problems even if we could overcome other limitations” (Baker, 1991, p. 12). This happens because language does not only describe events, but also creates a cosmology, a worldview that influences the thought, behaviour and perception of mankind. When a child begins to learn a language, the worldview of her ancestors is passed onto her. The pedagogic procedures used “both shape the ‘appearance,’ or ‘phenomenon,’ and establish a firm connection with words, so that finally the phenomena seem to speak for themselves without outside help or extraneous knowledge” (Feyerabend, 1993, p. 57). The human mind begins to take many facts of life as givens, and the entire process may be totally unconscious. Her worldview begins to create what she may observe. Also, in order to be unprejudiced, one will have to abandon language itself, which will remove all ability to perceive and to think, as a consequence of which the practice of science will stop before it begins. Writes Edward Sapir:

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language that has become the medium of expression of that society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the “real world” is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group.... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation. [Cited in Whorf, 1962, p.134]

In the study of high-energy particles, it has been found that particles cannot be understood as isolated entities but only in the context of their preparation and measurement. This means that the Aristotelian or the Newtonian idea of fundamental basic building blocks does not hold water anymore. Further, the classical distinction between subject and object—which was a natural outcome of the philosophy of naive Realism—has become vague as an observer has been found to be an integral part of the experiment. How an experimenter has set up an experiment and the measurement that he or she has decided to make determine the result of an experiment to a large extent. The observer is an inseparable part of the observation being made, or in other words, reality is not independent of the observer. Thus, Capra (1992) observes:

The human observer constitutes the final link in the chain of observational process, and the properties of any atomic object can only be understood in terms of object’s interaction with the observer. This means that the classical ideal of objective description of nature is no longer valid. (p. 78)

With the advent of the Relativity theory of Einstein, space and time, which appear to us as absolutes in our everyday experience, have been rendered relative with respect to the observer. The claim of the realists that objects like tables, chairs, bags, stones, statues, etc. have absolute existence also does not hold true in the light of the theory of relativity, for it has been shown that the length of an object—consequently its shape too—is dependent on its motion with respect to the observer. The length of a rod shortens as its motion increases with respect to the observer. Modern physics has also exploded the myth of an absolute linearity of time. Time in the theory of relativity has a meaning only with respect to a frame of reference, for as the velocity relative to the observer increases, time intervals increase. This means that the clock of the frame of reference of the observer slows down. In other words, time for two individuals moving at different velocities presents a different meaning.

To sum up, as the above arguments indicate that for an individual to be without a bias or a value, he or she has to come from nowhere. Values and biases are implicit to the human condition and dichotomies like subject-object, and fact-value are a myth.

Sociology of Knowledge: Objectivity Demystified

Apart from the values, inner expectations, knowledge, social position and observer’s bias, science embraces other dynamics as well which can constrain an objective approach to reality. The spirit of science is to question, but science can easily lose its tenor by falling prey to scientism, a kind of dogmatism comparable to the fundamentalist aspect of any organised religion. Imbued with the spirit of questioning, Kuhn (1970) questioned the notion of science itself. His work is significant in that he has made it abundantly clear that science, like any other human activity, is a social activity which affects and is affected by the milieu in which it is embedded, and is guided by the sociological, economic, historical and political forces. According to him, science is practised by communities of scientists and not by isolated men and women. To understand the workings of science, it is therefore imperative to understand the scientific community, its accepted and shared norms and beliefs. The complex nature of sociological factors that operate when any research is conducted can be appreciated with the help of Figure 1.



Figure 1. [Adapted from Danziger, 1990]

The innermost circle represents the immediate social condition in which research is conducted. The next circle represents the research community that has to accept the data as scientific knowledge. The outermost circle denotes the wider social context that embraces the research community. The investigators, the research community and the society are interconnected in a complex web of affairs, which has many dimensions.

If we analyse the dynamics of the inner circle—the immediate research conducted for generation of psychological knowledge, we find that the objectivity of psychological knowledge and the rationale of the Newtonian framework for psychology are seriously challenged. The experiments that are conducted are done by human beings on human beings, in sharp contrast to physical sciences where experiments are conducted on inanimate objects. With the recognition of “experimenter expectancy effects” and “demand characteristics,” it can be inferred that the experimental results are co-determined by the social relationship between the experimenter and the subjects (Danziger, 1990).

As far as the research community is concerned, Kuhn (1970) points out that scientific practice is shaped by deep assumptions of the worldview of which the scientist may be unaware. For research to take place, the community must agree upon the goals, the methodologies, and the valid subject matter in the context of research. The agreement on all these issues would constitute a framework or a paradigm within which the investigation of nature can take place. The paradigm has two components—*disciplinary matrix* and *shared exemplars*. The *disciplinary matrix* consists of a certain fundamental set of assumptions that are often unstated and not subject to empirical test. These assumptions form the basis for testing specific hypotheses. For example, reductionism states that the world can be understood by breaking it into smaller units until we arrive at a set of fundamental units. This is an assumption that is not subjected to any kind of an empirical test, and thus constitutes a portion of *disciplinary matrix* of scientists who adhere to this belief. As an example,

while analysing how Descartes influenced what was admissible in the scientific canon, and what was not, Kuhn (1970) writes:

After the appearance of Descartes’ immensely influential scientific writings, most physical scientists assumed that the universe was composed of microscopic corpuscles and that all natural phenomena could be explained in terms of corpuscular shape, size, motion, and interaction. That nest of commitments proved to be both metaphysical and methodological. As metaphysical, it told scientists what sort of entities the universe did and did not contain: there was only shaped matter in motion. As methodological, it told them what ultimate laws and fundamental explanations must be like: laws must specify corpuscular motion and interaction, and explanation must reduce any given natural phenomenon to corpuscular action under these laws. Most important still, the corpuscular conception of the universe told scientists what many of their research problems should be. (p. 41) And again,

[Paradigm] functions by telling the scientist about the entities that nature does or does not contain and about the ways in which those entities behave. That information provides a map whose details are elucidated by mature scientific research. And since nature is too complex and varied to be explored at random, that map is as essential as observation and experiment to science’s continuing development. Through the theories they embody, paradigms prove to be constitutive of research activity....In learning a paradigm the scientist acquires theory, methods, and standards together, usually in an inextricable mixture. (p. 109)

The other component of a paradigm is *shared exemplars*—the models for investigating new problems which include the methodology for pursuing the research. The *disciplinary matrix* and *shared exemplars*, by constituting the paradigm, unconsciously trains a researcher to approach a problem in a specific way which gradually becomes her natural way. In this vein, Leahey (1991) writes:

Neither source of data is comprehensible without training, yet once the scientist learns to interpret them, he or she will see them in those ways and no others. Thus training can act as a set of blinders, keeping the scientist from seeing in new ways. All observation and perception—whether scientific or not—is a matter of interpretation as numerous psychological examples have shown. (p. 14)

Weber (1946) similarly contends the notion that science can be free from suppositions ever. It presupposes that the rules of method and logic are valid, which cannot be tested by scientific means. Further, facts are meaningless and

neutral in themselves; they become facts when interpreted against a theory comprising *a priori* categories. For example, the measurements made with the Atwood machine would have meant nothing in the absence of Newton's *Principia*. Varied meanings can be ascribed to the same data. What once was a Leyden jar became a condenser, as there were changes in the electrical paradigms. Elucidating how the same entity can be interpreted in different ways under the influence of different paradigms or theories, Kuhn (1970) writes:

An investigator who hoped to learn something about what scientists took the atomic theory to be asked a distinguished physicist and an eminent chemist whether a single atom of helium was or was not a molecule. Both answered without hesitation, but their answers were not the same. For the chemist the atom of helium was a molecule because it behaved like one with respect to the kinetic theory of gases. For the physicist, on the other hand, the helium atom was not a molecule because it displayed no molecular spectrum. Presumably both men were talking about the same particle but they were viewing it through their own research training and practice. (pp. 50-51)

In short, Kuhn has shown that science is not as rational and objective as it had been supposed. Indeed, scientific rationality is a matter of consensus. It involves unexamined biases and social interests like fame, fortune, love, loyalty and power of the investigator. A choice of one paradigm over another may be induced by inner psychological causes or other sociological ones that cannot be defended by appealing to the office of reason. More often than not, scientists following the same norms of disinterestedness, objectivity and rationality arrive at different conclusions. The history of science reveals that there are many competing theories before one paradigm becomes dominant and all of them had arisen from experimentation and observation. Comments Kuhn (1970):

Early developmental stages of most sciences have been characterised by continual competition between a number of distinct views of nature, each partially derived from, and all roughly compatible with, the dictates of scientific observation and method. What differentiated these various schools was not one or another failure of method—they were all “scientific”—but what we shall come to call their incommensurable ways of seeing the world and of practising science in it. Observation and experience can and must drastically restrict the range of admissible scientific belief, else there would be no science. But they cannot alone determine a particular body of such belief. An apparently arbitrary element, compounded of personal and historical accident, is always a formative ingredient of beliefs espoused by a given scientific community at a given time. (p. 4)

Lyotard (1984) states that this is essentially a problem of legitimisation. The

question of good research and bad research is contingent upon the community of scholars deciding whether it is in harmony with the criteria of truth, of justice, of beauty—though these criteria are held to be universal to all humanity, they are specific to the larger culture or country to which the community belongs. Since research is a social activity, it is not free from politics. Feyerabend (1993) puts this most beautifully:

Scientists are not content with running their own playpens in accordance with what they regard as the rules of the scientific method, they want to universalise their rules, they want them to become part of society at large and they use every means at their disposal—argument, propaganda, pressure tactics, intimidation, lobbying—to achieve their aims. (p. 163)

The history of science also demonstrates that scientific knowledge is temporally relative. What was considered once as science has been later rejected as superstition. By the same token, what constitutes as scientific knowledge today, which has been extracted from nature by subjecting it to repeated investigation may turn out to be error tomorrow under the influence of a different paradigm. Kuhn (1970) states:

Historians confront growing difficulties in distinguishing the “scientific” component of past observation and belief from what their predecessors had readily labelled “error” and “superstition.” The more carefully they study, say, Aristotelian dynamics, phlogistic chemistry, or caloric thermodynamics, the more certain they feel that those once current views of nature were, as a whole, neither less scientific nor more the product of human idiosyncrasy than those current today. If these out-of-date beliefs are to be called myths, then myths can be produced by the same sorts of methods and held for the same sorts of reasons that now lead to scientific knowledge. If, on the other hand, they are to be called science, then science has included bodies of belief quite incompatible with the ones that we hold today. (p. 2)

A committed believer in science would say that the above stated phenomenon has taken place because science is cumulative, and scientists have refined their theories in an effort to come closer to a truer and more accurate interpretation and description of nature. Kuhn disagrees and contends that instead of science being cumulative, it is revolutionary. A change in the paradigm changes the worldview of the scientist; or in other words the world comes to be viewed differently by the scientist. It involves a “reconstruction of the field from new fundamentals, a reconstruction that changes some of the field's most elementary theoretical generalisations as well as many of its paradigm methods and applications”(Kuhn, 1970. p. 85).

Kuhn holds that it is difficult to demonstrate the superiority of one paradigm over another purely on “logical” argument. The primary reason is that the proponents of the rival paradigms subscribe to a different set of standards and metaphysical assumptions. The rival paradigms are so incommensurable that no appeal to “rationality” can settle the issue as Feyerabend writes:

Transition to criteria not involving content thus turns theory choice from a rational and “objective” and rather one dimensional routine into a complex discussion involving conflicting preference and propaganda will play a major role in it, as it does in all cases involving preferences. [Cited in Chalmers, 1982, p.138]

To complete this discussion let us analyse the outermost circle depicted in Figure 1. The pursuit of knowledge is very intimately connected with the society in which it develops; the sociology of knowledge very aptly discusses the dynamics operating therein which determine the subject matter of psychology or any discipline for that matter. The anti-theistic ideas of scientific psychology are a case in point. Science in order to establish its identity in post-medieval Europe had to struggle against the Church which had usurped all powers to arbitrate every activity of humankind. It had restricted the freedom of inquiry and held courts of Inquisition to prosecute men like Galileo and Descartes and all those who differed from the scriptures. Moreover it had waged holy wars in the name of religion and caused much bloodshed. Against this backdrop, science dissociated itself from anything that had to do with God or with supernatural forms of existence. In conclusion, social and historical forces do play a major role in the development of a subject (see Danziger 1990; Leahey 1991, for details).

It is being increasingly realised that each society has its own vision of reality that shapes the perception and thoughts of its inhabitants. This helps them to negotiate their life with different images, symbols, metaphors and institutions in a unique way that may be incommensurable with that of another society. It would be worthwhile to analyse the notion of the self in this light. Under the auspices of Cartesian metaphysics, self has been described by the western philosophers as universal, objective, ahistoric, non-contextual and authentic. This dominant paradigm suggests that the true and authentic self is atomistic, individualistic and non-social. The universality of this view is seriously challenged when different cultures are studied on their own terms, without the preconception that they are inferior. For example, in India according to the *Bhagavad Gita*, the idea of a separate, individualistic, isolated and egoistic self is false and illusory. The egoistic self which creates selfish desires, hatred, attachment,

craving, greed, conceit etc. is viewed as the cause of ignorance and suffering; and it is culturally expected that one transcends this egoistic self in order to be transported into a state of wisdom, knowledge, calm and peace.

Some Western philosophers too have contested this Cartesian idea of self and have argued that self is situated and shaped by social, cultural, economic and historical contexts. For example, Marx argued that the nature of humans is the product of material conditions determining their production. Allen (1997) states that “self is not something abstract, static, ahistoric and given. On the contrary, self is dynamic, complex and relational; it is socially, culturally and historically constituted and developed through an ongoing dialectical process” (p. 22).

Anthropology has challenged the uniformitarian view of humans—emerging from the Enlightenment concept—that the essence and truth of human beings are universal and constant, independent of time and culture. For instance, the Oedipal complex as espoused by Freud as universally valid did not hold ground when Malinowski (1953) tried to test its truth in matriarchal societies. Also, Mead (1968) challenged the psychologist G. Stanley Hall’s view that adolescence is a period of “storm and stress” which he held to be universally true. Mead found that the adolescents of Samoa Island did not manifest a period of storm and stress. Geertz (1973) comments:

Anthropology... is firm in conviction that men unmodified by the customs of particular places do not in fact exist, have never existed, and most important, could not in the very nature of the case exist.... The circumstance makes the drawing of a line between what is natural, universal, and constant in man and what is conventional, local and variable extremely difficult. (pp. 35-36)

What is intelligent, practical, viable and noble in one culture may be considered as foolish and lowly from the perspective of another culture. Torgovnick (1990) observes that it is very difficult to assess what is “modern,” what is “primitive,” what is “savage” and what is “civilised.” Montaigne (1958) observes that we designate anything that is not in conformity with our habits and customs as barbaric, for we have no criterion for judging the customs of others other than our own. Lévi-Strauss (1979) comments that the minds of “primitives” are not inferior constitutionally; it is just that they are different, shaped according to the demands that their surroundings and environment present.

Relativism and the Paradox of Self-referentiality

The above line of arguments very clearly explains why we have as many theories as we have psychologies. Psychologists are human beings as well, and they are very much grounded or caged in their own perspectives which totally

determine the way they approach the problem of solving the enigmas of human behaviour. Psychologists see different facts because they ascribe different meta-structures of biases, theories, paradigms, cosmological worldviews, beliefs, culture, expectations, etc. to the raw data in order to interpret them. In other words their individual humanness makes them see psychological issues differently. The aforementioned arguments also indicate that psychology and all forms of knowledge—there is an intimate connection between psychology and knowledge—are relative with respect to individuals, time, culture and paradigms. But incidentally, this is a statement suggesting an absolute truth. *Paradoxically the conclusion, “Truth is relative” harbours in it an absolute truth.* Similarly, experimental psychology has devised experiments (for example, the duck-rabbit experiment), the results of which show that the perception of reality is necessarily subjective. But while stating this, it also makes a statement which embodies an objective validity. So a fact discovered by psychology becomes subjective and objective at the same time leading to a paradoxical and a peculiar situation. In other words the pursuit of knowledge or Truth—which is the basis of any scientific investigation—becomes absolute and relative simultaneously.

A meta-analysis of Kuhn’s arguments culminates in a situation that is not different. One of the chief themes of his theses is that paradigms guide research in terms of observation and interpretation of data. If his premise is true—he has, of course supported it with a lot of evidence—then, by extension it can be said that he has culled out data from the body of the history of science to support his theory that paradigms guide research. In other words, the data was collected with the theory—paradigm guides research—already in his mind. As soon as we recognise this, Kuhn’s arguments turn on themselves, thus assuming circularity. A paradoxical situation emerges again: Kuhn’s arguments are true and false at the same time. True because there is evidence to support his claim, and false because he contradicts himself by inviting his arguments on himself. Alternatively, his arguments have been designated as self-referential by his critics, and have been termed as self-refuting.

Secondly, Kuhn has cited evidence to show that facts and data have no meaning in themselves; they acquire meaning when interpreted against a theory or framework. There is an implicit circularity and paradox here too. By force of Kuhn’s arguments, it can be argued that the evidence that he has used to demonstrate the truth of his arguments is meaningful only against his contention that evidence has no meaning in the absence of a framework. Evidence lends

support to his theory whereas a similar kind of contradiction as described above, and the fact of being oblivious to his own subjectivity, while attributing the crucial role of the scientist’s subjectivity in guiding research, render Kuhn’s theory problematic. If the evidences of the other scientists are not sacrosanct, it can as well be said that Kuhn’s are not either.

In view of relativism, self-referentiality, circularities and paradoxes, does this mean that the pursuit of knowledge and psychology approaches a dead end? For the mainstream approach of finding the truths of human behaviour or psychology based in the classical distinction of subject and object, fact and value, and relative and absolute has come to a cul-de-sac. Does this mean that the impasse cannot be resolved? The answer is a resounding no, if we begin to analyse the Indian spiritual traditions, and in particular the writings of Sri Aurobindo. Let us examine how mysticism, while offering the solution of extricating ourselves from the aforementioned situations, can be an alternative paradigm for psychology research.

(To be continued)

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The Seven Jewel Centres of the Earth Mother

Michael Miovic

Seven times seven are the planes of the Supreme Goddess, the steps of ascent and descent of the Divine Transcendent and Universal Adya-shakti.

Above are the thrice seven supreme planes of Sat-Chit-Ananda; in between are the seven planes of the Divine Truth and Vastness, Mahad Brahma; below are the thrice seven steps of ascent and descent into this evolutionary world of the earth-existence.

These three gradations are successively Supermind or Truth-Mind, with its seven Suns; Life with its seven Lotuses; Earth with its seven Jewel-Centres.

The seven Lotuses are the seven *cakras* of the Tantric tradition, descending and ascending from Mind (Sahasradala, Ajna, Visuddha, Anahata) that take up Life through Life in Force (Manipura, Swadhisthana) down to Life involved in Matter (Muladhara).

All these Life-Centres are in themselves centres of Truth in Life even as the seven Suns are each a flaming heart of Truth in luminous Divine-Mind-Existence; but these lotuses have been veiled, closed, shut into their own occult energies by the Ignorance. Hence the obscurity, falsehood, death, suffering of our existence.

The Jewel-Centres of the Earth Mother are seven luminous jewel-hearts of Truth in Substance; but they have been imprisoned in darkness, fossilised in immobility, veiled, closed, shut into their own occult energies by the hardness, darkness and inertia of the material Inconscience.

To liberate all these powers by the luminous and flaming descent of the Suns of the Supermind and the release of the eighth Sun of Truth hidden in the Earth, in the darkness of the Inconscience, in the cavern of Vala and his Panis, this is the first step towards the restoration of the Earth Mother to her own divinity and the earth-existence to its native light, truth, life and bliss of immaculate Ananda.

Sri Aurobindo
(*The Hour of God*, p.27)

Introduction

In one of the most richly suggestive paragraphs he ever wrote, Sri Aurobindo summarises the gradation of planes of consciousness that together constitute the being and becoming of the Supreme Goddess, from the heights of her transcendent status in the Sat-Chit-Ananda down to the densest depths of her expression in the material Inconscient. Yet, curiously, while he elaborated on many aspects of this comprehensive vision elsewhere in his voluminous writings, Sri Aurobindo seems not to have commented further on his tantalising reference to the “jewel-centres” of the Earth Mother. What are these jewel centres, and how are they related to Integral Yoga and the evolution of consciousness on earth? That is the question that will be considered in the following series of essays.

The hypothesis developed here is that the seven jewel centres correspond roughly to the seven continents, and that these jewel centres serve the same general functions with respect to the consciousness of the earth as the chakras of classical Indian yoga serve with respect to the consciousness of the human being. That is, each of the jewel centres opens to and canalises the expression of a major plane of consciousness in matter, and this can be perceived inwardly as the subtle atmosphere of the land of each place, much as one can inwardly see the aura of human beings. However, because the chakras in the human instrument open to and express the various planes of consciousness primarily on the Life plane, their influence is less directly palpable in the physical vehicle than are the influences of the jewel centres, which open to and express the planes of consciousness in physical substance proper. Also, as the Earth Mother is immense and ancient in comparison to the human being, the consciousness of the jewel centres is impressively strong and stable, once one begins to perceive it. As best as I have been able to determine to date, this spiritual force or consciousness is principally associated with the bedrock of each place, and seems muted around large bodies of water, especially seas and oceans, which may act as buffer or transition zones between the jewel centres. What the consciousness of sea floors may be is a good question, for which I have no reply as yet but would welcome insights from interested observers.

In any case, the following study represents an initial attempt to map out the geo-spiritual organisation of the planet Earth, paying special attention to how various human cultures have grown to express the consciousness of the jewel centre where they developed. Evidently, as an experiment in a new way of understanding the world, some of the reflections here will later be found to need revision, enlargement, or reformulation in the light of a higher

perception. The first step in this corrective process would be to document a large number of reported spiritual experiences of the lands of the planet, and this in turn will require the development of a new branch of collective yoga involving the efforts of many souls over time and space. My own observations reported here must therefore be taken as indicative at best, not definitive, as this direct experience is limited mostly to parts of North and Central America, Europe, and India, and even within these regions is not complete. Also, it is important to remember that all of the human cultural phenomena described in association with the jewel centres are ultimately secondary data, or a medium for studying jewel centre effects. The essential primary data is direct spiritual experience of the land, which compasses a complex range of inner and outer perceptions that are impossible to put into words adequately. To arrive at such an experiential understanding of the jewel centres, each soul must enter into and cultivate his or her own personal communion with the Earth Mother, and from that will flow later a new collective yoga.

Now critics are always eager to ask about veracity and utility. How do I know that the geo-spiritual theory developed here is true, and of what practical use is it? I shall not enter here into a defence of Sri Aurobindo’s metaphysics and model of consciousness, but simply state that I accept them in toto and work within that world-view. Yes, he could be wrong in the end, and if so then the observations reported here are either pure imagination, or only partially true and to be accounted for by some as yet to emerge model of consciousness that is materialistic yet non-local, such as some of the interpretive frameworks that are currently being considered in non-local research, formerly known as parapsychology. However, I believe that in the course of time these expanded or hybrid forms of materialism will be found to be experientially less useful than their more spiritual Eastern counterparts, albeit perhaps as intellectually valid, and will be seen as an evolutionary step in the process through which the material sciences accommodate to the influx of data from non-physical planes of consciousness.

As for utility, there are many possible applications of the geo-spiritual theory and as the following essays will suggest, geo-spiritual influences can be detected in virtually all spheres of human life. However, one immediate and prominent utility of the geo-spiritual theory that should be highlighted here is its application to the problem of global warming. The national and international efforts that shall have to be undertaken in the next century to curb or respond to this threat are so extensive and expensive, and will require such a radical change in the way that individuals and societies function, that people will need a constant motivating force in order to succeed. Even if the cause of global

warming is ultimately found to be natural and unrelated to human activity, which seems increasingly unlikely, that still does not solve the problem nor reverse its consequences—a fact so far insufficiently considered by sceptics of the global warming theory. Thus, in the coming decades humanity will be challenged to unite and protect the natural environment as never before. While the threat of survival is certainly one strong motivating force in responding to this crisis, it is always difficult to make sacrifices and people will naturally tend to resist change if they are only changing because they have to and not because they want to. And this is where a geo-spiritual perspective can help: for by bringing out the consciousness of the Earth Mother and the functional importance of each of the jewel centres to global affairs, this world-view offers a new way to frame the entire endeavour of dealing with climate change, a motivating vision from which service to the Earth is felt as an avenue to both spiritual and material fulfilment rather than a burden and a constriction and a loss of freedom.

Finally, a few comments on antecedents and congeners to the geo-spiritual theory developed here. Virtually every traditional society has in some way recognised the sanctity of the Earth Mother and the fact that she is a conscious being, and most of the world's great religious traditions have at least a few rituals or scriptural passages that acknowledge this profound truth. More recently, the development of the environmental movement and the Gaia hypothesis have tended to create, at least among some, a feeling of spirituality with regards to the Earth. There are also both Asian and Western healing traditions that have studied, to some degree, the “energy” or consciousness of the earth. The geo-spiritual theory developed here contradicts none of these antecedents, and embraces the seed truths contained in each and all of them, but elaborates the geo-spiritual perspective on a much larger scale, as well as with more functional detail, and was arrived at independently through the extension of Sri Aurobindo's method of Integral Yoga to the world-being. Thus, the uniqueness of this perspective lies in what is new about Sri Aurobindo's vision, namely, the perception that the evolution of consciousness on Earth is the cause, not the consequence, of the physical evolution heretofore studied by science, and the clear statement of a supramental evolution beyond the human being as the next step of terrestrial evolution.

Geo-Spiritual Anatomy of the Planet Earth

With those provisos, let us now turn our attention to mapping the geo-spiritual organisation of the planet Earth. First and foremost, it must be said that what we call “planet Earth” is in fact only the physical manifestation of the great Earth Mother, not the all of her. In her highest spiritual reality, the

Earth Mother is a large and living soul, a portion of the Supreme Goddess that has come down into the material universe to be a focal point for the evolution of consciousness midst the vast material cosmos. This soul of the Earth Mother can be experienced inwardly anywhere on the planet, but is especially apprehensible in the subtle atmosphere of the Indian subcontinent, where all of the planes of consciousness and parts of the being stand disclosed or revealed in their inmost spiritual reality, including the subtle godheads of all the jewel centres which are manifested more completely and outwardly in the other parts of the world.

The seven jewel centres, then, are the seven major continents of the planet, and these jewel centres serve on the macrocosmic scale of the earth-being the same functions as the seven chakras do on the microcosmic scale of the human being. Table 1, below, summarises Sri Aurobindo's descriptions of the seven lotuses (chakras) and tentatively correlates them with specific jewel centres and regions of the world. As one will note, there are complexities in this mapping that exceed a simple one-to-one correlation of chakras to jewel centres. These nuances stem both from the fact that Sri Aurobindo's model of consciousness compasses the existence of planes and parts of the being in addition to the seven chakras of classical Indian yoga (notably the psychic being, subconscious, and Inconscient), as well as from the fact that the Earth is organised spherically whereas the organisation of chakras is more vertical or axial. Also, the scientific definition of what constitutes a continent physically is variable. All of these factors introduce important subtleties which we shall explore in due course. However, before delving into those details, let us first sketch out the largest lines of the yoga of the world-being, for the meaning of the details emerges naturally from that broader canvas.

Table 1. Proposed correlations of chakras to jewel centres.

Chakra	Plane of Consciousness	Jewel Centre
[Chaitya Purusha]	True soul, opening to the Infinite	Maha-Bharat
1. Sahasradala	Intuitive planes (several levels)	Maha-Asia
2. Ajna	Mental proper (reason, ideas, will)	Maha-Europa
3. Visuddha	Externalising mind (power, action)	Maha-Asiatica minoris
4. Anahata	Higher vital (heart, emotion)	Maha-Africa
5. Manipura	Central vital (major life motives)	Maha-Pacifica (middle)
6. Svadisthana	Lower vital (creative energies)	Maha-Pacifica (south)
7. Muladhara	Physical proper (substance, matter)	Maha-America
[Subconscious]	Subconscious memory and habits	Maha-Australia
[Inconscient]	Existential void or darkness	Maha-Antarctica

Just as there is a classical or typical pattern to the yoga of individuals, so too is there an overall pattern to the yoga of the Earth Mother. For individuals, there is the cycle of rebirth with its associated growth of the psychic being across lives, leading eventually to a spiritual opening and turning inwards to the development of the inner being. As the inner being unveils itself to the outer awareness, one may experience the seven chakras opening to the various planes of consciousness, as well the kundalini shakti rising upwards from the physical towards the intuitive planes of consciousness that are felt to reside in the subtle body above the head. To this classical pattern of Indian yoga, which has incidentally been described in other traditional societies including some of the native tribes of North America, Integral Yoga adds the movement of a higher consciousness descending from the supramental planes of consciousness overhead to transform both the inner and outer being below.

Similarly, there is a corresponding pattern to the yoga of the earth-being, only it is developed across the much longer and slower pace of geological time. While the body of the Earth has not literally died and dissolved since its formation some 6 billion years ago, it has undergone several extended cycles of reconfiguration, and these past ages of geological evolution represent the past “lives” of the planet, each of which supported a different phase in the evolution of consciousness. According to the plate tectonic theory of modern science, at the dawn of the most recent cycle of geological evolution, some several hundred of million years ago, the current continents of the planet were all clustered together in a single huge landmass, called Pangaea, located over what is now Antarctica. This proto-continent broke up due to the shifting movements of underlying plates of bedrock, and the huge pieces slowly spread out and migrated northward around the globe, eventually producing the distribution of continents we now live with. Yogically, this upward movement of the continents represents the rise of the global kundalini shakti for the current cycle of evolution on Earth, and during this ascending movement of land and consciousness, Life evolved from the age of early dinosaurs that populated Pangaea, through the rudimentary mental strata of increasingly sentient forms organised around an increasingly developed central nervous system, to finally the full emergence of Mind through mammals, hominids, and lastly human beings.

Thus, the mental plane of consciousness is now fully developed and manifested on Earth, and the evolution is preparing for a transition into the next great cycle, the Supramental manifestation. To support this evolution, the body of the Earth Mother is now organised to reflect a north-to-south gradation of consciousness that corresponds to the vertical organisation of consciousness

already found in human yoga. The north pole of the Earth is the highest sahasradala stratum of the planet, opening inwardly to the intuitive planes of consciousness felt in human experience to reside around and above the head, while the south pole (Antarctica) represents the Inconscient and is associated with the planes of consciousness felt to reside around and below the feet. In between the two poles, there is a gradual gradation of consciousness from the intuitive and mental planes in the north, through the higher and middle vital planes around the equator, to the lower vital and physical consciousness in the south, merging eventually into the subconscious in the far south, as in Australia and the southern tip of South America.

This basic geo-spiritual anatomy of the world accounts for the phenomena, first noted by Montaigne in his description of cultural variations within Europe but since echoed by other writers around the world, that cultures from northern latitudes tend to be more mentalised, methodical, and emotionally restrained in their norms than cultures from southern latitudes, which tend to be less rule-oriented and more emotional, sensual, and physically expressive. For example, compare the northern discipline, punctuality, and affective reserve of the Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, northern Europeans, and North Americans, to the more affable ease, emotionality, relaxed time sense, and sometimes sensuality of Polynesians, Micronesians, Africans, and Latin Americans. However, while some thinkers have supposed, with some justification, that this common pattern of social psychology may be due to the effects of climate on lifestyle (colder climates require more planning to survive in and simply feel more harsh than the tropics), a full survey of the globe reveals the deeper cause to be a geo-spiritual effect. Africa, for instance, is warm from north to south and yet the cultures of north Africa are relatively more mentalised than those of central Africa, while the Andes are cold and mountainous and yet the Hispanic culture there is more physicalised in consciousness than, say, the relatively steamy southern band of the United States. Thus, in both of these regions we see the north-south effect modulating a purely climactic effect.

But human yoga recognises another organisation of awareness that intersects with the vertical gradation of planes of consciousness, and that is a dimensional experience that proceeds from the inside outward, from the inmost being or soul (psychic being), to the inner being, to the outer. In the correspondence that arises between the inner being and the outer body in human experience, this leads to the impression that the more inward parts of the inner being are experienced in or behind the back, while the more outer parts of the inner being are experienced in or in front of the body. In the geo-spiritual anatomy of the Earth, this dimensional organisation is somewhat

different than in the human vehicle, because the latter has an axial structure with a clear front and back, while the Earth is spherical and does not have a defined front and back. For the Earth, this dimensional organisation of consciousness is translated into an east-west distribution, starting around the international date line in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, and proceeding gradually westwards past the western shores of the Americas. Thus, the inmost parts of the inner being are most manifest or easily accessible in eastern Asia and the Pacific Rim, while Europe and Africa represent the outer parts of the inner being, and the Americas open to the outer being proper. Grossly, then, there is a major division of the world into the Eastern and Western hemispheres, with the soul of the world (the Indian subcontinent) and six jewel centres (down to the lower vital) in the east, and the physical consciousness and outer being located in the west, in the Americas.

This large plan accounts for some of the other cardinal features of human history, such as that human beings first evolved in the Eastern hemisphere and migrated late and lastly to the Western hemisphere; and that the first civilisations arose in Asia (Mesopotamia, India, China), spread later to Europe and southern Africa, and arose only belatedly in the Americas. Both of these facts are consistent with the process of manifestation described in Integral Yoga, according to which outer realities are first formed in the higher planes of consciousness and organised within the inner being, and then translated down into the physical and outward to the outer being. In addition, even despite the culturally homogenising effects of globalisation, one can still discern a general pattern of Asians being more inwardly oriented and delicate or subtle in their social norms and aesthetic preferences than are Europeans and Africans, who tend to be more outwardly oriented, while Americans from north to south were traditionally more absorbed in the natural world and to this day remain especially dedicated to the material world and outer activity.

These cultural characterisations are, of course, generalisations and not meant to be taken in any dogmatic or bigoted sense, but only to suggest that jewel centre influences on human culture exist and can be described. Evidently, human nature itself is the same everywhere on the planet and individuals vary considerably within cultures, so we take care to emphasise here that all of the cultural variations described in the following essays are not intended to suggest that any culture is better or worse than another, but rather that each is endowed by the Earth Mother in a unique way and that all are needed for the fullness of the divine manifestation.

In summary, then, the consciousness of the Earth varies in an organised fashion by latitude and longitude, with latitude corresponding to the planes of

consciousness to which the seven chakras of the human being open in spiritual experience, while longitude corresponds to parts of the being ranging from inner to outer as one proceeds westward. This global distribution of planes and parts of the being creates the physical support for a global rhythm of sadhana in the Earth consciousness that proceeds as follows:

As the sun rises over the mid Pacific—that Sun which is the physical symbol of the supra-physical Divine Being—the awakening movement of dawn streaks southward down the coast of northern Asia while at the same time rising northward from Australia. Since the lands of the Pacific Rim are roughly configured in a V-shape from the North Pole to the southern, this configuration creates a converging movement for the sunrise, whose two leading lines of landfall intersect on the southern shores of India, Maha-Bharat, the soul of the world-being. This culmination represents physically a presentation of the new day to the Divine Mother for her blessing. Stepping forth to receive the offering, the great Mahashakti reviews all the vast labour of evolution that has been done to date, and all that has yet to be accomplished, and She rekindles the hopes of the world-soul and revives the eternal dream of manifesting a life divine in divinised matter. Unlocked are the infinite treasure troves of her supernal worlds of Truth and Bliss, and down pours the flooding illumination of Her all-seeing gaze. Suffused with this higher light and guided by the inmost intimations of the Asian and Pacific jewel centres that have been baptised in the dawning of Maha-Bharat, now Maha-Europa, Maha-Asiatica minoris, and Maha-Africa spring to life. As the sunrise proceeds westward, the three great powers of the manifesting Idea, Power, and Heart throw their force behind the divine effort. Labouring under the blaze of full day, the entire Eastern hemisphere of the Earth Mother now throws all of her force into the concentrated tapasya of world-transformation.

But as the sunrise proceeds westward, a change comes over the manifestation. As night settles over the Eastern hemisphere and the six jewel centres, there retire into meditation to absorb the day's labours and prepare for the morrow, the spiritual work of the world-being is passed onto the seventh sister for her material blessing. Now daylight comes to Maha-America, again streaking down her northeastern coast while at the same time arising from below along her southern coast, repeating the same V-shaped pattern that transpired previously over the Pacific, but now over the Atlantic Ocean and kindling to consciousness the aspiration of the physical being and of sacred substance. Now the Western hemisphere of the globe springs to life and labours under the blaze of full day to manifest physically all that her six sisters in the East have conceived and planned and formed and felt and in the inner

planes of consciousness.

Finally, as this massive work reaches its culmination for the day, the sun sets over the western coast of the Americas, an event as great and glorious as was the dawn previously in the East. For Maha-America is splendidly sculpted to fulfil her divine purpose, and her western sunset is a spectacle of Nature not to be missed. Laying her heavenly physique diagonally across the globe from the Antarctic to the Arctic, so as to catch the light of the setting sun in an orderly fashion, she begins her review of the day. Starting with the very tip of South America, in the depths of the subconscious, the sunset climbs up Maha-America's majestic coastline like a fire of aspiration rising up an enormous stick of incense, reviewing every plane of consciousness along the way. Careful, comprehensive, precise, and complete, Maha-America leaves no detail of the world yoga untouched, and accounts for every movement of consciousness that has settled into her sacred substance in the last twenty-four hours. She inspects all that has been worked out in matter in the last day, and foresees all that has yet to be achieved the next. And then, with a last, mighty prayer from the bosom of the Earth, Maha-America surrenders her labours back to her six sisters in the East. As night settles over the Western hemisphere and the Americas sleep, already dawn streaks down Maha-Asia in the East and arises from the ancient memory of Maha-Australia in the south. Again the world's inner being is kindled to life, and again Maha-Bharat leans down from her supraconscious spheres to receive the offering and bless the new day.

And so the cycle flows ever onward, from day to day and month to month and year to year, endlessly unfolding the Mahashakti's will in her terrestrial form as the great Earth Mother. To produce seasonal variations in the emphasis of Her work, during the southern winter she tilts one way on her axis of rotation to focus the transformative Light on the intuitive and mental planes of consciousness in the north, while during the northern hemisphere's winter she tilts the opposite direction to focus the work of manifestation more on the physical and subconscient planes in the south. And, over the much longer and slower rhythms of geological time, she goes through cycles of heating and cooling in various regions of the planet that make her geo-spiritual forces more or less available to the full play of Life in each zone.

Currently, we are witnessing the beginning of one such period of heating in both the northern and southern poles. Putting aside temporarily the question of whether or not human activity has contributed to this new cycle of warming, and whether or not it is salutary to life on the planet, let us try to glean at least some faint intuition of the inner meaning of these large geological

changes. Could it be that the very Earth is feeling the influx of the new Supramental consciousness whose arrival Sri Aurobindo announced, and showing physical signs of both opening and resistance to the higher force that is flowing in from above and below? For even if global warming and polar melt are products of resistance to the influx rather than of opening to it, the Supermind uses every circumstance to advance the manifestation, and the errors that appear to the mental being as horrible or even catastrophic are seen by the higher consciousness as part of some greater, if yet to the mind, mysterious purpose.

If these initial inferences carry some truth, then we may look upon the problem of global warming that now confronts us as precisely the crisis needed to advance the evolution. For the stimulus of this global adversity shall then become the means for drawing humanity together as never before, and require the emergence of a new sense of unity and shared effort and destiny. But for such a global spiritual and material development to proceed to fruition there must also come a shared awakening to the divinity and consciousness of the planet Earth, and a growing perception of the inner meaning of her physical constitution. In this regard, the description of the seven jewel centres of the Earth Mother offered here can serve as an aide to evoking this world-being and setting the reality of Her presence firmly before us as a guiding light to illumine our collective endeavours.

Maha-Bharat: the World Soul

That India is the soul of the world-being should require little explanation to anyone of spiritual sensibility who has spent time in the subcontinent. For palpable everywhere within her physical reach, yet explicable nowhere by purely physical terms, is her extraordinary spiritual atmosphere. Nature's great temple to the supra-natural, and the Earth Mother's main formed opening to the formless Infinite, she is the home of the Timeless and the Transcendent. Everything about her lands and peoples speaks of this opening to inner and higher worlds of consciousness, and even the darkest manifestations of human ignorance that flower perennially upon her soil cannot negate her essential divinity. In fact, as we shall see later, these errors and perversions are phenomenon of resistance against the tremendous spiritual energies that flow upon Earth through the portals of Maha-Bharat, and thus rather than contradicting her status as the soul of the world only prove it further. For just as water flow becomes turbulent when a large volume passes rapidly through a narrow channel, or a wire overheats when the electric current in it is too strong, so too does the narrow human consciousness impede the massive geo-spiritual forces of the Earth Mother. In every jewel centre we will therefore

find both positive and negative expressions of the power of the land that are unique to each place, and nowhere on the planet is this dual manifestation of aspiration and resistance more abundantly evident than in India.

Geospiritually, what we shall refer to here as Maha-Bharat extends beyond the current political borders of modern India and contains the entire subcontinent, including Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, probably portions of Tibet, and perhaps Burma (Myanmar) as well as the Andaman and Nicobar islands. Physically, the most striking geographic feature of Maha-Bharat is the Himalayan range, formed in ages past when the subcontinent migrated northwards and collided with the landmass of Asia proper. Since great mountains have always been regarded as sacred by traditional societies around the world, it is only fitting that the greatest of the great mountains on the planet stand on the subcontinent. The youngest and tallest mountain range on earth, these Himalayan peaks are the apt physical expression of the Earth's aspiration for the Divine, and fittingly have always been viewed as the realm of Gods and yogis in the Indian tradition. But in addition to the towering Himalayas, the rest of the subcontinent contains, within a relatively small region, all of the major environmental zones of the earth—plains, deserts, jungles, rivers, ocean shores, drenching monsoons and arid droughts. From the coldest northern peaks to the hottest southern tropics, all of the essential geological and climatic zones of the world are summarised in the being of Maha-Bharat, for by virtue of her role she must be so constituted as to represent the entire world within her being.

This extraordinary physical setting for Maha-Bharat is complemented by an even more extraordinary inner scene, an aura or atmosphere or consciousness that is truly sui generis. So enchanting and awe-inspiring is this inner landscape that one could almost say the real Maha-Bharat can only be seen with eyes closed, for it is only in the depths of meditation that She reveals her full splendour. Everywhere one goes on the subcontinent there is a vast and profound spiritual atmosphere, an aura or light that often appears to the inner vision as variations upon Krishna's blue. There is an inner feeling of spaciousness and timelessness, an ineffable sensation of softness and subtleness that envelopes and permeates all objects, a sense that the physical world is but the thinnest of veils covering a vast and non-material world within. At times this pull towards the Transcendent is so strong that physical matter seems distant and unimportant to the experiencing consciousness, perhaps even unreal. Or, in moments and moods when the physical world becomes surcharged with the indwelling Divine or moved like a wave on the ocean of the Infinite by some vaster air, then Nature reveals her supranatural origin: in the

clouds one sees the forms of great Gods and Goddesses, in the air float perfumes that hint at other and higher worlds, in both night and day broods the presence of some stupendous fathomless Void that is the beginning and ending of all things created. And at certain spots, such as mount Arunachala in Tamil Nadu, the spiritual charge of the land so pure and potent, shines out with such a diamond-like Light from beyond space and time, that one can do aught but agree with the sages that indeed here the very Self of all existences stands mystically revealed in the form of a mountain. It is this revelation of the Spirit, this unveiling of the Transcendent, this manifestation of the Infinite within the finite terms of time and space that makes Maha-Bharat what she is, the soul of the world.

Because of this geo-spiritual force, human cultural evolution on the subcontinent has taken a turn towards the spiritual that is unique. While all human cultures contain spiritual elements, still, without denying the accomplishments of the rest we may appreciate that the subcontinent has supported the development not only of religion, but more characteristically of spirituality and mysticism, like no other region of the world. From the mantric chants of the Vedas, to the transcendent philosophy of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, to the high idealism of Jainism, to the Buddha's quest for Nirvana, to all the later permutations of yoga and Hinduism, there is a constant search for the Timeless, the Absolute, the Infinite, the Transcendent that is characteristic of Indic culture. It is truly remarkable how philosophically rich and subtle the Indian religious tradition has been, and how oriented towards direct spiritual experience of higher states of consciousness. Whereas the religions born in the Middle East (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity) espouse a mentally simple model of monotheism and emphasise the importance of doctrinal belief and institutional organisation over personal experience—both telltale marks of the visuddha chakra, the dynamic or externalising mind,—the Indian tradition has always been notable for its more complex world-view of polymorphic monotheism, according to which the one absolute Brahman expresses Itself through an infinite variety of forms and beings, both physical and supra-physical.

To support this vast and varied world-view, Indian spirituality is built upon psychological foundations that are more fluid than one finds in the religious traditions from the Middle East. The two main principles of the Indian approach to God are decentralisation and direct personal experience. That is, there is no one central scripture or Bible of what has come to be called Hinduism, rather several major texts and multiple smaller ones, and indeed one is not quite sure what Hinduism is or is not, as it tends to absorb saints and teachers

from other traditions over time (e.g., Lord Buddha became an avatar eventually, and one ventures that Mother Teresa will become a vibhutti of avatar Jesus the Christ in a few centuries). Likewise, there is no one, central holy spot in Hinduism. Whereas the Jews, Christians, and Muslims can all point to one or two holy spots where their respective religions arose, India is littered with sacred sites each more holy than the next, and so densely rich is the mythology around these manifold places that one can no longer tell where the mythology ends and history begins. Finally, all of this decentralisation is stirred to creative life by a full and ancient repertoire of yogic, devotional, and meditative practices aimed at experiencing God directly, without the intermediary of any church or religious authority. This periodically produces the spontaneous emergence of individual yogis, mystics, saints, and sages whose first-hand experience of the Divine counter-balances and often supersedes the authority of priests and shastras.

If one has any doubt about the veracity of these assertions, one need only look to the phenomenon of gurus for evidence that Indian culture engenders a different approach to spirituality than other cultures of the world. While the popular media have now trivialised both the word and the role of guru almost beyond recognition, that triviality vanishes when one is confronted with the actual fact of a Self-realised being, as happened in the first half of the 20th century when the life of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi was documented for all to see. The very archetype of the enlightened master who lives on a hill, teaches by silence, and owns nothing more than a loincloth, here is proof positive that the myths and legends of India are not all imagination. While such extraordinary souls do, very rarely, take birth in other parts of the world, in India they come frequently enough that the culture has developed words to describe them (e.g., Jivanmukta, Bhagavan, mahayogi, paramahansa, avadhuta, avatar, etc.), both social roles (sannyasi, guru) and philosophical traditions (Advaita Vedanta) to support their teaching, and a respectfully devout attitude in the people that receives them appropriately when they arrive. Had a soul such as Sri Maharshi taken birth outside of India where such cultural supports do not exist, the associated flood of devotees and flow of supernatural phenomenon would have either threatened the ruling orthodoxy or spawned a new religion. In contrast, inside India his presence was absorbed quite naturally as another in a long line of Self-realised beings who have graced the soil of Maha-Bharat—amazing, yes, but unprecedented, no.

And one starts with Sri Maharshi only because his example is so pure and incontrovertible. But Maha-Bharat has produced a whole rainbow of spiritual figures to appeal to all inclinations, and that just in the last hundred plus years,

not to mention her star-studded pantheon from centuries past. To name but a few: Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Anandamayi Ma, Krishnamurti, Neem Karoli Baba, two Sai Babas, and Ammaji among others, plus exports such as Yogananda, the Mahesh Yogi, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and his Hare Krishna movement, Swami Muktananda and his disciple Swami Chidvilasananda, Mother Meera, and more. Not all have been of the highest quality, and some, such as Rajneesh, ended in infamy, but the quantity is notable nonetheless. Furthermore, modern India has also played host to various foreign spiritual personages who came to teach, and this warm reception of the foreigner is especially compelling evidence of her authenticity, because it shows that in matters spiritual she judges not by colour or creed or gender, but by inner capacity. Thus, for instance, we have the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Mother Teresa, and the Dalai Lama. Particularly in the case of Mother Teresa one has to ask “why India?” Of all the slums in the world, why did she have to come to Calcutta to serve God? Why is it that with Christianity spread around the globe, the one soul in recent memory who has absolutely and unequivocally embodied the ideals of Jesus the Christ had to live in India? The West has made much of what Mother Teresa gave to India, and one gratefully acknowledges that service, but did not India also give something to her? For the grace of Maha-Bharat is the gift of spiritual vision and revelation, to see Christ in the beggar and know that the Lord lives right here in the midst of our fallen and death-bound mortal state. Like so many who came before her, and all those who shall come hereafter, Mother Teresa’s faith was elevated to its highest spiritual potential by the consciousness of India.

Still, all this represents the extraordinary side of Indian spirituality, the saints and sages and great teachers. But let us also consider its more ordinary side, as this too reflects the geo-spiritual influence of the region. The first of these is religion as it grows in the masses and non-religious leaders, while the second is its wide and deep influence on the creative arts.

For instance, one vivid illustration of how ordinary religious worship is qualitatively different in India from elsewhere in the world is the design of the Hindu temple, which in critical ways differs from temples, churches, mosques, and sites of worship outside of India. In all other cultures, from Asia to the pre-Columbian Americas, religious architecture is designed to focus attention on a single, central spot which houses a sacred image or from which a verbal message is delivered by a religious official. In contrast, the Hindu temple is discursive, sometimes disconcertingly so to the newcomer. Hindu temples do have a central deity in theory, but in practice he or she is hard

to find. One enters a huge enclosure, which symbolises the cosmos, and once inside one's attention is drawn in many directions simultaneously. Over here is a shrine to Ganesh, over there one to Durga; down this hall stretch hundreds of columns that entrance the eye with resonating shapes, while down that hall one arrives at temples within the temple, shrines to Lakshmi or Vishnu or Kali or Shiva or what have you. On this side a priest is ringing a bell and chanting mantras to one idol, while on that side a second priest is simultaneously leading a puja to another. Visitors are wandering in every direction, children are running and playing, and the devoted are each worshipping in his or her own way—this man lies prostrate on the floor, that woman sits counting mala beads and muttering, a small crowd to the left is receiving prasada from a Brahmin, while another crowd to the right is performing an arati. The only fixed regulation seems to be to leave one's chappals at the entry; other than that, one has true freedom of worship. Indeed, the sannyasin can even go about naked, if he has demonstrated a right to live outside social norms through extended austerities. The net effect on the visitor of wandering through this spectacle of God and humanity, all while passing through zones of blinding sunlight alternating with womblike darkness, is trance-like. It induces an altered state of consciousness and opens the mind to supra-rational realms.

And not only has the commoner developed a vivid approach to God, but so have Indian nobility and political leaders, who down through the ages have fomented a peculiar attraction to various types of spiritual idealism. Typically this impulse has been played out as a dynamic tension between renouncing political power in favour of a spiritual quest, versus ruling but trying to use power towards idealistic ends. Prince Gautama walked away from a kingdom to become the Buddha, while Chandragupta first built an empire only to renounce it later and die as a Jain ascetic in search of moksha. Ashoka, too, began with violence like Chandragupta, but then sought to use his power to spread the pacifist message of Buddhism and create a religiously tolerant society. The Kushans swept into India as marauding hordes from central Asia, only to end with Kanishka promoting an eclectic type of religious syncretism that expanded peaceable trade and exported Buddhism to China. The Mughals came as conquerors to impose Islam on the infidels, only to see Akbar the Great turn towards religious tolerance and the rule of reason, while his grandson Dara went one step further and sought the essential spiritual unity at the heart of both Hinduism and Islam. In the 20th century, Sri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi gave a modern expression to all sides of this dynamic tension, with Sri Aurobindo first working in politics and advocating the Gita's doctrine of karma yoga in the quest for Indian independence, only later to retire

from politics and even turn down the presidency of India in favour of his spiritual sadhana. On the other hand, Gandhi endeavoured throughout his political career to bring the ideals of non-violence and religious tolerance to the struggle for self-rule.

Today, this deeply ingrained sympathy for spirituality of all types continues to endow contemporary Indian culture with a degree of religious tolerance unparalleled by any other society in the world. Whatever be the many ills of modern India, now as before she remains the world's largest cauldron of spiritual experimentation and diversity. Whereas the United States and Europe espouse religious freedom on paper but in lived fact are rather restrained and anaemic in their public expression of the religious impulse, India is frankly florid in her quest for God. She has native traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism as well, plus has imported Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism en masse. She hosts the largest religious festival on Earth (the Kumbha Mela), has more religious holidays than any other society on the planet, has shrines to some god or goddess on almost every corner and yet continues to build more, and one can scarcely find a public or private office on the subcontinent that does not boast a garland to one sacred image or another. In a word, her whole approach is florescent: with paints (as in holi), and fireworks (as in pongal), and lights (as in diwali), and idols, and rituals, and myths, and music, and dance, and a billion people worshipping a thousand forms of gods and goddesses. In any other place in the world such a passion for religion would not be compatible with either peace or secular democracy, and yet somehow India manages to maintain both. Of course she has her constant smouldering religious tensions and the Hindu-Muslim problem, for religious conflict is inevitable given human nature, yet in the grand scheme of things Maha-Bharat contains these tensions relatively well and continues to advance slowly towards that great goal she has been seeking since the dawn of history—to behold the One who lives in the heart of the Many, to touch the Timeless living in the heart of Time, to realise the Infinite who manifests endlessly through all finite forms.

We began with matters religious and spiritual because these so patently reflect the geo-spiritual influence of the land on human consciousness in the subcontinent, but this force has had a palpable effect on every other aspect of Indic culture as well, from the arts to clothing, food, and even business and military affairs. In the creative arts, the constant push of the timeless and transcendent Infinite to manifest in finite time has marked all Indian art forms with the traits of subtle awareness, extension or elaboration, and repetition or resonance. Taken together, these features create the impression of endless

variations or permutations that seem to play around or against a background of timeless, unchanging permanence. This dynamic tension evidently expresses the relationship between the dynamic and static Brahman of Indian spiritual philosophy, and thus the ultimate effect of Indian creative activity is to induce a meditative state of consciousness that is felt to be spiritual.

In literature, for example, we have the staggering narrative extension of the Mahabharata, with its vast content that covers all of creation, from Gods to humans to the transcendent heights of the Bhagavad Gita. From this and the Puranas derive an almost infinite variety of local myths and legends that are elaborated and repeated in endless permutations in the many languages and oral traditions of the subcontinent. In modern times, the essential spirit of this narrative tradition took a new form of expression in Sri Aurobindo's prose and poetry, which are supremely meditative. In addition to developing a spiritual interpretation of the evolutionary process, note how Indian is Sri Aurobindo's approach to expressing his perceptions. He extends his exposition to great length, richly elaborates a few core ideas into seemingly infinite permutations, and employs formal devices such as periodic prose or metric verse to create droning rhythms that have a mantric effect upon the reader. Or, as in the case of *Savitri*, written in blank verse, constantly repeated themes and lines or blocks of sentence structure are used in place of metre to achieve that sense of elaboration and resonance which are so characteristically Indian. By way of contrast, Japanese and Chinese Zen literature have approached somewhat similar themes of spiritual awakening through a completely different formal method, e.g., the crystallisation of pristine moments of intuitive insight seen in Dharma stories, koans, and Basho's haiku.

These same features of extension, resonance, and spiritual or meditative effect are abundantly evident in the classical music and visual arts of the Indian subcontinent. What may be called the spiritual content of Indian music is admittedly difficult to describe in words, because terms such as psychic feeling and intuitive influence may seem abstract to readers, but many technical features of Indian music can be described which are central to its meditative appeal. In terms of subtlety, for instance, the sitar is without doubt the most delicate, complex, and subtle stringed instrument in the world; hear how simple and heavy the Western guitar is in comparison. Or take the Indian tabla which, with its relatively small size and blend of five metals, produces a much more harmonious and melodious sound than the drums of Europe, Africa, and Latin America. Furthermore, in addition to the sounds of Indian instruments being subtle and refined, the structure of Indian classical music also facilitates extension and resonance. These are achieved through formal devices such

as the juxtaposition of an elaborately developed (i.e. extended) raga that resonates around or against the background of a few constantly repeated drone notes, and the synthesis of improvisation with repetition of a huge repertoire of remembered scales and rhythms that allow the Indian musician to carry on almost ad infinitum when inspired. Add to this other contemplative features such as the opening alap that drifts so beautifully from musical formlessness into a defined shape and tempo, and vocals that abound in open and resonant "ah" sounds, and you arrive at a musical form that is uniquely tuned to the expression of the Timeless and the Infinite.

In the visual arts, these characteristics are even more obvious because immediately visible. Here one can literally point to the distinct technical features of Indian art. In classical sculpture, for example, the anatomical detail of the physical form was less emphasised than in the European tradition, because the Indian artist was interested not in a mental rule for correctly rendering external reality, but something more spiritual and subtle—the feeling of suppleness and beauty and even ecstasy that belongs to the inner physical being rather than the outer physical form, i.e. the body seen from within rather than without. Hence the endlessly repeated curves and rhythmic shapes of so much Indian temple sculpture, that motionless movement of stone that enchants the beholding eye with a sense of transporting ananda. Even when this temple sculpture descends from its purest spiritual heights to include a sensual or even frankly erotic element—and that, by the way, is also Indian: a cosmic vision that can embrace the spiritual and the sensual in a single gaze—it does so with a subtle and inward feeling. Thus, whereas in Europe classical sculpture depicted sensuality from without via perfect naked bodies, in India sensuality was evoked from within, via exaggerated busts, hips, shoulders, and curves that emphasise inner feelings and aroused perceptions over outer anatomical facts.

In architecture, the essential Indian motives and tendencies are expressed differently in the Hindu and Muslim traditions, but are clearly evident in both. We already touched upon many features of Hindu architecture in the prior description of the Hindu temple. To this we need only add that the technical devices of extension and resonance are achieved horizontally through the spatial stretch of hallways with endlessly repeating columns and arches, and vertically through features such as visually resonating roof lines and the teeming facades of the classical gopuram, which almost literally depict unending planes of consciousness populated by a countless variety of beings. Fused together, these formal methods create a visual impression of vibrating profusion, in north India with a more centrally organised temple structure to

reflect a more mental force in the land, while in south India with more horizontal extension of the temple structure to reflect the physical consciousness of the land. Or, in the case of Islamic architecture, the cleaner and sharper lines of Persia were refined, softened, and given an enchanting delicacy unequalled elsewhere. There is less profusion and permutation than in the Hindu tradition, but visual resonance is nonetheless exquisitely achieved through repetition of hallway arches and domed roofs. Hence the exceptional beauty of the Red Fort in Agra, Islam's most aesthetic fortress, and the sublime perfection of the Taj Mahal, that most mystical and magical of all tombs in the world. Luminous and ethereal, the Taj seems to float just above the ground, like a dream of delight conjured in some supra-physical world and materialised on earth. Indeed, it is precisely because of the geo-spiritual consciousness of the subcontinent that Islamic art and architecture reached their acme in India rather than elsewhere.

Today, the subtlety and richness of the Indian artistic temperament are evident both in contemporary painting—a veritable treasure-trove of talent we shall not have space to review here—as well in the less sophisticated but more popular medium of Bollywood film. While Bollywood does not have an overtly spiritual aim, still, it has latent visionary tendencies and aesthetic preferences that are typically Indian. Some of these include extended viewing time; dramatic emotional intensity that aims not at naturalism but rather hyper-realism; a universal narrative structure that contains all genres in one (e.g., drama, romance, action, musical, and comedy all together); the juxtaposition of individual protagonists against a background of large groups of people; vibrantly colourful music and dance that synthesise global influences; and lastly, for the moment at least, the repetition of one unchanging and ever-droning Story—a love story that ends in a wedding—that is yet spun into an infinite series of particular stories, each different from the next. When executed poorly, these methods of elaborating and amplifying human emotion can lead to sloppy melodrama carried to lengthy excess, but when well accomplished produce a breadth of vision and richness of beauty and feeling that are unparalleled in Western cinema. And, in the hands of a genius such as Mani Ratnam, the tools of Bollywood can be toned down and turned to a more probing exposition of life that is almost Shakespearean in its scope and depth.

Finally, even the more mundane arts and practical activities on the subcontinent embody the traits described above. In clothing, for example, see how a piece of cloth can be kept as simple and unchanging as the white cotton dhoti that men wear, or elaborated and lavishly spun into the subtle beauty and infinite permutations of women's saris. Or note how long it takes to

prepare traditional Indian food, how extensive the process is, how many and varied are the spices used, how much subtle variation of flavour there is within the unifying sameness of all Indian curries. And yet, when it is finally time to eat this elaborate cuisine, one will do so in the most simple way possible, with the human hand, and not put material instruments between oneself and food. Indeed, even business and war on the subcontinent tend towards the subtle and the power of consciousness over matter. For example, India is known especially for its computer programming and software industry, telecommunications satellites, call centres, and well-educated technology specialists—all of which appeal to the consciousness end of technology rather than its more material end. And in military affairs, note how the faculty of intuition takes precedence over sheer physical prowess in various ways—in Pakistan through shrewd manipulation of the United States, in Sri Lanka in the ruthless psychological tactics of the Tamil Tigers, and in a recent war exercise between India and the United States, American pilots were found to have better equipment, but Indian pilots were better at predicting their opponent's next move. Thus, literally every aspect of human culture on the subcontinent reflects a geo-spiritual influence.

Now one may well ask whether the consciousness of the subcontinent originates not from the land, but rather from the collective consciousness of the peoples who have inhabited the region for millennia. Perhaps human beings radiate a subtle psychosphere that, through non-local effects, has influenced the various forms of human cultural expression that have evolved over time. Yet while human beings undoubtedly do have a collective consciousness, there is evidence that the land is conscious as well, and is probably the stronger of the two forces by virtue of its enormously greater age and size. The most definitive proof that land itself is a conscious force lies in the Americas, and as we shall see later, there one can clearly trace how European colonists evolved over time from a mental to a physical consciousness. However, suggestive pieces of evidence exist within Maha-Bharat as well. One of the more fascinating of these is the Indian elephant, which differs in significant ways from its cousin, the African elephant. Whereas the African elephant is large, untamable, has ears the shape of Africa, and has an aura that to the inner eye looks deep red-rose, the Indian elephant is smaller, remarkably intelligent and trainable, has ears the shape of the subcontinent, and has a bluish aura to the inner vision, especially around the head. Thus, in migrating to the jewel centre of Maha-Bharat, the elephant entered a field of conscious force that influenced its evolution so as to bring out its aspect of consciousness, as opposed to the vibration of the higher vital prominent in Africa.

Another example of this jewel centre influence on animal evolution is the Indian cow, which is the most graceful and contemplative-looking cow in the world. With its large, peaceful, almost liquid-looking eyes, and elegantly arched horns and bony structures, overall it gives one the impression of wisdom and artistic beauty. In contrast, the European cow is more muscular and square of build, a creature defined more for outer function, while the American cow is simply a massive and rather unbecoming milk or meat producing machine. Significantly, one finds a similar trend in the shapes and forms of deer, gazelles, and antelopes, with the Indian varieties of these animals giving a greater impression of delicacy and softness than their European or American counterparts, in part due to their more rounded contours. These differences reflect the influence on animal evolution of a spiritual consciousness in the Indian subcontinent, the mental plane of consciousness in Europe, and the physical consciousness in the Americas. While human preferences around selective breeding may well have influenced the evolution of both cows and elephants (and more for cows than for elephants), the human factor probably had little influence on deer, gazelles, and antelopes. Thus, one has to wonder what underlying force moulded the evolution of all three animal species in a similar direction, especially as these more subtle qualities of form do not confer any obvious survival advantage, and are therefore difficult to explain solely on the basis of natural selection.

The consciousness of the land, then, is ancient and powerful, and affects the evolution of all life forms that it supports. Positively, this has led on the subcontinent to the remarkable spiritual, cultural, and artistic achievements we reviewed above. But the human system is ultimately small and feeble compared to the massive charge of the land, and therefore one also finds in Maha-Bharat numerous negative examples of resistance to the geo-spiritual force of the region. The consciousness of the Infinite inverted into its opposite becomes then the suffocating Finite, the Timeless imprisoned becomes the endless tyranny of Time, and the Transcendent descended becomes the hopeless Mundane. Therefore the land that has given the world its highest lessons in the liberation of consciousness has also produced seemingly infinite varieties of human suffering.

Historically, this side of Indian society is seen in the constant repetition of tragedy and downfall. The Mahabharata ends with all sides destroyed and dead, including Krishna himself. The great kingdoms of ancient India all ended in decay from within or destruction from without. The religious and cultural flowering initiated by Akbar and brought to its acme by Dara, was cut down brutally by Aurangzeb, who imprisoned his father, Shah Jahan, in a room in

the Red Fort from which he could see his beloved Taj Mahal yet never reach it, and then went on to murder his brother Dara and perpetrate horrific massacres of Hindus. Thus, on the verge of steering towards a brighter future of Hindu-Muslim unity, instead the subcontinent veered down the path of strife and hatred that led ultimately to the bloodbath of Partition and the Hindu-Muslim problem that continues to this day. And lastly there is that most pernicious and persistent of all Indian tragedies, the caste system, which over time turned the most complex and creative society in the world into little more than a jail.

Today, the dark side of the subcontinent is as disheartening to behold as its marvels are awe-inspiring—overwhelming population pressures, environmental degradation, poverty, lack of education, ignorance and backwardness of every kind, caste injustice, chaos, dirt, squalor, corruption, apathy, a total indifference to human suffering, the all-devouring greed of ruthless politicians and business tycoons, gang lords and cronyism, the absolute wickedness of child exploitation and child trafficking, and black magic practised with a degree of occult knowledge not found anywhere else in the world. We shall not dwell here on illustrating in gruesome detail all this misery, which is the work of asuric forces, but simply point out that its quantity and variety is the negative manifestation of the Infinite. Precisely because Maha-Bharat is the soul of the world, all material and spiritual possibilities are manifested within her multitudinous movement, and whatever problem is to be worked out in the world-being must be solved first in the soul of Maha-Bharat before it can be realised definitively in the life of the world. Therefore the essence of all potentials both positive and negative live within her, and therefore she shows a mixed manifestation of light and dark that can feel absolutely overwhelming to the small human instrument.

Geo-spiritually, this central role for the world-being means that all of the planes of consciousness manifested outwardly through the other jewel centres must have an inner or essential representation within Maha-Bharat, to serve as a channel through which these forces can flow into and out of the world-being. Thus, the same general plan previously described for the geo-spiritual anatomy of the Earth is repeated and summarised within Maha-Bharat, only on a smaller and less externalised scale: her northern lands open to ascending grades of the mental and intuitive planes of consciousness, while her central and southern lands grade through the various levels of the vital, down into the physical in south India and finally the subconscious in Sri Lanka. At the same time, her eastern shores open to the more inner parts of the inner being, while her western shores open to the more outer parts of the inner being. As a result,

if one looks at the overall character of the different cultural regions of the subcontinent, meaningful variations emerge that reflect the geo-spiritual organisation in the consciousness of the land.

For example, Bengal, in the northeast, is a land soft and gentle in her physical form, in some places almost visibly exuding that golden aura from which her name derives, and this poetic consciousness of the land is mirrored in the culture of her peoples. Bengal represents a plane of the inner mind that is both indrawn and intuitive yet at the same time interfused with the visuddha level, an unusual combination of forces that leads to the exceptional brilliance, sensitivity and expressivity of her people. The home of thinkers and artists and musicians and poets and dreamers great and small, she has always been given to large ideas and soaring inspirations that often far outreach the executive ability of her not so practical people. From here arose the movement for independence from the British, which other parts of India had to take up and accomplish, and from here issued that huge inspiration that still awaits its completion in the world: Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and Sri Aurobindo, the seers of a new spiritual dawn for the world.

Moving along a line that proceeds roughly northwest from Bengal, we ascend into a plane of consciousness that is more purely mental or cognitive. Thus, we pass from the soft and milky light blue aura that permeates Kolkata, into the drier and more concentrated dark blue light of Lumbini, the Buddha's birthplace in southern Nepal. In accordance with this consciousness of the land, note how eminently rational and cognitively penetrating was the Buddha's teaching, and how the artistic aesthetic of Nepal is more spare than in Bengal. And yet, at the same time, note how Nepal has never been a seat of great political power—for that, we must move further west, to Delhi, where the force in the land begins to flow more outwards into manifesting action. Delhi and her environs have long been the command and control centre of India, from the times of the Mughals through the British Raj, and more generally the whole expanse of the Ganges' plains on which she stands has been centre stage for the great movements of Indian history since the dawn of civilisation. This corridor has seen the coming and going of Krishna and the epic battles of the Mahabharata, of the Buddha's peripatetic ministry, of the westward expansion of Chandragupta's and Ashoka's empires, of the influx of the Kushans from Central Asia and the Mughals from Persia.

From Delhi turning southwards and descending into central India, we come to a region whose aura is experienced more in the heart chakra and mid vital. In the northern portions of this region one finds temples such as Khajuraho, where the feeling is devotional, emotional, and at times even sensual, as well

as Sanchi, a Buddhist site of worship where the consciousness opens naturally to a large and stable heart space. Further south lies Hyderabad, in the more dynamic band of the central vital, at about the same latitude as Mumbai, which shares this vital energy and which we will return to later. In Hyderabad the human culture is notably more mercantile and money-minded than Bengal, and this characterisation holds as true today with Hyderabad's headquarters for Microsoft as it did in the past with its wealthy nizams. Significantly, the vital force of Andhra is even reflected in the character of its more famous spiritual sites and figures, such as the exceeding wealth of the temple at Tirupati as well as Sai Baba's facility with miracles.

Proceeding further south and to the eastern shores of India, we come to Tamil Nadu, the inner physical being of India. Here one finds many traits of the physical consciousness, most notably stability and preservation of the past. Tamil culture has always been more insular than in the north, less affected by invasions and more religiously orthodox, and the Tamil language is one of the oldest on the planet. The temples of Mahabalipuram are known outwardly for their perfection in the physical discipline of sculpture, and inwardly are experienced in the root or physical chakra, towards the base of the spine in the back. Accordingly, in modern times Pondicherry became the site for Sri Aurobindo's sadhana for the spiritual transformation of the body and of matter, and the red earth of Auroville became the first soil in the world to manifest a truly supramental force.

Lastly, arriving at the southern tip of India, at Kanya Kumari, we find the temple where Swami Vivekananda is said to have received his adesh to go to America, the muladhara chakra of the world. And crossing the channel over to Sri Lanka, we come to the subconscious of the subcontinent, where aura of the land appears greyish black to the inner eye, and all the memories and habits of the subcontinent repose. From here the demon Ravana was said to have arisen in that time before time, and here Buddhism settled as a persisting memory after its life force left India through the upper gates into the rest of Asia. In modern times, from here the forces of violence and destruction resurged recently via the vehicle of the Tamil Tigers, and one can only hope that their recent defeat presages the possibility of terrorism being vanquished elsewhere on the planet. But that remains to be seen.

In any case, as we now return up the western shores of the subcontinent, one finds the consciousness of the land more out-flowing than on the eastern coast. Historically, this outpouring force has supported extensive trade relations with Africa, Europe, and the Middle East dating back to antiquity, and currently is reflected in the relatively more florescent and cosmopolitan human sub-

cultures of the region. For example, in Kerala, which expresses this abundance in the physical consciousness, one finds the most lush and verdant landscape of the subcontinent. Here the fullness in the land manifests in her human inhabitants via matriarchal traditions, socialist tendencies, and high educational level despite low income, all of which have helped Kerala succeed better than any other part of India in tending to the basic physical needs of her people. Indeed, this physical force is even reflected in the character of some of her more famous saints, such as Ammaji, who gives darshan with a maternal hug for those in spiritual need.

Moving further north, we ascend into vital region of India again, first passing through sensual Goa, erstwhile abode of laid-back hippies and still the home of relaxed Mediterranean influences, and then arrive in ambitious and extravagant Mumbai. This area is clearly the seat of a large and externalising vital consciousness, for it is now the centre of both Bollywood and India's financial industry, and in ages past produced the splendid artistic outpourings housed in the caves of Ajanta and Ellora, which lie just north of Mumbai. Completing the circuit of the subcontinent, we return through the higher vital into the visuddha level again. In the southern levels of this passage, such as Rajasthan, one meets a roseate aura in the land, and a corresponding force of heart, valour, and passionate expressivity in the people. Hence the courageous Rajput kings of old with their splendid forts and palaces, and the continued vibrancy of Rajashtani folk arts today. Note the dynamic dance forms, powerful vocal music, highly contrasted colour schemes, textiles with dazzling mirror-work and embroidery, and even business savvy. All of these features show a more simple yet forceful externalising power than the subtle and inward delicacies of Bengal.

Finally, in the northern level of this region we find Pakistan, where the consciousness of the land is grey and unmistakably felt in throat chakra. Connecting physically with the visuddha centre of the world via Afghanistan, this region is the subcontinent's gateway of Power and externalising force. Through here have flowed the large movements that have shaped not just Indian, but indeed world history. Here in the Indus river valley arose Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, which modern archaeological findings have shown to be the oldest known civilisations in the world, older than the ancient cities of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China. Remarkable for its orderly cities with sophisticated drainage systems, this civilisation clearly had some sort of centrally organised government, and yet there is no evidence that this society suffered the ills that characterise all other organised civilisations including our own—war, conflict, ideology, and a dominating upper class. Thus even here in the very cradle of

civilisation, one again finds evidence of a turn towards spirituality and peaceful idealism that has no precedent elsewhere on the planet.

In later ages this Indus Valley civilisation decayed and declined, for reasons unknown but perhaps related to climate change, and then this land became the gateway to the plains of the Ganges, which we have already reviewed. Through the Khyber pass and down into the subcontinent came, in sequence, the ancient Aryans, Alexander, the Kushans, and the Mughals, and through here from the Punjab to Bengal ran the Grand Trunk Road that was the backbone of British colonialism, the central artery for the most far-flung the Empire the world has known. And to this day the region continues to show all the stigmata of resistance to what could and ultimately must become a spiritual power of action, for in Pakistan we find the very epicentre of the problem that now preoccupies the major powers of the world. Here we find a nuclear-armed Muslim state that has become a breeding ground for Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, and for the moment even houses Bin Laden himself, the world's most wanted man. A disaster here would have global impact.

This then is a very brief introduction to that mighty force of God and Nature which is Maha-Bharat, soul of the world. Much more empirical work is needed to adequately characterise the many variations of consciousness across the lands of the subcontinent, and to understand how these geo-spiritual forces have affected the evolution past and present. However, for the moment we leave that aside and pass on to the other jewel centres of the Earth Mother, those great Goddesses who together organise and canalise the manifesting energies of the supreme Mahashakti.

Alternative Futures

Pravir Malik

Introduction

We are today at the crossroads in terms of the possible play of events, whether at the local, regional, national, or global levels. National and global security, economic development, management of environmental and social problems, amongst other key issues could proceed along several different directions. The key driver determining the direction in which events will tend to unfold will be the level of consciousness of decision-makers at that level. This article, derived from the author's book, *Connecting Inner Power with Global Change*, will explore alternative futures based on the generalised level of consciousness present at a certain level.

While *Connecting Inner Power with Global Change* makes the case that Progress manifests as a ubiquitous fractal (a pattern that repeats itself on different scales) that essentially drives all organisation to move from a physical-vital to a mental-intuitional way of being, this article will examine physical, vital, mental, and intuitional scenarios separately. In such a scheme, while the foreseeable end-result in a world characterised by Progress is inevitably the intuitional scenario, collective choices made now and in the future will cause the interim passage to be variable and express alternative paths, which because of the possibility of taking decades or even perhaps centuries will for all practical purposes need to be thought of in terms of alternative futures.

The physical scenario

At one end of the spectrum, a physical orientation by an actor would imply a reality dictated primarily by what the eye can see. The notion of a single, purposeful, conscious, and fully integrated world-system, more common perhaps to an intuitional way of seeing, would be an outright chimera or even blasphemy to the established way of seeing. The established way of seeing will be the unerring anchor-point and the filter through which all decisions need to be made. Climate Change, slow global poisoning, destabilisation of all forms of magneto-chemical systems, destruction of environments and the resource base,

common issues increasingly being discussed today, will likely be consigned to the category of hogwash and will definitely not be perceived as signs of rebellion from a conscious and progress-driven system. At most these will be thought of as natural occurrences in a cycle that has existed from time immemorial. People and society will continue to be thought of as existing to lubricate the unerring business engine that has proven its value just the way it is, time and time again. There will be no time nor need for searching for another way of being, because the one in existence now will be perceived as being perfect and in no want of change.

In this scenario major catastrophes and upheavals are likely to loom up suddenly. Obviously people will be utterly unprepared for what hits them. This scenario will be like that of the frog in slowly heating water. As the temperature of the water increases, rather than jumping out, the frog gets more and more used to it and does not even realise that something is amiss until it is too late and the water has begun to boil. At this point it is not possible for the frog to escape and it too boils with the boiling water. In this scenario, systemic weakness is not addressed but simply covered up. This is the scenario of financial bailouts and stark denial. Leading countries maintain global economic power by the application of military might. Currencies are artificially propped up to maintain the semblance of strength. Religious institutions intervene to promote yesteryear's leaders. The American Dream and way of life continue to be propagated as the best and strongest until it is too late. And all the while what really needs to be changed remains unaddressed.

The vital scenario

In the scenario marked by vital orientation the frenzies of today continue until exhaustion. This means that the pace of systemic debilitation will proceed faster than in the scenario marked by physical-orientation. In the physical-orientation scenario, we live with the denial far longer. Facades are kept up and we live in a space within ourselves trapped in from any hints of air or sunlight from greater possibilities. In the vital-orientation scenario, we hit the limits of the system far more quickly and comprehensively. This is because vital-orientation is driven by aggressiveness and a desire to aggrandise the sense of self. Self, however, is defined narrowly without including impacts that actions by the self have on the world and people around. This quickly brings us up against the limits of our view.

Hence, driven by the vital desire of the consumer, conspicuous consumption sets in motion disastrous ripple effects on the physical and psychological health of the people and the health of the world. On the psychological side, people

come to equate happiness and self-worth with products and ‘things’ out there. The sense of possibility, of creativeness, of true as opposed to surface self-power, engendered by a world-view marked by a conscious, purposeful, integrated world-system is all but absent. As a race, we lose subjective power and become slaves of an objective and often heartless world. The causal relationship between subjectivity and objectivity is reversed and instead of the landscape within determining the landscape without, it is the landscape without that determines the landscape within. This is a poverty-stricken deal in which we have literally surrendered our source of power to a fleeting and meaningless dance toward the bottomless darkness of the abyss. Consider, for example, that in this orientation all people are relegated to the stature of a business asset. Hence, business executives may be thought of as ‘more’ valuable assets and may be treated more carefully as a result of that, factory workers are thought of as ‘less’ valuable assets and correspondingly treated with relatively less care, and defenceless women and children are treated as ‘least’ valuable assets and as a result even traded as commodities in various markets.

But that is not all, the customer, who is perceived as the source of money is often treated as a god – not because god-like qualities may reside within their breasts, but because they temporarily provide the lubrication for this heartless business engine to continue. If a product or service is exchanged for money, then that exchange should indicate the equality of the transaction. Yet those who provide the service or product often continue to place the buyer on a pedestal, and the buyer himself believes that he should be placed on a pedestal. This again indicates the inherent and disproportionate value ascribed to money. This is a tragedy of epic proportions. The means has become the end. Yet money is only the symbol of a force or an energy that is needed to move things in different and hopefully progressive directions. In the vaster scheme of things it is the direction of movement in various circumstances that is of importance. In the vital scheme of things, however, it is money with its immediate power to satisfy the urge of a narrowly defined self-seeking assertiveness that is of importance.

On the tangible impacts to physical health, the stark compromise of consuming hurriedly and imperfectly thought-through products consequently replete with different sources and degrees of toxicity will take its toll on the very basis of our lives. While we have established that tobacco based products, for instance, consumed over decades result in cancers, what we have not as meaningfully established is how a vast array of other seemingly ‘safe’ products may similarly result in as debilitating conditions when consumed over an equal length of time. The smoke from tobacco is visible and hence more quickly has resulted

in a cause-effect relationship between its consumption and ill-health. Equally debilitating toxins present in other products are however ‘invisible’, and therefore do not as easily lend themselves to a similar cause-and-effect analysis.

The point is that given the underlying hurriedness and lack of comprehensiveness in thought and action that marks the vital-orientation, it is inevitable that this vaster array of products, regardless of industry considered, will emerge as unsafe. A little more research on nutritional value in processed foods, for instance, will more broadly reveal that all enzymes are destroyed through processing and that perhaps a different kind of processing and distribution needs to be undergone in order that nutrition retain its value. Weston Price’s ‘Physical Nutrition and Degeneration’¹ stands as a classic in this area. Similarly a little more research on drug formulation may reveal, as Andrew Weil’s² work has pointed out, that active ingredients in pharmaceuticals when removed from their naturally occurring environments and array of accompanying chemicals have a compromising effect on cells that they come into contact with, precisely because the array and relative proportions of accompanying chemicals that existed to bring about more holistic interaction with cells have now been removed. The underlying aggression of the vital-orientation does not allow for this extra time and comprehensiveness in research and development and thus of necessity must result in compromises of all sorts.

As far as negative impact on the scale of the world, we have already begun to witness the tremendous price we must pay for this orientation as evidenced by accelerated resource depletion, water and air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity destruction, and compromise to ecosystem services.

What we have not adequately considered however is the effect on global political stability. Fuelled by the twin thrusts of consumer demand on the one side, which stimulates investment in new manufacturing capacity, and business desire to increase margins on the other, which stimulates outsourcing of manufacturing to ‘cheaper’ countries, it is the ‘cheaper’ countries that stand poised to emerge as the new global leaders as more capital flows into their regions. This is not always a good thing especially if ideology of the new global leaders is unknown or controversial or untested in the global playing field. For, it provides the country with the resources to potentially fulfil whatever agenda may exist amongst its leadership. However, from a cause and effect point of view and in that we must reap what we sow, the continued vital orientation at the level of individual has to create a world that is effectively vital in response. In such a world there is little place for idealism and balanced development. There is only place for immediate fulfilment of desire to the detriment of any deeper and more holistic ideology. The USA’s aspiration for relative liberty, freedom,

equality, and democracy, all high ideals that belong in their nature to the mental sphere must erode when the citizens of the country are in fact not in reality practising that, but have abandoned themselves to the petty desires and satisfactions that animate the vital sphere. If at the end of the day, citizens are most concerned with bringing home a quick profit, and with convenience of access to products of all kinds, and with having plenty of toys to entertain themselves with, then this is the world that is going to result, and the question of how the profit is made, what the costs to the earth, people, and communities are, or what loss of self-power or of ideals results, will recede into the background to be overtaken by whatever it takes to fulfil the vital-based pattern in its play across the earth.

When China arises as the world's manufacturing centre to stock the inventories of the Wal-Marts of the world people then fulfil their desires for cheaper, more easily accessible goods aimed at a portfolio of vital-level desires. That is what the seed-pattern had initiated. The seed-pattern had nothing imprinted in it about the upholding of the generative capacity of the earth, or of the peoples and communities of the earth, or of the high ideals that signal progress in the broadest sense. In its vitalistic rise China, so it has been reported, has converted productive land into desert, polluted running and still bodies of water, compromised biodiversity, reinforced the notion that people exist for State, not only in China, but in Africa too, where it has entered into vital-level contracts with country governments. The short-sighted hunger of citizens in USA and in other rapidly growing parts of the world has fuelled this rise of vitalistic dynamics and large tracts of the world are now fast becoming either centres of need-less and wasteful consumption, centres of needless and wasteful manufacturing, and centres of needless and wasteful resource extraction.

The supply chains that span the world now exist to fuel this hunger and madness and in its essence signals the organisation of an inevitable destruction so long as the vital-orientation persists. No amount of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is going to make any difference at the end of the day, unless the base consciousness of citizens the world over, and this includes employees of companies that practise CSR and communities impacted by the operations of these companies, amongst many other stakeholder groups, completes their respective journeys through the sun-marked physical-vital-mental fractal. CSR is practised by large corporations that do not exist for CSR but to make money. If corporations make less money, CSR programmes receive less funds and CSR diminishes, unless it has become part and parcel of the way a business operates, and this can only happen if even in the absence of any calculated returns

on investment, employees still practise CSR because their own journeys have advanced to the generally more holistic mental level and they genuinely see the need for such holistic business action as represented by CSR on its own merit.

But such conversion of the world into a large supply chain, where 'cheaper' countries become leaders on the world stage and more actively dictate a newer and perhaps even crasser culture for the earth, is only the beginning of the end of the vital-orientation scenario. For as resources get scarcer, and this includes the all-important water, then likely a heightened irrationality will begin to dictate the politics of regions and countries and resource wars will become more prevalent. Then all manner of idealism gets dethroned as people enter into a phase of base survival. In such a scenario all assumptions are hopefully questioned and the seeds for a shift to the mental level are more powerfully bought into being.

The lower mental scenario

In the mental-orientation scenario, questioning comes alive. This signals a significant progress, for now all existing assumptions, many of which are of an irrational kind, can be questioned and the bases for our living consequently have a more likely chance to begin to be altered. In this scenario, *raison d'être* has the opportunity to come to the surface. Uniqueness and holism can begin to arise. Hence, the bases for business, amongst other modern-day institutions, can begin to be questioned, and if the questioning proceeds long enough and comprehensively enough, then more enlightened models of business and other institutions can begin to come into being.

Models in which business exists for and is accountable to a variety of stakeholders as opposed to just shareholders can come into being. Hence business would naturally begin to alter the way in which it generates profit to begin to address all costs of its transactions on the individual, social, cultural, and environmental fronts. Similarly other major institutions of the modern-day world can also be questioned and potentially altered to arrive at more enlightened versions of themselves. The often blindly-accepted tenets of religion, usually the creation of the fountainhead prophet or an ensuing circle of disciples can be questioned and affirmed through individual self-discovery. In such a manner the value of religion can be more truly affirmed and become more of a living force in the affairs of life. This same trajectory of questioning can then confirm the possible similarities, synergies, and complementarities of different world-religions. In such a way a more enlightened institution of religion that is also a more living part of life can come into being. Education itself can be similarly questioned, and the value of spawning cogs in a pre-arranged view of life ques-

tioned, to perhaps more truly make children and youth develop along lines driven by their own natural curiosities and uniqueness.

The question of course, is at what end of the mental-orientation spectrum will all this questioning proceed? If it proceeds at the end closer to the vital region, then in many respects it will have the characteristic thrusts that marked the vital-orientation as its accompaniment and context. Then the questioning will likely not proceed comprehensively enough and what will result is a number of biased “isms” that are still anchored to the primary institution that may have characterised the recent vital milieu. Hence, even though there will be greater questioning in each of the institutions of our lives, whether of art, education, science, government, business, military, or sport, each will tend to be interpreted in terms of the recent reigning institution. In our modern times, many will continue to interpret their value in terms of business hence. This same logic will also apply to independence and definition of countries. If the USA has been perceived as being the most successful country, then its culture and driving institutions will tend to become the standard by which each country interprets its success. The degree to which McDonalds, MTV, and Levis replace age-old institutions whether of tea drinking, tabla-playing and dhotis, will be the measure of success of a country.

The higher mental scenario

At the other end of the mental-orientation spectrum, questioning will proceed more independently, and may even at its highest be aligned with deeper drivers that animate the intuitional level. In this scenario each of the “isms” will tend to be truly more enlightened. Having been created through a basis of questioning though, as opposed to a deeper sense of who one is, the questioning will have its limits because it will be all about logic rather than penetrating through experience into the inner uniqueness that animates each person. When that experience becomes the centre around which activity is organised, then creation will proceed in a more living, organic and sustainable way. This is the stuff of intuition. In the meanwhile, what will result is a number of parts of society that still function in silos or independently of each other, and not as they should, as integral parts of a single whole.

Society, hence, while objectively surfacing more of the problems that plague life, and even surfacing more of the assumptions that may have led to these problems, will likely still be impotent to solve them, because it has still not penetrated into the heart of Progress so long as it remains stuck in questioning without following or opening to where the questioning leads. Questioning is of course powerful, but still there needs to be a receptivity to something that is beyond the mind, for true change to happen. In the mental-orientation scenario,

forms and processes may change as a result of what seems like the logical solution following the questioning. The United Nations Organisation and other forms that are new and different may come into being. The extent to which they successfully achieve their missions will still remain in the balance however, so long as there are no true personalities who organise themselves not based on questioning but on what they creatively and uniquely stand for in the scheme of things.

Hence, in this scenario, the world is likely to have a burst of apparent creativity where new technology infrastructures, new types of organisations, new processes and ways of connecting people together, new regional and global alliances at least in name, will come into being. This scenario will also result in frustration when it is discovered that all the new structures and processes and organisations have really not made the difference they intended to make. For the difference to manifest, we of necessity must enter into the intuitional-orientation.

Revisiting the intuitional scenario

In the intuitional-orientation scenario, deeper questioning and completion of many personal stagnated journeys open one to the reality of Progress. It is in the opening to this reality that a help beyond the present-day physical, vital, and mental capabilities comes to the surface. In the disassociation from these persistent and ever-present dynamics, one becomes more of a witness to one's operations. A freedom from the ordinary allows one to penetrate that which stands behind surfaces and the essence of what one is, in the vaster scheme of things that Progress conceivably holds in its heart, is allowed to come to the surface. Then one may find that what truly drives one is the essential reality of service and perfection, or adventure and courage, or knowledge and wisdom, or harmony and mutuality. In this state, if one turns one ear toward the heart of Progress, and the other toward opportunities that present themselves in the various fields of practical organisation, then spontaneous, organic, living, and uniqueness-based manifestations in each of the fields of practical organisation can begin to emerge.

It is then that structure and technology and process and organisation will have meaning, and it is then that society will begin to work in the manner intended. When the forms one creates are expressions of who one is, then there is a living and sustainable quality to them that becomes the basis for a progressive society. In this society, citizens are heroes because they have stood up for what they are at their core and they continue to take actions that are consistent with that core. Since their core is part of the heart of Progress, there is also a more spontaneous and integral interaction and harmony between all the various

parts of society. Religion, business, art, sport, education, military, science, and country relation with country, no longer exist at loggerheads with each other. Each of the institutions remakes itself from within so that they become expressions of the deeper drivers at the heart of Progress. With true leaders at their respective helms, it is the dynamics of Progress itself that really guides things.

Notes

- 1 Weston Price, “*Physical Nutrition and Degeneration*”, published by Keats Pub (6th edition, 2006)
- 2 Refer to Andrew Weil’s “*Spontaneous Healing: How to Discover and Embrace Your Body’s Natural Ability to Maintain and Heal Itself*”, published by Ballantine Books, 2000

The Theme Of Urvashi In The Indian Renaissance : Madhusudan Datta, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo

(Continued from the previous issue)

Ranajit Sarkar

The idea that Urvashi is beyond the law of *kāma* and *dharma*, which is earth’s law, and that she is heavenly, is poetically suggested in the next seven lines. In a Bengali home the lighting of the lamp at nightfall in every room and in front of the *tulasi*-plant¹³¹ is a beautiful dharmic act carried out generally by the wife, who is *griha-Lakshmi*, Lakshmi of the Home, who secures happiness harmony and fortune. But Urvashi is not such a woman: “You do not light the lamp in any home.” She has no domestic duty. But that is not all. The wife has her place also in the nuptial bed. Urvashi is not the timid bride who goes to meet her husband at night after she has finished her home-duties, “... smiling sweetly you do not go to the bridal bed in the silent midnight”.

This is what she is not. In another poem¹³² of the same period he describes the two visions of the beloved, the dharmic wife: at night she is the sweetheart, *preyasi*, the lady who rules the heart, *prāṇeśvarī*, but during the day she appears as a goddess whose form is auspicious and who is happiness, welfare, bliss and good-luck incarnate, *mangalmayī mūrati*.

Urvashi is neither of the day, nor of the night. This idea is suggested metaphorically: “Like the dawn-rise, unveiled,/ You are unabashed.” These two lines evoke the general picture of the nymph. She is heavenly; she has nothing of the earthly woman. The poet shows us the glorious apparition. But where does she come from? What is her origin? Like the dawn she is there before the mind’s eyes. She is, but she seems to come from nowhere, like the dawn that rises all on a sudden in the East out of darkness. This idea of a birth seemingly without any causal link to reality is carried on to the next stanza. This apparition is like

a “stemless flower”, *brinta-hīn pushpa*, which blooms in itself. This reminds us of the *ākāśa-kusuma*, the “sky-flower”, a creation of fancy which has no rational causal origin. In our rational world-vision every birth has a cause and is linked to time and place. The poet then asks, “When did you blossom?” It cannot be in our human time and in our human world? The poet accepts the solution already known: she was born in the mythological time and mythological space, before the rational human world was created. Here Rabindranath turns to the *Ramayana*-version of the story of the churning of the Ocean which says that Urvaśi rose from the waters. Some seem to see here the influence of the myth of Aphrodite’s birth from the sea-foam.¹³³ The mythological account dispenses the poet from giving a rational answer. The pre-rational mythological story, to which the poet adds new details, answers symbolically the query:

In the morning of the primal Spring you arose from the churned ocean, a cup of nectar in your right hand, and a poison-jar in your left –

This does not suggest in any way the ‘perilous goddess’ Venus, “the evil blossom... of sea-foam and the frothing of blood”.¹³⁴ Urvaśi holds both the nectar of immortality and the poison of death, but she is neither death nor immortality. Like the dawn she is sheer Beauty that does not either give immortality or death. The ancient myth does not put nectar or poison in her hands. When the gods and the demons churned the ocean there appeared both poison and nectar: Shiva drank the poison that would otherwise destroy the world, and the gods drank the nectar. Rabindranath aspired to immortality, but his idea of it was different from the static state of deathlessness in some heaven hereafter. He desired immortality here in this mortal world, as he desired freedom in bondage and joy mingled with tears. It was, in fact, the immortality that Shiva gives, not by denying death but by conquering it.

Rabindranath’s Urvaśi gives man neither poison nor nectar; she is neither evil nor good. She is a pure enchantment, a presence and a spell. Indeed,

the huge swelling sea like a snake spell-bound

lay at your feet drooping its myriad uplifted hoods.

She is perfectly free like her birth. Her actions too are not for producing any effect. They are a sheer joy, without any necessity and consequence. She is the incarnation of this causeless joy: “You are lovely in your nakedness, white as a *kunda*-jasmine, adored by Indra”. Her being - the truth of her existence - is sheer beauty. If she makes the world restless it is by the dynamic of her beauty. No blemish, no flaw can touch her or her actions: *tumi aninditā*, “You are blameless.”

In the next stanzas the seed-idea is given, as in the first one, by the second line: 0 eternally youthful Urvaśi, *he ananta-yaubanā Ūrvaśī*. She is ever

youthful. But again the rational mind peeps out. Is it possible? Life is a progression from birth to death; there is childhood before youth. The beauty of innocent childhood attracted Rabindranath, as it did Kalidasa. Urvaśi is eternally youthful. She rose in all her youthful glory in the morning of creation. There can be no childhood for her in time. And the poet knows it. She is a full-blown flower, stemless. Therefore her birth and her childhood can only be before time and creation. Rabindranath created what the traditional mythology had not supplied. He imagined Urvaśi’s childhood. Nevertheless, he made concession to the rational mind: the whole description is in the interrogative - the rational mind can take shelter behind this shadow of doubt:

Where, at whose home in the dark depths of the sea,

you played, alone, your childish games, with gems and pearls? -

at whose side on a coral-bed, in what room with jewel-lamps agleam,

lulled by the sea-waves’ songs, a guileless smile on your face, you slept?

In this imagination there is no touch of realism; it is a dream, without sorrow and even without childish tears - only music, riches, light, smile and love. A perfect innocence - there is no trace of sin.

The growth of the child is the growth from innocence towards experience. And every experience is painful for it makes the child conscious of the duality of joy and sorrow, of immortality and death, of good and evil. Urvaśi’s imagined childhood has no such growth. In fact the poet does not believe in her childhood. Is not she “eternally youthful”?

When, moulded in youth, and awake, you stood before the world,

you were already in the fullness of bloom.

She exists. She is there in the world since the first advent of spring’s loveliness, sweetness and youthfulness. Her existence is mysterious. But is she only an idea? She is the dream-companion of man, *svapna-sanginī*. But is she herself only a dream? Is she bodied or bodiless? Is the whole poem nothing but an incantation to an airy nothingness? Rabindranath never repudiated the body. There is certainly a beauty of idea and feelings and a beauty in things abstract. The poet may use ideas and abstractions but he must give them body; concretisation is the essential function of poetic imagination. Urvaśi is beautiful but she has a body, a form, *rūpa*: in the very first line the poet calls her *sundarī rūpaśī*. The lover desires the beauty that is in the form; the poet too. The philosopher may remain content with formless concepts; the world-negating ascetic too. But the poet and the lover want a concrete presence. Urvaśi now appears, in the next three stanzas, in her full-blown beauty. Man can see her, smell her and hear her, but cannot have her near him; he can weep for her, even die for her. She remains on the stage of heaven, unattainable.

The essence of these stanzas which make a unit, is contained in the three vocatives: *he apūrba-śobhanā Ūrvaśī*, “O Urvasi of unforeseen loveliness”; *he bilol-hillol Ūrvaśī*, “O Urvasi like the swaying waves”; *he bhuban-mohinī Ūrvaśī*, “O Ūrvaśī, the enchantress of the world”.

The first line of this section says that Urvaśī is “the beloved of the world”, *biśver preyaśī*. She is beauty incarnate, to her man pays the homage of love. Not only sensuous men, men of the world, but even the sages and the ascetics abandon their meditation and offer at her feet their spiritual merits and the fruits of their penance, *tapasyār phal*. Evidently, the allusion is to the Puranic theme of the temptation of ascetics by nymphs. But here it is more than a myth, it has become a symbol, it has acquired a deeper dimension. Rabindranath has always denounced the world-negating asceticism. When, therefore, he says that the sages lay down at her feet the fruits of their ascetic effort he does not consider it a fall, but a liberation; for, by so doing they participate in the world-play of beauty and delight.

Urvaśī, we have said, does not act in order to influence men and the world. She is the world’s beloved, but she is free. If men love her that love is the spontaneous outgoing of their own impulse and desire. We can perhaps best understand her nature if we see her as the dancer that she is, the dancer who moves the spectators to tears and laughter, to joy and sorrow and to various powerful feelings without herself being moved by those feelings. She has a body and her ornaments, but for the spectators she is unreachable.

Smitten with her sidelong glances, says the poet, the world grows restless with the youthful yearning of love. These glances are the perfect play of the eyes that the *Nāṭya-śāstra* teaches; these are the glances of an actress, of a dancer whose anklets jingle, whose skirt sways rhythmically and who moves fleet as the lightning. She is there blissfully ignorant of what happens in the world. The poet says:

the blind winds carry far and wide the intoxicating fragrance of your body,
and the enchanted poet like the honey-drunk black-bee roves longingly
singing the songs of ecstasy.

The fifth stanza is the most dynamic, most charged with movement. It shows Urvaśī as the dancer. She is full of rhythm. As the fragrance of her body spreads through the universe so the rhythm of her body makes the human heart and the cosmic nature dance. She is like the swaying wave. She becomes one with nature, one with the earth and the sky. She is indeed *prakṛiti* in all her manifold movement, *jagat*, the moving world:

when you dance...
the sea-waves dance in unison with your dance-rhythm,

earth’s raiment flutters on the waving ears of the corn,
stars drop on the sky’s floor from your necklace...

The sea, the earth and the sky are caught in a universal rhythm. All that is beautiful is the reflection of her beauty, all movement rises from the rhythm of her footsteps; the stars are nothing but the flashing of her necklace. Nature, the world of beauty, is pervaded by her marvellous presence.

Urvaśī has acquired two aspects; she is at once individual, the dancer on the stage of heaven and woman of flawless beauty; and she is also nature, *prakṛiti*. The next two lines are significant in this connection: *akasmāt puruṣer bakkho-māḥje citta ātma-hāra/nāce rakta-dhārā*—“Suddenly the heart of man loses its self-poise,/ blood dances in his veins.”

Rabindranath himself rendered these lines in the English version thus: “... and the blood dances in men’s hearts with sudden turmoil.”

I am quoting this translation to show the loss of a valuable suggestion which is there in the Bengali original. Thompson’s more literal translation too misses it. In fact it is hardly possible to preserve it in a translation. There is a subtle and complex suggestiveness in the word “*puruṣa*”. Its first meaning is man, the male. But *Puruṣa* is also the Self of the Samkhya philosophy, the unmoving witness-spirit who experiences the evolution of nature. The individual man seeing the woman-of-beauty becomes restless and loses his self-poise. Here Urvaśī has no association with Puruṣas, Arjuna or any other mythological or legendary person. She is the woman whom man the lover desires. Man the lover is the individual man, in the first place, the poet himself.

But there is also the universal *puruṣa* who is enamoured of the universal nature. As the individual man is moved by the beauty and the dance of Urvaśī, the woman, so also is the universal Puruṣa, the Cosmic Man, moved by the beauty and dance of Urvaśī, the Cosmic Nature. The image of the cosmic vision is strengthened by the last two lines in which she is shown in her naked glory standing at the horizon, like the goddess of Dawn: “At the horizon, all on a sudden, your girdle bursts,/ O beauty, revealed in nakedness!”

When we read these lines we visualise the horizon as the girdle of the universal nature, of earth, revealing herself to the earth-soul.

Urvaśī-Dawn, the enchantress of the world, appears in her naked beauty. The dance is ended; the rhythm reaches the climax and then when the whole world is moved to the utmost it comes to a stop - the whirling skirt drops and

she stands in the East with beauty unveiled. She has conquered and subdued the three worlds.

She is beauty perfect, beauty purified, the sublimation of all our earthly pains and the transmutation of pain into a work of deathless art. Desire lies at her feet; the world's desire has become her lotus-footstool:

the slenderness of your body is washed with the world's flowing tears,
the heart-blood of the world has given the redness of your feet-
O naked beauty, your hair is unbraided; you have placed
lightly your feet on the full-blown lotus of world's desire.

Urvaśi is now completely free from all that is not sheer imagination. Man and the world have offered at her feet all that they could give and all that had any connection with the reality of life. We make our images out of the things of the earth; but the poet tries to eliminate gradually that which is earthly; he transforms the earthly and the mortal into something that is free from the touch of imperfection and mortality. Urvaśi becomes the companion of Dream in Mind's heaven, the heaven of the ideal and the realm of imagination. There she is free. There is no end there to her delightful play; infinite are the expressions of her joy (*ananta-ranginī*).

Such is the form of the ideal beauty, a beauty that has escaped the world. It is a state of absolute freedom in which Man and the World cannot even desire her. She has gone beyond. Beauty that we, mortals, we of the earth, can desire and can comprehend, is one in which there is simultaneously bondage and liberty.

The "dream of youth" aspires to the perfect beauty, but once the perfection is reached we realise that beauty itself has escaped our grasp. We wake up from the youthful dream; and our first impulse is to weep, for we do not dare to confront reality yet, we have yet to find the true value of reality, the harmony between bondage and liberty. Beauty then takes a new form. Urvaśi is replaced by Lakshmi. At first we have our useless tears; but mortal tears do not move her - she is beyond our joys and sorrows: *he nishthurā badhirā Ūrvaśī*, "O cruel deaf Urvasi!" - we cry out in agony. Oh, don't you hear the heaven and the earth weep for you? She is indeed beyond heaven and earth.

And regret and nostalgia fill the air. Will she come back; will she ever again appear before us; will our eyes fall again on her body of beauty? The age of dream, mythology and imagination, that age with the evocation of which begins every tale of wonder - once upon a time - that primal age, ancient age, *ādi-yug purātan*, will it return again? And will she rise again from the boundless and depthless waters, with wet locks?

The poet does not yet lose hope. In an ultimate effort to resuscitate the past he dreams, perhaps of a new beginning and a new cycle of creation when that first form of beauty will appear in the primal morning; touched by the myriad looks of the world:

your limbs will shed
tear-drops of sea-water.

Suddenly the vast sea will burst out in waves of wonderful music.

This is but the nostalgic day-dream of one who has just woken up from a glorious dream and does not yet want to plunge into the reality of the world.

But this is short-lived. The day-dream may give a short respite; it is only a short escape. The endeavour to make the absent appear present is senseless.

The poet has seen Beauty, and he knows that it will not return. An immense sense of melancholy fills the world. The earth has her beauty; spring comes back but in the vernal gladness there blows "the sigh of an eternal absence". Both the individual and the cosmic are touched by that loss; the beauty has vanished, only its memory remains: "when on a moon-lit night laughter fills the sky/some distant memory, somewhere, plays a nostalgic flute and tears flow."

Desire is no more, for she has gone. Men and the world weep. Still hope remains, nothing but hope, fainter than dream, more unreal than imagination: "yet hope keeps vigil in the heart's weeping,/ O you eternally free!"

The last word, *abandhane*, free, sums up the whole significance of the poem. The poem opened with a denial - you are not a mother, not a daughter, not a bride - but there still was some contact with the world, for world could contemplate her beauty and could desire her. There was still the duality between *āmi*, "I", and *tumi*, "you". But finally the duality disappears, there remains only "you", free. The poem arrives at an absolute aesthetic monism which rejects this world's pain and the agony and ecstasy of man's heart.

Critics are unanimous about the flawless craftsmanship of this poem. In sheer beauty of sound, the wealth of descriptive vision and the glowing aura of suggestions this poem gathers much that is meaningful in Rabindranath's poetic imagination. The spirit of beauty, the sheer light of vision and the sublimity of idea are given a splendid concrete form. It is a hymn, an ode, in which the rhythm, the lyrical music, the felicity of expression and the fullness of sound give the impression of an oceanic movement. No translation can reproduce either its phonetic or its semantic structure and significance.

Many have spoken about this poem¹³⁵, but mostly the commentaries are personal impressions, which nevertheless throw light on some aspects of the poem. Rabindranath himself explains the symbolism of Urvaśi in a letter written thirty-seven years after the poem's composition.¹³⁶ I do not think that this

interpretation reveals the complex polyvalency of this rich poem, nevertheless it grasps quite clearly the philosophy which was behind its conception. Urvaśi is the symbol of womanly beauty that is self-fulfilled. She is the “woman” beyond any human or earthly relation; she is the enchantress. “She is not Indrani, Indra’s consort, she is not Lakshmi of Vaikuntha, she is the dancer of heaven, the female companion in the assembly of the gods when they drink nectar.” The poet seems to lay here a strong emphasis on the hetaera-nature of Urvaśi : she is a courtesan whose duty is to give pleasure to the gods. From the reading of the poem such an emphasis does not seem justified. True, she is a dancer in the assembly of the gods, yet the picture evoked goes far beyond the limits of the Puranic heaven.

The second question that is dealt with is that of beauty, and enjoyment of beauty. The enjoyment of the gods is not a carnal enjoyment; they enjoy the “beauty” of the woman. And beauty is physical; in the physical body beauty finds its completeness.¹³⁷ “In creation”, Rabindranath writes, “it is in the human form that beauty of form reaches its culmination. Indeed, the culmination of this human beauty is heavenly. In Urvaśi physical beauty has become most intense, fit for heaven.”

The beauty is that of the body. Usually the physical beauty of a woman draws the common man to sexual desire or the desire to possess; but Rabindranath imagines Urvaśi’s beauty as the sublimation of the earthly woman’s beauty without the slightest trace of carnal desire. Can there be enjoyment if there is no desire ? The poet seems to say that to enjoy the supremely beautiful one must abandon desire which is an egoistic impulse of the heart. In the enjoyment of beauty is the aesthetic *rasa*-enjoyment, in which the individual emotions are made universal, *sādhāranīkatā*, as the ancient Indian poetics held. This beauty, Rabindranath further writes “is the immortal nectar of form in the goblet of eternal youth - it is not mixed with good, *kalyāṇ*. It is unalloyed sweetness.” In this passage he interprets a symbol with another symbol, which makes it difficult for the thinking mind to grasp the rational meaning. We may however safely assume that what he means here is that the body is not beauty, the body is only the cup; it is not beauty, it contains beauty. Beauty is something not earthly at all, it is *amrita*, the delight-giving drink that the gods pour in that cup. Rabindranath seems to see a dualism between body and beauty. Body is the object of desire, it is physical, carnal. Beauty, it is true, cannot express itself without the body yet the body is nothing in itself. When the gods have drunk the

nectar and enjoyed beauty they have no use of the cup. Beauty is the aesthetic delight, the unalloyed sweetness. Urvaśi is the symbol of this sweetness, this beauty abstract, ideal and sublimated. She has a body only because beauty, to express itself, needs a support.

Rabindranath recognises this beauty, but he goes further, for he finds that the body too is real, has its place in nature by its own right. When beauty is mingled with welfare and goodness, the body recovers its proper place in the universe: it is then no longer a passive receptacle but an active instrument for the expression of the good in life and world, an expression in which desire, *kāma*, which was rejected, becomes purified of its selfish impulses under the guidance of *dharma*. Here there is a new vision; the descent of the heavenly beauty in the earthly body so that heaven can manifest itself on earth.

Urvaśi and Venus

Speaking of his poem Thompson writes, “The Western reader can gain little notion of this glorious poem’s wealth of allusion, in which Indian mythology mingles with European legends of mermaids and with recollection of the ‘perilous goddess’ who was born of the ocean-foam.”¹³⁸ The “perilous goddess” is, of course, none but Aphrodite (Venus) who was sung by Swinburne:¹³⁹

A perilous goddess was born,
Clove, and the foam at her feet,
Fawning, rejoiced to bring forth
A fleshy blossom,...

Taking this clue several critics have tried to show the indebtedness of Rabindranath’s conception of Urvaśi to Swinburne’s conception of Venus. They refer to these above lines and see their reflection in:

the huge swelling sea like a snake spell-bound
lay at your feet drooping its myriad uplifted hoods.

It is possible that there is a direct causal relation between the two poems, but it is not known for sure that Rabindranath knew Swinburne’s verses. It is probable. The reference is quite slight. However we can safely take for granted that he knew the legend of the birth of Aphrodite. An indirect manifestation of the Cytherean goddess in the image of Urvaśi is not at all improbable. The poet’s mind is a crucible in which images, impressions and associations coming from many sources mingle. Others have spoken of the Venus as hymned in Swinburne’s *Atalanta in Calydon*. I shall here quote a few lines from his *Hymn to Proserpine* in which he spoke also of Aphrodite, the Cytherean goddess. The images and expressions of these lines seem to be nearer to “Urvaśi”. But even here we cannot ascertain how far the influence is direct. The follow-

ing lines of Swinburne are remarkable for the similarity of the expressions “the world’s desire” and *biśva-bāsanā*, and the general descriptive tenor - the sensuous evocation of fragrance, colour and sweetness:

.. our mother, a blossom of flowering seas,
Clothed round with the world’s desire as with raiment, and fair as the foam,
And fleeter than kindled fire, and a goddess, and mother of Rome....
Her deep hair heavily laden with odour and colour of flowers,
White rose of the rose-white water, a silver splendour, a flame,
Bent down unto us that besought her, and earth grew sweet with her name.

With Madhusudan Datta the Western poetical world, its myths and legends, its classicism and romanticism, its versification, images and metaphors and its peculiar vision of beauty and love had entered the poetical mentality of India and had enriched the already rich tradition of Indian poetry. In order to understand modern Indian poetry with any completeness it is necessary to know both the traditions. “*Ūrvaśī*” is a poem in which the two traditions have felicitously mingled together. If a reader reading it is reminded of Lucretius, Botticelli’s, Swinburne’s or Rilke’s¹⁴⁰ Venus we can assume that the idea is no longer foreign to the Indian mind.

In the poem Rabindranath wrote the day after he composed “*Ūrvaśī*” the lyrical “I” takes leave of an unnamed heavenly nymph and returns to earth’s joy and sorrows, and its fortune and misfortune. He evokes the image of the earthly bride who will stay beside him in the days of good fortune as in those of misfortune, *sudine durdine*, in joy and in sorrow, *sukhe dukkhe*. She is the symbol of goodness, happiness, welfare and fortune. She wears on her forehead the vermilion mark, and round her wrists the bracelets which are symbols this goodness. The wife is the Lakshmi of the Home, *grha-Lakshmi*; she is the opposite of the nymph.

Two Women: Urvaśī and Lakshmi

The poem in which Rabindranath openly contrasts the two aspects of the woman, “Dui nāri”, “Two women”¹⁴¹ was published in *Balākā* (1915). When he wrote it he was a much older man. Life’s springtime had vanished; austere autumn had set in. But there is no real rejection of Urvaśī, the spirit of spring. Both she, and Lakshmi, the spirit of autumn, are real. One is the flower, the other the fruit. It is this contrast that he evokes, with a preference for Lakshmi who makes life and earth beautiful and who does not snatch away the mind of man from the reality of life to some ideal of an unattainable beauty.

It is a rhymed poem of 27 lines of unequal length. The metre is syllabic, with a much greater metrical freedom than in “*Ūrvaśī*”. It is divided into two paragraphs, the first of 10 lines, the second 17 lines. As there are no fixed stanzas,

no fixed metrical pattern, the lines flow freely. But this freedom itself makes it less closely knit, rhythmically less intense. The expressions are less colourful; there are less of the deep-sounding polysyllabic compound words; the whole tone is less tense, which makes it a fit structural vehicle of the quietness of autumn.

The first paragraph refers to the mythological origin of Urvaśī and Lakshmi both of whom rose from the ocean when it was churned by the gods and the demons. But to the mythology Rabindranath at once gives a metaphysical interpretation; he does not simply say “the churning of the ocean”, but “the churning of the ocean of creation”. This qualification at once points out that the poem has to be read philosophically. The two women rise from the same ocean-depth; this is what is common to them. They are both real - two prototypes of womanhood. But they are very different. The contrast is symmetrically introduced: metrically and structurally the lines (5-7) about Urvaśī are symmetrical to those (8-10) about Lakshmi:

One—Urvaśī, beautiful,
the queen in the desire-kingdom of the world,
the nymph of heaven.
The other—Lakshmi, blessed,
the mother of the world (we know)
the goddess of heaven.

A clear contrast is made between beauty (*sundar*) and blessedness, fortune, happiness (*kalyān*); also between the queen of desire, and the mother; and finally between the nymph of heaven (*svarger apsarī*) and the goddess, lady of heaven (*svarger īśvarī*).

The second paragraph elaborates the idea. The symmetry is here not metrical and formal but conceptual. As in the first paragraph the contrasting passages are introduced by the words; “one”, *ek-jan*, and “the other”, *ār-jan*. Urvaśī, the nymph, is the enemy of austerities (*tapas*); she fills the wine-cup of the month-of-honey with “the fiery delight of loud laughter”; she is the spirit of frolic who steals the hearts of hermits and “scatters them in the flowery prattle of spring, in sleepless songs of youth and among love-red *kinśuka*-flowers and roses.”

Everything related to Urvaśī is antagonistic to quietness, calm and asceticism; there is fire, intoxication and frenzy. The flowers mentioned are both symbols of love: in India the *kinśuka* has always been associated with erotic love (*kāma*). And the rose in Western poetry¹⁴² and in Persian and Indian Sufi poetry has always symbolised love, both carnal and mystical.

In the context of the nymph there is no self-poise; the heart and mind are scattered in the things of nature. The movement is outgoing. The truth of this vision is the truth of youth and spring when the mind yearns for beauty beyond oneself and beyond the earth. To this springtide of life is contrasted autumn, the season of mellow fruitfulness. Urvaśī takes man away from this earth, but Lakshmi brings him back. The movement is that of return. The return may be difficult; instead of the fiery wine there are here the tears of dew-drops. The desire is subdued; it is refreshing and cool. This is autumn; there is the “golden fruitful perfection of peace”. The heart is brought back towards the blessings of the world. Did the heart not know that the earth had also its beauty? Now with ripeness it turns back to see that the blessing that the earth has to give is “sweet with the nectar of the smile of quiet loveliness”.

There are tears. But tears purify us so that we become fit to receive the earth’s blessings. Rabindranath speaks indeed of the “ablution of tears”. Here instead of the loud laughter, *ucca-hāsyā*, there is sweet smile, *smīta-hāsyā*; and in place of the fiery drink, there is nectar, *sudhā*.

And the poem ends with images which make the earth a place of pilgrimage and a temple. Not beyond, but here; this earth is the place where man will get the fruit of his quest, finally Lakshmi brings the errant soul back:

to the confluence of life and death,
to the banks of the holy waters,
to the Infinite’s temple.

Life and death are like the rivers Ganga and Yamuna, one clear, the other dark. This earth, and man’s life, is the Prayāga, the holy confluence, the place of pilgrimage where the *amṛta-kumbha*, the jar of nectar, which rose from the churned ocean, was kept.

In the poem “*Ūrvaśī*”, we have seen, the nymph was pictured as rising from the waters with nectar in one hand and poison in the other. But she gave neither nectar nor poison. Life and death, nectar and poison, are inherent in creation. Man is torn between these opposites. The romantic idealistic quest can perhaps give a momentary relief in the vision of the ideal beauty, but it is not durable. When youthful enthusiasm dies away, when the reality of the opposites dawns upon the mind this vision vanishes. And man, tormented by the duality, wonders how it could be resolved. India gave us the solution of an ascetic escape; man tried to overcome the duality by denying one half of it. But Rabindranath saw that both were real. He proposes a solution in which the two are mingled and are exalted to a higher status where the duality disappears. The *sangama-tīrtha* symbolises this status: it is a confluence, *sangama*, of the opposites, and it is a *tīrtha*, a holy place of pilgrimage.

In the symbolism of Lakshmi beauty is not denied; it is incorporated into a larger vision. “In our ancient myths,” Rabindranath wrote in an essay, “Lakshmi is not only the goddess of beauty and fortune, she is also the goddess of good (*mangala*). The image of beauty is the perfect image of good and the image of good is the perfect form of beauty.”¹⁴³

Urvaśī, the poet himself said, was beauty without good. In Lakshmi beauty and good are harmonised. She, the mother of the world, has also another form, more homely and more human: she is the *gṛha-Lakshmī*, one who brings blessings and prosperity to the home. She is the Lakshmi-of-Home and the mother.

In “*Ūrvaśī*” the poet went out in search of the internal beauty, knowing that that beauty was unattainable. His joy lay in the quest, in the intensity of yearning itself; there was no sadness that the goal was never reached. Urvaśī maddens man’s mind, drives him far from hearth and home. She does not sanctify home. As long as youth lasts, in the spring of life, man may adore her, but in the autumn of life, when perception deepens, she can no longer give satisfaction. It is then Lakshmi who becomes life’s symbol; in her the opposites meet: “enjoyment” (*bhoga*) and renunciation (*vairāgya*), bondage (*bandhana*) and freedom (*mukti*), love (*kāma*) and asceticism (*tapas*}, life (*jīvana*) and death (*mrityu*) unite like the sacred rivers, Ganga and Yamuna, to form a holy confluence

(To be continued)

References

- 131 *Tulasi*, “holy basil”, is the symbol of Lakshmi. Until very recently almost every Hindu home in Bengal had a *tulasi* plant in the courtyard. Many poets have used the image of a young wife lighting a lamp in front of the plant.
- 132 “*Rātre o prabhāte*”, *Chitra*.
- 133 Thompson says that here “Indian mythology mingles with European legends of mermaids and with the recollection of the ‘perilous goddess’ who was born of the ocean-foam.” *Rabindranath Tagore. His Life and Works*, p.79. Mohitlal Majumdar found the influence of Swinburne’s *Venus (Atalanta in Calydon)*, *Kabi Rabindra o Rabindra-kābya*, 2, p.137. Others refute this opinion and say that perhaps there was some faint memory of Swinburne’s *Venus* but no influence. Shibchandra Lahiri, “*Rabindranāther Urbaśi Prasange*”, *Kathasahitya*, 17, pp.795-796. Whatever be the subtle distinction between “memory” and “influence” it is very likely that the image of Aphrodite was present in Rabindranath’s mind when he created his *Urvaśī*.
- 134 Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Atalanta in Calydon*, Chorus.

- 135 Elaborate commentaries on the *Urvasī*-poems of Rabindranath, impressionistic in nature, differing in some points and emphases, are, Mohitlal Majumdar, "*Urvasī*", *Kabi Rabindra o Rabindrakābya.*, Calcutta 1952. pp. 132-143, Shrikumar Bandyopadhyay, "*Urbaśī*"; Shibchandra Lahiri, "*Rabindranāther Urbaśī Prasange*". See also, Amiyaratan Mukhopadhyay, *Rabindranather Manodarshan*, Calcutta 1973. pp.367-368, Kshitimohan Sen, *Balākā-kābya-parikramā*, pp.165-169 and Pramathanath Bishi, *Rabindra-kābya-prabāha.*, I, p.91; II, pp.79-86.
- 136 Letter to Charuchandra Bandyopadhyay, 2nd Feb. 1933, qu. *Sanchayitā*, pp.856-857.
- 137 See, B. C. Chakravorty, *His Mind and Art. Tagore's Contribution to English Literature*. New Delhi 1971 pp.272-273.
- 138 Edward Thompson, *Rabindranath Tagore. His Life and Works*, p.79.
- 139 *Atalanta in Calydon*.
- 140 Rainer Maria Rilke, "*Geburt der Venus*", *Neue Gedichte*.
- 141 Rabindranath has himself rendered this poem into English, a free rendering much diminished in poetic value. *Lover's Gift*, No.LIV, *Collected Poems and Plays*. London 1962.
- 142 "*My love's like a red red rose.*" Burns.
- 143 "*Saundarya-bodh*", p.365.

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